

MORAL DECISION MAKING OF UNIVERSITY HOUSING  
AND RESIDENCE LIFE PROFESSIONALS

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MORAL DECISION MAKING OF UNIVERSITY HOUSING  
AND RESIDENCE LIFE PROFESSIONALS

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## DEDICATION

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MORAL DECISION MAKING OF UNIVERSITY HOUSING  
AND RESIDENCE LIFE PROFESSIONALS

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between moral decision making and professionals working in university housing and residence life positions within the Upper Midwest Region of the Association of College and University Housing Officers. The specific variables studied included age, gender, education level, professional housing experience, institutional characteristics, and the correlation between all of these variables. The study was conducted in an effort to identify levels of moral decision making of professionals who interact daily with college students on issues related to discipline, student leadership, role modeling, and hiring. These same professionals also serve in an overall university capacity related to issues of budget allocation, hiring of professional staff, and university mission fulfillment.

Data were collected through a quantitative methodology which utilized the Defining Issues Test (DIT) created by James Rest. The instrument was provided via the Center for the Study of Applied Ethics at the University of Minnesota. Survey data were obtained through a paper process from those members of UMR-ACUHO institutions who agreed to participate in the study. The survey consisted of a demographic sheet as well as the DIT instrument which utilized five scenarios to which participants rated specific responses and ranked top responses.

The completed surveys were sent to the University of Minnesota for machine scoring. The raw data were returned and analysis completed. In most cases, there was no statistically significant relationship between any of the individual variables. A step-wise forward regression indicated a statistically significant finding that age impacted the level of moral decision making of respondents when all variables were considered.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Ethical and moral decision making, as a field of study, is a challenging venture. Blimling (1998) found that moral judgment was a combination of the capacity to know what was right as well as the ability to act on what was right. Understanding that which people know in relation to their actions was difficult to assess. Although there are challenges, the importance of the subject warranted investigation. No one is immune from decision making; and issues of morals and ethics are embedded in every decision that individuals must make. As such, the implications of this research can impact any profession.

#### Background

Questions of that which was morally right or wrong date back to what many believe to be the beginning of time. Should Eve have eaten the apple and should she have shared it with Adam? Is it right and justified for nations to conquer other nations? Is slavery an acceptable course of action? Was it fair to the Native Americans to remove them from their land? Should the United State have dropped the atom bomb on Japan? Is assisted suicide ever justifiable? The list of macro-level questions could go on and on.

Similar questions could be considered at the micro-level of university administration. Should university administrators receive gifts of any kind for accepting contracts with third party vendors? Should athletic coaches be allowed to receive bonuses that no other entity on a campus is allowed to receive? Is it permissible that faculty date their graduate assistants or students? What expectation exists for university officials who

are aware of threats to life to self or other individuals? Universities deal with these issues often, as evidenced by reports in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

Individual departments are not exempt from moral dilemmas. Staff members of housing and residence life departments interact with students on a daily basis and continually encounter issues that require moral judgment. Do we hire student staff members solely because they are the children of high ranking university officials? Do we excuse their inappropriate behavior? How should we handle students in distress from eating disorders, alcohol abuse, mental issues, or low self esteem? Here too, the list could go on and on.

Faculty and staff work in a unique environment. The expectation is that faculty members serve as educators and guides of student learning. This expectation is set forward not only for the faculty of a college campus but also for some staff working in higher education, including professionals working in student affairs. Professionals working in university housing understand that the proportion of hours that students spend in the classroom as opposed to outside the classroom is disproportionate. This creates ample opportunity for professionals to serve as educators. Serving as an educator includes the role modeling of ethics. There is an expectation that professionals must, first and foremost, provide an example of ethical behavior.

With such opportunity comes great responsibility. Guthrie (1997) identified the overall mission of student affairs, of which housing is generally a component, to be “the moral conscious of the campus by promoting and supporting ethical behavior on campus and recognizing and confronting unethical behavior” (p. 40). Serving as the moral conscious is not embedded within any job description. It cannot be implied that student

affairs professionals be the only moral conscious of a campus. All professionals serve in this role and have the potential of seeing the breakdown of ethical behavior in higher education in their day-to-day work experiences.

Ethics and morals are not topics discussed in typical everyday conversation. Gini (1998) contended that no one would argue against the notion of ethics in private life but there was a different expectation for work settings. Gini specifically noted that “ethics is something we preach and practice at home in our private lives, but not at work. After all, it could cost us prestige, position, profits and success” (p. 31). Fox (as cited in Gini) maintained that people abandon their personal beliefs and convictions at the door when they enter the workplace. Given that moral and ethical issues are widespread in a college environment, it seems detrimental that personal beliefs and convictions would be abandoned in the workplace. Vaughan (1992) had one philosophy that could explain such abandonment. He noted:

One of the problems in dealing with ethics on campus is that too few presidents, deans, and faculty members, or anyone else for that matter, are willing to step forward and say that on their campus, at this point in time, they are committed to ethical behavior and will not deliberately violate this stand or permit others to violate it with out retribution. Throwing the first stone is difficult (in contrast to throwing the first chair), especially when everyone lives in a house at least partially constructed of glass. (p. 7)

#### Statement of the Problem

University housing and residential life staff members play an important role on a college campus. These professionals are not immune from issues related to ethics and

morals. On a daily basis, staff will encounter issues involving residence hall staff dating students, counseling of emotionally drained students, discipline cases which impact the individual and the environment around them, budgeting decisions, favoritism of high-profile residents and families, support of diverse populations, pressures from outside contingencies who may not have the best of intentions, power struggles among university agents, bid solicitations from outside vendors who may offer additional perks on the side if chosen, engaging in specific conversations regarding confidential information, and issues related to alcohol and other drug violations, to name a few.

Winston and Saunders (1998) explained the importance of these dilemmas when they noted that:

Student affairs professionals face many risks, especially legal risks, as they make decisions about staff, students, programs and services. Prudent practitioners balance personal and institutional risks with the potential gains for students' education and staff effectiveness within the framework of professional ethical standards. (p. 77)

Although it would imply that the existence of professional ethical standards provides a moral gauge for practitioners, the reality exists that professional codes are not all-inclusive and, at times, are contradictory (Kitchener, 1985). The contradiction in codes is one concern among many. There exists no professional expectation that individuals join organizations that have such codes and, when individuals do join, there is no accountability in place to ensure that members are abiding by the organizational codes.

Given the problems with ethical codes, the question then is by what standard professionals make moral and ethical decisions. Research supports the belief that decision

making is influenced by 1) the desire to stay out of trouble; 2) family, friend and outside influences; or 3) the concern with that which is right regardless of the consequences or the beliefs of others (Narvaez & Bock, 2002). The role played by university housing and residential life staff is important and their ability to make moral and ethical decisions is imperative. Understanding the decision making processes of these professionals will help provide a clearer picture of their moral development. Specifically, the results could be used to assist with staff training, professional development sessions, and to provide a framework for dealing with crisis situations.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to evaluate moral decision making of university housing and residence life professionals who were members of the Upper Midwest Region of College and University Housing Officers (UMR-ACUHO). Understanding moral decision making utilized by professionals in their decision making would provide an understanding of how decisions were made. Specific outcomes could include information relevant to the selection, evaluation, and ongoing training of university housing professional staff.

The results of this study produced data specific to two types of scores used to interpret higher end moral development stages (Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thoma, 1999). Specifically, this study identified the moral development scores for university housing and residential life professionals affiliated with the UMR-ACUHO (Upper Midwest Affiliate of the Association of College and University Housing Officials) region. The focus of the study was on issues of gender, professional housing experience, age, educational level obtained, and institutional characteristics.

## Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study are:

1. How is moral decision-making of university housing and residence life professionals within the UMR-ACUHO region linked to gender?
2. How is moral decision-making of university housing and residence life professionals within the UMR-ACUHO region linked to age?
3. How is moral decision-making of university housing and residence life professionals within the UMR-ACUHO region linked to professional housing experience?
4. How is moral decision-making of university housing and residence life professionals within the UMR-ACUHO region linked to education level obtained?
5. How is moral decision-making of university housing and residence life professionals within the UMR-ACUHO region linked to institutional characteristics?
6. What interaction is there between the demographic variables of gender, age, professional housing experience, education level obtained, and institutional characteristics in explaining the differences in moral decision-making of university housing and residence life professionals within the UMR-ACUHO region?

## Hypotheses

The following hypotheses will be used to answer the research question regarding gender:

1. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed by gender as defined by the P Scores.
2. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed by gender as defined by the N2 Scores.

The following hypotheses will be used to answer the research question regarding age:

3. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed by age as defined by the P Scores.
4. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed by age as defined by the N2 Scores.

The following hypotheses will be used to answer the research question regarding professional housing experience:

5. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed by number of years of professional housing experience as defined by the P Scores.
6. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed by number of years of professional housing experience as defined by the N2 Scores.
7. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed by job classification (entry level, mid level, senior level) as defined by the P Scores.
8. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed by job classification (entry level, mid level, senior level) as defined by the N2 Scores.

9. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed by employment experience solely within the UMR-ACUHO region as defined by the P Scores.
10. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed by employment experience solely within the UMR-ACUHO region as defined by the N2 Scores.
11. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed based on years of professional experience within the UMR-ACUHO region as defined by the P Scores.
12. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed based on years of professional experience within the UMR-ACUHO region as defined by the N2 Scores.

The following hypotheses will be used to answer the research question regarding education level obtained:

13. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed based on educational level obtained as defined by the P Scores.
14. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed based on educational level obtained as defined by the N2 Scores.

The following hypotheses will be used to answer the research question regarding institutional characteristics:

15. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed based on public versus private institution currently employed at as defined by the P Scores.
16. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed based on public versus private institution currently employed at as defined by the N2 Scores.
17. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed based on size of institution as defined by the P Scores.
18. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed based on size of institution as defined by the N2 Scores.

The following hypotheses will be used to answer the question regarding the relationship between moral decision-making and the selected characteristics of gender, age, professional housing experience, education level obtained, and institutional characteristics.

19. There is no significant correlation of variables in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals when all variables are taken into consideration as defined by the P Scores.
20. There is no significant correlation of variables in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals when all variables are taken into consideration as defined by N2 Scores.

## Limitations of the Study

A number of limitations existed with this study and included the following:

1. This study specifically looked at the ethical decision making skills of respondents employed within colleges and universities affiliated with the UMR-ACUHO region. No inferences could be made as it related to professionals in the region who were not affiliated with UMR-ACUHO, as well as professionals outside the UMR-ACUHO region.
2. UMR-ACUHO, as a regional area of the country, was less culturally diverse than the overall country with fewer African Americans and individuals of Hispanic descent. Careful consideration should be made when making inferences related to diversity.
3. Respondents included a random sampling of the housing professionals affiliated with the UMR-ACUHO region. As such, careful consideration should be made when making generalizations to all housing professionals within the UMR-ACUHO region.
4. Experience gained prior to the current employment situation was not addressed. No generalizations could be made as to how individuals gained the ethical and moral decision making skills they acquired.
5. The possibility existed that participants of the study may have been familiar with the DIT2 instrument. If so, there may have been some form of bias from the previous experience. There was no way to know or account for this possibility.

## Definition of Key Terms

*ACUHO-I* – The Association of College and University Housing Officers – International. The international professional organization for those employed within housing and residence life.

*Defining Issues Test (DIT)* – An instrument, created by James Rest (1999) from the University of Minnesota, utilized to measure moral development in individuals.

*Ethics* – Standards created by professional organizations to assist in applying ethical principles to situations.

*Morals* – Personal principles, beliefs, and rules of conduct, with respect to that which a culture or society identifies as right versus wrong, that guide actions.

*N2 SCORE* – A measure of moral development calculated via the Defining Issues Test as a measure of prioritizing the higher stages and a measure of discrimination and rejection of lower stages of moral decision making.

*P SCORE* – The weighted average of the ranked stage five and six items summed across the six stories embedded within the Defining Issues Test.

*UMR-ACUHO* – The Upper Midwest Region of the Association of College and University Housing Officers. UMR-ACUHO is the regional affiliate of the international Association ACUHO-I, Association of College and University Housing Officers International. The upper Midwest region consists of the following states: Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.

*University Housing/Residence Life Professionals* – Individuals employed at a college or university in the areas of university housing and/or residence life. Specific functions could range from professionals who live in the housing facilities with the

students to administrators who oversee the facilities from an administrative or staffing standpoint.

### Summary

Moral decision-making will continue to be a daily responsibility of housing professionals. No one is exempt from situations that require making decisions that have lasting impacts on those involved. The ability to process through a situation and make a decision that is beneficial for many as opposed to beneficial only for oneself is a challenge at times. Assessing a person's moral decision-making level could provide insight into how an individual handles a situation. This insight would be beneficial when considering the selection, training, and evaluation of university housing and residence life professionals. The role of such professionals specifically impacts students, university policy, and the day to day interactions with all who such professionals come into contact. Utilizing the Defining Issues Test would provide insight that would be valuable in understanding professionals that play such a vital role within the university.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

No one is immune from decision making and issues of morals and ethics are embedded in all decisions made. Cohen and Rozin (2001) noted:

Assessment of other people's character is perhaps one of the most important moderators involved in interpersonal interaction. Such assessments are based on evaluations of the moral trajectories of individuals. The attribution of immorality in any instance is often based on actions. (p. 697)

Although there were challenges related to the study of such moral trajectories, the importance of the subject warranted discussion.

#### Concepts Related to Ethics and Morality

##### *Ethics*

The term ethics has different meanings depending upon the context. Two specific concepts regarding personal ethics have been used by multiple researchers. The first concept dealt with ethics as an analysis of principles, beliefs, and rules of conduct that guide actions (Starratt, 2004; Vaughan, 1992; Wilcox & Ebbs, 1992). The second concept viewed ethics as an analysis of right versus wrong, and justice and fairness in relationships (Anderson & Davies, 2000; Ciulla, 1998; Erwin, 2000; Gini, 1998). Chambers (1981) noted that "ethics is not a well indexed code of behavior to be consulted when in doubt, but is rather a system of thought developed over many millennia about how human beings translate their inner motivations into external actions having social consequences" (p. 5).

### *Morality*

Similarities existed in the definitions of morality and ethics. Erwin (2000) contended that morality was defined as standards that govern human cooperation, specifically in relation to how duties, rights, and benefits were allocated. Similar to the second concept regarding ethics, morality consisted of evaluations of the actions or character of individuals with respect to that which a culture or society identified as right versus wrong (Haidt, 2001). Such evaluation constituted moral judgment. Rich and DeVitis (1994) contended that distinguishing between right and wrong was similar to developing a system of ethical values and learning to act morally.

### *Role of Values and Beliefs*

Values and beliefs served an important role as they related to ethics and morality. Fried (1997) contended that “ethical beliefs and belief systems are intended to serve as guides to action in confusing and difficult circumstances” (p. 5). Fried found that ethical systems that guide behavior are based on assumptions about reality and include a personal world view, elements that were considered good for people and the environment, and issues of common concern for human welfare. Individual values impacted how these assumptions were viewed. Gini (1998) noted that life was value-laden and that “all ethical judgments are in some sense a values-versus-values or rights-versus-rights confrontation” (p. 37).

The role of values was further complicated by the view that concepts of right and wrong were embedded in the community and cultural consensus about values. Given that individuals belonged to a variety of different types of communities and cultures, challenge existed when values differ by community or culture. Fried (1997) put it

succinctly when she noted that “most individuals are members of more than one culture, and cultural norms about good and right may vary among them” (p. 6).

*What Makes a Dilemma a Moral Dilemma?*

Strike, Haller and Soltis (1988) suggested that there were three points to consider regarding moral dilemmas. First, a determination must be made as to whether the dilemma concerns what the appropriate course of action is. Issues could not be resolved by determining the most expedient or least trouble-making caused action, but rather the fair or just action. Second, dilemmas could not be settled by facts alone. Facts were relevant but not sufficient if the dilemma was a moral dilemma. Third, the person involved in the situation experienced conflicting moral points of view.

Although a dilemma may be identified as a moral dilemma, solving the problem was typically more difficult than identifying the problem. Strike, Haller, and Soltis (1988) indicated that “there isn’t just one right answer to every moral dilemma” (p. 3). Ethical situations required that difficult decisions be made under complex circumstances. An added challenge was being able to specify what fair means in each situation and being able to articulate the rationale for the decision.

Sundberg and Fried (1997) noted conditions for making moral and ethical decisions. First, individuals must be aware of a range of options. Second, choices involved balancing and evaluating contrasting points of view. Third, mature decisions were to be made in awareness of the consequences for the chosen decision.

