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Perceptions of Business School Students About Character Development and Ethical Reasoning

Larkey Mays III
Walden University

Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Larkey Mays III

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Review Committee
Dr. James Bowman, Committee Chairperson, Management Faculty
Dr. Janice Spangenburg, Committee Member, Management Faculty
Dr. Howard Schechter, University Reviewer, Management Faculty

Chief Academic Officer
Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University
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Abstract

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by

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MBA, Loyola University Maryland, 1984

BA, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 1974

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Applied Management and Decision Sciences

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Abstract

Character development in higher education is essential for enhancing ethical awareness and moral reasoning. However, inconsistent perspectives exist concerning the impact of ethics education on students' ethical awareness and moral reasoning. This phenomenological study examined the perceptions of senior-level undergraduate business students on their own ethical belief systems and changes in ethical awareness. Astin's student development theory on the environmental effects on learning formed the conceptual framework. The research questions explored how the 4-year undergraduate business school experience changed the students' ability to recognize and evaluate ethical concerns in relation to the ethical aspects of coursework. Thirteen undergraduate seniors pursuing a business degree from a Catholic college were purposively selected. In-depth interviews were used to obtain data about ethical self-awareness, recognition of ethical issues, understanding ethical concepts, and assessing core values. The study followed Moustakas' recommendation for phenomenological analysis, a modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method. Emergent themes included the meaning of moral character development, the perception of the college business curriculum in relation to students' core values, and the approaches used to affect ethical situations. The findings suggest that the business curriculum increase the students' exposure to ethical situations and introduce decision tools that could be useful in ethical dilemmas. Recommendations involve considering a pretest and posttest design and Astin's entire inputs-environment-outcomes model as the theoretical framework. The implications for positive social change include the development of character education toward moral competencies and ethical decision-making skills of future business leaders.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate my dissertation to Corlette, my wonderful wife of 41 years, who has stood by me throughout this entire journey. You are the sunshine of my life. Thank you. Also, to my children, Chandra Knight and Kyle Mays, who have always been there to provide support and encouragement as well as to my granddaughter, Alexandra Knight, who will grow up believing that all things are possible. Lastly, to the memory of my father, Larkey Mays, Jr. and in honor of my mother, Cornelia Mays, who both taught me the value of hard work and determination as well as my sisters, Patricia Stewart and Deborah Cousin; my brother, Larry Mays; and to my late sister, Dawn Mays-Hardy, who left us too soon.

Acknowledgments

First of all, I want to thank God for the strength to complete the journey. Eyes have not seen, ears have not heard, all that He has planned for me! This journey would have been impossible without the support and guidance of my dissertation committee chair, Dr. James Bowman. I would also like to thank committee member, Dr. Janice Spangenburg, and university research reviewer, Dr. Howard Schechter, for his assistance in making this a finished work.

I have to give a special thank you to Jill Marie, who served as my mentor, reading and proofing my dissertation from beginning to end. I cannot express how much I appreciate all of her help. Also, I want to thank my church family. Their prayers have been invaluable!

Finally, I would like to thank the students who participated in the interviews and shared their perceptions on the impact of the business curriculum on their ethical reasoning and character development. As future business leaders, always remember that character *does* matter!

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

This study examined the perceptions of senior-level undergraduate business students concerning their own ethical belief systems and changes that may have occurred in their level of ethical awareness, their ability to recognize ethical issues, and the capacity to evaluate ethical concepts or points of view. Assessing their perceptions may be essential in the development of effective character education to address the moral competencies of future business leaders (Lickona, 1993).

Character development in higher education has been an essential component in the fundamental enhancement of ethics sensitivity and moral reasoning (Comrie, 2012; Curzer, 2014; Floyd, Xu, Atkins, & Caldwell, 2012; Langer, Hall, & McMartin, 2010; Lilley, Barker, & Harris, 2014; Mayhew & Engberg, 2010; Tirri, 2011). Ethical sensitivity, as defined by Rest (1986), involves the recognition of an ethical situation as well as the formulation of possible solutions to rectify ethical circumstances. Not only does higher education focus on the cognitive development of students, but colleges and universities also contribute to the affective or noncognitive growth of the undergraduate student body (Dellaportas, Kanapathippillai, & Leung, 2014; Elmore, Anitsal, & Anitsal, 2011; Liu & Yin, 2010; Rashedi, Plante, & Callister, 2015; Wright, Pincus, & Lenzenweger, 2012).

Some researchers have suggested that student perceptions may act as predictors of ethical behavior (Chiang & Lee, 2011; Galbraith & Webb, 2010; Iacobucci, Daly, Lindell, & Griffin, 2013). Additionally, educators are in a position to influence student

perceptions, judgments, and behaviors (Hsu, 2012; Towns & Ashby, 2014). Understanding the essence of students' ethical beliefs and perceptions may be essential in comprehending their choices and decisions (Assudani, Chinta, Manolis, & Burns, 2011). Also, research concerning student perceptions of ethical and moral comprehension may be utilized by academics to devise learning programs by means of ethical classes, service learning, social-emotional learning, student empowerment, and leadership training, each designed to provide students with the intellectual tools to make the appropriate ethical choices. The implications for positive social change include the development of effective character education that affects the moral competencies and ethical decision-making skills of future business leaders.

Chapter 1 includes the introduction, background of the study, the problem statement, research questions, purpose and scope, the conceptual framework, the nature of the study, definition of terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and the social significance of examining the ethical reasoning and moral character development of senior-level undergraduate business students at a small Catholic college.

Background of the Study

Over the past 25 years, a considerable number of scholars (Gilligan, 1977; Kohlberg, 1969; Lickona, 1999; Rest, 1986; Trevino, 1986) have examined the ethical reasoning and moral character development of undergraduate business students. In a ground-breaking study of the American undergraduate educational community, for example, Boyer (1987) concluded that the undergraduate experience should be a time when an individual's value system should be thoroughly examined. Lickona (1993)

contended that character education ought to improve issues regarding self-respect, empathy, self-discipline, honor, and integrity, serving as the conduit between judgment and behavior.

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) reported that 78% of AAC&U institutions have taken steps to improve the core values of undergraduates. In a study for the AAC&U, Hart Research Associates found that a significant percentage of these institutions have identified ethical reasoning as one of the outcomes for undergraduate students (Hart Research Associates, 2009). To reach this intended outcome successfully, educators in undergraduate institutions could consider reframing educational teaching approaches from a perspective that has been largely based on the future economic needs and desires of private individuals (Dey, Ott, Antonaros, Barnhardt, & Holsapple, 2010).

In several studies, the relationship between character development and some aspect of character and ethics education has been considered. The findings are discussed in detail in the Chapter 2 literature review. However, the following provides a summary of the literature. The perceptions and attitudes of students concerning business ethics have been examined based on gender (Alleyne, Devonish, Allman, Charles-Soverall, & Marshall, 2010; Ballantine & McCourt, 2010; Cory, 2015; Elias, 2011; Fitzpatrick, 2013; Mack, 2010; Onyebuchi, 2011; Phatshwane, Mapharing, & Basuhi, 2014; Pressley & Kennett-Hensel, 2013; Rajasekar & Simpson, 2014; Wang & Calvano, 2015; Wang & Juslin, 2012); age (Alleyne et al., 2010; Cloninger & Selvarajan, 2010; Elias, 2011; Mack, 2010; Nather, 2013); and major of study (Alleyne et al., 2010; Kucher, 2012;

Mack, 2010; Nkenke, 2010; Onyebuchi, 2011; Phatshwane et al., 2014; Pressley & Kennett-Hensel, 2013). The results suggested that differences exist in ethical perceptions and attitudes based on gender, age, and major of study.

Researchers have examined the overall effectiveness of business ethics instruction (Burns & Gupta, 2015; Cameron & O'Leary, 2015; Fletcher-Brown, Buono, Frederick, Hall, & Sultan, 2012; Hollier, Blankenship, & Jones, 2013; Lau, 2010; Martinov-Bennie & Mlandenovic, 2015; Mohamed Saat, Porter, & Woodbine, 2012; Murphy, 2011; Quesenberry, Phillips, Woodburne, & Yang, 2012; Reynolds & Dang, 2015; Stachowicz-Stanusch, 2011; Valentine & Bateman, 2011).

Researchers have also examine the impact of course instructional models (Acevedo, 2013; Beggs, 2011; Bloodgood, Turnley, & Mudrack, 2010; Chawla, Khan, Jackson, & Gray, 2015; Dzuranin, Shortridge, & Smith, 2013; Gill, 2012; Graham, 2012; Harkrider et al., 2013; Gu & Neesham, 2014; Harris, Lang, Yates, & Kruck, 2011; Jagger & Volkman, 2014; Jazani & Ayoobzadeh, 2012; Kennedy, 2010; Kleinrichert, Tosti-Kharas, Albert, & Eng, 2013; Klimek & Wenell, 2011; Lukea-Bhiwajee, 2010; May, Luth, & Schwoerer, 2014; Mitchell & Yordy, 2010; Money, 2013; Murphy, 2014; Nair Rajeev, 2012; Nelson, Smith, & Hunt, 2014, Oakley, 2011; Revoir, 2011; Ryan & Bisson, 2011; Sentell, 2013; Simmons, Shafer, & Snell, 2013; Simola, 2010; Singer, 2013; Slocum, Rohler, & Gonzales-Canton, 2014; Sternberg, 2015; Tackett, Claypool, & Wolf, 2011; Thomson, 2011, Vendemia & Kos, 2013; Wilhelm & Czyzewski, 2012; Willey, Mansfield, & Sherman, 2012; Willey, Mansfield, Sherman, & Updike, 2013).

Further, researchers have looked at how the undergraduate business experience changed the students' awareness of ethical concerns or issues in the business environment (Canarutto, Smith, & Smith, 2010; Morgan & Neal, 2012; Stichter, 2012). Some studies showed improvements in the level of perception toward the value of ethics education (Graham, 2012; Lau, 2010); while other studies showed no significant impact on student attitudes toward business ethics (Burns & Gupta, 2015) or the level of awareness toward ethical issues (Money, 2013).

Other studies have examined the undergraduate business curriculum that isdesigned to change student awareness of ethical concerns or issues in the business environment. The studies included the effect of goals, methodologies, and characteristics of curriculum designed to change ethical awareness (Canarutto et al., 2010; Morgan & Neal, 2011) and the assessment of changes in morality and attitudes toward unethical behavior (Stichter, 2012). The results suggested that ethics education may increase student awareness regarding ethical issues in the workplace or business setting.

The search of the current literature identified a gap regarding the effectiveness of business ethics training and instruction (Guyotte & Piotrowski, 2010; Jazani & Ayoobzadeh, 2012; Warren, Sampson, & McFee, 2011; Willey et al., 2012). In this study, the gap was addressed by examining the ethical reasoning and moral character development of senior-level undergraduate business students. Such an assessment may add to the body of knowledge on the efforts in higher education to improve student core values and character development.

Problem Statement

The nature of the problem is the inconsistency regarding the efficacy of ethics education on students' ethical perceptions, attitudes, awareness, and moral reasoning. Several studies have assessed the differences in ethical reasoning before and after an ethics course and found no significant impact (Burns & Gupta, 2015; Money, 2013). However, additional studies conducted during the same period found that ethics education improved students' ethical awareness and moral reasoning (Canarutto et al., 2010; Jazani & Ayoobzadeh, 2012; Lau, 2010). While some researchers tended to suggest that teaching ethics can be effective, there is a gap in the literature on the relative efficacy of different instructional methods to increase ethical reasoning, as evidenced in awareness, recognition, judgment, and behavior (Guyotte & Piotrowski, 2010; Jazani & Ayoobzadeh, 2012; Willey et al., 2012).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the perceptions of senior-level undergraduate business students regarding business coursework and curriculum activities designed to (a) heighten ethical awareness, (b) recognize ethical issues, and (c) influence the evaluation of ethical concepts or points of view. Also considered were the perceptions of undergraduate business students concerning their own core values in relation to ethical reasoning and decision making.

The AAC&U developed an ethical reasoning rubric to assess learning outcomes at colleges and universities throughout the United States. The value of the rubric is that it allows students to assess their ethical self-identity at any point during their undergraduate

education. The rubric is designed to evaluate five elements of ethical reasoning : (a)

ethical self-awareness, (b) understanding different ethical perspectives, (c) ethical issue

recognition, (d) the application of ethical perspectives, and (e) the evaluation of different

ethical perspectives or concepts. Appendix F provides a definition of each element,

beginning with a benchmark level, progressing through two milestone levels, and

culminating at a capstone. The rubric was used to determine the students' perceived level

of ethical reasoning on entering the college as freshmen as well as their current level of

ethical reasoning and decision making as seniors.

Research Question

The phenomenological study examined the perceptions of business students

regarding their ability to make ethical choices. The primary research question addressed

the following:

What is the experience of senior-level undergraduate business students regarding

the business coursework designed to impact ethical awareness, recognition of

ethical issues, and evaluation of ethical concepts or points of view?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the study was based on Astin's (1985, 1993)

student development theory, which centers on the environmental effects on learning.

Astin's theory is represented by the input-environment-outcome (1993) model, which

addresses relationships among the following elements: (a) inputs, including such factors

as the student's socioeconomic status, background, and experiences prior to college; (b)

the student's educational experiences while in college, including curricular and

extracurricular activities; and (c) the outcomes of the educational experiences, including

levels of satisfaction, changes in cognitive growth, ethical or moral development, and

career aspirations (Figure 1).
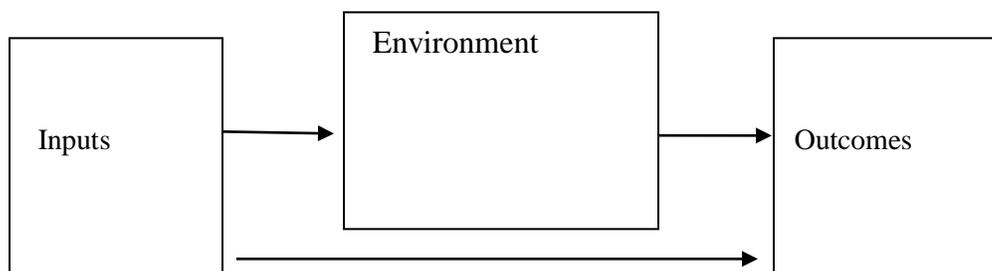
Figure 1. Astin's (1993) inputs – environment – outcomes (I-E-O) model. Adapted from *Assessment for Excellence* (p. 18), by Alexander W. Astin, 1993, Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press. Copyright 1993 by the Oryx Press. Reproduced with permission from Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., Westport, CT.

Rath, Harmin, and Simon's (1978) values clarification theory and Kohlberg's

(1969) theory of cognitive moral development are subordinate theories that were used to

enhance the assessment of student perceptions related to personal values and ethical

reasoning. Values clarification theory posits that individuals with a clear set of values

seem to be keenly aware of their future direction and purpose in life (Rath et al., 1978).

In Kohlberg's theory of cognitive moral development, individuals move

progressively through various stages of ethical decision making. Specifically, Kohlberg

(1969) contended that individuals approach ethical decision making using a three-level,

six-stage model. The transition through the stages may ultimately lead to the use of

universal moral principles. Kohlberg's work is based predominantly on Piaget's (1969) two-stage, heteronomy-autonomy typology.

Nature of the Study

This study used a phenomenological methodology, which allowed investigation, description, and reflection on the "essential themes which characterize" the lived experiences of the business students' value of a program (Van Manen, 1990, p. 30). Quantitative and mixed-methods designs were optional approaches to inquiry. In quantitative studies, questionnaires are often used to collect information in a numeric format of the perspectives of a sample population. Then, the researcher analyzes the data to check if hypotheses can be verified with the goal of generalized results for a larger population (Hess-Biber, 2010). Both qualitative and quantitative designs are combined when using mixed methods as a research strategy to triangulate data or support data with the goal of obtaining a more detailed analysis than with using one method alone (Hess-Biber, 2010).

While other research designs can be employed, a qualitative design allows for more in-depth understanding of the participants' lived experiences (Love, 2012). In addition to phenomenology, there are several other types of qualitative research that could be utilized in education. Ethnography focuses on a school's culture or community, case studies provide "intensive descriptions and analyses on a single unit or bounded system," and grounded theory centers on the generation or discovery of a new education theory (Merriam, 1998, pp. 14). Contrary to these other designs, in phenomenology, the researcher explores lived experiences. The phenomenological method "aims at gaining a

deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 9).

Phenomenology is superior to the other types of qualitative designs because it allows for a clear delineation of the internal structures, the essence of the senior-level business students' everyday classroom experiences designed to affect their ethical reasoning. The aim of this phenomenological study was centered on the business students' primary source of knowledge–their perceptions of lived experience (Moustakas, 1994, p. 52.)