## Ethical Models

### *Role of Theories and Models*

Ethical theories invoke the concepts of justice, freedom, equality, rights, duties and obligations, or, as Mill (1985) would describe it, the Principle of Maximizing Benefits. Just as scientific theories explained how things are, ethical theories utilized established standards to explain how things should be. Taking it one step further, Robinson and Moulton (1985) contended that ethical theories were not only concerned with what was right and wrong but with explaining the specific principles that were involved and the alternative explanations that were possible. Although the focus was on principles, individuals must remember that ethical theories help clarify what is involved in a moral issue as opposed to telling us what to do in a particular situation. Robinson and Moulton succinctly noted that ethical theories “focus on principles rather than conclusions and on reasoning rather than outcomes” (p. 6).

When comparing ethical, theoretical concepts to moral development theories, Rich and DeVitis (1994) noted similarities as they related to distinguishing right from wrong, as well as developing a system of ethical values and acting morally. Moral development theory drew on the socialization process whereby individuals “become inculcated with societal values and acquire appropriate social roles” (Rich & DeVitis, p. 7). Similar to ethical theories, moral development theory emphasized maturation, growth, developmental stages, and the emergence of cognitive and moral abilities.

Anderson and Davies (2000) contended that ethical models assisted individuals in three ways. First, models served as a starting point for developing an overall plan to move individuals and institutions forward. Second, models helped individuals maintain

objectivity. It was commonplace that ethical dilemmas brought with them conflicts of interest and emotions. It was easy to be swayed to a particular decision by emotion. Models provided a framework for considering a dilemma without focusing solely on the emotional side of the dilemma. Finally, models helped individuals check the reasoning process. Working through a model could help individuals establish ethical justification for a decision or realize that there was no ethical justification for a decision or action.

### *Making Ethical and Moral Decisions*

Anderson and Davies (2000) clarified that, although ethics and morality were similar, there were key differences. Morality could have connections to religious values whereas ethics had connections to professional standards. Ironically, in many instances, the two terms could be used interchangeably. Models exist for making moral decisions as well as for making ethical decisions. The irony lies in the similarity of the models.

Anderson and Davies (2000) noted six steps in applying an ethical decision-making model. Specific steps included (a) identifying the ethical dilemma, (b) gathering facts, (c) asking important questions, (d) creating alternate courses of action, (e) evaluating the alternatives, and (f) implementing the course of action by moral follow-through and virtue ethics. Similarly, Wilcox and Ebbs (1992) identified a five step model for making a moral decision. Steps included (a) identifying the concrete ethical issues, (b) determining alternatives, (c) reviewing alternatives in relation to established principles, (d) checking the proposed solution against one's intuitive moral judgment, and (e) acting on the best judgment. Both models involve identification of the problem, creating and evaluating alternatives, and implementing an action based on moral judgment.

### *Four Component Model*

James Rest and his colleagues (1999) proposed a model of the processes involved in the production of moral behavior (Bebeau, 2002; Cottone & Claus, 2000; Guthrie, 1997; Walker, 2002; Winston & Saunders, 1998). The model involved the following four processes (Cottone & Claus, p. 276):

1. To interpret the situation in terms of how one's actions affect the welfare of others
2. To formulate what a moral course of action would be; to identify the moral ideal in a specific situation.
3. To select among competing value outcomes of ideals, the one to act upon; deciding whether or not to try to fulfill one's moral ideal.
4. To execute and implement what one intends to do.

These four components have been labeled moral sensitivity, moral motivation, moral character, and moral judgment (Bebeau, 2002; Cottone & Claus, 2000; Guthrie, 1997; Walker, 2002; Winston & Saunders, 1998). Both Walker and Guthrie contended that moral failure could result from a deficiency in any one of the four components. The value of the model exists in its usefulness for understanding the reasons for moral failure.

Bebeau, Rest and Narvaez (1999) contended that "The Four Components are *proximal* criteria of moral education interventions, rather than ultimate criteria. The components are psychological processes likely to register the effects of moral education, rather than long-range, multiply-determined, gross effects" (p. 23).

*Ethical sensitivity.* Clarkeburn (2002) suggested that "Ethical sensitivity is the first step in real-life moral decision-making. Without recognizing the ethical aspects of a situation, it is impossible to solve any moral or ethical problem, for without the initial

recognition no problem exists.” (p. 439). Interpretation was the key to ethical sensitivity. Interpretation included awareness of a situation, awareness of the moral factors and implications, awareness of how others are impacted, interpretation of reactions and feelings of others, empathy, and awareness of different courses of action (Bebeau, 2002; Bebeau, Rest & Narvaez, 1999; Erwin, 2000; Guthrie, 1997; Walker, 2002).

Ethical sensitivity was considered to be a combination of moral imagination and recognition of moral issues (Clarkeburn, 2002). As sensitivity was described as a skill, it was implied that there was a capacity to develop this skill. Although people differ in the extent to which they were morally sensitive, Clarkeburn suggested that the skill was acquired by exposure to, and experience with, moral problems. As such, ethical sensitivity was a skill that could be cultivated and improved in order to help individuals understand the moral aspects of problems. Finally, Solomon (1998) contended that “morally sensitive leaders are the essential feature of any good organization” (p. 87).

*Moral motivation.* Moral motivation was grounded in the concept of prioritizing the importance of moral values (Bebeau, 2002; Bebeau, Rest & Narvaez, 1999; Guthrie, 1997; Walker, 2002). The challenge was to prioritize moral values over personal values. Bebeau clarified that “deficiencies in motivation are apparent when personal values such as self-actualization or protecting one’s self or organization replace concerns for doing what is right” (p. 285). There were dilemmas associated with moral motivation. Walker (2002) contended that different types of conflicting moral motivation might be operating at the same time. He also contended that “having reasoned through a conflict and identified the moral course of action does not necessarily imply that one feels compelled to act in this way” (p. 358).

*Moral character.* There were two major components related to moral character. The first component was strength of conviction to follow through with the identified moral decision (Bebeau, 2002; Bebeau, Rest & Narvaez, 1999). Bebeau contended that “if the practitioner wilts under pressure, is easily distracted or discouraged, or is weak-willed, then moral failure occurs because of a deficiency in character and competence” (p. 287). The second component related to moral character was related to implementation skills (Guthrie, 1997; Walker, 2002). Walker summed this component up when he indicated that “the fourth component in the model entails the personality attributes and cognitive strategies involved in the implementation of actions that are consistent with the moral choice” (p. 359).

*Moral judgment.* Bebeau (2002) suggested that moral judgment was a critical element of professional ethical development. Moral judgment entailed deliberating over multiple considerations, figuring out what option should be made and justifying the choice, and determining what action is morally right or wrong (Bebeau, Rest & Narvaez, 1999; Guthrie, 1997; Walker, 2002).

#### *Kitchener’s Model of Ethical Decision-Making*

Kitchener (1985) proposed in her model of ethical decision making that:

The process of ethical justification is hierarchically tiered. There are three increasingly general and more abstract levels of ethical reasoning appeals can be made to; appeals can be made to a higher level if a lower, more specific level fails to provide the rationale for a decision. (p. 18)

The three tiers included professional rules and codes of ethics, ethical principles, and ethical theories.

*Rules and codes.* Rules and codes of conduct were affiliated with professional organizations. An example would include the Association of College and University Housing Officers – International (ACUHO-I) which serves as the professional body for university residence hall professionals. More global to a university setting are the Americal College Personnel Association (ACPA) and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) which provide codes of behavior more generally to university student affairs administrators. Rules and codes function like a set of laws for an organization. These laws are recognized as binding rules for those affiliated with the organization although there is no enforcement of the rules. One dilemma with rules and codes was that they sometimes have omissions or offer contradictory guidance. Other times, administrators would have multiple organizations to which they were affiliated that operate from different sets of standards. Fargo, as cited in Kitchener (1985), noted that “No code, no set of aspirations, however closely followed or devoutly emulated, can address the fundamental internal conflicts of interest that emerge from our job descriptions” (p. 19).

*Ethical principles.* Ethical principles are typically more general and abstract than ethical codes. Principles provided a consistent vocabulary and framework within which cases could be reviewed. The advantage of ethical principles was that “they also provide a rationale for what the codes themselves include” (Kitchener, 1985, p. 19). Kitchener elaborated on four specific principles including autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence, and justice. Beauchamp and Childress (1979) identified a fifth principle of being faithful.

Autonomy allows for the right to act as a free agent. Individuals have the right to determine how to live their lives as long as their actions do not impact others. Respecting autonomy also includes freedom of thought and choice. Individuals have the ability to choose how to respond to the actions of others and to what they believe to be true or ethical (Kitchener, 1985).

Non-maleficence implies that professionals need to be aware of the physical and psychological harm that could occur due to actions. Doing no harm suggests the need to be sensitive to the possible negative consequences on an individual's sense of self worth and ability to advance professionally.

Beneficence implies actively promoting the health and well-being of others. Conflicts could occur when the necessity to do no harm is weighed against benefiting others. Ethical dilemmas could be generated as a result of this type of quandry when benefits could be achieved for one group at the expense of another group. An additional dilemma exists when weighing benefiting others against respecting autonomy. The principle of benefiting others could not assume that one individual or group knows more than the individuals being benefitted. A dilemma exists when autonomy was lost due to the actions of another who was trying to benefit others.

Justice could traditionally be applied in issues of fair distribution of resources. The concept is broader than this. Being just implies "fair treatment when the rights of one individual or group are balanced against another" (Kitchener, 1985, p. 24). Kitchener noted that being just assumed three standards including impartiality, equality, and reciprocity.

Finally, being faithful involves issues of loyalty, truthfulness, promise keeping, and respect. Kitchener (1985) noted that “even if all people are not bound by the principle of being faithful, those in the helping professions acquire a special obligation to be so by virtue of the roles ascribed to them: that is, to help, to be deemed trustworthy” (p. 25).

*Ethical theories.* Just as rules and codes might have been in conflict, which led to the use of ethical principles, principles might have been in conflict, which led to the use of ethical theories. Just as scientific theories explained how things were, ethical theories explained how things should be, based on established standards. Taking it one step further, Robinson and Moulton (1985) contended that ethical theories were not only concerned with what was right and wrong, but with explaining the specific principles that were involved and the alternative explanations that were possible. Although the focus was on principles, individuals must remember that ethical theories helped clarify what was involved in a moral issue, as opposed to telling us what to do in a particular situation. Robinson and Moulton put it succinctly when they noted that ethical theories “focus on principles rather than conclusions and on reasoning rather than outcomes” (p. 6).

When applying these concepts specifically to moral development theory, Rich and DeVitis (1994) noted similarities as they related to distinguishing from right and wrong, as well as developing a system of ethical values and acting morally. Moral development theory drew on the socialization process whereby individuals “become inculcated with societal values and acquire appropriate social roles” (Rich & DeVitis, p. 7). Similar to ethical theories, moral development theory emphasized maturation, growth, developmental stages, and the emergence of cognitive and moral abilities.

### *Moral Theories Throughout the Lifespan*

Moral development exists throughout the lifespan of individuals. Examples of the application of moral development through the lifespan exist and begin with childhood. There are five moral theories specific to childhood. Freud's studies were related to enlightened self interest and psycho-sexual development (Rich & DeVitis, 1994). Adler (Rich & DeVitis) focused on social influences. Jung (Rich & DeVitis) focused on the transition from internal fantasy to real world reality. Bandura (Rich & DeVitis) emphasized social situations as the context for which behavior is learned. Piaget contended that both cognitive and moral development proceed hand-in-hand (Rich & DeVitis).

Four models were specific to moral development in adolescence (Rich & DeVitis, 1994). Havighurst (Rich & DeVitis) was known for his focus on developmental tasks, specifically ten tasks which culminated in the acquisition of a set of values and an ethical system as a guide for behavior. Erikson (Rich & DeVitis) studied identity confusion and ideology. Packer (Rich & DeVitis) studied the impact of emotions on moral development. Finally, Hoffman found logic in the connection between empathy and its role in moral action (Rich & DeVitis).

Moral development theory could also be applied to higher education (Rich & DeVitis, 1994). Jacob (Rich & DeVitis) studied the connection between curriculum and student values. Chickering (Rich & DeVitis) was well known for his seven vectors of college student development. Perry and Heath (Rich & DeVitis) contended that development progressed along a line from dualism to relativism to the evolving of commitments.

Finally, moral development through the lifespan included Levinson's work in relation to adult life cycles. Fowler (Rich & DeVitis, 1994) found importance in the study of faith and human development. Loevinger (Rich & DeVitis) proposed an eight-stage theory of ego development referred to as milestones of development. Gilligan (Rich & DeVitis) studied the moral development specifically of women. Kardiner and Berry (Rich & DeVitis) found significance in the study of cross-cultural human development. Kurtines (Rich & DeVitis) developed a psychosocial role theory that views human behavior as rule governed. Finally, Kohlberg contended that there are six culturally universal stages of cognitive moral development. Some believe it was the work of Kohlberg that had shown the greatest promise in terms of moral development theory and had set the stage for the work of many other researchers (Rich & De Vitis).

Multiple perspectives existed regarding moral development. Although this research was based on a situational moral decision making process, it is important to review other frames of references including the thoughts of Kant and Mill. It would be wrong to focus solely on a situational frame of thought at the expense of other perspectives. The intent was to provide a basic view of the differing perspectives of Kant and Mill with specific emphasis on the situational decision making processes of Kohlberg and Rest.

#### Kant

A review of Kant indicates that he believed that morality was to be "defined as the relation of actions to the autonomy of will, that is, to a will which by its maxims can make universal law" (Liddell, 1970, p. 185). Liddell tried to make meaning of this definition by clarifying that morality is "the relationship of the self-legislating will to an

action perceived as objectively necessary through its own self-legislation” (p. 185).

Inherent within these definitions were multiple concepts that needed further clarification in order to understand Kant’s intended meaning.

Kant believed that “knowledge could extend only to the limits of human experience itself and any attempt to philosophize about matters removed from experience...would result in confusion and ultimate contradiction” (Liddell, 1970, p. 4). The concept suggested that individuals could not know objects beyond experience; therefore, placing value on such objects would be subjective. In order to avoid such subjectivity, individuals must appeal to reason only as the source of moral goodness (Duncan, 1957; Kant, 1938; Kant, 1956; Kant, 1963; Liddell, 1970; Murphy, 1970; Van Der Linden, 1988). For Kant, morality became a matter of consistency in action rather than pursuit of a subjective value.

Knowledge and reasoning were important concepts for Kant. He differentiated between practical knowledge as “knowledge of that which is” and theoretical knowledge as “knowledge of that which ought to be” (Liddell, 1970, p. 8). Fundamental was the differentiation between *a priori* and *a posteriori* whereby an *a priori* argument derived a conclusion according to a formal rule or reason as opposed to *a posteriori* arguments which derived arguments from experience (Duncan, 1957; Kant, 1938; Kant, 1956; Kant, 1963; Liddell, 1970; Murphy, 1970; Van Der Linden, 1988).

The foundation of morality, for Kant, involved concepts of good will, duty, motive, results and respect for law. Kant (1956) suggested that “the only thing that is good without qualification or restriction is a good will” (p. 17). A good will is “one which chooses to act simply because it recognizes that an action is the right thing to do”

(Liddell, 1970, p. 41). The concept implied that an agent with a good will understood that a specific decision was the right decision and the understanding alone was the sufficient reason to act. Agents had a duty to act. Kant noted that “under human conditions, where we have to struggle against unruly impulses and desires, a good will is manifested in acting for the sake of duty” (p. 18).

Also of relevance to the decision making process was motive. Decisions made based on motive were not moral. Decisions made based on good will and duty may have added beneficial motives but the motives were not the reason for the decision. Action was to be made due to duty alone (Duncan, 1957; Kant, 1938; Kant, 1956; Liddell, 1970; Murphy, 1970; Van Der Linden, 1988). Potential results, whether positive or negative, were irrelevant as related to the decision to act. A decision to act made from good will, no matter the positive or negative outcomes, was to be acted upon solely from the fact that it was the right thing to do. Respect for the law was found when agents made decisions out of respect for the law with no regard for self-interest. The law, or maxim, was the only rationale needed to act. The ability to set aside self-interests and make decisions solely based on the law was the moral decision. Kant (as translated by Manthey-Zorn, 1938) noted that:

Since then an action from duty must eliminate entirely the influence of the inclinations and this every object of the will, there is nothing left to determine the will, except objectively the law and subjectively pure respect for this practical law, that is to say, the maxim to obey such a law, even at the expense of all my inclinations. (p. 16)

Law was imperative for Kant. The concept of law opened the door for discussion of what constituted law and how to know whether a decision was law. Inherent in Kant's work was the concept of universal law (Liddell, 1970). Kant believed that the only factor common to all law was *universality*. Universality implied that "every law is impersonal, impartial, or – which comes to the same thing – universally applicable to everyone in the same situation" (Liddell, p. 72). For example, the law of driving on a specific side of the road applies only to drivers but also to all drivers equally. Given that universality was implied to have been a common element of all law, then the law of morality had to incorporate universality. Kant believed that conformity to law as law was conformity to the universality of law. The question became how to conform to the universality of law. Kant believed in his rule of morality which was to "never do anything from a maxim which you could not propose to be a universal law" (Liddell, p. 72). Maxims were believed to be principles upon which we act (Kant, 1956). This meant that individuals should not act on principles that could not be proposed as moral law for all. The decision to act differently given circumstances would be inappropriate. The decision to act situationally would violate the concept of universality. A simple question to help clarify complicated concepts would be "How would you like it if everyone did that?" Universality implies that the decision is applicable to all. Inherent in this question was basic commonsense. Kant believed that "commonsense moral judgments are generally based on this rule" (Liddell, p. 72).

Kant's complicated perspective was succinctly clarified when Liddell (1970) noted:

The good will is one which conforms its maxim to law as law, thus acting from the moral motive (respect for law as law) in performing its duty (that action which conforms to law). This principle or ultimate rule provides two things: a way of deciding when our actions are in accordance with moral goodness, and a yardstick for determining whether our motives are moral or not. When we act in accordance with the principle of conformity to law as law, then we perform a morally good action; and if conformity to law as law is the reason why we act, then we act with the moral motive. This principle, moreover, will apply to any action whatsoever, for it is a purely formal rule, without reference to any circumstances or persons. (pp. 72-73)

Contrary to the perspective upon which this research is based, Kant found moral behavior to be a function of conformity to the law. Other perspectives saw moral decision making as a function of decisions that promote happiness and prevent unhappiness. This perspective by Mill was also a different perspective that warranted review although it too was contrary to decision making based on circumstance or situation.

#### Mill

Mill spoke of moral philosophy as a principle of utility. To understand the moral concept it was important to get an understanding of the term utility. Bentham (1969) believed:

The principle of utility is meant that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency which it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question; or, what is the same thing in other words, to promote or to oppose that happiness.

(p. 7)

Mill (1985) regarded utility as “the ultimate appeal on all ethical questions; but it must be utility in the largest sense, grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being” (p. 70). Inherent within this perspective was the idea of action. Mill believed that “all action is for the sake of some end, and rules of action, it seems natural to suppose, must take their whole character and color from the end to which they are subservient” (Mill, 1969, p. 33). Contrary to Kant who believed moral decisions were made out of duty to law, Mill believed more in a concept of decision making based on the ends or the perceived outcomes.

Mill (1969) believed the ends were the pursuit of happiness and the absence of pain. He noted:

The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals ‘utility’ or the ‘greatest happiness principle’ holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain and the privation of pleasure. (p. 36)

Mill (1969) made connection to the concept of morality through these concepts when clarifying that the standard of morality could be defined as rules and precepts for human conduct through the observance of the existence that could be secured for all.

The identification of what constituted a pleasure under this philosophy was important to understand. Mill (1969) believed there to be only one answer when comparing two pleasures and identifying which of the two was more valuable. Mill thought:

Of two pleasures, if there be one to which all or almost all who have experience of both give a decided preference, irrespective of any feeling of moral obligation to prefer it, that is the more desirable pleasure. If one of the two is, by those who are competently acquainted with both, placed so far above the other that they prefer it, even though knowing it to be attended with a greater amount of discontent, and would not resign it for any quantity of the other pleasure which their nature is capable of we are justified in ascribing to the preferred enjoyment a superiority in quality so far outweighing quantity as to render it, in comparison, of small account. (pp. 37-38)

A key point within this quote included the understanding that the decision of more than one person was required to identify which pleasure was more valuable.

A confusing point for some could have been the belief that man would intentionally and consistently choose items of pleasure in all situations. Mill (1969) clarified that individuals capable of enjoying competing items of pleasure indicated a preference for the item that employed their highest faculties. In comical form, Mill noted:

Few human creatures would consent to be changed into any of the lower animals for a promise of the fullest allowance of a beast's pleasures; no intelligent human being would consent to be a fool, no instructed person would be an ignoramus, no person of feeling and conscience would be selfish and base, even though they should be persuaded that the fool, the dunce, or the rascal is better satisfied with his lot than they are with theirs." (p. 38)

Mill did recognize that individuals lacking character did choose the lower, more easily obtainable pleasures although they were less valuable.

A concern existed regarding the concept of happiness and the reality that perpetual happiness could not be obtained. Mill (1969) acknowledged that a “continuity of highly pleasurable excitement” is impossible but also that tranquility and excitement are sufficient for a satisfied life. Mill contended that with tranquility came the ability to be content with very little pleasure and that with much excitement came the ability to tolerate considerable quantities of pain.

Happiness was not intended to be individual happiness of but happiness of the whole (Mill, 1969). The highest ideals of Mill’s perspective included “to do as you would be done by” and “to love your neighbor as yourself” (p. 45). Gaining as close proximity to this ideal meant:

Utility would enjoin, first, that laws and social arrangements should place the happiness or the interest of every individual as nearly as possible in harmony with the interest of the whole; and, secondly, that education and opinion, which have so vast a power over human character, should so use that power as to establish in the mind of every individual an indissoluble association between his own happiness and the good of the whole. (p. 45)

Utilitarian morality, according to Mill (1969), recognized in people the power and ability to sacrifice their own greatest good for the good of others. Although this was recognized, Utilitarianism did not acknowledge that sacrifice for the sake of sacrifice was good. Sacrifice that did not increase the sum total of happiness was presumed to be wasted. The devotion to the happiness of other individuals was recognized as a goal for some but was apart from the concept of Utilitarianism.

Finally, Utilitarianism acknowledged the thought that human experience led individuals to a Utilitarian perspective. The analogy was made that nobody argued that the art of navigation was not founded in astronomy because rational men go to sea with the calculation already made. Human experience led sailors to utilize navigation to set their path. Mill (1969) clarified:

All rational creatures to out upon the sea of life with their minds made up on the common questions of right and wrong, as well as on many of the far more difficult questions of wise and foolish. And this, as long as foresight is a human quality, it is to be presumed that will continue to do. (p. 52)

Kant believed that adherence to law was the moral objective. Mill found that the pursuit of human happiness was imperative. Contrary to either philosophy, the works of Kohlberg and Rest provided the most relevancies to the perspective of moral decision making studied in this research. As such, it is imperative that great detail be afforded to both researchers.

## Kohlberg

### *Background*

Kohlberg was a leading theorist of cognitive moral development. When compared to the works of Kant (Kant, 1956; Liddell, 1970) and Mill (1969), Kohlberg's work more closely adhered to the philosophy of Kant and his respect and adherence to law. Like Piaget, Kohlberg was not concerned with the moral behavior of individuals, nor was he concerned with individuals' statements about whether an action was right or wrong (Duska & Whelan, 1975). The fact that both children and adults could exhibit the same behaviors or verbalize the same thoughts exemplified the fact that there was no

perspective of moral development provided by behavior or statements. Duska and Whelan noted that for Kohlberg, “it is more informative to look at the reasons a person judges an action as wrong than it is to look at the person’s action (behavior) or even to listen to what the person says is wrong (statement)” (p. 43).

Kohlberg’s research in the area of cognitive moral development began in the 1960s where his initial research focused on fifty males ranging from ten to twenty-eight years of age. Kohlberg, utilizing the Moral Judgment Interview (MJI), interviewed this group of men every three years over a period of eighteen years. Kohlberg found through this research that his subjects experienced the same sequence of stages of moral development, although the rate at which the men developed differed (Duska & Whelan, 1975). This style of research continued through the works of Kohlberg and other researchers, which supports Piaget’s original supposition of stage development.

Kohlberg’s assessment existed in the form of standardized scenarios that were shared with participants, followed by a consistent set of questions designed to probe the reasons for specific decisions for each scenario. Kohlberg established a scoring system which allowed researchers to organize subject responses to the scenarios (Duska & Whelan, 1975).

### *Stages of Moral Development*

Kohlberg identified three specific levels of moral development including: 1) pre-conventional, 2) conventional, and 3) post-conventional (Duska & Whelan, 1975; Kohlberg, 1981; Rich & DeVitis, 1994). The pre-conventional level presupposed that “the child is responsive to cultural rules and labels of good and bad, right or wrong, but interprets these labels in terms of either the physical or the hedonistic consequences of

action (punishment, reward, exchange of favors)” (Duska & Whelan, p. 45). The conventional level suggested that “maintaining the expectations of the individual’s family, group, or nation is perceived as valuable in its own right, regardless of immediate and obvious consequences” (Duska & Whelan, p. 46). Also inherent in the conventional level was loyalty to conforming to personal expectations and social order as well as actively maintaining, supporting, and justifying the order. Finally, the post-conventional level suggested that “there is a clear effort to define moral values and principles which have validity and application apart from the authority of the groups or persons holding these principles and apart from the individual’s own identification with these groups” (Duska & Whelan, p. 46-47). The research of Kohlberg yielded support for the belief that young children were typically in the pre-conventional level, most adults fall in the conventional level, and up to 25% of adults fall within the post-conventional level (Duska & Whelan; Rich & DeVitis, 1994).

Each specific level also contained two stages within, for a total of six stages including: (a) punishment and obedience orientation; (b) individual instrumental purpose and exchange; (c) mutual interpersonal expectations, relationships, and conformity; (d) social system and conscience maintenance; (e) prior rights and social contract; and (f) universal ethical principle orientation (Kohlberg, 1981).

#### *Stage One: Punishment and Obedience Orientation*

The punishment and obedience orientation suggested that behavior was based on the avoidance of punishment. Duska and Whelan (1975) found that “the physical consequences of action determine its goodness or badness regardless of the human meaning or value of these consequences” (p. 45-46). Also inherent in this orientation was

the belief that the values of punishment avoidance and deference to authority were valued in their own right, as opposed to adherence based on respect for moral order (Duska & Whelan; Kohlberg, 1981). Kohlberg clarified that this stage took on an egocentric point of view whereby the interests of others were not considered.

*Stage Two: Individual Instrumental Purpose and Exchange*

Individuals who transitioned into stage two saw right action as being the action that satisfied individual needs while occasionally meeting the needs of others (Duska & Whelan, 1975; Rich & DeVitis, 1994). Inherent in this stage was the concept of reciprocity where individuals made decisions based on the adage “you scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours.” Concepts of loyalty, gratitude and justice were replaced by that which provided a personal benefit or reward for the individual. Kohlberg (1981) clarified that “the reason for doing right is to serve one’s own needs or interests in a world where one must recognize that other people have their interests, too” (p. 409).

*Stage Three: Mutual Interpersonal Expectations, Relationships, and Conformity*

Stage three was characterized by concern about other people and feelings, loyalty and trust with partners, and motivation to follow the rules (Duska & Whelan, 1975; Kohlberg, 1981; Rich & DeVitis, 1994). Individuals utilized the “Golden Rule” under this orientation whereby “if one puts oneself in the other person’s place one would want good behavior from the self” (Kohlberg, p. 410). This stage was also associated with a good boy/nice girl perspective whereby individuals earn approval by being nice (Duska & Whelan).

#### *Stage Four: Social System and Conscience Maintenance*

Inherent in stage four were the concepts of doing one's duty in society, maintaining social order, and maintaining the welfare of the group (Duska & Whelan, 1975; Kohlberg, 1981; Rich & DeVitis, 1994). The switch to this stage signified the transition from interpersonal motives to acceptance of the viewpoint of the society which defined both roles and rules. Kohlberg explained:

What is right is fulfilling the actual duties to which one has agreed. Laws are to be upheld except in extreme cases where they conflict with other fixed social duties and rights. Right is also contributing to society, the group, or institution. The reasons for doing right are to keep the institution going as a whole, self-respect or conscience as meeting one's defined obligations, or the consequences: "What if everyone did it?" (pp. 410-411)

#### *Stage Five: Prior Rights and Social Contract*

Intrinsic to stage five was orientation to the rights and standards that had been critically reviewed and agreed upon by society (Duska & Whelan, 1975; Kohlberg, 1981; Rich & DeVitis, 1994). Duska and Whelan noted that "aside from what is constitutionally and democratically agreed upon, the right is a matter of personal values and opinion" (p. 47). What resulted from this perspective was an emphasis on the legal point of view coupled with the possibility of changing law due to social considerations rather than a rigid maintenance of the law as characterized in stage four.

#### *Stage Six: Universal Ethical Principle Orientation*

Finally, stage six was characterized by the knowledge of universal principles of justice. Individuals at this stage had reached the pinnacle of moral development and were

able to evaluate situations and make decisions based on the principles on which laws and social agreements are made rather than the laws themselves (Duska & Whelan, 1975; Kohlberg, 1981; Rich & DeVitis, 1994). This stage emphasized commitment to abstract principles such as the “Golden Rule” as opposed to concrete law.

### *Stage Development*

An examination of Kohlberg’s stages illustrated a clear picture of the four qualities of stage development. First, stage development is invariant in that “one must progress through the stages in order, and one cannot get to a higher stage without passing through the stage immediately preceding it” (Duska & Whelan, 1975, p. 47-48). In this light, moral development is growth which takes place according to a pre-determined sequence.

Second, subjects can not comprehend moral reasoning at a stage more than one stage beyond their own. Accordingly, a person at stage two can not comprehend stage four concepts. Third, subjects are cognitively attracted to reasoning at one level above their current level. According to Duska and Whelan (1975), Kohlberg had noted that “reasoning at higher stages is cognitively more adequate than reasoning at lower stages” (p. 49). As such, once an individual progresses to a new stage, they are unlikely to regress to a previous stage.

Finally, movement through the stages occurs when cognitive disequilibrium is created. This quality is illustrated when “a person’s cognitive outlook is not adequate to cope with a given moral dilemma” (Duska & Whelan, 1975, p. 49). If an individual is unable to utilize their current orientation to resolve a problem they will be pushed to a

new framework, or stage. Conversely, when there is no cognitive disequilibrium, there is no reason to advance to a new stage of moral development.

### *Support for Kohlberg*

Although there were some who believe that the work of Kohlberg was fundamentally flawed and should be started fresh, Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, and Thoma (1999) believed that Kohlberg's theory was beneficial in helping to guide the research of others. Four specific concepts established by Kohlberg assisted Rest, et al. in their research. First, Kohlberg emphasized cognition and the belief that researchers must understand how people make sense of the world in order to understand their moral behavior. Second, Kohlberg suggested that individuals self-construct their own basic categories of morality such as justice, duty, rights, and social order. This belief set the stage for meaning-making as set by the individual, as opposed to passively accepting the beliefs of the individual's culture.

Third, Kohlberg's stages emphasized development. The differences in individuals' moral development were represented by varying degrees of comprehensive, more elaborated concepts. Rest, et al. (1999) noted that "in broad terms the course of moral judgment development can be described as evolving from simpler ideas to more complex ideas" (p. 2). Finally, Rest, et al. found much use in Kohlberg's shift from conventional to post-conventional thinking. They specifically found benefit in the transition from maintaining social norms as being the way things were done to the idea that rules, roles, laws, and institutions must combine to form the ideal of cooperation.

### *Criticisms of Kohlberg*

Although Rest, et al. (1999) found support for the research of Kohlberg, they also found various areas of concern categorized by the following: (a) criticisms from psychologists that require changes in both method and theory; (b) criticisms from moral philosophers on Kohlberg's formalist, normative theory; (c) criticisms that require an acknowledgement of limitation of scope but no change in basic tenet; and (d) criticisms that are unwarranted and require no change in Kohlberg's approach.

#### *Psychological Criticisms*

Kohlberg's theory was considered a hard stage model in that there was a required progression from one stage to the next with no overlapping areas. Moral development as a hard stage model had received criticism. Siegler (cited in Rest, et al., 1999) noted that "change is better depicted as a series of overlapping waves than as a staircase progression" (p. 19). This criticism suggested that there were gray areas in Kohlberg's model, given the perspective that there should be overlap between the stages.

Critics suggested that Kohlberg's theory was specifically built around the concept of justice as it related to the thought processes for decision making. Specifically, justice was the consideration in terms of operation with little emphasis placed on the content of the dilemma (Rest, et al. 1999). Critics had suggested that other considerations must be involved, including concepts related to care.

#### *Philosophical Criticisms*

Kohlberg's theory was formulated as a principle-based theory which some criticized. The contention was that "principles are not sufficient guides for clear direction for choosing a course of action" (Rest, et al., 1999, p. 23). Critics contended that

Kohlberg's theory was limiting in nature and that his stages did not provide a clear picture of how to obtain moral development.

A second philosophical criticism was that abstract principles are not the only source for moral guidance. Toulmin (as cited in Rest, et al., 1999) indicated that "Specific cases can also lead to moral reflection, which in turn can supply moral guidance. Moral guidance from the analysis of specific cases is sometimes more certain and produces more agreement than difficult-to-fathom principles." (24). The medical field was an example of such thought process. A community of doctors will review cases looking for similarities and differences which help establish moral guidelines. New cases are continually reviewed with the purpose of reflecting on the established moral guidelines in order to determine what, if any, change should occur.