The intent of the study was to explore the perceptions of senior-level undergraduate business students at a small Catholic college located in the Northeastern part of the United States. In-depth interviews were used to obtain the following type of data related to student perceptions: (a) ethical self-awareness, (b) the recognition of ethical issues, (c) understanding a variety of ethical concepts or points of view, (d) the application of ethical principles, and (e) the evaluation of a variety of ethical concepts or points of view. Additionally, in in-depth interviews, values clarification was implemented to understand values that were held by the business students. The rank ordering of 20 character traits from the most to the least important was the approach used to clarify individual values. The rank ordering process was followed with open-ended questions and clarifying responses, with students explaining their choices and their reasons for them.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used within the context of the dissertation:

Character: The word "character" is derived from the Greek "charakter," which is defined as the collection of strengths and weaknesses that shape and define who individuals are, including their prominent thoughts and actions (Murphy, 2011).

Character development: Character development tends to be a lifelong process involving the formation of ethical virtues, such as integrity, fairness, trust, respect, and empathy (Murphy, 2011).

Core beliefs: The basic principles that intentionally or unintentionally influence an individual's ethical conduct and ethical reasoning. Even when unrecognized, core beliefs affect an individual's reactions (Association of American Colleges & Universities, 2012).

Ethics: The word "ethics" comes from the Greek word "ethikos", which is defined as moral, or showing moral character. DeGeorge (2006) stated that ethics involves the study of morality. DeGeorge (2006) contended that "morality is a term used to cover those practices and activities that are considered importantly right and wrong; the rules that govern those activities; and the values that are embedded, fostered, or pursued by those activities and practices" (p. 19). Thus, ethics is a deeply personal philosophy or standard utilized by individuals to identify or determine what is considered to be right or wrong; good or bad, as well as the actions and decisions related to what is deemed right or good.

Morals: The word "morals" comes from the Latin word "moralis,"which is defined as the principles, habits, or behavior related to right or wrong conduct. Often times, "ethics" and "morals" are used interchangeably, as one word is used to describe or

define the other. However, by my definition, ethics relate to a set standard of rules and morals relate to behavior within a social, societal, or cultural system. Morals involve the practices, behaviors, traditions, or norms as defined by a given society. What is deemed right or moral in one group or society may be wrong or immoral in another. Often, morals may change as societal practices or traditions change.

Values: According to Rokeach (1973), values are conceptual principles, positive or negative, that characterize a person's beliefs about ideal actions and behaviors. Rokeach noted that individual values are differentiated from attitudes, because personal values tend to be lasting and transcend specific situations or circumstances.

Assumptions

There were several assumptions regarding this study:

1. Participants had a sufficient level of intelligence and comprehension to understand the questions asked during the interview process.

2. The courses taken within each business major, along with the required ethics course, may have affected the students' ethical reasoning abilities.

3. The students possessed an adequate understanding of ethical reasoning to assess their own level of ethical values.

4. The assumption also included the ability to recognize and consider myriad ethical issues related to such subjects as management, marketing, finance, accounting, economics, and general business as well as the implications of alternative decisions within each discipline.

5. The students were truthful when answering questions during the interview, and not respond with answers that were presumed to be what the researcher would expect to hear.

Philosophical worldviews influence or shape the approach used in academic research (Guba, 1990, p. 17). The positivist approach to research implements experiments, surveys, and other forms of statistical analysis in an effort to explain or predict human behavior. The research results in one truth, a single reality that can be measured with quantitative approaches. To clarify, positivists maintain that objects or events examined in research "exist independently of people's perceptions and hence there can be one version of that truth" (Rubin & Rubin, 2011, pp. 15-16).

Truth is more complex within the interpretive constructionist philosophy. Interpretive constructionist researchers believe and accept that a reality exists, but it exists as an individual's perception, examined through the lens of his or her prior experience, knowledge, and expectations (Rubin & Rubin, 2011, p. 19). This study was conducted from an interpretive constructionist approach, with an understanding that truth will differ from person to person, according to what individuals see and experience and how they interpret events, stories, and conversations (Rubin & Rubin, 2011, p. 19).

Limitations

The limitations of the study involved senior-level undergraduate business students at one college in the northeastern region of the United States. The sample size of this qualitative research was 13 participants out of the total population of 34 students, with no expectations to generalize the results. Additionally, self-reported data may have been a

limitation (Moskal, 2010). These types of data may contain possible sources of bias including selective recall, telescoping, or the improper recollection of events, improper attribution of events, and exaggeration or embellishment of events. Some may have been too religious to admit to unethical thoughts or reasoning.

Scope and Delimitation

The scope of the study is centered on senior level undergraduate business students from a small Catholic college in the northeastern part of the United States. The delimitation entails the collection of data, which were limited to one college located in a major city in a northeastern geographical region.

Significance of the Study

This study sought to identify the perceived level of character development attained by senior undergraduate business students. Previous research has considered (a) undergraduate students' perceptions of character development and ethical reasoning based on demographic factors, such as gender (Alleyne et al., 2010; Ballantine & McCourt, 2010; Cory, 2015; Elias, 2011; Fitzpatrick, 2013, age (Alleyne et al., 2010; Cloninger & Selvarajan, 2010; Elias, 2011; Mack, 2010; Nather, 2013), and major (Alleyne et al., 2010; Kucher, 2012; Mack, 2010; Nkenke, 2010; Onyebuchi, 2011; Phatshwane et al., 2014; Pressley & Kennett-Hensel, 2013) in addition to (b) effectiveness of instruction and how the undergraduate business classroom experience change student awareness of ethical concerns in the business environment (Burns & Gupta, 2015; Cameron & O'Leary, 2015; Fletcher-Brown, Buono, Frederick, Hall, & Sultan, 2012; Hollier, Blankenship, & Jones, 2013; Lau, 2010). Lickona (1993) claimed

the primary purposes of education are to help individuals increase their intelligence and to understand what is good and right. Due to the social benefit of critical thought and responsible action, the undergraduate educational experience should include a thorough examination of an individual's personal values and ethical decision-making (Assudani et al., 2011). The intended outcome of character education is to identify and cultivate a set of personal skills that provide the construct for ethical behavior (Stedje, 2012).

Summary

Chapter 1 included the introduction, background of the study, nature of the problem, research questions, purpose and scope, the conceptual framework, definition of terms, assumptions, limitations, scope and delimitations, and the social significance of this study on perceived levels of ethical reasoning and moral character development of senior-level undergraduate business students at a Catholic college.

Chapter 2 consists of the literature review. The following topics are addressed: character education, ethical concepts of moral development, ethical reasoning, as well as the qualitative assessment of the perceived level of ethical development of college students by various researchers. Chapter 3 includes the research methodology, the selected design paradigm, context for the study, measures of ethical protection, and the method of data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 contains the findings and emerging themes of the study, and Chapter 5 concludes the dissertation with recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The problem under examination was the lack of a consistent perspective by researchers concerning the impact of ethics education on students' ethical perceptions and attitudes related to awareness and ethical reasoning. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of senior-level undergraduate business students regarding the business coursework designed for students to change ethical awareness, recognize ethical issues, and assess ethical concepts. The results found in the current literature concerning the impact of ethics education have been mixed. Several studies found no significant improvement (Burns & Gupta, 2015; Money, 2013, Oakley, 2011), while other studies found that ethics education has had a positive effect (Canarutto et al., 2010; Lau, 2010). In Chapter 2, the literature associated with this study is reviewed. The chapter includes the literature search strategy, followed by sections on character education. Additionally, the literature concerning the theories and models of student development and change as well as concepts related to the assessment of students are addressed.

Literature Search Strategy

The following databases were used to identify full-text, peer-reviewed journal articles as well as dissertations: Academic Search Complete, Education Research Complete, Psych INFO, Google Scholar, ProQuest ABI/Inform Complete, ProQuest Central, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses @ Walden University, Sage Premier, Science Direct, and Taylor and Francis Online The following key words were used: *case studies, character development, character education, college students, ethical behavior, ethical*

development, ethical reasoning, ethics, input-environment-outcome model, moral development, moral judgment, moral reasoning, student perceptions, psychosocial theory, qualitative assessment, and *values clarification.* The search retrieved articles that addressed early character education, major theories of moral and character development, impact models of college student change, perceptions of undergraduate business students related to changes in ethical reasoning and character development, effectiveness of ethics instruction, and the use of rubrics and values clarification in assessment. Additionally, books from my personal library were also used for support and background information related to theories concerning moral development (Piaget, 1969), ethical reasoning (DeGeorge, 2006), qualitative research methodologies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, Moustakas, 1990; Van Manen, 1990), assessment (Astin, 1985; 1993), and values clarification (Kirschenbaum, 2013).

Early Character Education

Character education in the American school system dates back to the 18th and 19th centuries. The Bible was used as the primary source for the introduction of moral values and character development (Lickona, 1993). In the 1920s, according to Hartshorne and May (1928, 1929, 1930), The Institute of Social and Religious Research, located at Columbia University in New York City, studied the nature of character and the school system's role and responsibility in the character development of 11,000 elementary and high school-age students. Student deceit and self-control were examined in this nationwide study. The findings indicated that, generally, children used deceit in some situations and not in others. The deception involved the use of lying, cheating, or stealing,

depending on the test scenario. In the results, no significant relationship was found

between the use of didactic teaching methods to instill codified value systems with

improvements in character development and classroom behavior. The character education

study brought into question the effectiveness of the long-standing method of value system

inculcation.

The Decline of Character Education

Thomas Lickona (1993) was used as a key source of information concerning the

emergence of character education and the implementation of programs to affect moral

value and ethics within the educational environment. Lickona (1993) noted that by the

mid-20th century, character education began to falter, primarily due to myriad pressures:

(a) the introduction of Darwinism, theory of biological evolution, into the educational

curriculum, which may have changed the perceptions of the Bible as the primary source

of moral values; (b) the introduction of philosophies surrounding logical positivism,

logical reasoning, and related theories associated with empirical or analytical verification

of truth and meaning into American universities, which brought ethical or moral

reasoning concepts, as sources of truth, into question; (c) the continued rise of

personalism, which focused on individual rights and less on the desire to maintain a

society based on a moral authority; (d) the increase of religious pluralism in America,

with the movement toward the acceptance of all religious practices as equally valid; and

(e) the secularization movement, which served as a driving force toward the separation of

church and state, resulting in the removal of religious training in the public school

system.

The resulting decline in character education was evidenced by the rising number of social ills among America's youth. Lickona (1999) identified several trends or indicators of the upsurge in moral problems, including, an increasing levels of youth violence, rising incidences of dishonesty (deceit and theft), a mounting disrespect for authority figures, including parents and teachers, and a decreasing ability to address moral dilemmas, due to a lack of understanding of right and wrong, good and bad, or ethical and unethical.

The Renewal of Character Education

In response to the growing trends of ethical and moral disregard, in the early 1990s, a number of United States organizations formed to address character education: the Character Education Partnership, the Character Counts Coalition, and the Communitarian Network (Lickona, 1999). One of the outcomes of the organizational effort in affecting character education was the creation of a set of principles to reintroduce character development programs within the school environment. The principles included the promotion of core values, such as honor, fairness, responsibility, and respect. Ultimately, the goal of the school system was to assist the student body in the identification and comprehension of what is considered right and good, to prize it, and to effectively integrate it throughout the learning community (Lickona, 1999).

Character education within the school system can be best described as a purposeful attempt at affecting the development of moral excellence, ethical values, and moral behavior of its students (Hanson & Moore, 2014; Lickona, 1999; Wagner & Ruch, 2015). In regard to the resurgence of character education in the 21st century, Dalton and

Crosby (2011) and Hanson and Moore (2014) identified key areas of character or moral

education that are prevalent at a significant number of U.S. colleges and universities,

including the preservation of civility and order of campus life with the formation of

ethical codes, and the promotion of prosocial attitudes and behaviors, such as honesty,

integrity, and tolerance. The intention of character or moral education is to influence the

character development of college students, with a specific focus on affecting ethical and

social responsibility.

The Cognitive Development of Morality and Character

Several theories have addressed moral and character development from a

cognitive development perspective (Gilligan, 1977; Kohlberg, 1969; Lickona, 1999;

Piaget, 1969; Rest, 1986; Trevino, 1986). The cognitive development process of morality

and character refers to how an individual thinks logically about ethical situations.

Cognitive development theory of moral character development originated with the work

of Jean Piaget (Piaget, 1969) and Lawrence Kohlberg (1969). Cognitive development

theory focused on the thinking processes of individuals at various developmental stages

(Ültanir, 2012).

The Cognitive Work of Piaget and Moral Development

Piaget examined the relationship between moral values and cognitive

development. Piaget's research centered on the stages of child development, as shown in

the following four-stage model: (a) the sensorimotor stage in which children, newborn

children to 2 years of age, familiarize themselves with their environment through the

action of any of their senses; (b) the preoccupational stage in which children, 2 to 7 years

of age, gain motor function; (c) the concrete operations stage in which children, 7 to 11

years of age, acquire the capability of logical thought about concrete or tangible events;

and (d) the formal operations stage in which children, 11 years of age to adulthood, attain

the capability of abstract reasoning (Ültanir, 2012).

Recent studies have confirmed Piaget's conclusions concerning the cognitive

development of children (Borst, Poirel, Pineau, Cassotti, & Houde, 2013; Cocorada &

Cazan, 2011; Shayer & Adhami, 2010). Borst et al. (2013) examined the cognitive

development of children and young adults, by assessing their problem solving strategies.

The results found that the young adults were more proficient than the children at problem

solving tasks. The findings suggested that problem solving ability increased with age.

Additionally, the stages of cognitive development appeared to overlap, rather than as

separate stages.

Cocorada and Cazan (2011) considered the moral and cognitive development of

Romanian children and found that the moral development stages identified by Piaget

were also found in the Romanian children. However, two new elements were identified:

(a) an amoral group of children with little or no respect for cultural norms and (b) a group

of children categorized as obedient preadolescents, who accept the rules established by

authority and understand the moral intent of ethical decisions. The research also found

that as children age, they use an increasing level of autonomous reasoning, which, in

essence, represents a propensity toward individual accountability for their own decisions.

Shayer and Adhami (2010) examined a program designed to affect the cognitive

development of children, 5-7 years of age. The results found the children experienced a

relative increase in levels of intelligence. The study suggested that collaborative settings positively affect cognitive development. Not only do these studies support Piaget's original work, but the findings also suggested that some children may develop the cognitive ability to discern rules and intent. Additionally, with the proper level of encouragement, increased levels of moral judgment may be attained.

Studies Built on Kohlberg's Model of Moral Development

Kohlberg (1969) added to Piaget's work with the conceptualization of a stage-sequence model in which three levels of moral development were identified. Each stage denotes a sequential progression of ethical reasoning in relation to age and cognitive development. Table 1 outlines Kohlberg's stages of moral development. Kohlberg's utilization of moral dilemmas was also an essential element in the assessment of the various stages of moral development.

In several recent studies, Kohlberg's stage process theory of moral development was considered, including the moral judgment of pre-adolescent children in public schools (Gupta, 2010), the relationship between moral cognitive development and the level of education (Nather, 2013), and the relationship between moral reasoning and brain structure in adults (Prehn et al., 2015). In the Gupta (2010) study, a significant difference was found in cognitive moral development between 10 and 11-year-old children and 8 and 9-year-old children, confirming Kohlberg's stage sequence model.

Nather (2013) examined the relationship between moral cognitive development and the level of undergraduate education. The results found that most participants, regardless of educational level, scored at the conventional level of moral reasoning. Prehn

et al. (2015) considered moral cognitive development in relation to brain structure. A sample of Master of Business Administration students completed the Defining Issues test (DIT-2), which assessed moral development. The results found that participants who scored at the post-conventional level possessed an increased volume of gray matter, in comparison with participants who scored at lower levels of moral reasoning. Gupta (2010) and Nather (2013) confirmed the relationship between moral reasoning and ethical behavior as well as the confirmation that cognitive development may be impacted by age. Rest (1986) furthered Kohlberg's stage process theory of cognitive moral development with a four-step model of ethical decision making. Rest's model included (a) the situational self-awareness of an ethical circumstance; (b) the recognition of what ought to be done; (c) the consideration of students' moral values, in the pursuit of an effective solution from among various options; and (d) the implementation of a suitable moral action or response (Krishnakumar & Rymph, 2011). However, unlike Kohlberg's sequential model of ethical decision making, the elements in Rest's decision model are interrelated, adding complexity to the decision process (Venezia, Venezia, Cavico, & Mujtaba, 2011).

Rest and Narvaez (1994) continued to address moral development by focusing on the four-component model of moral behavior. The model has been utilized to assess a set of teachable skills to affect an individual's moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral self-identity, and moral action (pp. 22-23). The variability witnessed in moral behavior may be attributed to a person's schema development and applications across situational

contexts, and not, necessarily, an individual's temperament or natural predisposition, or a

lack of personal morals or values.