#### *Limitations of Scope*

Kohlberg's six-stage theory addresses moral judgment. His theory had been criticized for failing to address issues of moral sensitivity, moral motivation, and moral character (Rest, et al., 1999). A sole focus on moral judgment resulted in criticism that "Kohlberg's theory (dealing with moral judgment) is too cerebral, that it misses the 'heart' of morality" (Rest, et al., p. 10).

Originally, Kohlberg contended that his six stages applied to all moral problems. Through his debate with Carol Gilligan he acknowledged that his stages are more applicable to issues of justice (Rest, et al., 1999). Critics contended that "although justice issues are a large part of any totally comprehensive set of moral problems and must be part of any comprehensive theory of morality, they do not cover the gamut of moral issues" (Rest, et al., p. 14).

A third concern stemmed from the dilemmas themselves as utilized in his research. The specific criticism was that the scenarios did not adequately represent the entire range of the moral domain (Rest, et al., 1999). Those same critics acknowledged that they “do not know how to devise a set of dilemmas that adequately represents all portions of the moral domain in a balanced fashion” (Rest, et al., p. 15).

#### *Unwarranted Criticisms*

A variety of criticisms had been expressed regarding Kohlberg’s work which had caused others to come to Kohlberg’s defense. Specifically, one contention was that there was a “lack of evidence for a developmental sequence from conventionality to post-conventionality” (Rest, et al., 1999, p. 31). The work of Rest, et al. supported Kohlberg’s contention that such a shift does occur.

A second criticism stemmed from Kohlberg’s claim that development accounts for the differences in moral development. Shweder (as cited in Rest, et al., 1999) maintained that “the fundamental differences in moral thinking are better accounted for by cultural differences, namely a difference between rights-based morality and duty-based morality” (p. 32). Rest, et al. supported Kohlberg’s contention and noted that Kohlberg’s theory had both a duty-based morality and a rights-based morality within it which was really a developmental difference and not a cultural difference, as argued by critics.

### Rest Compared to Kohlberg

#### *Assessment Techniques*

Lynch, Surdyk, and Eiser (2004) noted that “although assessing professionalism poses many challenges, gauging and ascertaining growth in professionalism is impossible

without assessment” (p. 366). Although Rest (1999) and his research team defended some of the work of Kohlberg, it was in the area of assessment that the path diverged between Kohlberg and Rest. Kohlberg utilized “an interview in which participants were presented with several moral dilemmas, asked to solve the dilemmas, then asked for the reasoning behind their choices” (Rest, et al., 1999, p. 47). In contrast, “the DIT (Defining Issues Test) is a paper-and-pencil task that presents participants with six moral dilemmas; each dilemma is followed by 12 items presenting an issue for consideration in solving the dilemma” (Rest, et al., p. 48).

Kohlberg’s (Rest et.al, 1999) test was classified as a production test whereby the participants were producing their own responses. In contrast, Rest classified his test as a recognition task given the defined set of potential options available for participants to choose from. Rest diverged in the format to a recognition task as he and his colleagues believed that there were a variety of advantages to this type of assessment. Rest, et al. (1999) identified the following advantages:

1. Production tasks credit participants for having explicitly expressed ideas. Tacit understandings were excluded from such a tool. It was believed that production tasks underestimate what individuals understand because of this. Recognition tasks did not rely on verbal expressions as ideas were presented from which individuals choose.
2. In recognition tasks, the only thing that varied was the subject’s response. Tremendous room for error existed in production tasks whereby there was variability in the respondent’s response, variability in the interviewer’s interpretations of the response, and variability in the scorer interpretations.

3. During production tasks, participants who may not fully understand what they were to do may ramble in speech to the point that their comments are unable to be scored. Recognition tasks eliminated this possibility as participant tasks were clarified through the expectation of rating and ranking items.
4. Respondents participating in an interview might only respond to the questions from an individual perspective and never consider the societal point of view. By contrast, recognition tasks involved societal perspectives for consideration. Although this perspective was available, those respondents who truly only considered dilemmas from an individual perspective would still do so under recognition tasks as well so as to not incorrectly inflate scores.
5. Finally, recognition tasks were proven to be more convenient than production tasks. Production tasks required trained personnel to administer, evaluate, and score the interview. To the contrary, recognition tasks had the convenience of computer scoring.

Although there were several benefits to recognition tasks, it was important to realize that there were problems as well. Rest, et al. (1999) shared the following concerns:

- (a) participants may randomly check off ratings and rankings without attending to the task at all, thus giving bogus data;
- (b) participants may respond to aspects of the test stimuli that are not intended by the test designer;
- (c) test items may be ambiguous, or reactions to items may be idiosyncratic; and
- (d) generally speaking, just as production tasks probably *underestimate* a person's

development, a recognition task probably *overestimates* a person's development.  
(p. 52)

#### *Similarities Between DIT and MJI*

Although Rest and his colleagues chose to utilize the Defining Issues Test, the DIT was similar to other measures of moral judgment, such as the MJI, in several ways. Narvaez and Bock (2002) identified four similarities between the two instruments. First, a dilemma was presented to respondents and they were expected to make an action decision and convey the reasoning behind the decision. Second, ideas and knowledge related to the dilemma were retrieved as moral schemas were activated from long-term memory. Third, the moral schemas activated by the stimuli were comprised of verbal and non-verbal tacit knowledge. Finally, similar to the MJI, the DIT measured how individuals structure their understanding of a dilemma along the lines of justice reasoning. Although these similarities existed, the DIT method followed a different path at this point.

#### *Differences Between DIT and MJI*

Narvaez and Bock (2002) found that the DIT was distinctive from the MJI in three ways including: (a) the post-dilemma stimuli it presents, (b) in what it measures, and (c) in the tasks assigned to the respondent. In terms of the post-dilemma stimuli it presents, "the target stimuli of the DIT are fragments of moral reasoning arguments from different moral schemas" (Narvaez & Bock, p. 307). This allowed for respondents to fill in the missing information from what they already understand. The advantage of this was that "the fragmented nature of the items requires the participant to supply meaning to the

items that they are rating” (Narvaez & Bock, p. 307). The meaning was what was evaluated to identify the respondent’s level of moral development.

The DIT measured tacit knowledge. Rest and his colleagues asserted that individuals may not have had the ability to verbalize what they know. The measurement of tacit knowledge allowed for researchers to “uncover higher levels of understanding in the lay person than can a moral judgement [*sic*] interview approach” (Narvaez & Bock, 2002, p. 309). Lewicki, Nisbett and Wilson, and Uleman and Bargh (as cited in Narvaez & Bock) supported the belief that self-reported explanations of one’s own cognitive processes had many limitations and that respondents could report out their thoughts but were unable to verbalize the thought process behind the thought.

The third difference related directly back to the utilization of recognition tasks versus production tasks as previously explained. DIT theory suggested that the thought process activated when a respondent read a dilemma guided the respondent in how they rated and ranked the statements about the dilemma. Narvaez and Bock (2002) indicated that DIT theory also suggested that

When the respondent encounters a statement that both makes sense and also activates a preferred schema, that item is given a high rating and ranked of high importance. Alternately, when the respondent encounters a statement that either doesn’t make sense or seems simplistic and unconvincing (is not activating a preferred schema), the item receives a low rating.” (p. 309)

Although there were criticisms, Kohlberg was credited with leaving a legacy which provided research in morality by looking at individuals’ cognition and moral judgment (Rest, et al., 1999). Walker (1981) shared that “Rest and his colleagues believe

that the approach is still generally useful and largely valid but that some modifications are required, hence the new-Kohlbergian label” (p. 360). The various criticisms of Kohlberg’s model sent Rest and his colleagues looking for a revised avenue to study moral development. Thoma (2002) noted that “in short, the rejection of an orthodox stage model set the Minnesota group on a path that increasingly diverged from the Kohlberg’s group’s model and methods” (p. 230). A strong foundation in Kohlberg was required to understand the path that Rest traveled. It was this path which provided a foundation for this research project.

### Rest’s Defining Issues Test

#### *Origination*

It was clear that the DIT originated from the work of Kohlberg as indicated by Walker (2002) when he noted that “the Minnesota approach to moral development initially ‘piggy-backed’ on the rising tide of Kohlberg’s moral stage model” (p. 353). Narvaez and Bock (2002) noted that, “Historically, philosophy has described moral judgement [*sic*] as conscious and deliberative decision-making. Consequently, studies of moral judgement [*sic*] usually focus on testing conscious, thoughtful reasoning about moral dilemmas.” (p. 297). The focus on moral dilemmas was the backbone of the DIT. This instrument could be utilized to measure moral development. “The core criteria adopted by the group argued that the DIT could be claimed to measure moral judgment development” (Thoma, 2002, p. 231-232) assuming the following conditions were met:

1. The measure distinguishes between groups who are expected to differ on a measure of moral judgment development.
2. The measure produces evidence of upward movement across time.

3. Exposure to specific experiences that are expected to stimulate development is associated with change on the measure.
4. The measure is more closely related to cognitive measure than personality measures.

### *Role of Schemas*

The DIT “is designed to capture moral schema changes that are particularly visible throughout adolescence and early adulthood” (Narvaez & Bock, 2002, p. 304). Given the emphasis on the role of schemas, it was important to understand schemas in general. Narvaez and Bock found that schemas are a set of expectations, hypotheses and concepts that are formed as individuals begin to recognize the similarities and recurrence in their experiences. Specific descriptions of schemas included (a) memory objects which were units of related characteristics; (b) cognitive fields which were sets of memory objects; and (c) mental models which included structures of meaning in regards to particular situations.

Narvaez and Bock (2002) have also noted that “schemas operate constantly in the mind, being evoked or activated by current stimulus configurations that resemble the stimuli that created the schema in the first place” (p. 301). For example, news stories have the potential to paint a picture of a black man as the criminal when no person is identified solely because previous news stories aired with pictures of black men as the assailants. Images or stories have the ability to tap into our internal memory of similar situations and give us a frame of reference when considering those similar situations. The importance of schemas lies in the fact that a schema consists of “a representation of some

prior stimulus phenomenon that organizes or guides the application of prior knowledge to new information” (Narvaez & Bock, p. 302).

Schemas can change through experience. No two experiences are identical and the more experiences that a person has, the more likely it will be that their schema will alter. The DIT was an assessment utilized to measure the change in the schemas that individuals used to answer questions identified as macro questions. Macro questions can be differentiated from micro questions in that “macro and micromorality concern ways of constructing and enriching the web of relationships – one through the structures of society, and the other through personal, face-to-face relationships” (Rest, et al., 1999, p. 3). The DIT, as well as the work of Kohlberg, had been found to be more enlightening as it relates to macro-issues (Narvaez & Bock, 2002; Rest, et al., 1999; Thoma, 2002; Walker, 2002). Post-conventional thinking, as measured by the DIT, “considers macro-level cooperation in terms of advocating sharable ideals that are open to scrutiny and negotiated through the give and take of community life” (Narvaez & Bock, p. 304).

#### *How It Works*

The assessment tool produces two individual scores. A “P score” is identified for each individual. The P score is identified as a “weighted average of the ranked stage five and six items summed across the six stories” (Thoma, 2002, p. 232). Ongoing research and concern was expressed over the fact that a focus on only stage five and six responses left out a great deal of other information. Rest and his colleagues identified an additional score labeled the “N2 score” which measures the difference in ratings between the personal interest and the post-conventional items with more weight given to the post-conventional items (Walker, 2002).

The insights provided by understanding the role of schemas have provided a clear picture of how the DIT works. Specifically, schemas have helped clarify how the DIT works through the following points (Rest, et al., 1999):

1. The DIT could be viewed as a tool for activating or triggering moral schemas from long-term memory to help process what is in working memory.
2. Schema activation did not need to be conscious or reflective. The process could activate tacit schemas as well as deliberate, reflective thoughts.
3. When completing the assessment, subjects provided a high rating and ranking in importance to an item if the item meant something to the subject and was perceived as the more adequate response than other items. Presumably, if a subject did not understand a DIT item or rejected the concept elicited by an item, the subject passed over the item and went on to select another item as important.
4. There was no assumption that every rating and ranking was truly representative of moral schemas. The DIT assessment was viewed as probabilistic whereby, over several dilemmas and over large enough samples, it worked well enough to be useful for diagnosing the development of moral schemas.
5. DIT items must strike a strong balance between too much information and too little information. There must be enough information in an item so as activate a moral schema and to suggest a definite line of thinking, but not too much information so as to lead respondents to an expected answer.
6. The extensive research on different ways to score the DIT, such as through the P score and the N2 score, was an attempt to discover which pattern of ratings and

rankings best represent the activation of schemas so a more clear understanding of moral judgment could be identified.

7. Through research, subjects who had low N2 scores also tended to check off the “can’t decide” category on a separate inventory of public policy issues. This consistency reinforced the validity of the instrument.
8. To the contrary, strongly schematic subjects who were both politically and religiously conservative as well as elicit the maintaining norms judgment had dramatically different views on public policy matters than did strongly schematic subjects who were equally conservative as well as possess post-conventional moral judgment. This suggested that moral schemas afforded a sense of moral certainty and polarized evaluation of public policy issues even for those who were politically and religiously conservative.

#### Research Related to Variables Studied

##### *Gender*

A comprehensive examination of the literature confirmed that there were mixed findings regarding the impact of gender on moral development. Given the contradicting studies, Al-Ansari (2002) suggested that “empirical support for consistent gender differences in moral reasoning has been quite difficult to establish” (p. 75). Although inconsistent, it was important to understand what the existing studies suggested.

Female researchers are troubled by the contention that women achieved a stage three status of moral development as it related to Kohlberg’s scale while men were reported to achieve a stage four status (Armon & Dawson, 1997; Bussey & Maughan,

1982). These reports were “cited as evidence for females possessing a less developed sense of moral reasoning” (Bussey & Maughan, p. 701).

This contention fueled the fire of Carol Gilligan who was convinced that Kohlberg’s instrument centered around a perspective of justice when, in her perspective, women made decisions from a perspective of care (Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Gilligan’s perspective was supported by fellow researchers who held the same belief regarding women’s perspective of care (Armon & Dawson, 1997; Ferguson, 1996; Keefer & Olson, 1995). Ferguson was concise in clarifying that “men’s ideas of the good tend to focus on rights – to property, person, freedom, liberty and their pursuit” while women “appear to be more relational in that they place their emphasis and value on their relationships” (pp. 256-257).

In spite of the contention that men and women viewed decision-making from a different perspective, research had shown little difference as it related to moral decision-making (Ford & Lowery, 1986; Lifton, 1985; Maqsd, 1998; Pratt, Pancer, Hunsberger & Manchester, 1990; Rest & Thoma, 1985; Wark & Krebs, 1996). Ford and Lowery found that both genders utilized a perspective of justice and care as well as had statistically insignificant differences in moral development. Lifton concluded from a review of 45 studies that 27 of the 45 studies reported no significant main effect related to gender. A significant study by Rest and Thoma included 3000 participants. Their research showed that gender accounted for only .02% of the variance of scores.

To the contrary, research has shown that gender differences did exist. Ironically, the work of Pearson and Bruess (2001) found that “it was the men who scored lower than the women in moral development” (p. 16). This research added to the confusion that

already existed in regards to the impact of gender on moral development. The work of Wark and Krebs (1996) supported the belief of a disparity in levels of development for the genders. Their research also favored women as it related to moral development when considering situations that were real-life dilemmas.

### *Age*

The research reflected varying findings regarding the impact of age on moral development (Pratt et.al, 1991). The continuum ran from age having no impact to significant impact. Armon and Dawson (1997) noted that studies “limited in duration or age-range have difficulty addressing whether positive moral reasoning development continues through adulthood” (p. 436). Rest, Cooper, Coder, Masanz, and Anderson (1974) concluded that a chronological study would need to be completed in order to analyze this but went on to note that a study of this type would be challenging.

An assumption existed that moral development advanced with age. This assumption would then expect that P scores would correlate with age. Rest, et al. (1974) believe “it is easier to make this assumption with student groups (supposedly in their formative years) than with an adult sample” (p. 498). Walker (1989) found that “the data regarding development trends indicated that, although there were age differences, there was no evidence of development over time” (p. 164). Speicher (1994) as well as Armon and Dawson (1997) produced research which yielded no significant impact regarding age on moral development. Speicher’s study specifically showed that “during early adulthood, age was unrelated to moral reasoning” (p. 629).

To the contrary, research also produced significant support for the belief that age did make a difference as it related to moral development (Armon & Dawson, 1997;

Perez-Delgado & Oliver, 1995; Pratt, et al., 1991). Perez-Delgado found that “a positive relation between DIT scores and changes in age and formal education had been documented” (p. 66). They noted that 38% of the variance in scores was attributed to age and formal education but that formal education did have a more significant impact than age.

Research provided clarification and confusion regarding moral development of adults. Lonky, Kaus and Roodin (1984) found that “the belief that the adult years define an important and lively period for moral change has emerged as a theme in many recent works in moral development” (p. 1159). The term that needed clarification was adulthood. Perez-Delgado and Oliver (1995) found that age had a significant effect on P scores up to age 20. Pratt et al. (1991) contended that longitudinal studies showed forward movement in stages over time in early to middle adulthood and that lower scores might be seen in later adulthood. Armon and Dawson (1997) found variability of scores with increasing age as well as diminished scores as adulthood advances.

Research provided conflicting messages regarding age and moral development, specifically for the undefined category labeled as adulthood. Armon and Dawson (1997) confirmed the conflicting results by noting that “findings to date suggest three possible developmental paths of moral reasoning development in adulthood: 1) a plateau effect in adulthood; 2) ongoing development throughout adulthood; or 3) on-going development in earlier adulthood with decline in later adulthood” (p. 438).

#### *Professional Experience*

Research was limited related regarding the impact of professional experience on moral development and decision-making. Resources were available that expressed the

need for administrators to handle moral dilemmas in an appropriate fashion. Strike, Haller, and Soltis (1988) contended:

Human beings are moral agents. They are responsible for their choices, and they have a duty to make choices in a morally responsible way. Thus it is crucial that people be able to reflect ethically on their choices and their actions. That is especially important when individuals have power and influence over the lives of others. We can think of few areas where it is more important than in the administration of schools. (p. 6)

Although Strike, Haller, and Soltis were speaking in regards to K-12 education, the same philosophy holds true for higher education.

Carr (1999) investigated the role of professional education and professional ethics. Philosophically, he reviewed professional roles, such as education, and found:

Despite the undeniable ethical dimensions of paid occupations – trades and services – other than the traditional professions, it is still natural to associate courses of professional ethics with medicine, law, nursing or teaching, rather than auto-repair, supermarket assistance or window-cleaning. Indeed, it seems plausible to hold that if there is anything more to the traditional distinction of professions from trades or other services than considerations of social and economic status, it might well reside in the distinctive ethical or moral character and implications of such occupations as medicine, law and education. (p. 33)

To be sure, roles within higher education opened the door for ethical dilemmas to unfold more so than other professions.

Winston and Saunders (1991) delved into the issue of ethics and student affairs professionals. They contended that “no clear answers exist for all the ethical and professional behavior issues faced on a daily basis by student affairs professionals” (p. 323). Professionals utilized codes, facts, personal values, social norms and moral principles to decide how to handle dilemmas. Canon (1996) suggested that our “resources interact with one another in ways that empower us to grow as individuals and move with some consistency toward a higher level of ethical conduct in performing our duties” (p. 125).

Aside from the available resources which viewed decision making from a philosophical perspective, there were minimal examples of research that investigated this issue. Cook (1990) completed a dissertation that studied the moral judgment of higher education administrators. Her research yielded no significant impact in regards to her population sample. Fontana and Noel (1973) completed research which confirmed that university administrators utilize a justice perspective more so than faculty and students. They also speculated that administrators were highest in stage four of Kohlberg’s scale because “a large part of their role is to preserve the university or their department as an organization and to facilitate its smooth operation” (p. 420). This speculation was supported by their research.

Boldizar and Wilson (1989) sought to verify that those in higher status occupations, such as administrators, facilitate the development of higher justice perspectives. Their perspectives assumed that higher status occupations have increased autonomy which affords opportunities to participate in decision making and conflict resolution. These perspectives were not supported by their research.

### *Level of Formal Education*

Studies existed which both supported and refuted the impact of formal education on moral development. With that said, the number of studies supporting the connection was more widespread. One study indicated that religious perspective overshadows education level (Bouhmama, 1988). Bouhmama found that the participant's belief in Islam overshadowed any development resulting from educational level. Although outnumbered by numerous other studies, Maqsd (1998) found that increased years of formal education actually decreased the participant's level of moral development.

Minimal numbers of studies reflected no effect of formal education on moral development yet a substantial number of studies produced results to the contrary (Bunch, 2005; Perez-Delgado & Oliver, 1995; Pratt, Diessner, Hunsberger, Pancer, & Savoy, 1991; Rest & Thoma, 1985; & Speicher, 1994). Bunch found that "gains in moral judgment, as measured by the Defining Issues Test (DIT), correlated strongly with advancing education" (p. 363). A study completed by Perez-Delgado and Oliver yielded results that "thirty-eight percent of the variance in DIT scores should be attributed to age and education levels" (p. 67) with education level having a stronger impact than age. Pratt et al. noted that "the most consistent effect was for education level, which was positively related to higher scores of all of the state-type measures in the study" (p. 673). One study of significant impact was that of Rest and Thoma which produced evidence that formal education accounted for 53% of the variance in moral judgment when analyzing the scores of 3000 participants. This number equated to formal education having a 250 times more powerful effect on moral judgment than the impact of gender.

Colby, Kohlberg, Gibbs, and Lieberman. (1983) noted that “the finding of a moderate relationship between moral judgment stage and education is not surprising given the cognitive-developmental nature of the moral judgment stages” (p. 71). They went on to share that none of their subjects reached stage four without having attended some college and that none reached stage five without having completed college. Although the numbers reflected a positive effect of formal education, Rest and Thoma (1985) cautioned that “formal education as a condition promoting development is not emphasized, perhaps because the mechanisms in formal education leading to change are not clear” (p, 709). Although they supported the contention of a positive main effect of formal education, Armon and Dawson (1997) also acknowledged:

The same education is never the same experience for any two individuals and that the relationship between the development of moral reasoning and education can be meaningfully examined only when the nature and quality of the student-education relationship is taken into account. (p. 439)

#### *Institutional Characteristics*

An extensive search of the literature yielded few sources of information regarding institutional characteristics and moral development. Specifically, a search regarding size of institution as well as private versus public status yielded few results. This void could possibly be explained as one of the following: 1) there has been no interest in this specific inquiry; or 2) this is a true void in the literature that may begin to be filled by this research.

The limited findings did suggest that “the environment of liberal arts colleges tend to be more conducive to fostering the development of moral reasoning than that of other

types of colleges and universities” (King & Mayhew, 2002, p. 253). Pascarella and Terenzini (as cited in King & Mayhew) also found:

Moral reasoning differed significantly by institutional type, with students from church-affiliated liberal arts colleges scoring the highest, followed by those at public research universities, two-year colleges, private liberal arts colleges, private universities and public comprehensive universities, respectively. (p. 253)

### Conclusion

In the end, issues related to morals and ethics will always be a challenge. Although the research showed that avenues existed to measure such development, the reality was that this did not produce a change in behavior – only a measure of such behavior. The responsibility lied within each professional to understand the “why” and “how” of decision making and consider the reason for a decision in light of the world around them. This research would help identify the moral decision making of a specific population of staff members within higher education who have a tremendous opportunity to serve as educators and role models for our students.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the procedures and methods utilized to conduct this study. The chapter includes specific information related to the purpose of the study, research questions, hypotheses to be tested, limitations of the study, population to be studied, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis.

#### Purposes of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine moral decision-making skills of housing and residence life professionals from one region of the Association of College and University Housing Officers – International (ACUHO-I). ACUHO-I consists of housing professionals throughout the United States as well as various countries throughout the world. This study assessed the moral stage development of university housing and residence life professionals affiliated with the Upper-Midwest Region of the Association of College and University Housing Officers (UMR-ACUHO). Out of convenience, UMR-ACUHO was chosen as the population to study. This study lends itself to subsequent studies regarding other regions within the professional organization to determine if any comparable differences and similarities exist. The use of this population was limited to those who were affiliated members of the organization and excluded non-member paying institutions.

The importance of this study lies in the combined importance of morals and ethics in general, in conjunction with the important role that university housing and residence life professionals play in the life of the university and students. This study helps to

identify the moral development levels of individuals in the selected geographic region who make, on a daily basis, decisions which impact the university community.

### Research Questions

The overarching research questions answered by this study are:

1. How is moral decision-making of university housing and residence life professionals within the UMR-ACUHO region linked to gender?
2. How is moral decision-making of university housing and residence life professionals within the UMR-ACUHO region linked to age?
3. How is moral decision-making of university housing and residence life professionals within the UMR-ACUHO region linked to professional housing experience?
4. How is moral decision-making of university housing and residence life professionals within the UMR-ACUHO region linked to education level obtained?
5. How is moral decision-making of university housing and residence life professionals within the UMR-ACUHO region linked to institutional characteristics?
6. What interaction is there between the demographic variables of gender, age, professional housing experience, education level obtained, and institutional characteristics in explaining the differences in moral decision-making of university housing and residence life professionals within the UMR-ACUHO region?

## Hypotheses

The intent of the study was to identify the level of moral decision-making utilized by university housing and residence life professionals. The scoring processes allowed for the identification of two scores for each participant. The first score, the P score, identified the highest level of moral thinking for participants. The second score, the N2 score, identified the highest level in relation to the ability to not choose options representing thinking at the lower levels of moral development. Based on these two scores, the following hypotheses were generated:

1. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed by gender as defined by the P Scores.
2. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed by gender as defined by the N2 Scores.
3. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed by age as defined by the P Scores.
4. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed by age as defined by the N2 Scores.
5. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed by number of years of professional housing experience as defined by the P Scores.
6. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed by number of years of professional housing experience as defined by the N2 Scores.

7. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed by job classification (entry level, mid level, senior level) as defined by the P Scores.
8. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed by job classification (entry level, mid level, senior level) as defined by the N2 Scores.
9. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed by employment experience solely within the UMR-ACUHO region as defined by the P Scores.
10. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed by employment experience solely within the UMR-ACUHO region as defined by the N2 Scores.
11. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed based on years of professional experience within the UMR-ACUHO region as defined by the P Scores.
12. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed based on years of professional experience within the UMR-ACUHO region as defined by the N2 Scores.
13. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed based on educational level obtained as defined by the P Scores.

14. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed based on educational level obtained as defined by the N2 Scores.
15. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed based on public versus private institution currently employed at as defined by the P Scores.
16. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed based on public versus private institution currently employed at as defined by the N2 Scores.
17. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed based on size of institution as defined by the P Scores.
18. There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed based on size of institution as defined by the N2 Scores.
19. There is no significant correlation of variables in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals when all variables are taken into consideration as defined by the P Scores.
20. There is no significant correlation of variables in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals when all variables are taken into consideration as defined by N2 Scores.

## Limitations of the Study

This study specifically looked at the ethical decision making skills of respondents employed within, and affiliated with, the UMR-ACUHO region. As such, no inferences could be made as they related to professionals in the region who were not affiliated with UMR-ACUHO, as well as professionals outside the UMR-ACUHO region. One reason for this was that UMR-ACUHO, as a regional area of the country, was less culturally diverse than the overall country. As such, careful consideration should be made when making inferences related to diversity.

Respondents included a random sampling of the housing professionals within, and affiliated with, the UMR-ACUHO region. As such, careful consideration should be made when making generalizations to all housing professionals within the UMR-ACUHO region.

Experience gained prior to the current employment situation was not addressed. As such, no generalizations could be made as to how individuals gained the ethical and moral decision making skills they have acquired.

The possibility existed that participants of the study may have been familiar with the DIT2 instrument. If so, there may have been some form of bias from the previous experience. This study did not account for this possibility.

## Population and Sample

The individuals studied included housing professionals affiliated with the Upper Midwest Region of the Association of College and University Housing Officers (UMR-ACUHO). UMR-ACUHO is the regional affiliate of the Association of College and University Housing Officers International (ACUHO-I). The region consists of the

following states: Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.

The population consisted of approximately 800 individuals who were invited via email to participate in the study. Subjects were asked to meet the eligibility status of full time employee within their college or university. Graduate students were excluded from the survey. The UMR-ACUHO database did not differentiate between full-time employees and graduate students. The email briefly explained the intent of the survey, the time commitment to participate, and the criteria of full time status to fill out the survey. The goal was to identify 200 subjects who met the eligibility criteria and had the desire to participate in the study. Those who agreed to participate and met the qualifications were mailed the instrument.

Of the 838 individuals in the database, 174 (20.73%) agreed to complete the survey. In the end, 140 of the 174 surveys mailed were returned for a return rate of 80.46%. Completed surveys were mailed to the University of Minnesota Center for the Study of Applied Ethics for scoring. One survey was rejected due to being incomplete, leaving 139 complete surveys for statistical analysis.

#### Data Collection

As a member of UMR-ACUHO, the researcher had access to the association database. In preparation for the study, the researcher also received endorsement by the executive board of UMR-ACUHO for the research. The endorsement allowed the instrument to carry the name of UMR-ACUHO as well as the researcher which was hoped would encourage members to participate in the study.

Once the deadline date had been reached, the researcher mailed the Defining Issues Test 2 and demographic sheet, along with a postage paid return envelope, to the participants. A key component of the mailing included a participant consent statement as part of the cover letter. Participants were told that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the process at any time without risk of consequence. The return of the survey served as participant consent to partake in the study.

Participants were given a deadline date by which to complete and return the survey to the researcher. Approximately two weeks were allowed from the date the survey was mailed to the date which the survey and demographic sheet was to be returned to the researcher. Emails were sent to the participants notifying them that the instrument had been mailed. A follow up email was sent one week later to remind participants to return the instrument.

Completed instruments were mailed to the University of Minnesota Center for the Study of Ethical Development for scoring. A diskette of information was returned to the researcher so that demographic information could be added to each person's score. Each DIT instrument was coded with a number which coincided with the number on each demographic sheet. Data were exported into a SPSS statistical software package for analysis.

### Instrument

The instrument utilized was the Defining Issues Test (DIT) published by the Center for the Study of Ethical Development at the University of Minnesota. This instrument is widely used in the study of ethics and is well recognized within the field of ethical studies. The DIT consisted of five specific scenarios which participants read and

then individually rated 12 issues on a Likert scale ranging from great importance to no importance. Participants then identified in rank order the top four issues per scenario in terms of their importance. The version utilized was the DIT2 which was a modified version of the DIT. The second version utilized scenarios that were more recent and timely, whereas the original version had older scenarios related to outdated topics such as the Vietnam War.

The DIT2 was a recognition task as opposed to a production task whereby participants were choosing their responses from a specified set of responses. The responses covered a spectrum of possible options making up the different schemas of moral development. The belief was that responses that represented a higher level of moral development would not be rated high if the respondent could not comprehend the option. Respondents would then choose the response that best represented the highest level of moral cognition that they understood. The responses were then tabulated into scores of moral development. The instrument was estimated to take 35 minutes to complete. The addition of the demographic sheet added an additional five minutes.

Validity of the original DIT had been assessed in terms of seven criteria including differentiation of various age and education groups. Data involving thousands of subjects showed that 30% to 50% of the variance of DIT scores was attributable to education level (Rest, et al., 1999). Longitudinal studies over a ten year time frame showed significant gains in both men and women. DIT scores were significantly related to scores produced via other existing measures. DIT scores were sensitive to moral education programs, with one study showing that moderate gains of .40 were made for those taking a moral education program while those not taking the program had small gains of .09. DIT scores

were significantly linked to desired professional decision making. DIT scores were significantly linked to political attitudes and political choices. Finally, in terms of reliability, the DIT consistently had a Cronbach alpha score in the upper .70s and low .80s. Test-retest reliability scores were consistent with the Cronbach alpha score with a score in the upper .70s and lower 80s (Rest, et al.). Validity of the instrument had also been achieved through face validity of the numerous researchers who had utilized this instrument over the years and found merit in its results. The DIT2, as opposed to the original DIT, posed a challenge in that the instrument, although exceedingly similar to the original, had yet to have an established reliability score.

#### Data Analysis

The DIT2 produced a P score as well as a N2 score. The P score represented a weighted sum of scores of responses that are indicative of postconventional moral thinking, specifically, thinking that was at the higher end of the moral development stages. The P score provided evidence of higher level moral thinking as it related to decision making. The N2 score incorporated the use of the P score in conjunction with the differentiation of higher level items from lower level items. The key concept of the N2 score was that individuals not only recognize higher level items but also systematically reject lower level items. P scores range from 0 to 95, with 95 being the highest level of moral reasoning. The N2 score followed the same range of 0 to 95, yet had been proven to be a stronger determinant of moral reasoning.

Each participant received a P score and an N2 score which allowed for cross tabulations based on a variety of demographic items including age, gender, professional experience, educational level obtained, and institutional characteristics. Specific tests

included descriptive statistics, t tests, ANOVA, chi-square, and multiple regression analysis. The significance level was identified as .05 for all tests. The hypotheses studied, with the specific tests utilized, were as follows.

1. There is no significant difference in the P Scores of housing professionals analyzed by gender. The t-test was utilized.
2. There is no significant difference in the N2 Scores of housing professionals analyzed by gender. The t-test was utilized.
3. There are no significant differences in the P Scores of housing professionals based on age. ANOVA was utilized.
4. There are no significant differences in the N2 Scores of housing professionals based on age. ANOVA was utilized.
5. There are no significant differences in the P Scores of housing professionals based on number of years of professional housing experience. ANOVA was utilized.
6. There are no significant differences in the N2 Scores of housing professionals based on number of years of professional housing experience. ANOVA was utilized.
7. There are no significant differences in the P Scores of housing professionals based on job classification (entry level, mid level, senior level). ANOVA was utilized.
8. There are no significant differences in the N2 Scores of housing professionals based on job classification (entry level, mid level, senior level). ANOVA was utilized.