Table 1

Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development

Level	Stage	Characteristics of stage/level
Level 1 Preconventional	Stage 1	A punishment orientation toward following rules to avoid punishment
	Stage 2	A reward orientation toward following rules to obtain rewards or to be given favorable status or attention
Level 2 Conventional	Stage 3	A good boy/girl orientation geared toward following rules to avoid the rejection of others
	Stage 4	An authority orientation geared toward following rules to avoid criticism of authorities and personal shame or remorse of not performing students' civic or social duty
Level 3 Postconventional	Stage 5	A social contract orientation, focused on actions directed by principles generally held by society
	Stage 6	An ethical principle orientation, focused on actions directed by principles that find merit in social justice, self-worth, honesty, and fairness or equity

Note. Adapted from *The Psychology of Moral Development by* L. Kohlberg, 1984, San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row.

Rest's four-component model of moral behavior was examined in a number of recent studies, including the assessment of moral judgment, moral motivation, and antisocial behavior of undergraduate students (Brooks, Narvaez, & Bock, 2013), and the comparison of moral judgment between two groups of first-year undergraduate students (Jagger, 2011). In the results of Brooks et al. (2013), moral motivation was identified as a stronger predictor of antisocial behavior than moral judgment. The results of Jagger's study were mixed, with one of the student groups showing no significant increase in postconventional moral judgment scores and the other group showing a decrease in postconventional scores. The findings of the recent research suggested that education to prevent antisocial behavior should be directed toward moral motivation and ethical reasoning. Additionally, findings suggested that Rest's defining issues test may not accurately assess the level an individual's moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral self-identity, or propensity toward moral action.

Gilligan (1977) advanced Kohlberg's theory of cognitive moral development with the publication of a differing opinion concerning the gender universality of Kohlberg's theory. Gilligan contended that Kohlberg's work, which was based on John Rawls' principles of justice, rights, and fairness, resulted in a male gender bias. Gilligan put forth the contrasting position that women's ethical decisions were oriented toward care and interpersonal relationships (Elm & Radin, 2012). The resulting model included the following stages: (a) a preconventional level which was focused on individual survival and selfish motivation; (b) the transitioning to the conventional level, which was focused on caring for others; and (c) the post-conventional level which was centered on the

development of a just community, which at the heart, not only focused on the caring of others but the realization that caring for oneself was of equal value (Elm & Radin, 2012).

In several recent studies, Gilligan's ethics of care was examined including the moral reasoning of university students and the relationship between ethics of care and empathy-related feelings, such as sympathy and personal anguish or sorrow (Skoe, 2010); and the bioethical reasoning of first-year and fifth-year medical students and the effects of gender and educational level on moral reasoning (Sommer, Boos, Conradi, Biller-Andorno, & Wiesemann, 2011). Skoe (2010) supported Gilligan's position concerning gender-based differences in ethical decision-making and that empathy-related feelings were instrumental in care-based moral reasoning. However, Sommer et al. (2011) found no significant difference in ethical reasoning, by gender or educational level, when presented with ethics or care and justice-based survey items. In this recent study, it was suggested that while there continues to be much support for Gilligan's model of ethics of care reasoning, the research also provided evidence identifying the complexities of ethical decision making and that certain types of school curricula may result in an ethical orientation that contained elements of both care and justice.

Trevino (1986) developed a decision model which also incorporated Kohlberg's stages of cognitive moral development. In Trevino's person-situation interactionist model is described ethical decision making as an interaction or relationship between an individual's ego strength (a measure of will or self-control); external information to affect the decision process; and students' ability to control or influence the outcomes of life's situations. These individual variables are impacted by the specific work situation, relative

to the job's pressures to influence decision making; the organization's ethical culture; and the level of authority to positively affect the organization's ethical culture, including the ability to resolve ethical dilemmas (Trevino, 1986).

Trevino's (1986) person-situation-interactionist model including the examination of the size of the bribe, time pressure, and the abstractness of business codes on the decision process commit corrupt behavior (Rabl, 2011), factors affecting the relationship between supervisory ethical leadership and whistle blowing (Mayer, Nurmohamed, Trevino, Shapiro, & Schminke, 2013), and factors affecting the ethical adaptability between criminal justice students and business students (Segal, Gideon, & Haberfeld, 2011) were all considered in recent studies. The findings of supported Trevino's model with the identification of factors which impacts corrupt behavior, such as organizational culture and ethical climate set by management (Mayer et al.), and personal values and personality traits (Segal et al., 2011). However, Rabl (2011) found no significant difference in the factors affecting the decision to commit unacceptable behavior. It was suggested that ethical decisions involve an array of factors, including values and organizational culture as well as being situational or contextually driven.

The Three Elements of Lickona's Morality Model

Lickona (1999) posited that morality consists of three elements: a cognitive, an affective, and a behavioral component. Moral or character development involves knowing the difference between good and bad, wanting to do what is good or right, and developing habits or behavior resulting in outcomes that are considered as such. According to Lickona, the cognitive component includes moral awareness; an

understanding of virtues, such as wisdom, honesty, and kindness; an ability to assess ethical issues from various perspectives; ethical reasoning; a thorough decision process; and a keen understanding of the ethical decision making process. The affective component includes moral conscience, self-respect, a compassionate spirit, a strong desire to do good, and a willingness to improve any personal moral deficiencies. The behavioral component includes a sufficient level of moral competence, willingness to behave morally, and an established practice of acting ethically.

Recent researchers have addressed various aspects of Lickona's morality model including the internalization of virtues among undergraduate students (Fox, Jones, Machtmes, & Cater, 2012); and the role of teachers in the development of character (Saghafi & Shatalebi, 2012). The results supported Lickona's model with the identification of the process related to the development of moral awareness, understanding, respect, and a sense of moral and ethical responsibility, as well as the relevance of self-evaluation and reflection on character development. The research indicated the implementation of strategies designed to affect character development may positively affect the undergraduate student population.

The Psychosocial Perspective of Character Development

The psychosocial perspective of character development addresses an individual's personal growth in character or moral fiber over a life time. Several researchers have addressed character development of college students from a psychosocial perspective (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Erikson, 1968). In psychosocial theory, an individual's personal and interpersonal relationships are examined including changes in thought

processes, attitudes, values, and actions, with the belief that personal development is a life-long process of change (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Iarussi (2013) suggested that the moral anatomy or makeup of character resembled an intricate spiral, comprised of seven psychological elements: moral action or behavior, moral values or virtues, morally-based personality, moral sentiment, moral decision making, moral self-image, and a moral foundation.

Chickering and Reisser's (1993) psychosocial student development theory seven vectors or stages of student development in the college environment were also identified including (a) developing intellectual, physical, and interpersonal competence; (b) managing feelings and emotions, such as angst, despair, resentment, remorse, humiliation, and shame; (c) fostering independence from others and reliance on oneself; (d) establishing mature relationships; (e) establishing a sense of self; (f) developing a sense of purpose; and (g) developing and establishing a modicum of personal integrity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, pp. 39-49).

Current researchers have considered Chickering and Reisser's seven vector model including the impact of the liberal arts college environment on educational outcomes (Seifert, Salisbury, Pascarella, Baliach, & Goodman, 2010), and the self-efficacy of academic success between first-generation and second-generation sophomore students (Vuong, Brown-Welty, & Tracz, 2010). The findings of Seifert et al. (2010) supported Chickering and Reisser's model, particularly the components related to the management of emotions, the development of competence, establishing self-identity, and the development of purpose. In the results of Vuong et al.'s study, Chickering and Reisser's

theoretical component concerning self-efficacy was supported, particularly the belief in students' ability to accomplish a task. In this case, academic success, it was suggested that colleges and universities continue to provide the opportunity to positively affect student development.

Chickering and Reisser's (1993) theory was an addition to Erikson's (1968) eight-stage identity and psychosocial development theory. Erickson considered the parental and societal influences on psychosocial development throughout an individual's lifetime. The model consisted of the following stages: (a) infancy is marked with the potential development of trust, confidence, and personal security; (b) the toddler stage brings the prospective development of self-esteem and self-sufficiency; (c) the preschooler stage consists of the possible development of purpose and resourcefulness; (d) the school age stage brings the latent development of competence or possible inadequacy; (e) adolescence brings a search for identity; (f) young adulthood consists of possible relationship building; (g) middle age brings the possible search for meaning and a chance to make a difference in society; (h) and the final stage of late adulthood provides a time for reflection, focusing on ones' fulfillment or a life filled with regret or unfulfilled dreams. Erikson related the theory to college age students, with the search for identity as the primary development facing them (Karkouti, 2014).

In recent studies, Erikson's psychosocial identity theory has been considered including the socio-cultural and psychological adjustment of international undergraduate students in the United States (Kim, 2012); the examination of psychosocial stages in predicting levels of satisfaction with personal relationships, and the achievement of

identity, and levels of self-efficacy among Turkish university students (Özgüngör &

Acun Kapikiran, 2011). The findings of Özgüngör and Acun Kapikiran (2011) supported

Erikson's psychosocial stages associated with the search for identity, building intimate

relationships as well as self-efficacy.

Kim's (2012) research resulted in a new six-phase conceptual framework of

psychosocial identity formation. Critical components of the model included emotional

and social support, motivation, interaction and self-confidence of international students.

The work of both Kim and Özgüngör and Acun Kapikirin suggested a cross-cultural

applicability of Erikson's theory.

The Impact Models of College Student Change

The impact models of college student change address the developmental changes

of students in relation to the college environment, including the student's entire collegiate

experience. Several theorists have addressed the environmental and sociological impact

of change in college students (Astin, 1985, 1993; Pascarella, 1985; Tinto, 1975, 1993).

Impact models of college student change typically present the conceptual processes

surrounding change as a method to assess the influences or effects of college (Pascarella

& Terenzini, 2005, pp. 52-53). Astin's input-environment-outcome model represents the

conceptual framework. Under this model, student inputs may directly affect the outcomes

at the end of college and indirectly, through a multiplicity of college experiences. The

change experienced by students is assessed by comparing inputs with outcomes as well as

considering the related environmental experiences which may or may not have affected

change (Astin, 1993, pp. 16-23).

Additionally, Astin (1985) proposed a theory of student involvement as a critical component of change. The theory maintains the amount of development or change is in relation to the quality and quantity of student involvement. Consequently, the educational effectiveness of a program, policy, or instructional practice is related to its capability to promote student involvement. (Astin, 1985, pp. 135-136)

Astin and Antonio (2004) identified college experiences within the curriculum as well as extracurriculur activities that may have affected character development. Character development was assessed on the basis of civic and social values, volunteer participation, the importance of family, and religious principles. The findings suggested that specific curricula that focused on women's and ethnic issues as well as courses which addressed societal needs significantly impacted character development. Additionally, extracurricular involvement, including regular participation in religious endeavors, intercultural activities, and leadership roles, had a positive effect on character development.

Pascarella (1985) introduced a causal model in which learning and cognitive development is attributed to five key variables: (a) student background and precollege traits, including intellectual ability, level of achievement, and ethnicity; (b) institutional characteristics, such as enrollment, size, and student-faculty ratio; (c) the college or university's environment; (d) the influential aspects of both faculty and peer interactions; and (e) the quality of student effort placed on learning and development. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) examined the relationship between cognitive development and the formation of personal values and belief systems. They contended that progressive

adjustments or changes in cognitive ability were necessary to affect the development of students' value system.

Tinto (1975, 1993) proposed a model that had similarities to both Astin's I-E-O model and Pascarella's causal model, but with an outcome specific to a student's departure from college. Tinto's theory considered the impact of the following variables on the student's departure decision: (a) the student's pre-college attributes and goals or intentions; (b) the curricular and extracurricular experiences; (c) the level of the student's academic and social integration; and (d) the change in a student's goals and intention based on the level of integration. As the level of integration increases, the level of commitment in pursuit of personal goals may also increase. However, negative interactions may hinder the process of integration, encumbering the commitment to goals and to the college, which may result in an early departure decision. Tinto's work may benefit researchers interested in assessing the variables associated with student change.

In recent studies, college impact models for assessing change and involvement have been considered, including the impact of engagement on economic outcomes after graduation (Hu & Wolniak, 2010); the development of character and values in college students (Jenney, 2012); the environmental factors influencing the development of moral reasoning among a diverse undergraduate student population (Mayhew & Engberg, 2010); and the impact of student engagement on grade point average and persistence among undergraduate healthcare students (Popkess & McDaniel, 2011). Hu and Wolniak (2010) considered Astin's, Tinto's and Pascarella's models in the conceptual framework to examine the impact of student engagement on earnings. The findings showed that

student engagement was positively related to earnings. The results of the study generally

supported Astin's, Pascarella's and Tinto's theories related to student involvement,

specifically the quality of effort in relation to learning and development.

Jenney (2012) incorporated Astin's I-E-O model to examine the factors that affect

the development of character and values in college students. The results found that

spirituality was a factor in the development of values related to achievement, compassion,

and emotional health. Mayhew and Engberg (2010) used Astin's I-E-O model as part of

the conceptual framework to examine the environmental factors impacting the

development of moral reasoning in undergraduate students, finding that a student's

negative interaction within the learning environment may adversely affect the learning

process. Popkess and McDaniel (2011) also implemented Astin's I-E-O model to assess

student engagement and resulting outcomes. The results indicated that a student-centered

teaching approach, particularly a collaborative learning platform, affected outcomes

related to grade point average and persistence to graduate. The studies generally

supported Astin's theory concerning student involvement, particularly the relationship

between development or change and the quality and quantity of student involvement. The

impact models of student change presented by Astin, Pascarella, and Tinto provided a set

of frameworks to evaluate the various influences to the change process. The current

research suggested that critical aspects of change are reflected in the level of involvement

and interaction within the institution environment.

Undergraduate Student Perceptions of Ethical Reasoning

and Character Development

In the literature of ethical reasoning and character development of undergraduate business students, a considerable amount of research has been focused on the students' perceived levels of ethical reasoning and moral character development; the aspects of the curriculum activities, designed to impact ethical awareness, and the recognition of ethical issues; and how the classroom experience changed student awareness of ethical issues. Recently, researchers have examined student perceptions based on similar factors, including gender (Alleyne et al., 2010; Ballantine & McCourt, 2010; Cory, 2015; Elias, 2011; Fitzpatrick, 2013; Mack, 2010; Onyebuchi, 2011; Phatshwane, Mapharing, & Basuhi, 2014; Pressley & Kennett-Hensel, 2013; Rajasekar & Simpson, 2014; Wang & Calvano, 2015; Wang & Juslin, 2012), age (Alleyne et al., 2010; Cloninger & Selvarajan, 2010; Elias, 2011; Mack, 2010, Nather, 2013); major of study (Alleyne et al., 2010; Kucher, 2012; Mack, 2010; Nkenke, 2010; Onyebuchi, 2011; Phatshwane et al., 2014; Pressley & Kennett-Hensel, 2013). Alleyne et al. (2010) examined the factors that affected the ethical perceptions and intentions of undergraduate students in Barbados. The results showed that gender significantly impacted the ethical perceptions of students, with females possessing more ethical intentions than males.

In studies by Ballantine and McCourt, 2010, Cory (2015, Elias (2011), Fitzpatrick, 2013, Mack (2010), Onyebuchi (2011), Phatshwane et al., 2014, Pressley and Kennett-Hensel (2013), and Wang and Calvano (2015) the perceptions of male and female accounting, business, and non-accounting students were examined on ethical

situations in business, accounting, and auditing. In the Elias et al., Pressley and Kennett-Hensel, and Wang and Calvano studies, females possessed higher levels of ethical perception than males. However, in the Ballantine and McCourt, Mack, and Rajasekar and Simpson studies, the findings showed no significant difference by gender. While the results of the current research examining the ethical perceptions of males and females are contradictory, it suggest there may be a difference in ethical perceptions based on gender.

Alleyne et al. (2010), Butler, Hammel, and Mascia (2011), Cloninger and Selvarajan, (2010), Elias (2011), Gupta, Walker, and Swanson (2011), Mack (2010), and Nather (2013) considered the ethical perceptions of students by age. In the Alleyne et al., Butler et al., Elias, and Gupta et al. studies, the results indicated that age significantly impacts the ethical perceptions of undergraduate students. However, in Mack's assessment of senior undergraduate students and in Cloninger and Selvarajan's examination of graduate level business students, no significant difference was found by age. Nather's research examined the impact of educational level on the moral reasoning of college students. The results found no significant differences by level of education. While the findings of the current study were inconsistent, it suggests that age impacts the perceptions of undergraduate students regarding questionable business practices.

Alleyne et al. (2010), Culver, Puri, Wokutch, and Lohani (2013), Kucher (2012), Mack (2010), Nkenke, (2010), Onyebuchi (2011), Phatshwane et al. (2014), Pressley and Kennett-Hensel (2013), Thomas and Dunphy (2014) considered the major of study as a possible factor impacting the ethical perceptions of students. In Alleyne et al., Culver et al., Nkenke, Phatshwane et al., and Pressley and Kennett-Hensel, their findings indicated

that the major significantly impacted the ethical perceptions of business students.