9. There is no significant difference in the P Scores of housing professionals based on employment experience solely within the UMR-ACUHO region. The t-test was utilized.
10. There is no significant difference in the N2 Scores of housing professionals based on employment experience solely within the UMR-ACUHO region. The t-test was utilized.
11. There are no significant differences in the P Scores of housing professionals based on years of professional experience within the UMR-ACUHO region. ANOVA was utilized.
12. There are no significant differences in the N2 Scores of housing professionals based on years of professional experience within the UMR-ACUHO region. ANOVA was utilized.
13. There are no significant differences in the P Scores of housing professionals based on educational level obtained. ANOVA was utilized.
14. There are no significant differences in the N2 Scores of housing professionals based on educational level obtained. ANOVA was utilized.
15. There is no significant difference in the P Scores of housing professionals based on public versus private institution currently employed at. The t-test was utilized.
16. There is no significant difference in the N2 Scores of housing professionals based on public versus private institution currently employed at. The t-test was utilized.
17. There are no significant differences in the P Scores of housing professionals based on size of institution. ANOVA was utilized.

18. There are no significant differences in the N2 Scores of housing professionals based on size of institution. ANOVA was utilized.
19. There is no significant correlation of variables as determined by the P Scores of housing professionals when all variables are taken into consideration. Multiple regression was utilized.
20. There is no significant correlation of variables as determined by the N2 Scores of housing professionals when all variables are taken into consideration. Multiple regression was utilized.

### Summary

The DIT instrument had a proven history of success in measuring moral judgment development. The utilization of this instrument would help shed light on moral judgment development with a population that had received little attention. The results of this study provided a specific view of the ethical development of this sample of professionals and a generalized view of all housing and residential life professionals within the region.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study was to evaluate moral decision making of university housing and residence life professionals who were members of the Upper Midwest Region of College and University Housing Officers (UMR-ACUHO). Understanding the moral schemas utilized by professionals in their decision making could provide an understanding of how decisions were made. Specific outcomes could include information relevant to the selection, evaluation, and ongoing training of university housing professional staff. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How is moral decision-making of university housing and residence life professionals within the UMR-ACUHO region linked to gender?
2. How is moral decision-making of university housing and residence life professionals within the UMR-ACUHO region linked to age?
3. How is moral decision-making of university housing and residence life professionals within the UMR-ACUHO region linked to professional housing experience?
4. How is moral decision-making of university housing and residence life professionals within the UMR-ACUHO region linked to education level obtained?
5. How is moral decision-making of university housing and residence life professionals within the UMR-ACUHO region linked to institutional characteristics?

6. What interaction is there between the demographic variables of gender, age, professional housing experience, education level obtained, and institutional characteristics in explaining the differences in moral decision-making of university housing and residence life professionals within the UMR-ACUHO region?

### Demographics

A quantitative design utilizing the Defining Issues Test created by James Rest (1999) guided the study. The instrument and demographic page was administered to full time university housing and residence life professionals employed at colleges and universities affiliated with the Upper Midwest Region of the Association of College and University Housing Officers (UMR-ACUHO).

Permission was granted by the President of UMR-ACUHO to utilize the Association's member database for the study. An email invitation was sent to all members requesting their participation in the study. Follow up emails were sent requesting participation. Follow up emails were also sent to those who agreed to participate requesting a return of the completed survey. Of the 838 individuals in the database, 174 (20.73%) agreed to complete the survey. In the end, 140 of the 174 surveys mailed were returned for a return rate of 80.46%. Completed surveys were mailed to the University of Minnesota Center for the Study of Applied Ethics for scoring. One survey was rejected due to being incomplete, leaving 139 complete surveys for statistical analysis.

Of the 139 usable surveys, there were 77 (55.4%) from women and 62 (44.6%) from men. The age of the respondents ranged from age 23 to age 58 and had a mean of 35, a median of 32, and mode of 28 as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

*Demographics – Age*

N	Mean	Median	Mode
139	35	32	28

The range of total number of years in the housing and residence life profession ranged from 1 to 36 and had a mean of 10, median of 6, and mode of 3 as outlined in Table 2.

Table 2

*Demographics – Total Years Housing and Residence Life Experience*

N	Mean	Median	Mode
139	10	6	3

Of the 139 participants, 52 (37.41%) classified themselves as being in an entry level position, 62 (44.60%) classified themselves as being in a mid level position, and 25 (17.99%) classified themselves as being in a senior level position. In terms of their entire

professional housing experience being solely within the UMR-ACUHO region, 101 (72.66%) worked solely within the region while 38 (27.34%) had previous professional housing experience outside of the UMR-ACUHO region.

The range of total number of years of professional experience within the UMR-ACUHO region ranged from 1 to 36 and had a mean of 9, median of 6, and mode of 1 as outlined in Table 3.

Table 3

*Demographics – Total Years Housing and Residence Life Experience*

*Within UMR-ACUHO*

	N	Mean	Median	Mode
Total Years	139	9	6	1

The educational level of the participants consisted of 12 who had received their bachelors degree, 7 who had received a professional degree (i.e. Jurist Doctorate, M.B.A, etc.), 107 had a masters degree, and 13 had either a Ed.D. or a Ph.D. Public institutions accounted for 111 (79.86%) of the participants while 28 (20.14%) worked at a private institution. Finally, the housing capacity ranged from a housing capacity of 400 to a capacity of 9000+ with a mean of 3417, a median of 3150, and a mode of 3000 as outlined in Table 4.

Table 4

*Demographics – Housing Capacity in UMR-ACUHO*

	N	Mean	Median	Mode
Housing Capacity	139	3417	3150	3000

Hypothesis Testing

*Gender Findings*

Two hypotheses were generated to study the link between moral decision making of university housing and residence life professionals and gender. Each hypothesis was studied utilizing t-tests.

The following null hypotheses were tested:

*H<sub>01</sub>*: There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed by gender as defined by the P Score.

*H<sub>02</sub>*: There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed by gender as defined by the N2 Score.

*P Score and Gender*

Analysis of moral decision making as defined by the P Score through the use of t-test indicated no significant difference in the higher level moral decision making skills based on gender. As exhibited in Table 5, the mean P score for women ( $M = 44.68$ ) was greater than the meal score for men ( $M = 40.81$ ). Factoring in the standard error resulted in a failure to reject the null hypotheses.

Table 5

*Means and Standard Deviation of P Scores Based on Gender*

	<u>N</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>SE</u>
Females	77	44.68	14.46	1.65
Males	62	40.81	16.09	2.04

As indicated through the analysis of the t-test, the probability of having unequal variance was not significant ( $p = 0.14$ ) resulting in a failure to reject the null hypothesis. The probability of gender differentiating moral decision making as identified by the P Score was more likely due to chance alone as clarified through the following table.

Table 6

*Gender Dependent t-test of Mean Differences of P Scores*

	<u>N</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>t Value</u>	<u>p</u>
Gender	139	42.75	1.49	0.14

*N2 Score and Gender*

Analysis of moral decision making as defined by the more refined N2 Score through the use of t-test indicated no significant difference in the higher level moral decision making skills based on gender. As exhibited in Table 7, the mean N2 score for

women ( $M = 43.84$ ) greater than the mean score for men ( $M = 40.54$ ). Factoring in the standard error resulted in an insignificant difference in scores and a failure to reject the null hypothesis.

Table 7

*Means and Standard Deviation of N2 Scores Based on Gender*

	<u>N</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>SE</u>
Females	77	43.84	14.09	1.61
Males	62	40.54	15.83	2.01

As indicated through the analysis of the t-test, the probability of having unequal variance was not significant ( $p = 0.20$ ) resulting in a failure to reject the null hypothesis. The probability of gender differentiating moral decision making as identified by the N2 Score was more likely due to chance alone as clarified through the following Table 8.

Table 8

*Gender Dependent t-test of Mean Differences of the N2 Score*

	<u>N</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>t Value</u>	<u>p</u>
Gender	139	42.19	1.30	0.20

Neither the P Score nor the refined N2 Score indicated a significant difference in the levels of moral decision making as it related to gender differences.

### *Age Findings*

Two hypotheses were generated to study the link between moral decision making of university housing and residence life professionals and age. Each hypothesis was studied utilizing analysis of variance.

The following null hypotheses were tested:

*H<sub>03</sub>*: There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed by age as defined by the P Scores.

*H<sub>04</sub>*: There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed by age as defined by the N2 Scores.

### *P Score and Age*

Participants were grouped in age categories including the 20s, 30s, 40s and 50+ as exhibited by Table 9. The table illustrates that the average P Score was higher for those participants aged 50 or above. Sequentially, the highest mean scores were then for participants in their 20s, followed by those in their 30s and, finally, those in their 40s.

Analysis of moral decision making as defined by the P Score through the use of ANOVA indicated no significant difference in the higher level moral decision making skills based on age. Analysis of variance indicated that the probability of age impacting higher level moral decision making was insignificant ( $p = 0.83$ ) resulting in a failure to reject the null hypothesis as illustrated in Table 10.

Table 9

*P Score Means Based on Age By Group*

	<u>N</u>	<u>M</u>
20s	53	44.20
30s	47	42.19
40s	28	41.28
50+	11	44.43

Table 10

*P Score ANOVA – Age*

	<u>DF</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
Age	3	211.65	70.55	0.30	0.83

*N2 Score and Age*

Participants were grouped in age categories including the 20s, 30s, 40s and 50+ as exhibited by Table 11. Similar to P Scores, the table illustrates that the average N2 Score was higher for those participants aged 50 or above. Sequentially, the highest mean scores were then for participants in their 20s, followed by those in their 30s and, finally, those in their 40s.

Table 11

*N2 Means Based on Age by Group*

	<u>N</u>	<u>M</u>
20s	53	43.84
30s	47	41.65
40s	28	39.86
50+	11	44.76

Analysis of moral decision making as defined by the N2 Score through the use of ANOVA indicated no significant difference in the higher level moral decision making skills based on age. Analysis of variance indicated that the probability of age impacting higher level moral decision making was insignificant ( $p = 0.64$ ) resulting in a failure to reject the null hypothesis as illustrated in Table 12.

Table 12

*N2 Score ANOVA – Age*

	<u>DF</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
Age	3	377.96	125.98	0.56	0.64

### *Professional Housing Experience Findings*

Eight hypotheses were generated to study the link between moral decision making of university housing and residence life professionals and professional housing experience. The hypotheses were studied utilizing a combination of t-tests and analysis of variance.

The following null hypotheses were tested:

*H<sub>05</sub>*: There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed by number of years of professional housing experience as defined by the P Scores.

*H<sub>06</sub>*: There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed by number of years of professional housing experience as defined by the N2 Scores.

*H<sub>07</sub>*: There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed by job classification (entry level, mid level, senior level) as defined by the P Scores.

*H<sub>08</sub>*: There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed by job classification (entry level, mid level, senior level) as defined by the N2 Scores.

*H<sub>09</sub>*: There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed by employment experience solely within the UMR-ACUHO region as defined by the P Scores.

*Ho<sub>10</sub>*: There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed by employment experience solely within the UMR-ACUHO region as defined by the N2 Scores.

*Ho<sub>11</sub>*: There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed based on years of professional experience within the UMR-ACUHO region as defined by the P Scores.

*Ho<sub>12</sub>*: There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed based on years of professional experience within the UMR-ACUHO region as defined by the N2 Scores.

*P Score - Total Years of Professional Housing Experience*

An analysis of variance was calculated related to total years of professional housing experience. Grouping the data into ranges of years of full time housing experience produced the data as outlined in Table 13.

The analysis of variance of P Scores based on these year ranges indicated that there was no significant difference in the level of moral decision making of housing professionals based on their years of experience. ANOVA produced a probability score ( $p = 0.65$ ) which indicated that chance alone would cause a difference in scores. The analysis failed to reject the null hypothesis.

Table 13

*P Score Ranges of Total Years Professional Housing Experience*

	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>
<5	52	42.74
5-9	32	43.00
10-14	21	42.90
15-19	13	38.00
20+	21	46.51

Table 14

*P Score ANOVA – Total Years Professional Housing Experience*

	<u>DF</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
Total Years	4	587.71	146.93	0.62	0.65

*N2 Score - Total Years of Professional Housing Experience*

A test of analysis of variance of the N2 scores was run related to total years of professional housing experience. Grouping the data into ranges of years of full time housing experience produced the data as outlined in Table 15.

Table 15

*N2 Score Ranges of Total Years Professional Housing Experience*

	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>
LT5	52	42.03
5-9	32	42.85
10-14	21	42.53
15-19	13	38.08
20+	21	44.97

The analysis of variance of N2 Scores based on these year ranges indicated that there was no significant difference in the level of moral decision making of housing professionals based on their years of experience. ANOVA produced a probability score ( $p = 0.78$ ) indicating that chance alone could account for a difference in scores. The study failed to reject the null hypothesis

Table 16

*N2 Score ANOVA – Total Years Professional Housing Experience*

	<u>DF</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
Total Years	4	396.74	99.18	0.44	0.78

*P Score - Job Classification*

Of the participants, 52 considered themselves entry level, 62 considered themselves mid level, and 25 considered themselves senior level housing officials. A test of analysis of variance was run on the P Scores of participants based on the job classification categories of entry level, mid level, and senior level.

Table 17

*P Score ANOVA – Job Classification*

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	<u>DF</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
Classification	2	199.85	99.93	0.42	0.65

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The results indicated no significant impact of job classification on moral decision making of housing professionals. The probability score ( $p = 0.65$ ) indicated that chance alone would impact the P Score of housing professionals. Again, the results failed to reject the null hypothesis.

*N2 Score and Job Classification*

Applying the same test of analysis of variance to the N2 Score resulted in the output outlined in Table 18. Again, there was no significant impact of job classification on moral decision making as it related to the N2 Score. There was a greater chance that the results were obtained by chance alone ( $p = 0.44$ ) resulting in a failure to reject the null hypothesis.

Table 18

*N2 Score ANOVA – Job Classification*

	<u>DF</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
Classification	2	368.91	184.46	0.82	0.44

*Employment Solely Within UMR-ACUHO and P Score*

An analysis of the P Scores of those having full time professional experience coming solely from within the UMR-ACUHO region as opposed to experience outside the region was made. A predominant number of the participants worked solely within the UMR-ACUHO region and had a higher mean P Score ( $M = 43.62$ ) as compared to their counterparts who had a lower mean score ( $M = 41.16$ ).

Table 19

*Means and Standard Deviation of P Scores Based on Experience Solely Within  
UMR-ACUHO*

	<u>N</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>SE</u>
Experience Solely in UMR-ACUHO	101	43.62	15.63	1.55
Experience Outside of UMR-ACUHO	38	41.16	14.36	2.33

As indicated through the analysis of the t-test, the probability of having unequal variance was significant ( $p = 0.40$ ). The probability of experience coming solely from within UMR-ACUHO differentiating moral decision making as identified by the P Score was more likely due to chance alone resulting in a failure to reject the null hypothesis as clarified through the following table.

Table 20

*Sole Experience in UMR-ACUHO Dependent t-test of Mean Differences of P Scores*

	<u>DF</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>t Value</u>	<u>p</u>
Sole Employment in UMR-ACUHO	137	44.38	0.85	0.40

*N2 Score - Employment Solely Within UMR-ACUHO*

An analysis of the N2 Scores of those having full time professional experience coming solely from within the UMR-ACUHO region as opposed to experience outside the region was made. A predominant number of the participants worked solely within the UMR-ACUHO region and had a higher mean P Score ( $M = 43.62$ ) as compared to their counterparts ( $M = 41.16$ ).

As indicated through the analysis of the t-test, the probability of having unequal variance was not significant ( $p = 0.52$ ). The probability of experience coming solely from within UMR-ACUHO differentiating moral decision making as identified by the N2 Score was more likely due to chance alone resulting in a failure to reject the null hypothesis as clarified through the Table 22.

Table 21

*Means and Standard Deviation of N2 Scores Based on Experience Solely Within UMR-ACUHO*

	<u>N</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>SE</u>
Experience Solely in UMR-ACUHO	101	42.87	15.43	1.54
Experience Outside of UMR-ACUHO	38	41.04	13.58	2.20

Table 22

*Sole Experience in UMR-ACUHO Dependent t-test of Mean Differences of N2 Scores*

	<u>DF</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>t Value</u>	<u>p</u>
Years Employed Within UMR-ACUHO	137	45.70	0.64	0.52

*P Score - Years of Experience Within UMR-ACUHO*

An analysis of the moral decision making as identified by the P Score was made as it related to the number of years that respondents worked within the UMR-ACUHO region. Analysis of variance was utilized after breaking the total years working within UMR-ACUHO into ranges.

Table 23

*P Score Ranges of Total Years Working Within UMR-ACUHO*

	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>
LT5	55	42.85
5-9	35	43.49
10-14	23	44.12
15-19	12	35.83
20+	14	46.19

The analysis of variance of P Scores based on these year ranges indicated that there was no significant difference in the level of moral decision making of housing professionals based on their years of working within the UMR-ACUHO region. ANOVA produced a probability score ( $p = 0.50$ ) which clarified that chance alone could cause a difference in scores resulting in a failure to reject the null hypothesis.

Table 24

*P Score ANOVA – Total Years Professional Housing Experience Within UMR-ACUHO*

	<u>DF</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
Total Years	4	798.35	199.59	0.85	0.50

*N2 Score - Years of Experience Within UMR-ACUHO*

An analysis of the moral decision making as identified by the N2 Score was made as it related to the number of years that respondents worked within the UMR-ACUHO region. An analysis of variance was made utilizing the same ranges as used with the P Score.

Table 25

*N2 Score Ranges of Total Years Working Within UMR-ACUHO*

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	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>
<5	55	42.18
5-9	35	43.73
10-14	23	42.99
15-19	12	34.94
20+	14	45.07

---

The analysis of variance of N2 Scores based on these year ranges indicated that there was no significant difference in the level of moral decision making of housing professionals based on their years of working within the UMR-ACUHO region. ANOVA produced a probability score ( $p = 0.50$ ) which dictated that chance alone would cause a difference in scores resulting in a failure to reject the null hypothesis.

Table 26

*N2 Score ANOVA – Total Years Professional Housing Experience*

	<u>DF</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
Total Years	4	839.60	209.90	0.94	0.44

*Education Level Findings*

Two hypotheses were generated to study the link between moral decision making of university housing and residence life professionals and education level. The hypotheses were studied utilizing analysis of variance.

The following null hypotheses were tested:

*Ho<sub>13</sub>*: There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed based on educational level obtained as defined by the P Scores.

*Ho<sub>14</sub>*: There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed based on educational level obtained as defined by the N2 Scores.

*P Score - Education Level*

An analysis of the moral decision making as identified by the P Score was made related to the education level of respondents. Analysis of variance was utilized reviewing the four categories of education level including bachelors, masters, professional, and Ed.D and Ph.D. degrees.

Table 27

*P Score – Mean Score of Education Level*

	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Bachelors	12	40.83
Masters	107	42.67
Professional	7	43.43
Ed.D and Ph.D.	13	46.98

The analysis of variance of P Scores based on these year ranges indicated that there was no significant difference in the level of moral decision making of housing professionals based on their education level. ANOVA showed the probability score ( $p = 0.76$ ) which indicated that chance alone could cause a difference in scores. The results failed to reject the null hypothesis.

Table 28

*P Score ANOVA – Education Level*

	<u>DF</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
Education Level	3	274.58	91.53	0.39	0.76

*N2 Score - Education Level*

An analysis of the moral decision making as identified by the N2 Score was made related to the education level of respondents. Analysis of variance was utilized reviewing the same four categories of education level including bachelors, masters, professional, and Ed.D and Ph.D. degrees.

Table 29

*N2 Score – Mean Score of Education Level*

---

	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Bachelors	12	41.06
Masters	107	41.88
Professional	7	43.32
Ed.D and Ph.D.	13	47.08

---

The analysis of variance of N2 Scores based on these year ranges indicated that there was no significant difference in the level of moral decision making of housing professionals based on their education level. ANOVA showed a probability score ( $p = 0.68$ ) which indicated that chance alone could cause a difference in scores resulting in a failure to reject the null hypothesis.

Table 30

*N2 Score ANOVA – Education Level*

	<u>DF</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
Education Level	3	341.34	113.78	0.51	0.68

*Institutional Characteristics Findings*

Four hypotheses were studied to study the link between moral decision making of university housing and residence life professionals and institutional characteristics. The hypotheses were studied utilizing analysis of variance and t-tests.

The following null hypotheses were tested:

*Ho<sub>15</sub>*: There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed based on public versus private institution currently employed at as defined by the P Scores.

*Ho<sub>16</sub>*: There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed based on public versus private institution currently employed at as defined by the N2 Scores.

*Ho<sub>17</sub>*: There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed based on size of institution as defined by the P Scores.

*Ho<sub>18</sub>*: There is no significant difference in higher level moral decision making of housing professionals analyzed based on size of institution as defined by the N2 Scores.

*P Score - Public Versus Private Institutions*

Respondents identified their institution as either public or private in nature. Of the 139 respondents, 111 worked at public institutions while 28 worked at private institutions. The responses were analyzed utilizing t-tests. A predominant number of the participants worked at public institutions and had a lower mean P Score ( $M = 42.21$ ) as compared to those at private institutions ( $M = 45.10$ ).

Table 31

*Means and Standard Deviation of P Scores Based on Public Versus Private Status*

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	<u>N</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>SE</u>
Public Institutions	111	42.41	15.07	1.43
Private Institutions	28	45.10	16.17	3.06

---

As indicated through the analysis of the t-test, the probability of having unequal variance was not significant ( $p = 0.41$ ). The probability of public versus private institutional status differentiating moral decision making as identified by the P Score was more likely due to chance alone resulting in a failure to reject the null hypothesis as clarified through Table 32.

*N2 Score - Public Versus Private Institutions*

The same respondents were analyzed based on their N2 Scores utilizing t-tests. Those who worked at public institutions had a lower mean N2 Score ( $M = 41.78$ ) as compared to those at private institutions ( $M = 44.69$ ).

Table 32

*Public Versus Private Status Dependent t-test of Mean Differences of P Scores*

	<u>DF</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>t Value</u>	<u>p</u>
Public Versus Private Status	137	43.76	-0.83	0.41

Table 33

*Means and Standard Deviation of N2 Scores Based on Public Versus Private Status*

	<u>N</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>SE</u>
Public Institutions	111	41.78	14.85	1.41
Private Institutions	28	44.69	15.27	2.88

As indicated through the analysis of the t-test, the probability of having unequal variance was not significant ( $p = 0.36$ ). The probability of public versus private institutional status differentiating moral decision making as identified by the N2 Score was more likely due to chance alone as clarified through Table 34. The study produced a failure to reject the null hypothesis.

Table 34

*Public Versus Private Status Dependent t-test of Mean Differences of N2 Scores*

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	<u>DF</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>t Value</u>	<u>p</u>
Public Versus Private Status	137	43.24	-0.92	0.36

---

*P Score - Size of Institution Based on Housing Capacity*

An analysis of the moral decision making as identified by the P Score was made related to the institution size based on housing capacity of respondents. Analysis of variance was utilized reviewing the four categories of housing capacity including less than 1500, 1500-2999, 3000-4499, and 4500 or more.

Table 35

*P Score – Size of Institution Based on Housing Capacity*

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	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Less than 1500	23	45.74
1500-2999	26	38.26
3000-4499	57	42.71
4500+	33	45.12

---

The analysis of variance of P Scores based on these size ranges indicated that there was no significant difference in the level of moral decision making of housing professionals based on their size of institution based on housing capacity. ANOVA produced a probability score ( $p = 0.27$ ) which indicated that chance alone could cause a difference in scores. The study resulted in a failure to reject the null hypothesis.

Table 36

*P Score ANOVA – Size of Institution Based on Housing Capacity*

	<u>DF</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
Education Level	3	909.76	303.25	1.31	0.27

*N2 Score - Size of Institution Based on Housing Capacity*

An analysis of the moral decision making as identified by the N2 Score was made related to the institution size based on housing capacity of respondents utilizing the same four categories of capacity.

The analysis of variance of N2 Scores based on these size ranges indicated that there was no significant difference in the level of moral decision making of housing professionals based on their size of institution based on housing capacity. ANOVA showed the probability score ( $p = 0.43$ ) which indicated that chance alone could cause a difference in scores resulting in a failure to reject the null hypothesis.

Table 37

*N2 Score – Size of Institution Based on Housing Capacity*

	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Less than 1500	23	44.60
1500-2999	26	38.76
3000-4499	57	41.86
4500+	33	44.53

Table 38

*N2 Score ANOVA – Size of Institution Based on Housing Capacity*

	<u>DF</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
Education Level	3	621.57	207.19	0.93	0.43

*Correlation of All Variables Findings*

Two hypotheses were studied to study the link between moral decision making of university housing and residence life professionals and all variables previously mentioned, including gender, age, professional housing experience, education level, and institutional characteristics.

The following null hypotheses were tested:

*Ho<sub>19</sub>*: There is no significant correlation of variables as determined by the P Scores of housing professionals when all variables are taken into consideration.

*Ho<sub>20</sub>*: There is no significant correlation of variables as determined by the N2 Scores of housing professionals when all variables are taken into consideration.

#### *P Score - Relationship of All Variables*

An analysis of the moral decision making of university housing and residence life professionals as identified by the P Score was made related to all variables. The hypotheses were studied utilizing step-wise forward regression. The advantage of step-wise forward regression is that the analysis starts with the best single regressor, finds the next best one to add to the equation, and so forth. The additional step of the analysis checks to see if the variables remain significant after each new variable is added. Table 39 provides a view of all variables utilizing this step-wise forward regression.

Table 39 shows that one variable, age, did have a statistically significant impact on the moral decision making of university housing and residence life professionals. The variable of age produced a probability score ( $p = 0.03$ ) meaning that chance alone would impact moral decision making only three percent of the time. Years working within the UMR-ACUHO region produced a statistically significant probability score ( $p = 0.05$ ). No other factor was close to being statistically significant.

#### *N2 Score - Correlation of All Variables*

Step-wise forward regression was also run on the N2 Scores of all participants. In this case, the regression model excluded all variables that generated a 0.50 or more significance score. In the case of the N2 Scores, only three variables were factored into

the regression including gender, type of institution (public versus private), and housing capacity as highlighted in Table 40.

Table 39

*P Score – Correlation of All Variables*

	<u>Partial R-Square</u>	<u>Model R-Square</u>	<u>F Value</u>	<u>p</u>
Age	0.03	0.06	4.85	0.03*
UMR Years	0.03	0.09	3.80	0.05*
Gender	0.02	0.02	2.22	0.14
Public vs. Private	0.01	0.11	1.34	0.25
Classification	0.01	0.10	1.06	0.30
Capacity	0.01	0.11	0.95	0.33
Sole UMR	0.01	0.03	0.79	0.38
Education	0.01	0.02	0.56	0.46
Total Years	0.01	0.03	0.56	0.46

\* Statistically significant at 0.05

Utilization of the regression model on the N2 Scores in Table 40 clarified that there were no variables of statistical significance and that, in all cases, chance alone was likely the cause for any impact on moral decision making.

Table 40

*N2 Score – Correlation of All Variables*

	<u>Partial R-Square</u>	<u>Model R-Square</u>	<u>F Value</u>	<u>p</u>
Gender	0.01	0.01	1.68	0.20
Public vs. Private	0.01	0.02	0.66	0.42
Capacity	0.01	0.03	1.32	0.25

## Summary of Findings

A variety of demographic information was provided to account for the make up of the sample of the study. A broad range of individuals representing gender, age, professional experience, educational degree, and institution type was identified.

Analysis of the findings through the use of t-tests and analysis of variance indicated that there was minimal impact of the individual variables of gender, age, professional housing experience, education level, and institutional characteristics on moral decision making of university housing and residence life professionals. Step-wise forward regression analysis provided indication of the only statistically significant variable, that being age as a factor in impacting moral decision making.

Although the statistical analysis yielded a low impact of the variables related to moral decision making, the results yielded several opportunities for ongoing research and, more importantly, implications for the field of university housing and residence life.

CHAPTER FIVE  
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Moral decision making continues to be an issue of relevance for higher education. As such, the study of moral decision making was imperative. The view of decision making specifically related to university housing and residence life professionals proved to be an interesting, yet relevant, venture with implications for all of higher education.

The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between university housing and residence life professionals within the UMR-ACUHO region and moral decision making. The focus of the study was on full time, professional staff members employed at institutions affiliated with UMR-ACUHO. The study was conducted in an effort to determine what, if any, correlation existed between these professionals and moral decision making such that effective training, professional development, and hiring practices would be positively impacted. Utilization of the Defining Issues Test created by James Rest and his colleagues (1999) helped identify potential correlations between variables.

Overview of the Study

Moral decision making is a factor for all people regardless of their profession, education, or upbringing. Higher education is no exception and the environment and culture of higher education brings its' own array of issues of morality. Issues related to hiring practices, budget decisions, and student conduct situations are just a few of the issues inherent within higher education in general and university housing operations specifically.

Professionals working in university housing and residence life are challenged with the task of providing a safe, secure environment which meets the needs of the student while, at the same time, supporting the educational mission of the university. Housing professionals focus on the educational component of the institution through the venues of programming, discipline situations and mentoring opportunities. This research was conducted in an attempt to study moral decision making of those responsible for providing the housing component of higher education.

Specifically, this study involved 140 individuals who were willing to answer a survey regarding their moral decision making as it related to five specific scenarios. The survey also consisted of a demographics page which asked questions specific to professional experience. A response rate of 80.46% was achieved with one respondent being pulled from the data analysis due to incomplete responses. The respondents consisted of 77 women and 62 men who were ages 23 to 58. The range of professional experience as well as educational level of the respondents was diverse which added to the value of the findings.

Individual variables of age, gender, professional housing experience, education level and institutional characteristics were studied as well as an analysis of the correlation of all variables was examined. The intent was to identify specific variables which exhibited significant levels of moral decision making in an attempt to identify and build upon those variables through training efforts.

## Discussion of Findings

### *Gender Findings*

The first of six research questions was “How is moral decision of university housing and residence life professionals within the UMR-ACUHO region linked to gender?” Two hypotheses were studied to answer this research question. In both hypotheses the end result, found through the use of t-tests, was an insignificant finding of the link between moral decision making and gender. The utilization of the refined N2 Score produced a probability score higher than that of the P Score. The end result was that the chance of gender impacting moral decision making was more impacted by chance alone when analyzing the data from a more refined point of view.

This finding was consistent with the findings of previous researchers who found no significant link between moral development and gender. The findings were consistent with some research which found that women have a higher level of moral development than men. This was found to be true when comparing mean P Scores and N2 Scores. The scores of women were consistently three points higher in both the P Score and the N2 Score. Ultimately, no contention could be made that gender has an impact on moral decision making via the analysis of either score.

### *Age Findings*

The second research question was “How is moral decision making of university housing and residence life professionals within the UMR-ACUHO region linked to age?” Neither results via analysis of P Score or N2 Score produced any statistically significant evidence that age is linked to moral decision making. Of interest to note was that the mean scores by age range was consistent between the two tests. In both cases, the age

range of 50+ proved to have the highest mean score followed by those in their 20s, 30s, and then 40s. A potential rationale for the two age groups with the highest scores being those in the 50+ range followed by those in their 20s could be that those who are oldest have experienced enough in their professional careers to be less concerned with the political implications of their decisions and instead choose to do that which they believe is right. Those same people may be the population who sets the standard for decision making and do not experience political pressure to make specific decisions. Those in their 20s may not be politically savvy enough to know of the political ramifications or cultural expectations of their decisions and may soon learn through their experiences that their institution may have unwritten or written expectations of decision making.

Overall, these data were consistent with most of the literature review findings which indicated that age was not statistically important as it was related to moral development. The data analysis indicating that older participants had a higher level of moral development as compared to younger participants did support the conclusion of some research which proved a link between age and moral development.

The broad range of mean scores with those in their 20s and those aged 50 and over being highest begged the question of what happened to those in their 30s and 40s. Why was there a decline in moral decision making from the 20s to the 30s and again from the 30s to the 40s only to increase substantially in the 50+ range? Researcher speculation was that those in their 20s were young professionals who may not have learned the expected norms and political expectations of their culture. As such, they may have been acting solely on what they believed to be truly right versus wrong. As individuals reached their 30s, the professional and political culture was learned through

trial and error and participants may have started to make decisions that fell in line with expected considerations of their culture.

Those in their 40s were probably not yet at their last professional position prior to retirement. As such, moral decision making could have been a factor of keeping those in higher positions happy so that advancement could occur. The potential existed that those in their 50s were in their last professional position prior to retirement and they could make whatever decisions they felt were right. Those in their 40s were moving closer to this professional position but were not there yet.

#### *Professional Housing Experience Findings*

The third research question asked “How is moral decision making of university housing and residence life professionals within the UMR-ACUHO region linked to professional housing experience?” This question was analyzed through the use of four variables including 1) years of professional housing experience; 2) job classification of entry level, mid level, and senior level; 3) employment status solely being within the UMR-ACUHO region; and 4) years of experience with the UMR-ACUHO region.