However, the results in the Kucher, Mack, Onyebuchi, and the Thomas and Dunphy

studies showed that the major had little effect on the ethical perceptions of students. The

results of the current research were mixed. Continued exploration in this area may be

necessary to further explain the impact the major of study has on the ethical perceptions

of students.

Effectiveness of Ethics Instruction

Researchers have considered the aspects of coursework and curriculum activities

designed to impact the ethical awareness of undergraduate business students as well as

the evaluation of ethical concepts or points of view. The effectiveness of business ethics

education has been examined recently including the overall effectiveness of business

ethics instruction (Burns & Gupta, 2015; Cameron & O'Leary, 2015; Fletcher-Brown et

al., 2012; Hollier et al., 2013; Lau, 2010; Martinov-Bennie & Mlandenovic, 2015;

Mohamed Saat et al., 2012; Murphy, 2011; Quesenberry et al., 2012; Reynolds & Dang,

2015; Stachowicz-Stanusch, 2011; Valentine & Bateman, 2011; the impact of course

instructional models (Acevedo, 2013; Beggs, 2011; Bloodgood et al., 2010; Chawla et al.,

2015; Dzuranin et al., 2013; Gill, 2012; Graham, 2012; Harkrider et al., 2013; Gu &

Neesham, 2014; Harris et al., 2011; Jagger & Volkman, 2014; Jazani & Ayoobzadeh,

2012; Kennedy, 2010; Kleinrichert et al., 2013; Klimek & Wenell, 2011; Lukea-

Bhiwajee, 2010; May et al., 2014; Mitchell & Yordy, 2010; Money, 2013; Murphy, 2014;

Nair Rajeev, 2012; Nelson et al., 2014; Oakley, 2011; Revoir, 2011; Ryan & Bisson,

2011; Sentell, 2013; Simmons et al., 2013; Simola, 2010; Singer, 2013; Slocum et al.,

2014; Sternberg, 2015; Tackett et al., 2011; Thomson, 2011; Vendemia & Kos, 2013; Wilhelm & Czyzewski, 2012; Willey et al., 2012; Willey et al., 2013); and how the undergraduate business experience can change the students' awareness of ethical concerns or issues in the business environment (Canarutto et al., 2010; Morgan & Neal, 2011; Stichter, 2012).

Burns and Gupta (2015) studied undergraduate students at two universities, one Jesuit university and a state university, to assess the overall effectiveness of business ethics education. The results showed that the incorporation of ethics throughout the university curriculum had no significant effect on the students' ethical attitudes. Cameron and O'Leary (2015) examined the effectiveness of ethics instruction by considering moral and legal issues in business. The results found that business scenarios which addressed both ethical and legal issues significantly improved the ethical perception of students. Fletcher-Brown et al. (2012) examined incoming freshman business students to establish a baseline of ethical reasoning. The results of the pretest found the students' baseline scores were at a level of moral reasoning that suggested they would condone unethical behavior.

Hollier et al. (2013) assessed the ethical attitudes of business students after reading a business scenario which contained ethical dilemmas. The participants were given three options as possible solutions; one unethical option and two ethical options. The results found that 92% of the participants selected the ethical options. Lau (2010) also examined undergraduate students at a major research university to determine the relationship between ethics education and the students' ethical awareness and moral

reasoning. Contrary to Burns and Gupta's (2015) study, Lau's findings indicated that ethics education significantly improved students' level of ethical awareness and moral reasoning.

Martinov-Bennie and Mlandenovic (2015) considered the impact of a comprehensive program to integrate ethics education throughout the business curriculum in an effort to affect ethical sensitivity and ethical judgment. The results found that integrated ethics education increased both sensitivity and ethical judgment. Mohamed Saat et al. (2012) also examined the impact of an ethics education program on the decision making of accounting students. The program consisted of a dedicated ethics course followed by practical training in accounting. The results found a significant increase in the ethical reasoning scores of the students. Murphy (2011) examined the perceptions of students and faculty concerning business ethics education. The faculty perceived there was more emphasis placed on teaching ethics than the students perceived. Also, the faculty felt they had a greater responsibility to teach business ethics than the students felt.

Quesenberry et al. (2012) assessed the ethical reasoning level of freshman and sophomore students who had taken a business course with an embedded ethics component. Students who had taken more courses with ethical content scored higher in values assessment and ethical reasoning. Reynolds and Dang (2015) considered the level of satisfaction of business students after the completion of a business ethics course. The results found that the ethics course may not have been properly designed, as the course did not meet the students' primary expectations. The students expected the course to

prepare them to be effective managers and offer strategies to resolve ethical situations in the workplace.

Stachowicz-Stanusch (2011) examined the effectiveness of university education on the students' moral competencies. Both undergraduate and graduate business students participated in the survey. The moral competencies with the highest rankings were integrity, responsibility, compassion, and forgiveness. Valentine and Bateman (2011) assessed the impact of the students' personal ethical ideologies on ethical reasoning. Sales-based scenarios were utilized to assess ethical awareness and ethical intention. The results found that the moral intensity of the situation was related to increased levels of ethical recognition and ethical intention.

Current researchers have considered the development of effective ethics instruction by assessing the impact of course instructional models. Acevedo (2013), Singer (2013), and Sternberg (2015) recommended a framework that could enhance ethics education in the management curricula. The framework included clarifying the differences among ethics, morality, law, and corporate social responsibility. Slocum et al. (2014) recommended the micro-insertion approach to integrate ethics into the business curricula. Slocum et al.'s approach suggested the introduction of small amounts of ethical information throughout the course. Ethical reflection and open discourse ought to be encouraged to affect decision making. Murphy (2014) argued honest and open discussion, personal reflection, and framing discussions from ethical points of view, positively affects ethical instruction. Sentell (2013) also suggested the use of written reflection and oral presentations to positively affect moral reasoning.

Nelson et al. (2014) examined the status of ethical education in business curricula. The results were that most relevant ethical concepts included the development of ethical culture in organizations and personal integrity. Content delivery should comprise ethical scenarios, case studies, role playing and in-class presentations. Willey et al. (2013) recommended the use of corporate codes of conduct to enhance ethical decision making. The results involved the inclusion of corporate codes into the course content increased ethical awareness of appropriate workplace conduct. Nair Rajeev (2012) assessed one university's approach to teaching business ethics. The university's foundational course in ethics was part of the management course. The course allowed for the reflection and internalization of ethical values and beliefs, discussed real-world issues, and enhanced ethical awareness.

Beggs (2011) examined a teaching method that exposed students to ethical dilemmas. The results found that in-class exercises involving ethical scenarios significantly increased the students' ethical awareness and ethical intention. Bloodgood et al. (2010) assessed the perceptions of upper level undergraduate students regarding the acceptance of cheating. Bloodgood and his associates also considered the relationship between the level of ethics instruction and their personalities. The results found that taking an ethics course had no significant influence on students' views on cheating.

Contrary to Bloodgood's study, Chawla et al. (2013) and Graham (2012) examined the perceptions of students concerning the effectiveness of teaching ethics in undergraduate accounting programs based on the stand-alone course model or the integration of ethics throughout the course curriculum. Students concluded that ethics

teaching was most beneficial as a stand-alone course. Simmons et al. (2013) considered the effects of a business ethics course on the students' personal values and attitude toward organizational ethics and social responsibility. The results found that the participants were significantly more inclined to support the stakeholder view of business.

Jazani and Ayoobzadeh (2012) also examined the impact of a stand-alone ethics course on graduate-level management students. Three groups took part in the research; a group that took no ethics course, a group that learned about ethics from informal classroom discussions, and a group that took an ethics course as part of the curriculum. The group that took the ethics course experienced more of an impact on ethical intention than the other two groups. Kennedy (2010) examined the impact of a stand-alone business ethics course on business students compared to non-business students. The results found that business students perceived issues related to the misrepresentation of corporate records and bribery as less ethical than non-business students. Gill (2012) examined the impact of an experiential learning approach of ethics on students' ethical decision making. The results were that the learning approach may have positively affected the students' ethical awareness.

Harkrider et al. (2013) considered case-based ethics instruction which included student presentations and instructor prompting to affect decision making. The results found when cases were presented in a sequential fashion as well as the use of structured prompts to encourage discussion, the effectiveness of ethics instruction improved. Gu and Neesham (2014) examined an identify-based ethics method to affect decision making. The approach involved a series of self-reflection writing exercises partnered with the

traditional rule-based teaching philosophy. Three different student groups participated in the study and were exposed to one of three programs; an integration of identity- based tasks and rule-based teaching, rule-based teaching only, and no special approach to affect ethics. The results were that the students who were exposed to the integrated program of identity-based writing exercises and rule-based teaching reported higher levels of ethical decision making.

Mitchell and Yordy (2012) proposed an ethical decision making framework to assist students in the recognition and analysis of ethical dilemmas. The approach requires the identification of ethical dilemmas, the consideration of alternative solutions, the organization's code of conduct, the effect on the organization's mission, culture, and the impact the exercise has on the student's personal value system. Harris et al. (2011) proposed that information systems undergraduate education be infused with ethical and social responsibility issues. The primary ethical issues related to information systems were professional conduct, privacy, intellectual property, cybercrime, freedom of speech, and sustainability.

Similar to Harris et al.' study, Lukea-Bhiwajee (2010) discussed the relevance of including the concept of values in the management education curricula. Lukea-Bhiwajee recommended the inclusion of the following concepts of values: ethics, corporate social responsibility, responsibility, and sustainability. Jagger and Volkman (2014) recommended the implementation of a holistic approach to impact ethical instruction. The approach suggested students receive encouragement to develop ethical knowledge and to assess their personal value systems. The method resulted in increased levels of

ethical awareness and sensitivity. Kleinrichert et al. (2013) examined the impact of a business and society course on business students' ethical perceptions. The results were that students who the course were more likely to believe that a company's primary responsibility was to create value for the stakeholders of the business, rather than to maximize shareholder value.

Tackett et al. (2011) examined the impact of teaching ethics from an altruistic versus and economic point of view. The results found that presenting ethics from an egotistic or selfish perspective had a greater impact on the students' ethical perceptions, than presenting ethics from an altruistic or unselfish point of view. The study suggests that presenting ethics from an egoistic perspective made be a more effective framework. Revoir (2011) examined an online instructional tool to determine its effectiveness on student learning during a business ethics course. The results found that group work impacted moral sensitivity and judgment. The use of videos introduced students to ethical concepts and enhanced their understanding of ethical issues. The results were that the instructional tool increased the students' confidence level in handling ethical situations.

Money (2013) examined an ethical instrument designed to improve ethical awareness and intention of accounting students. The results found no significant difference in ethical reasoning ability between the students who used the instrument and the students who did not. May et al. (2014) examined the effects of an ethics course on accounting students' moral efficacy, meaningfulness, and courage. The results found that the course significantly improved students' beliefs in all three values. Klimek and Wenell (2011) compared the ethical reasoning ability of students who took a stand-alone ethics

course in accounting versus students who had ethics discussions embedded in accounting courses. They found that students who took the stand-alone ethics course scored higher in ethical reasoning than students who participated in courses with embedded ethical content.

Oakley (2011) also examined the relationship between a stand-alone ethics course and academic conduct among undergraduate business students. Contrary to Klimek and Wenell's study, Oakley's findings indicated no significant differences in ethical reasoning between business students who took the ethics course and those students who did not take the course. Ryan and Bisson (2011) also addressed the question concerning whether ethics is best taught as a stand-alone course or whether it should be embedded throughout the curriculum. While some of the researchers found no benefit to stand-alone ethics instruction, several of the researchers contended that both methods of implementation have merit. However, embedded ethical content was preferred to the stand-alone format, and ethical content should be infused throughout the program, addressing real-world concepts and concerns.

Simola (2010) examined a coping-modeling, problem-solving (CMPS) approach to teach a business ethics course to third-year undergraduate students. The CMPS approach provides students with the correct solution to a specific problem and an alternate solution to the same problem, but with ambiguity, emulating more of a real-world process. Simola found that the model increased the students' understanding of their personal behavior, higher levels of ethical awareness, and early recognition of ethical concerns as well as an improved ability to develop creative solutions. Vendemia and Kos

(2013) and Willey et al. (2012) examined a model for ethics instruction that could be implemented across the undergraduate business curriculum. The results found that the model was an effective method to assess ethical scenarios, increase ethical awareness, and propose appropriate solutions.

Lastly, researchers have considered how the undergraduate business experience can change the students' awareness of ethical concerns or issues in the business environment. In current studies, the degree to which undergraduate business experience changed student awareness of ethical issues was assessed (Canarutto et al., 2010; Morgan & Neal, 2011; Stichter, 2012). Canarutto et al. (2010) examined the impact of an ethics presentation utilized in the United States and adapted for Italian undergraduate students. Issues concerning corporate governance, the global impact of ethics, the advantages of ethical behavior, and the need to agree on basic values were discussed. The presentation, which served as a precursor to ethics training within the undergraduate curriculum, significantly increased the students' perceptions concerning the value of an ethics education.

Morgan and Neal (2011) compared the ethical perceptions of freshman level and junior/senior level information systems students. Ethical violations specific to information systems in a series of real-world scenarios were examined. The findings showed that the upper level students judged the behavior within the scenarios at a significantly higher level than the freshman students.

Stichter (2012) examined the factors affecting ethical sensitivity of accounting students in public universities and Christian universities. The results found that ethics

education was a statistically significant factor in determining ethical sensitivity of accounting students at both types of universities.

In sum, researchers have considered how the undergraduate business experience can change the students' awareness of ethical issues in the business environment. The current research suggests that ethics education may impact ethical awareness. However, additional studies may be considered to identify the specific aspects of course content which affects ethical awareness and the related concepts of moral judgment, ethical intention, and ethical action or behavior.

The Use of Rubrics in Assessment

Using rubrics for assessment provides educators with an evaluative tool to measure student learning outcomes. As this study utilized the AAC&U ethical reasoning VALUE rubric to assess learning outcomes related to ethical reasoning, it was necessary to examine the literature associated with the use of rubrics in assessment. Several researchers have examined the empirical literature concerning the use of rubrics in assessment (Andrade, Du, & Mycek, 2010; Cheyney, 2010; Reddy & Andrade, 2010; Reynolds-Keefer, 2010; Woodburne, Quesenberry, & Young, 2013). Andrade et al. (2010) also examined the literature and found that there was some evidence concerning a relationship between the use of rubrics by students to self-assess their work and overall improvement in achievement.

Reddy and Andrade et al. (2010) examined the literature and found some support relative to using rubrics and positive impacts on the learning process. In a separate study, Reynolds-Keefer (2010) explored student perceptions concerning the use of rubrics in the

learning process as well as in the future when the students become educators. Similar to the results of Reddy and Andrade's work, it was indicated that rubrics positively influenced the learning process. Woodburne et al. (2013) determined the adequacy of a course rubric to assess ethical decision making. The rubric was designed to evaluate students on four components: identification of ethical issues, discussion of ethics, identification of stakeholders' issues, and identification of associated costs of ethical and unethical decisions. The results found that the rubric adequately measured all of the components.

Additionally, Cheyney (2010) and Reddy and Andrade (2010) identified the following themes associated with rubric use: (a) the perceptions of students and faculty concerning the use of rubrics; (b) self and peer assessment; (c) critical thinking; (d) student development, both formatively and summatively; (e) overall academic performance; and (f) validity and reliability studies of rubric use. Consequently, the researchers identified gaps in the literature as well: (a) added rigor to current research methods, (b) the assessment of geographical and cultural perspectives related to rubric use, and (c) more indepth assessment of student learning.

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U, 2012) established the Value Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) project to evaluate the work of college students. The VALUE project, consisting of 15 rubrics, is designed to extend the assessment process beyond standardized testing. The purpose of the AAC&U's 2005 initiative was to create a common set of learning outcomes that could be used across disciplines or learning institutions, which include the

following: (a) the knowledge of human cultures through the study of social and physical sciences; (b) the development of intellectual and practical abilities with an emphasis on analytics, critical thinking, teamwork, and problem solving; (c) the promotion of social responsibility, including civic engagement and ethical reasoning; and (d) the demonstration of integrative and applied learning (AAC&U, 2012).

The AAC&U (2012) reported that over 2000 institutions have incorporated VALUE rubrics into their assessment programs. In examining the assessment programs of various institutions, Reed (2011) conducted case studies at five universities at the behest of the AAC&U, addressing issues concerning myriad assessment methodologies. Reed identified a common theme through the study: a core belief that the definition of student learning outcomes and effective measurement was essential to the institutional mission of student development. It was also suggested that a critical element of the process must involve increased levels of faculty engagement to establish and articulate learning outcomes throughout the academic programs. In a preliminary search of the literature, no studies were found that utilized the AAC&U ethical reasoning VALUE rubric as a tool that the students could use to self-assess their own ethical values, understanding of various ethical perspectives, and ethical recognition.

The Use of Values Clarification Methodology in Assessment

Values clarification is a process to help individuals bring clarity to the personal values that impact life's decisions. As the study design used the values clarification process to assess the personal values of students, it was necessary to consider the methodology and the related literature. Rath et al.'s (1978) values clarification

methodology was designed to assist individuals (a) to identify and set personal goals and priorities; (b) to select the appropriate decisions to affect goal achievement; and (c) to execute the decision-making process to successfully achieve the selected goals and priorities.

The values clarification methodology contains seven processes: the need to comprehend what an individual treasures or highly values, the willingness to publicly acknowledge what areas of an individual's life are highly valued, and the ability to consider and choose an individual's values from a number of possible options as well as the consideration of the possible consequences related to an individual's choices concerning said values, the opportunity to freely choose an individual's value system without coercion, and finally, to act on the selected values on a consistent basis (Kirschenbaum, 2000). Kirschenbaum (2013) acknowledged that the research on values clarification generally supported the implementation of clarification approaches in counseling, educational, and healthcare settings (p. 183).

In recent studies, values clarification has been considered as a possible intervention to affect the decision-making processes related to patient diagnosis and associated treatment options (Kokufu, 2012; Pieterse & deVries, 2013); the value choices made by students during the educational process (Horton-Deutsch, Young, & Nelson, 2010; Poff, 2010; Yang, Chen, Chao, & Lai, 2010); and influencing behavioral change in college students (Searight & Searight, 2011). Kokufu (2012) and Pieterse and de Vries (2013) found that values clarification allowed participants to become clearer about their personal values while positively influencing the decision process. Horton-Deutsch et al.'s

(2010), Poff's (2010) and Yang et al.'s (2010) work supported Rath et al.'s methodology, particularly the aspects related to ethical choices made by students during ethics and leadership training during the educational process. Searight and Searight (2011) found values clarification as an effective self-assessment tool to affect student behavior, particularly, by increasing levels of personal knowledge and changes in personal attitudes. Searight and Searight suggested that with proper application, values clarification not only aids the decision process by encouraging the consideration all appropriate options, but also offers a methodology to facilitate the comparison of possible options, while allowing time to develop a personal mission statement.

In summary, assessment is necessary to examine the specific learning outcomes of a student's ability, and overall educational experience. This study utilized the AAC&U ethical reasoning VALUE rubric to assess learning outcomes related to ethical reasoning. While the results of the current research were mixed, the findings seemed to suggest that, in general, rubrics have a positive influence on the learning process. The study may contribute to the literature regarding the use of rubrics in the assessment of student perceptions. Furthermore, Rath et al.'s (1978) values clarification methodology was used in the research design to assess the personal values of students. Current research seemed to suggest that the methodology may be an effective strategy to affect students' decision choices, prioritize and set goals, and to clarify core values.

Summary

The literature reviewed in this chapter concerned character education, ethical concepts of moral development, ethical reasoning, and related research involving the

qualitative assessment of the perceived level of ethical development of college students. The use of ethical scenarios and the ethical reasoning VALUE rubric as student self-assessment tool were addressed.

The review of the literature concerning moral and character development examined articles on character education, key theories of moral development, models of college student change related to ethical reasoning, and the efficacy of ethics instruction. For over a century, attempts have been made to impact the ethical values of students by implementing character education. Significant effort was made to examine the factors affecting the development of ethical values in college students. The search and analysis of recent literature from 2010 supported the further examination of the efficacy of coursework and instruction designed to impact ethical awareness of undergraduate business students. In Chapter 3, the research methodology, the selected design paradigm, context for the study, measures of ethical protection, and method of data collection and analysis are presented.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

In Chapter 3, the phenomenological research methodology for the study is presented, including the qualitative design and the rationale, the role of the researcher, the specific methodology used, and issues related to trustworthiness.. The purpose of this study was to describe and interpret the lived experience of senior-level undergraduate business students regarding the business coursework designed to impact their level of ethical awareness, their ability to recognize ethical concerns, and their capacity to evaluate ethical concepts or points of view. Additionally, I assessed their perceptions concerning the impact of the business curriculum on their core values. The assessment of their perceptions may be essential in developing effective character education that affects the moral competencies of future business leaders (Lickona, 1993).

Research Design and Rationale

This study was guided by the following question: What is the experience of senior-level undergraduate business students regarding business coursework designed to impact ethical awareness, the recognition of ethical issues, and the evaluation of ethical concepts or points of view? The qualitative approach provided an opportunity to ascertain and address a complex understanding of the students' perceived level of character development (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, pp. 3-4).

The selected methodology for this study was phenomenology. Van Manen (1990) stated that phenomenological research was the study of "lived or existential meanings; it

attempts to describe and interpret these meanings to a certain degree of depth and richness" (p. 11). Van Manen noted that phenomenological methodology is also interpretive. In this process, the researcher attempts to pay attention to how things appear, allows things to speak for themselves, and maintains that all phenomena may be clarified or made clear (p. 180). Van Manen stressed that "the aim of phenomenology is to transform the lived experience into a textural expression of its essence – in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflective appropriation of something meaningful" (p. 37). Additionally, Van Manen identified phenomenology as a retrospective process rather than an introspective one, as the methodology is intended to focus on the recollection and reflection of a past or lived experience (p. 10).

However, since the phenomenological method involves the interviewing process, it may be considered both retrospective and introspective (Jäkel & Schreiber, 2013). In a general sense, introspection requires self-analysis—a reflective look at ones' own thoughts and feelings (Jäkel & Schreiber, 2013). Jäkel and Schreiber found that introspection is useful as an exploratory method in problem solving research. Jäkel and Schreiber commented that introspection allows participants to reflect or think aloud about their actions and the cognitive or thinking processes utilize to explain their reasoning.

Narrative is considered the "primary scheme by which human existence is rendered meaningful" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 1). Narrative studies typically focus on "one or two individuals, gathering data through the collection of their stories, reporting individual experiences, and chronologically ordering…the meaning of those experiences" (Van Manen, 1990). Polkinghorne (1995), similarly, defined narrative inquiry as a

"qualitative research design in which stories are used to describe human action."

Narrative is an exceptional tool for understanding and interpreting stories within a

specific context. The goal of narrative or storytelling is to formulate meaning (Prokkola,

2014).

In a narrative, the problem is addressed by the stories that are told and retold by

both the respondent and the researcher, concerning the respondent's past and present

experiences of a particular phenomenon (Chase, 2005). The narrative is not the proper

approach for this study because the aim is not to understand or ascertain the meaning of

the lived experiences of one or two individuals. The goal is to consider the perceptions of

several undergraduate business students.

Yin (2009) defined the case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a

contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the

boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 18).

Merriam (1998) noted that "qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic description and

analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit" (p. 27). This methodology

requires the use of multiple sources of data, such as in-depth interviews, observations,

archival records and relevant documents. The case study approach was not appropriate

for this study because data collection focused on the use in-depth interviews as the data

source to assess the perceptions of students' ethical reasoning and character development.

A grounded theory study is an inductive, analytical process that allows

researchers to assess unexplained phenomena, identify a set of integrated concepts, and

construct theory from qualitative data (Foley & Timonen, 2015). Grounded theory was

not proper for this study because there are a number of existing theories available to address the concepts related to ethical reasoning and character development of students. Ethnography centers on a total cultural group, and the shared patterns of behavior, belief systems, and methods of communication (Glaser, 1978). An ethnographic approach may be implemented to address the characteristics of a particular culture and their indigenous behavior, due to a lack of knowledge concerning the group in the existing literature (Glaser, 1978). Ethnography was not appropriate for this study because the analysis did not focus on an obscure, underserved, or marginalized cultural group. The analysis considered the ethical perceptions of senior-level college students.

The stated aim in this research is to identify the perceived levels of ethical reasoning and moral character development of senior-level undergraduate business students at a Catholic college, in order to assess the students' level of ethical awareness, the ability to recognize ethical issues, and the capacity to evaluate ethical concepts or points of view. The phenomenological method is deemed to be the best approach to allow the students to reflect on the aspects of the undergraduate business education that contributed to the perceived level of character development during the college experience.

Role of the Researcher

Due to the qualitative design, the researcher served as the key instrument in the data collection process (Merriam, 1998, p. 20). This method requires the development of the questionnaire, including the interview questions. Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted to collect and analyze the data, and disseminate the results (Yin, 2009).

Merriam (1998) noted that the researcher must be able to work well within ambiguous situations and be willing to adapt and alter the direction, in the discovery of meaning. Merriam indicated that, as a human instrument, the researcher must recognize the effect of personal biases and values, which may potentially impact the interpretation of the findings. A level of sensitivity is required to understand the context as well as the variables encountered during the collection process, with awareness that personal biases may influence the study (Merriam, 1998, pp. 20-21).

Yin (2009) noted that the researcher must "have a firm grasp on the issues being studied" (p. 69). I examined how undergraduate business students perceive aspects of the business coursework that is designed to impact the ethical decision process. Over the past five years, I have taught ethical management and corporate social responsibility courses at the associates, undergraduate, and graduate degree levels. I have had the privilege of teaching business courses containing ethical components to both traditional undergraduate students and undergraduates in accelerated degree programs at the research site. As a former sales manager with 35 years' experience as well as a current business owner, I have been fortunate to have worked in business environments and for organizations whose leaders cared deeply about ethical practices. My work experience has provided me with the background to understand the potential ethical issues encountered in the workplace. I have been able to effectively integrate my past work experience into the classroom, providing an historical perspective concerning ethical behavior in the corporate environment.

During the past 3 years as a classroom instructor, I have developed professional relationships with a number of undergraduate business students. The possibility exists that some of these students may participate in the study. However, power relationships, which may have developed in the classroom, could affect the participants' confidence level, possibly hindering their ability to answer questions freely. My role, as the researcher, was to collect each person's information, while preserving an ethical commitment that best suited the research goals. My intention was to maintain a power relationship during the study that balances a respectful association between each participant and me, based on mutual trust throughout the entire process. During the initial stage of the actual interview process with the students, I acknowledged the previous instructor-student relationship as a power relationship, but that it did not apply to this particular researcher-participant interaction, in which the goal was information gathering about their classroom experiences. I understood the importance of personally recognizing the power relationship during the interview and worked to establish a mutual level of communication that allowed criticism of the study and its methodology.

This study involved the offering of financial incentives to encourage participation. Current research suggests that incentives facilitate higher levels of overall recruitment (Giguere, Labrecque, Borduas, & Rouleau, 2015; Jennings, MacDonald, Li, Brown, McConnachie, & Mackenzie, 2015). In this instance, the incentive was considered a form of trade. When perceived from an economic point-of-view, the incentive may be considered as compensation, in exchange for a valued service. However, some researchers contend that the use of financial incentives may violate one of the primary

ethical principles of research: that participation should involve informed consent

(Seymour, 2012). As with typical forms of trade, for the transaction to be ethical, the

participation must be considered voluntary (Singh, Negin, Otim, Orach, & Cumming,

2015). During the process of informed consent, the participants were notified of the

financial incentive, and that the payment would be offered in return for the time and

effort spent to join in the study.

The group studied was all of the full-time senior-level undergraduate business

students participating in a traditional program, which totaled 34. These 34 students in the

college's business program, by business major, were in the following majors: accounting

(21); management (6); marketing (4); and international business, language, and culture

(3). The college maintains a policy that each undergraduate student must take an ethics

course as a requirement for graduation. While there is an expectation that ethical issues

are included in each course curriculum, there is no firm policy to that effect. Table 2 lists

the number of required courses, by major.

Merriam (1998) noted the two basic sampling methods are probabilistic and

nonprobabilistic. Probability sampling is not a justifiable method for qualitative work.

Nonprobabilistic, purposeful sampling was the selected method. Purposeful sampling

allows the researcher to discover and to gain knowledge and insight about the research

problems (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). The following criteria were used to select participants

for this purposeful sample. The students must have been (a) in the senior year of the

Catholic college and (b) pursuing a degree in a traditional undergraduate business

program, with a major in one or the following degree programs: accounting,

management, marketing, or international business, language, and culture. Verification of

how these students met the criteria was made through the Dean's office of the School of

Undergraduate Studies.

Table 2

Type and Number of Business Courses Taken by Major

Major	Required Courses and Number Required
Accounting	Accounting courses (9), general business courses (2), finance courses (1), management courses (2), marketing courses (1), computer proficiency courses (2), economics courses (3), business math courses (3), ethics courses (1)
Business administration	Business administration courses (3), accounting courses (2), finance courses (2), management courses (3), marketing courses (1), economics courses (3), business math courses (4), computer proficiency courses (3), general business courses (3), ethics courses (1)
Management	Management courses (7), accounting courses (2), general business courses (3), finance courses (1), marketing courses (1), economic courses (4), computer competency courses (2), business math courses (3), ethics course (1)
Marketing	Marketing courses (7), management courses (2), accounting courses (2), general business courses (3), finance courses (1), computer competency courses (2), economic courses (3), business math courses (3), ethics courses (1)
International business, language and culture	International business courses (2), accounting courses (2), finance courses (2), marketing courses (2), management courses (1), language courses (6), economic courses (4), computer competency courses (2), political science courses (1), ethics courses (1)

A variety of methods were utilized during recruitment. Information on the study was distributed in all senior-level business courses and ethics courses. Additionally, flyers were posted in all academic hall elevators. Lastly, snowball or chain sampling was implemented, with participants being asked to recommend other students. The group that was studied included 13 undergraduate senior-level business students. Given the total group of 34 senior-level business students, the participants represented 38.2% of the group. Group sizes for qualitative studies are typically smaller than samples used in quantitative research. Mason (2010) noted that such samples should be of sufficient size to ensure that most of the perceptions that may have significance can been discovered. Francis et al.(2010) noted that a point of diminishing return exists with a qualitative sample; as the data collection progresses, additional data may not result in any new information. This point of diminishing return describes the concept of saturation. Saturation is defined as the point at which the collection of new data does not yield any further insight or understanding concerning the research problem (Francis et al., 2010).

Instrumentation

Several instruments were incorporated to affect the collection of data during the in-depth interview process. The following question guided the study: What is the experience of senior-level undergraduate business students regarding business coursework designed to impact ethical awareness, the recognition of ethical issues, and the evaluation of ethical concepts or points of view?

The Association of American Colleges and Universities Ethical Reasoning VALUE Rubric (Appendix F) was used as one of the tools to assess student perceptions

on ethical development. This rubric was designed to assist teachers in the evaluation of whether students possess the intellectual ability to make ethical choices, with the focus on five components: (a) ethical self-awareness, (b) recognition of ethical issues, (c) understanding a variety of ethical concepts or points of view, (d) application of ethical principles, and (e) evaluation of a variety of ethical concepts or points of view. The rubric was used to determine the perceptions of the students' ethical self-identity, relative to the evolution of ethical decision making skill level and their ability to describe and assess ethical issues. An interview protocol (Appendix A) was used to discover the students' perceptions related to character development and ethical reasoning. Interview protocol questions 1, 2, 3 and 4 are related to perceived changes in the student's ethical development. Interview protocol questions 5, 6, 7a, 7b, 7c, 7d, and 7e are related to the students' perceptions concerning the impact of the undergraduate business coursework.

To enhance the qualitative detail of the study, data concerning perceived changes in their ethical development were collected by presenting an ethical reasoning scenario. The data were utilized to assess student perceptions concerning research questions 1 and 2. The written version of the scenario was presented by first, reading the scenario aloud. After reading the scenario aloud, the participants were asked for a possible course of action as well as their reasoning for their choices. Interview protocol questions 9, 10, 11, and 12 were used to assess each student's perceptions related to the scenario.

Ethical scenarios simulating actual business situations are typically used in ethics research to measure ethical reasoning (Segal et al., 2011). Rest, Thoma, and Edwards (1997) noted this type of process is considered a production task, for the participants

provide responses without any prompting or provocation. In addition, they were asked

whether their reasoning about the dilemma would have been different as college

freshmen as well as perceptions concerning changes in their reasoning. An ethical

scenario designed to assess moral intensity, ethical issue recognition, and ethical

intention, which had been in previous work by Ross and Robertson (2003), was selected.

The ethical scenario (Appendix B) was deemed acceptable for use in this study because it

presents a situation that could be understood by myriad participants, particularly business

students.

Interview protocol questions 13, 14, 15, and 16 were used to assess the students'

perceptions concerning the core values held. A values clarification exercise (Appendix C)

consisting of 36 core values was presented to the students. Upon completion of the

exercise, each individual had identified a personal set of beliefs, attitudes, and values that

affect decision making.

The data provided an opportunity to understand the perceptions of the business

students' held values. Cattell (1944) noted that the normative method allows values to be

measured independently of one another, with a resultant rating or value score for a set of

statements representing a specific value. Conversely, the ipsative method allows for the

assessment of choice among different values (Cattell, 1944). In general, the participants

either rank order a list of values or select one value over another.