There was no statistically significant finding in any of the four variables studied. There were insignificant findings that were still of interest. The mean scores for both the P Score and N2 Score indicated that those with 20 or more total years of professional housing experience has the highest level of moral development. Of interest is that the next highest range of years for both the P Score and the N2 Score was years five through nine. Those with the lowest mean score had 15 to 19 years of experience.

Also of interest was the analysis of years of experience within the UMR-ACUHO region. The same finding related to total years of housing experience was found as it

related to years of experience within UMR-ACUHO. Those working within the region for 20 or more years had the highest mean score followed by those with five to nine years of work experience within UMR-ACUHO. Those with 15 to 19 years of service had a lower mean score than those with less than five years of service. Again, this was a point of interest although not statistically significant. The same rationale as that related to age might be possible in this case. Those with increased years of experience may be more confident in their decision making regardless of the political expectations of their environment whereas new professionals may not be aware of the political expectations of their environment.

#### *Education Level Findings*

The fourth research question asked “How is moral decision of university housing and residence life professionals within the UMR-ACUHO region linked to education level obtained?” Analysis of education level reported through the categories of bachelors, masters, professional, and Ed.D and Ph.D. degrees produced results contrary to results found through the review of the literature. A review of previous studies found that, in more cases than not, the education level of participants was a significant factor. Results produced through an analysis of variance of participants of this study indicated that education level did not have a significant impact on the moral decision making abilities of the respondents. Although not significant, it was not surprising to find that those with their doctorate had the highest mean score followed by those with a professional degree, masters degree, and then bachelors degree.

### *Institutional Characteristics Findings*

The fifth research question asked “How is moral decision of university housing and residence life professionals within the UMR-ACUHO region linked to institutional characteristics?” Two areas were studied to answer this question including public versus private status of the institution and size of the institution based on housing capacity. No previous research was found related to these two areas therefore there was no benchmark to compare against. Although not significant, those working at private institutions had a higher mean score on both the P Score and the N2 Score. When looking at the housing capacity of the respondents, those working at institutions housing over 4500 students had scores very comparable to institutions housing less than 1500 students. The possibility exists that many of the institutions housing less than 1500 are also private schools so the potential for a connection exists although still not significant.

### *Correlation of All Variables Findings*

The sixth and final research question asked “What correlation is there between moral decision making of university housing and residence life professionals within the UMR-ACUHO region and the selected characteristics of gender, age, professional housing experience, education level obtained, and institutional characteristics?” The utilization of step-wise forward regression of the P Score produced results indicating that age is a significant factor in moral decision making. This was the first and only statistic found to be of significance in the study. Also significant ( $p = 0.05$ ) was years employed within UMR-ACUHO.

Of significant interest was the step-wise regression utilizing the N2 Score. The regression model excluded all variables that had a high probability level ( $p > 0.50$ ). Given

this fact, it was interesting to note that only three variables were factored into the analysis. They included gender, public versus private status of institution, and housing capacity. Analysis utilizing these three variables produced no significant findings indicating that there was no significant correlation of variables as they related to moral decision making. The exclusion of so many variables supports the intent that the N2 score be a more refined score of moral development.

### Implications for Practice

Although the results of the study showed minimal link between the moral decision making and university housing and demographic descriptors of residence life professionals, there was benefit gained by the study and included the following:

1. Age, when all variables were taken into consideration, was a statistically significant variable. As such, effective role modeling of those aged 50 and over could be important for fellow professionals. Opportunities for role modeling could come in the form of a mentoring program or other professional development opportunities which could be provided on campuses individually and through UMR-ACUHO. Connecting senior housing officers of advanced age with senior housing officers not in their 50's could provide an opportunity for role modeling and individual counsel when situations arise.
2. The statistical significance of age was seen through the P Score analysis but not through the N2 Score analysis. This opens the door for moral development discussion and professional development for all ages. Higher education, and housing programs specifically, could foster advanced moral decision making

through intentional, ongoing training for all staff members without focusing on a specific sub-population.

3. If the goal is to produce moral leaders, a clear definition of moral should be considered. As such, an opportunity exists for the professional association, UMR-ACUHO, to take the initiative to provide a standard definition of the term so that colleges and university housing operations within the region could function and train to the same standard.
4. Opportunities exist for professional conferences to offer training specific to issues of moral decision making.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

This study failed to reject 19 of the null hypotheses. Through the process of studying both the current literature as well as the findings of this study, the following opportunities for further research were identified:

1. The study found that those employed at private institutions had a higher mean score than those at public institutions. In many cases, private institutions tend to be religiously affiliated. Further research could be conducted on religious institutions related to moral development.
2. Given the inconsistent definition of the term moral, opportunity exists to identify whether there is a consistent definition that exists within higher education specifically.
3. The importance of moral decision making is clear. A review of professional development opportunities that currently exist within the UMR-ACUHO region could be made to identify those programs that are effective and share them with

fellow institutions through general conference sessions or a specific conference on moral decision making.

4. This study was based on the philosophy whereby morality and ethics is focused on rules and that which is right versus wrong. A separate philosophy of moral decision making focuses on the individual situation. The DIT instrument utilized in this study does not take this second philosophy into consideration. Future research could identify a different way to study moral decision making from this second philosophy. One approach would include a qualitative investigation of the role that emotions and empathy play in decision making.
5. The study was limited specifically to the UMR-ACUHO region and could be replicated in other regions or nationally.
6. The data suggested that age was an interesting dynamic related to moral decision making. Further study could be completed on those in their 30s and 40s to identify why their level of moral decision decreased as compared to those in their 20s. This study could include an analysis of generational events to help identify any potential impact of generational events on moral decision making.
7. The data suggested that those with 15 to 19 years of total housing experience had a lower mean score than any other category. Further research could be conducted to help identify the rationale for this decline.

#### Summary of the Study

Ongoing decisions that question individual morals and ethics are rampant in our society including the environment of higher education. The literature supported the fact that moral decision making is not as easy a process as one may think given the individual

perceptions of what constitutes morality and ethics. Regardless of the vague definition, the study of moral decision making is relevant. The intent of this study was to analyze moral decision making related to university housing and residence life professionals within a specific region of the country.

This study utilized housing professionals employed at institutions affiliated in the UMR-ACUHO region. This region represented colleges and universities within an eight state region of the Midwest and provided an acceptable pool of respondents representing the various types of institutions (public versus private), gender, age, education level, and varied housing experiences that individuals have.

The study provided evidence that the correlation of variables resulted in age being statistically significance related to moral decision making. The results also suggested that no other variables were significant either individually or when interaction occurred. This suggested that all have issues with moral decision making as well as opportunities to benefit from professional development related to moral decision making. Strike, Haller, and Soltis (1988) noted that “there isn’t just one right answer to every moral dilemma.” The opportunity to discuss issues of morals and ethics may allow professionals to identify appropriate responses to moral dilemmas before the situations occur.

The use of the Defining Issues Test is well supported in the field of moral studies. The ongoing utilization of this instrument may continue to provide insight for university professionals, particularly those in the field of university housing and residence life. This insight may open doors for improved moral decision making of professionals who impact such a large number of college students.

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## Appendices

## APPENDIX A

### Email Invitation to Participate

SUBJECT LINE: UMR-ACUHO Sponsored Research

My name is Brenda Moeder and this email is being sent with the endorsement of UMR-ACUHO. This email serves as an invitation to participate in a valuable research study regarding the moral decision making skills of full time university housing and residence life professionals. This study also serves as a doctoral dissertation for my degree from the University of Missouri – Columbia.

Although the moral decision making skills of graduate assistants is important, this study is limited to full time professionals only. I am requesting your assistance in participating in this important study. Should you desire to participate you will be sent a survey via the mail that will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. The survey consists of five scenarios to which you will be asked to read and respond.

Please know that all data collected will be kept in a locked room within a locked building for 3 years from completion of project and that subjects will also have the option to learn about the results of the study should they so desire by notation on their informed consent form.

Your participation in this study which has passed the University of Missouri IRB process is voluntary and you would be able to cease your participation at any point during the study. Please review the information in the consent form below before deciding to participate in this study. The results of this study are valuable to my research project and, more importantly, to UMR-ACUHO. If you are a full time professional in housing or residence life and desire to participate in this study, please respond to this email no later than Friday, May 11, 2007.

I appreciate your willing to participate in this important project!

Should you have any questions you can contact me, the primary investigator, at [Moeder@ucmo.edu](mailto:Moeder@ucmo.edu) or (660) 543-4515. You can contact my faculty advisor at [rbowman@ucmo.edu](mailto:rbowman@ucmo.edu). You can also contact the University of Missouri IRB office at 483 McReynolds Hall, Columbia, MO 65211, by email at [umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu](mailto:umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu), or by phone at (573) 882-9585.

## APPENDIX B

### CONSENT FORM

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
I, \_\_\_\_\_ consent to participate in this  
(please sign name)  
research project and understand the following:

Project Background: This project is the research component of a dissertation entitled “Moral Decision Making of University Housing and Residence Life Professionals” as part of a degree program through the University of Missouri – Columbia.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to evaluate the level of moral decision making utilized by university housing and residence life professionals on college campuses. The benefit to this research is the understanding of individual decision making processes of a population that has a significant interaction with and impact on university students. The results of this study will produce data specific to two types of scores used to interpret higher end moral development stages. Specifically, this study will identify the moral development scores for university housing and residential life professionals affiliated and within the UMR-ACUHO region as it relates to issues of gender, professional housing experience, age, educational level obtained, and institutional characteristics.

Voluntary: Your participation in completing the DIT2 instrument is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question or choose to withdraw from participation at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

What do you do?: You will be asked to complete a demographic sheet as well the Defining Issues Test 2 (DIT2) published by the Center for the Study of Ethical Development out of the University of Minnesota. The DIT2 consists of five specific scenarios which participants must read and then individually rate 12 issues on a Likert scale ranging from great importance to no importance. Participants must then identify in rank order the top four issues per scenario in terms of their importance. The instrument is estimated to take 35 minutes to complete. The addition of the demographic sheet would add an additional five minutes of completion time.

Risks: This project does not involve any risks greater than those encountered in everyday life.

Confidentiality: Your confidentiality will be maintained in that I will not identify the institution or a participant’s name in the study itself. The data will only be reported in aggregate form and your name will not be used. The results of this study will be published in the UMR-ACUHO News as well as through a program presentation at the annual UMR-ACUHO conference.

I greatly appreciate your willingness to work with me on this research. If you have any questions regarding this research project, please do not hesitate to contact me. Should you have any questions you can contact me, the primary investigator, at [Moeder@ucmo.edu](mailto:Moeder@ucmo.edu) or (660) 543-4515. You can contact my faculty advisor at [rbowman@ucmo.edu](mailto:rbowman@ucmo.edu). You can also contact the University of Missouri IRB office at 483 McReynolds Hall, Columbia, MO 65211, by email at [umcresearchcibr@missouri.edu](mailto:umcresearchcibr@missouri.edu), or by phone at (573) 882-9585.

## APPENDIX C

### Cover Letter

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research study regarding the moral decision making skills of university housing and residence life professionals. This study has passed the University of Missouri IRB process. Please understand that your participation is voluntary and that you may withdraw from this study at any point. I want to assure you that your responses will be kept confidential and that your individual responses will, in no way, be connected with your name. The completion and return of this instrument and coinciding demographic sheet serves as your consent to participate in this project.

Please review the attached consent form prior to returning your survey. Should you desire to receive an executive summary of this research please submit your request to me via email. Also know that my dissertation advisor is available to answer any questions should you feel you need to speak with him directly. He can be contacted at [rbowman@ucmo.edu](mailto:rbowman@ucmo.edu).

You will find enclosed a demographic sheet, the Defining Issues Test 2 as well as the DIT2 Answer Key. Please complete the demographic sheet as well as mark your responses to the various questions for each scenario on the answer key. When completed, please return your answer key and demographic sheet to me in the enclosed, self addressed stamped envelope.

I request that I receive your responses by the deadline date of May 21, 2007, so that statistical analysis can be completed soon and the information shared with those desiring to learn of the results.

Please know that all data collected will be kept in a locked room within a locked building for 3 years from completion of project and that subjects will also have the option to learn about the results of the study should they so desire by notation on their informed consent form.

Should you have any questions you can contact me, the primary investigator, at [Moeder@ucmo.edu](mailto:Moeder@ucmo.edu) or (660) 543-4515. You can contact my faculty advisor at [rbowman@ucmo.edu](mailto:rbowman@ucmo.edu). You can also contact the University of Missouri IRB office at 483 McReynolds Hall, Columbia, MO 65211, by email at [umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu](mailto:umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu), or by phone at (573) 882-9585.

A few key points to keep in mind:

- Please use pencil
- Do not fold the answer key
- Only return the answer key and demographic sheet.

Thank you again for your participation in this important study.

APPENDIX D

Demographics Sheet

**MORAL DECISION MAKING OF UNIVERSITY HOUSING  
AND RESIDENCE LIFE PROFESSIONALS**  
Demographics Sheet

1. How many years (including this year) of full time housing/residence life experience have you worked? \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. How many years (including this year) of full time housing/residence life experience have you worked in the UMR-ACUHO region? \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. How would you classify your current position? Please choose one.  
Entry Level                      Mid Level                      Senior Level
  
4. At what type of institution are you currently employed? Please choose one.  
Public                                  Private
  
5. Has your full time housing and residence life employment been solely within the UMR-ACUHO region?    Yes    No
  
6. What is the capacity of the housing/residence life system at which you are employed?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
7. Please classify your institution based on the Carnegie classification system.  
\_\_\_\_\_ Associate's Colleges (2 year institution)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Baccalaureate Colleges (4 year institution)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Master's Colleges and Universities (master's degree offered)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Doctoral-granting Universities (doctoral degrees offered)

Please return this form with the DIT2 answer sheet. Thank you for your participation!

## APPENDIX E

### Letter of Exclusion of DIT Instrument

206 Burton Hall / 178 Pillsbury Drive SE / Minneapolis, MN 55455 / (612) 624-0876 / FAX: (612) 624-8241

#### **CENTER for the study of ETHICAL DEVELOPMENT**

*University of Minnesota*

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Muriel Bebeau, Executive Director / 15-136 Moos Tower / 515 Delaware SE / Minneapolis, MN 55455 / (612) 625-4633 / FAX: (612) 625-6096 / e-mail: bebeau001@umn.edu  
Steve Thoma, Research Director / 205 Child Development Center / Box 870158 / 108 E Annex / University of Alabama / Tuscaloosa, AL 35487 / (205) 348-8146 / FAX: (205) 348-3789 / e-mail: sthoma@chee.us.edu

March 8, 2007

Dear

Thank you for your inquiry about our policy with respect to reproducing the DIT.

We no longer grant permission to reproduce the DIT stories (either version) or items for dissertations or journal articles. Our reasoning has to do with maintaining the integrity of the measure for future researchers. Also, in our experience, dissertation committees only expect measures to be included in the appendix if the measure was designed specifically for the dissertation or is a measure that is not well established. Well-known and well-validated measures are simply summarized in the methods section. You will notice that the DIT manual has summary information available that you can either quote or paraphrase. When you do so, it is particularly important that you describe the validity and reliability of the measure and reference the most current literature on the measure. At the moment, the most recent comprehensive summary of the status of the validity of the DIT is: Thoma, S.J. (2006). Research on the Defining Issues Test. In M. Killen & J.G. Smetana (Eds.), *Handbook of Moral Development*. Mahwah, N.J.: Erlbaum Associates. pp. 67-92. In addition to such references, you can provide contact information as to how another researcher may access the test. You may list our web address in your dissertation. (<http://www.centerforthestudyofethicaldevelopment.net>)

In the event your committee is unfamiliar with the measure, it is clearly permissible to have a copy available for each committee member's review. Ideally this would be presented at a dissertation proposal meeting, but you could have a copy available for review at a dissertation defense.

Thank you for using the DIT, and I hope this assists you with completing your project.

Yours truly,



Muriel J. Bebeau, Ph.D.  
Professor, Department of Primary Dental Care  
School of Dentistry  
Faculty Associate, Center for Bioethics  
Director, Center for the Study of Ethical Development  
University of Minnesota  
<http://www.centerforthestudyofethicaldevelopment.net>  
MJB/ctc

## VITA

Brenda Moeder, the daughter of Ray and Bernadine Moeder, was born March 25, 1967 in Great Bend, Kansas. She attended high school in Great Bend and then attended college at Kansas State University completing a degree in Secondary Education, English. Rather than pursuing a career in secondary education, she continued her education at Kansas State and completed a master's degree in College Student Personnel.

Upon graduation in 1992, she accepted a position with the University of Wisconsin – Stout, in Menomonie, Wisconsin, where she served as a full time Residence Hall Director. In 1996, she accepted a position at the now University of Central Missouri in Warrensburg, Missouri, as an Area Coordinator for University Housing. Since that time she accepted the position of Assistant Director of Housing and now serves as the Associate Director of Housing. She also teaches in the graduate College Student Personnel program at UCM.