The values clarification instrument was provided by the Massachusetts Institute of

Technology (MIT) Global Education and Career Development office. The values

clarification exercise had been selected for the study because rank ordering or prioritizing

allowed the students to clarify what core values are most cherished. Additionally, the exercise allowed the participants to reflect on the thoughts and attitudes associated with an iterative process of creating the rank order. As a consequence, the students were prepared for the research protocol questions concerning their perceptions on their own core values (Kirschenbaum, 2013, pp. 69-70). Due to the use of a researcher-developed questionnaire, face and content validity had to be established. A three-member expert panel at the study site with expertise in ethics, curriculum, and the business coursework assessed the questionnaire. In addition, permission was given by Walden University's Institutional Review Board to conduct a pilot study.

The purpose of the pilot study was to examine the research protocol to be followed in the major research. Kim (2011) noted pilot studies of qualitative designs may be used to identify "practical and methodological issues" as well as consider possible modifications to the main study. In-depth interviews were used to assess both the wording and the order of the student interview questions listed in the protocol (Appendix A).

Peat, Mellis, Williams, and Xuan (2002) provided a procedure intended to improve the credibility of a questionnaire. The following steps of the procedure were implemented: (a) administer the questionnaire to the participant(s) in the exact manner as the main study, (b) ask them to identify ambiguously worded questions, (c) record the time taken to complete the interview and determine if the time is within the expected 40–60 minutes, (d) discard all unnecessary or ambiguous questions, and (e) shorten and or revise the questionnaire, if needed (p. 123).

The pilot may have had a limitation. The group in the major study totals 34 senior-level business students. Given the number of potential participants, there was a limit of three students being asked to participate. Baker (1994) noted that a recommended group size of 10-20% of the actual study size is sufficient for the pilot study. Thus, a 3-student pilot fell within these parameters. Due to the participation in the pilot study, the three students were excluded from the major study.

Data Collection

As previously stated, the objective of the study is to identify the perceived level of character development attained by senior level undergraduate business students at a Catholic college. Patton (2002) identified the researcher as the primary instrument. For the purpose of this research, data were collected by face-to-face open ended interviews and continued until the point of saturation. The duration of the interview was expected to be 40 minutes to one hour.

Van Manen (1990) suggested that data collection may include observations, closed-ended or open ended interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials. Moustakas' (1994) recommendations concerning data collection were followed and included conducting unstructured, open-ended one-on-one interviews, audio taping the interviews, taking extensive descriptive and reflective interview notes, and completing the data collection by transcribing the interviews .

Data Analysis

Moustakas (1994) noted data analysis in qualitative research involves the preparation and classification or ordering of the data for analysis; the thematic reduction

of the data through a process of codification; and ending with the display of the findings in tables, charts, diagrams, or discussion. Data analysis methods derived from phenomenological research were employed. This study followed Moustakas' (1994) recommendation for phenomenological analysis, which is a modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method. The method contains the following: (a) the description of the researcher's personal experiences with the particular phenomenon under study, with the researcher bracketing his or her own experiences; (b) the creation of a list of the participants' significant statements concerning their experiences; (c) the grouping of the significant statements into themes; (d) the development of a textural description of what they experienced; (e) the development of a structural description of how they experienced the phenomenon; and (f) the creation of a composite of both of the descriptions to arrive at the essence or meaning of the experience or phenomenon.

During the data collection process, each interview was audio-recorded with an Olympus digital voice recorder. A digital file was created and identified by a pseudonym of the participant, an interview number, and date. The file was sent to a transcription service to prepare a word-by-word transcription of the interview. Subsequently, the written transcript was submitted to the research participants as a member check, which is a technique utilized to ensure that the researcher has accurately translated the participants' interviews into data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Trustworthiness of the Study

One of the primary issues in qualitative research is the method employed to establish trustworthiness. One of the primary concerns is the method employed to

establish the trustworthiness of the research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) provided a four-component model of trustworthiness which includes the following aspects: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability. Lincoln and Guba noted that credibility is enhanced by spending prolonged periods of time with the participants in order to observe aspects of the situation that are relevant to the issues or problems addressed in the study. The intention is to allow the researcher to construct precise descriptions or interpretations of the experience (p. 304).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined transferability as having the capability to compare or generalize the results of the study to another circumstance, situation, or population. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated the concept of dependability is related to the identifiable aspects of the variability within the study. Because this study was qualitative, issues regarding transferability, as they relate to generalization and dependability in relation to variability or variance were not applicable. Lincoln and Guba (1985) maintained that the primary determinant of confirmability is to insure whether the findings of the study are "grounded in the data." (p. 323). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested the consideration of myriad strategies to affect trustworthiness including extensive involvement with the participants, understanding the culture, analyzing the assessment for misinformation, and doing member checking.

To affect credibility, the strategy of reflexive analysis was implemented. Reflexivity is the personal assessment of the researcher's perceptions regarding the research experience. Lincoln and Guba's (1985) recommendation to use a journal to record the daily schedule and a log of methods utilized throughout the process was

followed. Also, the journal included the researcher's thoughts, ideas, and attitudes related to the face-to-face interviews. Member checking was the second strategy used to impact credibility. This process involved the student assessing a written draft of the interview to increase the certainty of an accurate transcription and interpretation of each individual's perceptions. If an objection was found, the student was asked to provide a more suitably worded interpretation. Last, credibility was affected by the interview process. The reframing of research questions as well as follow up probes helped to verify participants' responses and interpretations.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated transferability is suitable for contexts involving the generalization of results. However, methods to affect transferability were not implemented because the results were not intended for generalization. To impact dependability and confirmability, a reflexivity journal containing data collection methods as well as the interpretive analysis of the data were maintained. Lincoln and Guba (1998) recommended that the journal include information such as (a) the raw data (the field notes and all recordings), (b) data analysis methods, (c) development of thematic categories, (d) notes related to trustworthiness, and (f) the information regarding instrument development.

Informed Consent

The approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Walden University was obtained prior to the implementation of both the pilot study and major study (09-22-14-0140966). The approval of IRB for the study site was also received. A letter of informed consent was given to the students prior to the face-to-face interviews. This letter

(Appendix D) offered an invitation to participate in a research project to study senior-level business students' perceptions concerning changes in the level of ethical awareness, the ability to recognize ethical concerns, and the capacity to evaluate ethical concepts or points of view. Additionally, the participants were advised that the purpose of the research was to examine how these students perceive aspects of the business coursework that was designed to impact the ethical decision process. Lastly, the students were informed that the study was to be used to assess senior-level business students' perceptions concerning the impact of the business coursework on their core values. The examination of student perceptions might have been essential in the development of effective character education regarding moral competencies of future business leaders (Lickona, 1993).

The participants were informed that the study would include the collection of demographic data, that the data collection would involve audiotaped face-to-face interviews, that the transcript of each interview would be reviewed to verify and insure the accuracy of the data, and that the data would be included in my doctoral dissertation as well as other publications. Additionally, the students were advised that the interview process would take about 40–60 minutes to complete, that participation would be completely voluntary, that completion of the interview would constitute consent to participate in the study, and that the students would have the right to discontinue the interview process at any time for any reason and without explanation.

Regarding confidentiality, the students were made aware that their responses would be held in the strictest confidence; that responses would be coded to protect the

personal privacy of each participant; that the researcher would be the only individual with access to the audio-tapes, interview notes, and transcripts; and that all data would be destroyed and discarded 5 years after publication of the study. With respect to debriefing procedures, a debriefing form was read with each participant. The form listed the key aspects of the research, a notification that a follow-up interview might have been necessary to receive clarification on any unclear statements, a list of relevant internet sites to locate information related to the research topic, and the researcher's contact material should any of the participants require additional information.

Summary

In Chapter 3, the research methodology for the study was presented. The chapter included the qualitative design and the rationale, the role of the researcher, and the specific methodology used. Methodological aspects concerning population and sampling, instrumentation, the pilot study, data collection and analysis as well as issues related to trustworthiness were addressed.

The phenomenological study followed Moustakas' (1994) recommendations for data collection and analysis. Specifically, face-to-face interviews and transcription of the interviews were used during collection and a modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method was used during analysis. The assessment included the bracketing of the researcher's experiences, coding, and thematic grouping of the data. In addition, trustworthiness was enhanced by the implementation of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four-component model which examined aspects of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In Chapter 4, the findings, including the pilot study, the setting of the

main study, the demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness,

and the results are presented.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to examine the perceptions of senior-level undergraduate business students regarding business coursework and curriculum activities that were designed to (a) impact ethical awareness, (b) affect the recognition of ethical issues, and (c) influence student evaluation of ethical concepts or points of view. The perceptions of these students about their own core values in relation to ethical reasoning and decision making were also considered.

This investigation was guided by the following question: What is the experience of senior-level undergraduate business students regarding business coursework designed to impact ethical awareness, the recognition of ethical issues, and the evaluation of ethical concepts or points of view? Chapter 4 includes the pilot project, the setting of the main study, the demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and results.

Pilot Study

A pilot project was conducted to examine the research protocol that was to be followed in the major study. In-depth interviews were used to assess both the wording and the order of the interview questions. The questionnaire was administered to three participants in the same manner as proposed for the major study. The participants were asked to identify any ambiguously worded questions for possible shortening or revision (Peat et al., 2002). Each of the interviews was completed within the expected 40–60 minutes. All of the participants were satisfied with the research protocol. No changes

were needed in either the wording or the order of the questionnaire. Thus, the research

protocol was used for the major study.

Setting

I recruited senior-level business students at a small Catholic college in

southeastern Pennsylvania. I conducted the interviews in one of the reading rooms

located at the college's library or in a classroom in one of the school's academic halls.

The students were made aware that I was an adjunct professor at the college.

Additionally, I advised the students that the project was separate from my role as an

adjunct professor. There were no personal or organizational conditions that could have

influenced the participants nor their experience during the study and thus have affected

the interpretation of the results.

Demographics

The data from the demographic questionnaire (Appendix G) are summarized in

Table 3 by gender (four females, nine males), age (21 to 23), race (White), and major

course of study. All of the students had taken an ethics course.

Table 3

Participant Demographics

Participant ID/Gender	Pseudonym	Age	Race	Major
1 (M)	Mason	21	White	Management
2 (M)	Jacob	22	White	Management
3 (F)	Lily	22	White	Marketing
4 (F)	Madison	22	White	Business Administration
5 (M)	Liam	21	White	Management
6 (M)	Noah	21	White	Marketing
7 (F)	Emma	21	White	Management
8 (M)	Aiden	21	White	Business Administration
9 (F)	Ava	21	White	Management
10 (M)	Ethan	23	White	International Business, Language, and Culture
11 (M)	Benjamin	22	White	Business Administration
12 (M)	William	23	White	Management
13 (M)	Dylan	21	White	Management/International Business, Language, and Culture

In this section, a detailed description of the participants' personal information is presented with their assigned pseudonyms and identification numbers. Pseudonyms and numbers were given to each person to protect anonymity. The participants are presented by their pseudonyms in the order of their participation in the study. Information is given about the participants' number of years attended at the college, what influenced their present attitude toward ethical behavior, and whether the undergraduate business curriculum had influenced their ethical development.

Participant 1: Mason was a 21-year old white male majoring in Management. Mason was in his fourth year of attendance. He stated he had taken an ethics course during his undergraduate study. He indicated that all of the business courses taken at the college had an ethics component built-in to the class discussion. Mason had a Catholic upbringing, which influenced his present attitude toward ethical behavior. When asked if he thought the curriculum may have contributed to his ethical development, he commented, "I don't think I would have looked in ethics as much (as a freshman), but now…I would consider, like my reasoning behind it and make sure I'm going about it the right way."

Participant 2: Jacob was a 22-year old White male student, majoring in Management. Jacob was in his fourth year. He indicated that he had taken an ethics course as part of his undergraduate study. Jacob had attended Catholic school his entire life. Both his Catholic education and his parents influenced his attitude toward ethical behavior. When asked to describe what role the college's business curriculum had played in the formation of his present attitude toward ethical behavior, he stated, "I think college is an extension of my high school Catholic education…there's nothing specific here that's really changed me as a person."

Participant 3: Lily was a 22-year old White female student, majoring in Marketing. Lily was in her second year, having transferred from a small Catholic college in Western Pennsylvania. Both her parents and personal life experiences had the greatest impact on her attitude toward ethical behavior. Lily had taken an ethics course during her undergraduate experience. When asked to describe what role the college's business

curriculum played in her present attitude toward ethical behavior, she replied, "I don't think that I've ever had any classes that kind of put you in a situation where you have to make ethical decisions ... the curriculum is set up just to give you the information and then … you kind of find yourself along the way."

Participant 4: Madison was a 22-year old White female student, majoring in Business Administration. Madison was in her fourth year of attendance. She had taken an ethics course as part of her undergraduate program. When asked about the influence that had the greatest impact on her present attitude toward ethical behavior, she stated, "I would say…the business ethics course … and the human resources course because those where specifically dealing with everything in relation to ethical reasoning and relating them specifically to certain situations … you are constantly talking about what's going on in the business world today."

Participant 5: Liam was a 21-year old White male student, majoring in Management. Liam was in his fourth year of attendance. He had taken an ethics course during his undergraduate experience. His mother's stroke affected his opinion of ethical behavior. He commented, "My mother having a stroke kind of put things into perspective that anything can happen to anyone and you should do what's right as opposed to what's wrong." When asked what courses in his major contributed to his understanding of ethical decision making, he stated, " Economics… A lot of the economics courses really impacted it because it [economics] deals with why people do things or what happens if this happens… It's mostly circumstantial."

Participant 6: Noah was a 21-year old White male student, majoring in Marketing. Noah was in his fourth year of attendance. He had taken an ethics course as part of his undergraduate program. Noah indicated the Internet had a definite influence on his current attitude toward ethical reasoning because the Internet exposed him to real world events. When asked what courses in his major contributed most to his understanding of ethics, ethical awareness and ethical reasoning, he stated, "Business ethics…really gave me the base knowledge of the different ethical theories…in marketing research, you come across ethical dilemmas such as 'is it okay to take people's information and sell it to other places.'"

Participant 7: Emma was a 21-year old White female student, majoring in Management. She was in her fourth year of attendance. She had taken an ethics course during her undergraduate experience. She identified her father as the greatest influence on her present attitude toward ethical behavior. She commented, "He would always teach me right from wrong and try to explain what it means." When asked to describe the role of the college's business curriculum on her ethical reasoning ability, she replied, "I think the courses here have…helped me develop my ethical thinking. Helped me grow and understand."

Participant 8: Aiden was a 21-year old White male student, majoring in Business Administration. He was in his second year of attendance, having transferred from a community college located on Long Island in New York. Aiden indicated that his family upbringing had the greatest influence on his current attitude toward ethical behavior. When asked what courses in his major contributed most to his understanding of ethical

awareness and ethical decision making in addition to the ethics courses, he stated, "Human resource management and…moral theology…So many people now…they're so quick to jump to conclusions and only stick to one side, but an efficient manager…is someone who can step back and look at both sides and come to a conclusion of what the real truth is."

Participant 9: Ava was a 21-year old White female student, majoring in Management. Ava was in her fourth year of attendance. She had taken an ethics course during her undergraduate experience. When asked about the influences in her life concerning ethics and ethical behavior, she commented, "My mom, I've always been taught what was wrong and what was right…she always had a huge impact on how I dealt with ethics." When asked to address the courses in her major that contributed most to her understanding of ethics, ethical awareness, and ethical behavior, she responded, " I had a human resources class…and I had the business ethics class…those two were probably…the best."

Participant 10: Ethan was a 23-year old White male student, majoring in International Business, Language, and Culture. Ethan was in his second year of attendance, after graduating from a community college. He had taken an ethics course during his undergraduate experience. Ethan commented that the professors were influential in his understanding of business ethics. When asked to describe the role of the college's business curriculum on his view of ethics, he responded, "I think it really helped me grow, not only as a person, but as a student and hopefully as a business owner or business person."

Participant 11: Benjamin was a 22-year old White male student, majoring in Business Administration. Benjamin was in his second year of attendance, having transferred from a small liberal arts university in Southeastern Pennsylvania. He had taken an ethics course prior to transferring. Benjamin indicated that a business law course, taken at the previous university he attended, had the greatest impact on his current attitude toward ethical behavior. When asked what courses in his major contributed most to his understanding of ethics, ethical awareness or ethical decision making, he commented, "I had Corporate Finance and Introduction to Business…things that I wouldn't normally have viewed ethically, I see more ethically now."

Participant 12: William was a 23-year old White male student, majoring in Management. William was in the fourth year of attendance, having come to the college after completing his secondary education in France. He had taken an ethics course as part of his undergraduate experience. He was born into a Catholic family but did not participate in the religion after completing Catechism classes. When asked what courses in his major contributed most to his understanding of ethics, ethical awareness, or ethical decision making, he commented, "I want to say business ethics. But I think that Business Strategy was… big…because I learned that being ethical in the workplace can have great rewards."

Participant 13: Dylan was a 21-year old White male student, with a major in Management and a minor in International Business, Language, and Culture. Dylan was in his fourth year of attendance. He had taken an ethics course as part of his undergraduate study. Dylan commented that his family upbringing and attendance at a Catholic high

school were great influences on his present attitude toward ethics. When asked if there

were any courses in his major that impacted his understanding of ethics, ethical

awareness, or ethical decision making, he responded:," I think my

management…class…focused a lot on real life situations."

Data Collection

The data collection process began after receiving Walden University's approval of

the application to the Institutional Review Board. The data were collected from 13

participants. The student interview protocol (Appendix A) was utilized to collect data

using face-to-face open-ended interviews. All of the data were collected in one sitting

from each of the participants. The duration of the interviews ranged from 27–51 minutes,

for an average duration of 42 minutes. The outcomes of the participant recruitment and

data collection steps were as follows:

1. The research site approved the study after receiving a copy of Walden
    University's Conditional Institutional Review Board Approval (09-22-14-
    0140966). Letters of Cooperation were sent from the college's Dean and Business
    Department Chair at the beginning of October.

2. The recruitment process began in October with the presentation of the information
    for pilot study to the Senior Seminar class.

3. Three students volunteered to participate in the pilot study. The students were
    asked to send an email confirming their willingness to participate. Scheduling of
    the interviews took place after the confirmation emails were received. The three

pilot studies were arranged in the latter part of October and the interviews were

scheduled to take place at the end of October.

4. The interviews for the pilot were conducted at the end of October. Step16 outlined

the steps of the procedure used in the pilot project. The procedure was

implemented as follows: (a) the interview protocol (Appendix A) was

administered in the same manner as proposed for the main study; (b) the

participants were asked to assess the student interview questions for ambiguous

wording and the order of the interview questions; (c) the length of time to

complete each interview was recorded to determine if the actual time of the entire

interview was within the expected 40–60 minutes. The interviews ranged in

length from 33–37 minutes; (d) no unnecessary or ambiguous words were found;

and (e) no shortening or revision of the questionnaire was necessary.

5. Recruitment visits for the main study began in November. Visits were made to the

Senior Seminar class, the Market Research class, the Operations Management

class, and the International Financial Management class. The recruitment efforts

resulted in seven students agreeing to participate. These interviews took place

between November 2014 and January 2015. An additional recruitment visit was

made to the Senior Seminar class in January. The visit resulted in the six more

students agreeing to participate in the main study. These interviews took place

from the beginning of February until the end of March.

6. The initial recruitment flyers for the study were posted in the academic hall

elevators and placed onto numerous poster bulletin boards throughout the college

academic halls in November. New recruitment flyers were posted in January 2015. Additional recruitment flyers were also posted in March.

7. Snowball or chain sampling was used in November. Study participant 1 recommended a female student. The recommendation resulted in an interview with the latter, Participant 3. The interview was also conducted in November.

8. A letter of informed consent was given to all of the participants prior to the face-to-face interviews.

9. The letter of informed consent invited participants to be part of an ethical study to assess their perceptions concerning changes in the level of ethical awareness, the ability to recognize ethical concerns, and the capacity to evaluate ethical concepts or points of view.

10. Each participant received information that the purpose of the study was to examine how these students perceived aspects of the business coursework that was designed to impact the ethical decision process.

11. Each participant was informed that the study was used to assess senior-level business students' perceptions concerning the impact of the business coursework on their core values.

12. The participants were informed about the collection of demographic data, the use of digital audio-taped, face-to-face interviews for data collection, verification of interviews for accuracy, and that the data would be included in the researcher's doctoral dissertation as well as possible publications.

13. The students were advised that the interview process would take 40 minutes to 1 hour, that participation was completely voluntary, that completion of the survey constituted consent to participate, that the participants had the right to stop the interview process at any time and for any reason, without explanation.

14. All participants were made aware of the study's confidentiality, that responses were being held in the strictest confidence, that data would be coded to protect personal privacy, that only the researcher would have access to audio-tapes, interview notes, and transcripts, and that the data would be destroyed 5 years after publication.

15. A debriefing form was read aloud at the end of the face-to-face interview. The form listed the key aspects of the study, notification that a possible follow-up interview for the sake of clarification on any unclear statements may take place. A list of relevant internet sites related to ethics was provided. The researcher's contact information was provided should the participants require additional information.

16. The procedure outlined in Step 16 was followed in the pilot study. The steps were detailed in Step 4 of the participant recruitment and data collection process.

17. Data were collected by face-to-face open-ended interviews and continued to the point of saturation. Thirteen face-to-face interviews were conducted. The researcher deemed the point of saturation had been attained after the thirteenth interview, based on the repetition of participants' responses.

18. Each interview was audio-recorded with an Olympus digital voice recorder. A digital file was created and identified by a pseudonym of each participant, an interview identification number, and date. The digitally recorded interviews were sent for transcription within a day of the interview. Transcriptions were sent between November and March.

19. The written transcriptions were emailed to the participants as a member check. Transcriptions were sent between December and April of the following year. All of the member checks by were completed by mid-April.

20. Results of the study were emailed to each participant.

One variation made in the data collection plan is presented in Chapter 3. An adjustment was made to the demographic survey (Appendix G) to include race. The approval to make the change was received in February. The participants who had completed the original demographic survey were contacted. The revised demographic survey was emailed to each individual who had completed the original document during the interview. The revised document was completed and returned to the researcher. Beside the adjustment to the demographic survey, there were no other unusual circumstances encountered during the collection process.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Moustakas' modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis of phenomenological data (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 121-122). The steps of the data analysis are as follows:

- Obtain a thick, rich description of the researcher's experience of the phenomenon.

- Consider each statement of the researcher's transcript based on the significance or relevance for an accurate description of the experience.

- Record all relevant statements.

- List each nonrepetitive statement (the invariant horizons or meaning units of the experience.

- Combine the invariant meaning units into themes.

- Synthesize the invariant meaning units and themes into textual descriptions of the experience, including verbatim examples.

- Provide a reflection of the researcher's individual textual description. Additionally, provide an individual structural description of the researcher's experience.

- Provide a textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the researcher's experience.

- Utilize the verbatim transcripts of the research participants; follow the aforementioned steps.

- From the individual textural-structural descriptions of research participants' experiences, provide a composite textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience, to create a universal description of the experience, as a collective representation of the all of the research participants.

Each of the aforementioned steps outlined were repeated by reviewing each of the participants' interview transcriptions.

The data from each transcription were coded by hand. Saldana (2013) recommended several methods suitable for qualitative data analysis. Based on Saldana's recommendations, the following coding methods were used: (a) attribute codes, which standardized each participant's demographic information; (b) structural coding, which utilized the 16 research questions from the interview protocol to assess the commonalities and differences of the data; (c) in vivo coding, which utilized the literal or actual words used by the participants during the interviews; and (d) values coding, which considered the perceptions of each participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs concerning the impact of the business curriculum on their personal view of ethics, ethical reasoning, and core values.

Discrepant and Nonconforming Data

During the data analysis process, discrepant or nonconforming data emerged. The discrepant data either did not support, or it contradicted the responses of the participants. The negative or nonconforming data were included within the analysis of the themes and subthemes to explain or account for responses that related to the research question. Examples of discrepant data included comments made by students regarding the lack of exposure to ethical situations within the course curriculum and their perceptions regarding minimal changes in ethical development. The students' comments are discussed in more detail in the Results section of this chapter.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

As stated in Chapter 3, one of the primary issues in qualitative research is the method employed to establish trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four-

component model of trustworthiness was implemented and included (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability.

To affect credibility, I followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) recommendation to record the researcher's thoughts, ideas, and attitudes related to the interviews. Each participant's interview was utilized to write the researcher's thoughts both during and immediately after the interview. Member checking was the second strategy used to affect credibility. Each participant reviewed a written transcription of the interview to increase the certainty of an accurate transcription and interpretation of each individual's perceptions. No objections were found in any of the student transcriptions and no changes were required. Lastly, credibility was impacted during the interview process. Following the recommendation of Krefting (1991), the reframing of research questions, as well as follow up probes, were implemented to verify participants' responses and interpretations.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated transferability is suitable for contexts involving the generalization of results. However, methods to affect transferability were not implemented because the results were not intended for generalization. To impact dependability and confirmability, I intended to use a reflexivity journal containing data collection methods. However, the individual student interview protocols were used to record my reflections concerning the interview process. Lincoln and Guba' s (1998) recommendations to include information (such as data analysis methods and the development of thematic categories) were also followed, with the utilization of Excel spreadsheets.

Results

Following the steps identified by Moustakas (1994), the invariant horizons or

meaning units, were combined into themes and subthemes. The themes that emerged

from the data are (a) meaning of moral character development; (b) the role of the college

business curriculum on students' understanding of ethics, ethical awareness, and ethical

decision making; (c) perceived changes in ethical development; (d) perceptions in

students' personal core values; and (e) perception of college business curriculum in

relation to students' core values approaches introduced in business courses used when

faced with ethical dilemmas. The themes will be discussed, with support by the

comments of the participants. Table 4 lists the themes and subthemes.

Theme 1: Meaning of Moral Character Development

The interview protocol was designed to examine the perceptions of senior-level

undergraduate business students concerning their own ethical belief systems and changes

that may have occurred in the student's level of ethical awareness, the ability to recognize

ethical issues, and the capacity to evaluate ethical concepts or points of view. The first

question was prepared as a clarifying probe to determine the participants' meaning of

moral character development. The subthemes were as follows: (a) the development of an

individual's character over time; (b) how one sees right and wrong; and (c) the impact on

decision making.

Table 4

Themes and Subthemes Emerging from the Data

Theme	Subtheme	No. of participants (13) mentioning the subtheme
Meaning of moral character development	The development of an individual's character over time	11
	How one sees right and wrong	6
	The impact on decision making	4
The role of the college business curriculum on students' understanding of ethics, ethical awareness, and ethical decision making	Exposure to ethical situations	6
	The creation of students' ethical identity	3
	The application of ethical decision processes to real world situations	2
Perceived changes in ethical development	Changes in ethical thinking	13
	Influences on students' present attitude toward ethical behavior	13
	Limited change in personal view of ethics	8
	Approaches uses as a senior to assess ethical situations	13
	Approaches used to assess ethical situations as a freshman or on entering the program	8

(table continues)

Theme	Subtheme	No. of participants (13) mentioning the subtheme
Perception of students' personal core values	Good understanding of personal values	6
	Desire for an ethical workplace	7
	Goal setting as a personal value	3
Perception of college business curriculum in relation to students' core values	Better understanding of self	6
	Different perspective on ethical analysis but no change in core values	2
	Realization of what is most important	3
	The relationship between value clarification and the diversity of the classroom student population	1
	Enhanced personal belief in what is ethical	6
	Desire to live a balanced life	1
	Desire to respect others	1
	The possession of tools to handle ethical situations	6
	A refined personal belief system	2

Note. Subtheme mentioned by at least 1 participant ($N = 13$)

Subtheme 1: The development of an individual's character over time. Eleven (85%) subjects felt that moral character development happened over time. Mason said, "As a kid, you grow up and you produce what you see is right and wrong in life." Lily said, "Over the span of your life, you develop different values." Liam said, "The way which your values and ethics change every time according to what you experience and the knowledge that you've gained." Noah said,

> you grow in the way that you see morals and ethics…my moral development [has] changed gradually throughout the 3 years [at this school], and I'm sure it will for the rest of my life.

Subtheme 2: How one sees right and wrong. Six (46%) participants felt that moral character development involved how an individual perceives what is right and wrong. Madison said, "I think it's mostly how you'd assess certain situations…, ethics is a choice of doing something right and wrong." Aiden stated, "it means what you feel is right and wrong. What you feel is just." Ava said, "It's something that you learn over experiences…what's right and wrong, which comes from experiences."

Subtheme 3: The impact on decision making. Four (31%) participants commented that moral character development impacted the ethical decision process. Jacob said, "…I would say even business decisions (are) based off your ethical view of the world." Ethan stated,

> It's, it's everything. A person without morals or character development is nobody. It is just shows who you are, if you're a person that lives by your own, like, code of ethics, what your own beliefs of what is right and what is wrong, you're gonna

do whatever is right, and know what's going to benefit you the most. You know

you have your character not to cheat or lie in any circumstances, especially in

businesses, for instance.

When asked about the meaning of moral character development, four students

exhibited an awareness of their personal belief systems. Additionally, it seemed the

students considered both their individual beliefs and personal character as the basis for

ethical decisions.

Theme 2: The Role of the College Business Curriculum on Students' Understanding

of Ethics, Ethical Awareness, and Ethical Decision Making

Question 4 addressed the participants' perceptions concerning the impact of the

undergraduate business coursework. The subthemes were as follows: (a) exposure to

ethical situations; (b) the creation of students' ethical identity; and (c) the application of

ethical decision processes to real world situations.

Subtheme 1: Exposure to ethical situations. Four (31%) participants indicated

the business curriculum increased exposure to ethical situations. Lily said,

The only thing I can say is that marketers can sometimes bend the truth because

their objective is to get you to buy the product or service. So, in that aspect, I've

actually found that this year I've been thinking about it more, is how do you go

about it ethically but still get the point across? Or still get people to buy your

product or service?

Madison stated,

In high school, you learned the basic things like ethical reasoning, so what's right and wrong. That's basically it, but at least for the courses that I've taken over the past four years, um, you actually get to relate to real things that are happening in the business world. It brings it more into perspective. It happens in every class, not just the course that has to do with business ethics, in the courses that are offered here. But I've even see in the things that go on because you are constantly talking about what's going on in the business world today and certain situations that are happening and why they're wrong and why they're right. And even professors will give examples, like "okay, when I worked here, this is what happened and this is why it was wrong and this is why it was right." So, I think that, as a college, they do very well on getting the overall meaning of ethical reasoning to their business students.

Ethan said,

I think it really helped me grow, not only as a person but as a student and hopefully a business owner or business person because prior to coming here, I wasn't really aware of everything that happens in going into business or all the ethical dilemmas that might happen and I've had some good classes.

Dylan stated,

I would definitely say that (the college) specifically focuses a lot on moral behavior, ethical behavior. I know for instance we had an entire class that was required in the business field. It was business ethics…But beyond that there was

probably three or four, at least other classes that really dove in to pretty strongly

ethics moral behavior.

However, 2 (15%) participants believed the business classes focused more on

course information by major of study and less about ethical implications. Lily stated, "…I

guess, um the classes that I've taken have been more just…informational…I don't think

that I've ever had any classes that kind of put you in a situation where you have to make

ethical decisions." Ava said,

> I would say I learned a lot being here…I would say as far as ethics go though, I
>
> would say that it probably could have been a little more because it just seems
>
> like...a lot of this stuff that we learned doesn't seem like it really applies to what
>
> the real world is like now.

Subtheme 2: The creation of students' ethical identity. Three (23%) of the

participants indicated the business curriculum contributed to the creation of their own

ethical identity. Noah said, "It maybe gave me more knowledge to be able to define my

ethical reasoning…it gives you a wider, a more diverse view of ethical dilemmas, which

kind of helps you to make your own identity." Ethan stated,

> My business ethics class has helped me a lot because sometimes the little things
>
> you don't really notice …You need to be ethical and you need to be right and say,
>
> "I'm going to do what I'm supposed to…"

Subtheme 3: The application of ethical decision processes to real world situations

Two (15%) participants commented that the business curriculum offered

opportunities to apply ethical decision processes to situations in the business world.

According to Madison, "You are constantly talking about [events] in the business world today and why they're wrong [or] right…. Professors will give examples, [such as] "when I worked here, this happened and this is why it was wrong [or] right."…you are constantly talking about what's going on in the business world today and why they're wrong [or] right…. Professors will give examples, [such as] " when I worked here, this is what happened and this is why it was wrong and this is why it was right."

Aiden spoke of similar experiences concerning myriad opportunities to apply ethical options to real world scenarios in a Human Resource management course. Aiden commented,

I've always had an understanding of ethical behavior, but HR management looked into how we apply it in the business world and I think that was invaluable in itself because you would apply it. But to learn how to apply it, I think is more valuable than anything else and that really helped me realize how I'm going to use it in the future.

Theme 3: Perceived Changes in Ethical Development

Interview protocol questions 2, 3, 5, 6, 7a, 7b, 9, 10, and 11 addressed the participants' perceived changes in ethical development. The subthemes were as follows: (a) changes in ethical thinking, (b) influences on students' present attitude toward ethical behavior, (c) limited change in personal view of ethics, (d) approaches uses as a senior to assess ethical situations, and (e) approaches used to assess ethical situations as a freshman or on entering the program.

Subtheme 1: Changes in ethical thinking. Questions 2 and 3 asked the participants to assess their own ethical self-identity. The Association of American Colleges and Universities' Ethical Reasoning VALUE Rubric (Appendix F) was used as the basis for the students to address their own ethical self-identity along five factors: (a) ethical self-awareness, (b) understanding different ethical perspectives/concepts, (c) ethical issue recognition, (d) application of ethical perspectives/concepts, and (e) evaluation of different ethical perspectives/concepts. Each factor consists of four levels: Benchmark 1, Milestones 2 and 3, and Capstone 4. For each factor, the students were asked to identify the level which represented their ethical reasoning as freshmen or upon entering the college. Subsequently, the students were asked to identify the level which represented their ethical reasoning as seniors. The self-identification by participants for factor – ethical self-awareness – is presented in Table 5.

In the assessment, ethical self-awareness, as freshmen or on entering the college, one (8%) participant placed herself at Benchmark 1, four (31%) participants placed themselves between Benchmark 1 and Milestone 2, four (31%) participants self-identified themselves at Milestone 2, one (8%) participant placed himself between Milestones 2 and 3, two (15%) participants placed themselves at Milestone 3, and one (8%) participant placed himself between Milestone 3 and Capstone 4. At Benchmark 1, the students are able to either identify their core beliefs or the origins of their core beliefs, but not both. At Milestone 2, the students can identify both their core beliefs and the origins of those beliefs. At Milestone 3, the students are able to discuss and analyze both their core beliefs and the origins of those beliefs. At the capstone level, the students are

able to discuss and analyze their core beliefs and origins of those beliefs in great detail.

Madison said, "Definitely 1." Jacob said, "Yeah, I think I'm between 1 and 2." Mason

stated, "I would say either 1 or 2." Four (31%) participants self-identified themselves at

Milestone 2. Emma said, "I would probably say that I was in the 2, when I first came."

Liam said, "I'd say about 2."

Table 5
Factor 1: Ethical Self-awareness

Benchmark or milestone	Self-identification by participant number as a freshman or on entering the college	Self-identification by participant number as a senior
Benchmark 1	4	
Between Benchmark 1 and Milestone 2	1, 2, 6, 9	
Milestone 2	5, 7, 10, 12	
Between Milestone 2 and Milestone 3	13	
Milestone 3	3, 8	
Between Milestone 3 and Capstone 4	11	4, 6, 9, 10, 13
Capstone 4		1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12

Assessing Factor 1, ethical self-awareness, as seniors, five (38%) participants self-

identified themselves between Milestone 3 and Capstone 4, and eight (62%) participants

self-identified themselves at Capstone 4. At Milestone 3, the students are able to discuss

and analyze both their core beliefs and the origins of those beliefs. At the capstone level,

the students are able to discuss and analyze their core beliefs and origins of those beliefs

in great detail. Madison said, "I'd say a 3 or a 4." Noah said, "I would say probably

between 3 and 4." Ethan stated, "I think, um, I could say I'm at 4, or almost there." Emma said, "I want to say 4, but I feel like…it could be three…No, I think 4." Jacob said, "Definitely, number 4." Liam said, "4." Mason said, "The capstone" (Table 5).

The assessment of factor 2, understanding different ethical perspectives is presented in Table 6. In the assessment of factor 2, as freshmen or on entering the college, six (46%) participants self-identified themselves at Benchmark 1, and three (23%) participants placed themselves at Milestone 2, and three (23%) participants placed themselves at Milestone 3. At the benchmark level, students are only able to name the major theory used in their ethical decision making process. At Milestone 2, students are able to both name the major theory used in decision making and provide a basic definition of the theory. At Milestone 3, the students can name the major theories utilized in decision making, provide the basic definition, with some inaccuracies. Emma said, "Probably the first one, when I first came in." Madison said, "One." Mason stated, "Uh, the benchmark, number 1." Jacob said, "Um, I think, number 2." Lily said, "Um, I would say number 2." Noah said, "Um, probably a 2." Benjamin said, "probably at 3." Dylan said, "I would say I was a 3 as a freshman."

Assessing factor 2, understanding different ethical perspectives, as seniors, one (8%) participant placed herself at Milestone 2, one (8%) placed himself between Milestones 2 and 3, four (31%) individuals self-identified between Milestone 3 and Capstone 4, and four (31%) participants placed themselves at the capstone level. At Milestone 2, students are able to both name the major theory used in decision making and provide a basic definition of the theory.

At Milestone 3, the students can name the major theories utilized in decision making and provide the basic definition with some inaccuracies. At the capstone level, students can not only name the theories utilized, but provide accurate definitions and detailed explanations of the theories used in the decision process. Lily said, "Um, I don't think I moved just because I don't, I can't name a theory, I guess." William said, "Between 2 and 3, I would say." Aidan said, "And, now, I'm more like a 3 or 4." Mason said, "Between 3 and 4." Noah said, "3 and 4." Jacob said, "Number 4." Liam said, "And 4 now." Madison said, "4" (Table 6).

Table 6

Factor 2: Understanding Different Ethical Perspectives

Benchmark or milestone	Self-identification by participant number as a freshman or on entering the college	Self-identification by participant number as a senior
Benchmark 1	1, 4, 7, 9, 10, 12	
Between Benchmark 1 and Milestone 2		
Milestone 2	2, 3, 6	3
Between Milestone 2 and Milestone 3		12
Milestone 3	5, 11, 13	7, 10, 11
Between Milestone 3 and Capstone 4		1, 6, 8, 9
Capstone 4		2, 4, 5, 13

The assessment of factor 3, ethical issue recognition is presented in Table 7. Assessing factor 3, as freshmen or on entering the college, one (8%) participant placed

himself between Benchmark 1 and Milestone 2, and seven (54%) participants self-identified at Milestone 2, one (8%) participant placed herself between Milestones 2 and 3, three (23%) participants placed themselves at Milestone 3, and one (8%) placed himself at Capstone 4. At Benchmark 1, students are able to recognize basic ethical issues, but lack the ability to comprehend the complexity or interrelationships of the ethical circumstance. At Milestone 2, students recognize basic ethical issues and have minimal comprehension of the complexities and interrelationships of the ethical situation. At Milestone 3, students are able to comprehend the gray areas that exist within ethical situations as well as the interrelationships among the issues. At the capstone level, students can recognize the complexities, intricacies and interrelationships among the ethical issues. Mason said, "Uh, 1 or 2. Closer to 1." Jacob said, " I think number ... number 2." Liam said, "2 as a freshman." Madison said, "Two." Ava said, "[pause] Uh, between a 2 and a 3." Lily said, "I would say 3." Benjamin said, "Probably 4."

Assessing factor 3, ethical issue recognition, as seniors, one (8%) participant placed himself at Milestone 3, two (15%) participants placed themselves between Milestone 3 and Capstone 4 and ten (77%) participants self-identified themselves at Capstone 4. At Milestone 3, students are able to comprehend the gray areas that exist within ethical situations as well as the interrelationships among the issues. At the capstone level, students can recognize the complexities, intricacies, and interrelationships among the ethical issues. Mason said, "[pause] Uh… I'd say 3." Aidan said, "Between a 3 and 4 now." Ava said, "Um, like a 3 and a 4." Liam said, 4 now." Lily said, "Four. I think I moved up." Madison said, "Four." Noah said, "I think 4" (Table 7).

Table 7

Factor 3: Ethical Issue Recognition

Benchmark or milestone	Self-identification by participant number as a freshman or on entering the college	Self-identification by participant number as a senior
Benchmark 1		
Between Benchmark 1 and Milestone 2	1	
Milestone 2	2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 12	
Between Milestone 2 and Milestone 3	9	
Milestone 3	3, 8, 13	1
Between Milestone 3 and Capstone 4		8, 9
Capstone 4	11	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13

The assessment of factor 4, the application of ethical perspectives is presented in

Table 8. Assessing factor 4, as freshmen or on entering the college, four (31%)

participants self-identified themselves at Benchmark 1, one (8%) participant placed

himself between Benchmark 1 and Milestone 2, four (31%) participants placed

themselves at Milestone 2, three (23%) placed themselves at Milestone 3, and one (8%)

participant placed himself at Capstone 4. At Benchmark 1, students can apply ethical

concepts in a group setting, but the students are not able to apply the concepts

independent of others. At Milestone 2, students can apply ethical perspectives

independently, however the application may be inaccurate. At Milestone 3, the students

can accurately apply ethical concepts independently, but do not always consider the

implications of their actions. At the capstone level, the students are able accurately apply

ethical concepts, and they can do so independently along with considering the full

implications of their actions. Ava said, "Like a 1…" Ethan said, "…1." Madison said,

"One." William said, "Between 1 and 2." Mason said, "probably a 2." Noah said, "[long

pause] 2." Jacob said, "[long pause] Um ... I'd say number 3." Benjamin said,

"Uh…probably 4 as well."

 Assessing factor 4, the application of ethical perspectives, as seniors, five (38%)

participants placed themselves at Milestone 3, one participant (8%) self-identified herself

between Milestone 3 and Capstone 4, and seven (54%) participants placed themselves at

the capstone level. At Milestone 3, the students can accurately apply ethical concepts

independently, but do not always consider the implications of their actions. At the

capstone level, the students are able accurately apply ethical concepts, and they can do so

independently along with considering the full implications of their actions. Aidan said,

"Probably I came in as a 2 and am a 3 now." Ava said, "A 3..." Lily said, "Um, I'd say 3

but I'm moving toward 4." Jacob said, "Number 4." Madison said, "[short pause] Four."

Mason said, "A 4" (Table 8).

Table 8

Factor 4: Application of Ethical Perspectives

Benchmark or milestone	Self-identification as a freshman or on entering the college by participant number	Self-identification as a senior by participant number
Benchmark 1	4, 9, 10, 13	
Between Benchmark 1 and Milestone 2	12	
Milestone 2	1, 6, 7, 8	
Between Milestone 2 and Milestone 3		
Milestone 3	2, 3, 5	8, 9, 10, 12, 13
Between Milestone 3 and Capstone 4		3
Capstone 4	11	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11

The assessment of Factor 5, the evaluation of different ethical

perspectives/concepts is presented in Table 9. Assessing Factor 5, the evaluation of

different ethical perspectives/concepts, as freshmen or on coming to the college, one

(8%) participant placed himself at Benchmark 1, seven (54%) participants self-identified

at Milestone 2, three (23%) participants placed themselves at Milestone 3, one (8%)

participant placed himself between Milestone 3 and Capstone 4, and one (8%) participant

self-identified at the capstone level. At Benchmark 1, the students are able to state a

position when evaluating ethical concepts, but are limited in their ability to make

assumptions related to different ethical perspectives. At Milestone 2, students are able to

state a position when evaluating concepts, make assumptions and understand the

implication related to different ethical perspectives, but do not act on them, making no changes in their original position. At Milestone 3, students are able to state a position when evaluating concepts, make assumptions, and understand the implication related to different ethical perspectives, but their response to the circumstance may be inadequate. At the capstone level, the students are able to state position and adequately and effectively defend any objections made concerning the position they have taken. Mason said, "Uh, number 1." Jacob said, "[long pause] Number 2." Noah said, "[Long pause] 2." Lily said, "[pause] Hmm…3." Benjamin said, "Probably between 3 and 4." Aidan said, "[long, long pause] I probably came in at a 4 and I'm still a 4."

Assessing Factor 5, the evaluation of different ethical perspectives/concepts, as seniors, three (23%) participants self-identified themselves at Milestone 3, one (8%) participant placed himself between Milestone 3 and Capstone 4, and nine (69%) participants placed themselves at the capstone level. At Milestone 3, students are able to state a position when evaluating concepts, make assumptions and understand the implication related to different ethical perspectives, but their response to the circumstance may be inadequate. At the capstone level, the students are able to state position and adequately and effectively defend any objections made concerning the position they have taken. Ava said, "And a 3 now." Mason said, "Between 3 and 4." Jacob said, "[pause] Number 4 again." Liam said, "[long pause] 3 as a freshman and 4 now." Lily said, "I think 4." Noah said, "4…" (Table 9).

Table 9

Factor 5: Evaluation of Different Ethical Perspectives

Benchmark or milestone	Self-identification by participant number as a freshman or on entering the college	Self-identification by participant number as a senior
Benchmark 1	1	
Between Benchmark 1 and Milestone 2		
Milestone 2	2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 13	
Between Milestone 2 and Milestone 3		
Milestone 3	3, 5, 12	4, 9, 13
Between Milestone 3 and Capstone 4	11	1
Capstone 4	8	2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12

Interview protocol questions 7a and 7b asked the participants to discuss their exposure to ethical theories as undergraduate business students. The intent was to determine if the exposure to ethical theories caused any significant changes in the way the participants thought about ethics. Thirteen (100%) participants commented about their exposure to ethical theories. Madison said, "From general terms, yes, because I didn't know the severity of several of them and how something so small, such as sending an email, could really affect someone or a group of people, when it could be ethically wrong."

Liam said,

That the person is most likely only interested in themselves; that people do things

for themselves as opposed to others…Now that's not true in every case but then

definitely it allows you to think, how people, how people think, like you can think

about how people work, how they do things.

Ethan said,

Like, even in the little things, you're like *ooohh*. For instance, even in taking a

test, sometimes there comes a question and you're really not sure about it and it's

easy for you to just look at the person next to you and you peek and think, "Oh,

they put 'C' so…maybe I can just go with whatever they're putting" but the

professor would always say, "You, know, it's easy to cheat, but is that really

ethical? Is that who you are? Do you see yourself as that person that is going

to…look and trust someone's paper instead of your own values? So, I think that

helped me a lot.

Noah said,

…I don't think it necessarily changed the way…it just makes you more aware of

the way that you think. Because up until that, you may have had a utilitarian

mindset or an egotistic mindset, but you don't realize what it was…But once you

study it, you think a lot more in depth about the way that you are looking at

things, and the way that other people are.

Subtheme 2: Influences on students' present attitude toward ethical

behavior. Protocol interview questions 5 and 6 asked the participants concerning

influences that had impacted their present attitude toward ethical behavior. Thirteen (100%) participants commented on various influences that had an impact on their current attitude toward ethical behavior. Benjamin said, "Mostly the professors. Some of the texts made a little bit of an influence but not dramatic."

Madison said,

[Pause] I would say, in general, the business ethics course. And the human resources course because those were specifically dealing with everything in relation to ethical reasoning and relating then specifically to certain situations that have happened in the past.

Mason said, "I guess classes that make you think more…uh more like reasons behind it…" Noah said, "…being around such a diverse group of people in classes…"

Subtheme 3: Limited change in personal view of ethics. Some of the participants felt that exposure to ethical theories and concepts had limited impact on their personal view of ethics. Dylan said,

… It's always good to be better educated and you now have more knowledge on any topic. But I think by the time I took that class I was 19/20 years old. I think for the most part, in my opinion when a person hits 18, 19, 20 years old they're kind of set in their ways.

Jacob stated, "I don't think it really changed, didn't like give me a 180… There's nothing specific here that really changed me as a person."

Mason said, "…I don't think it changed my opinion…if I disagree with the theory I don't believe… I kind of, I would say I see where it is coming from, but I think I still held my stand on things."

Subtheme 4: Approaches used to assess ethical situations as a senior. After hearing an ethical scenario concerning product sales, protocol interview questions 9, 10, and 11 asked the participants about their ethical reasoning as seniors and as freshmen or on entering the college. The intention was to determine the approaches used to assess ethical situations and the perceptions concerning what may have caused changes in their ethical thinking. The following comments reflect some of the approaches used as seniors.

Aidan said,

…you'd have to see what the situation is. I mean, in all business transactions, there is usually um, some kind of gift in a way, but not…but there's a line-there's bribery and there's business gifts. You know, so there's a line that you have to draw.

Ava said,

Well, if they've been a significant customer and they had an impact on the company, then I would definitely look into making something worth…for that buyer, but before I made that decision, I would evaluate sales and stuff without them and, um, before, before making…look at costs between making this present for them and uh, or how them would be without that company.

Mason said,

I guess first, you really have to think, "Is it worth it?" I mean you have to consider the costs and the benefit…it could cost you a job but I think maybe there's other…there's always another way to go about it…I probably would go to someone higher than I am and see what their opinion is or at the least let them know that if this is the reason why we are losing the sale.

Subtheme 5: Approaches used to assess ethical situations as a freshman or on entering the program. The following comments reflect some of the approaches the participants may have used as freshmen or when they first entered the college. Aidan said,

I probably would have said, "Give him what he wants." [laughs] Just because I think when I was a freshman, my idea of the business world was a little different. It was more you have to be cut throat and it doesn't matter what you have to do to get it done – get it done.

Ava said,

Um, I probably would have just said, "If the buyer wants that, if they want the present, then I have to give it to them." So…because I would look at the money part of it and not think of the other effects of the company.

Mason said, "I think…I probably would have thought, okay, that doesn't sound right. But at the same time, it could cost you a job, it could cost you $3000 in commissions, which in the long run, you have to keep yourself."

Theme 4: Perception of Students' Personal Core Values

Question 13 asked the participants to discuss their thoughts about their personal values and ethics, as new people embarking on professional lives. The subthemes were (a) good understanding of personal values, (b) desire for an ethical workplace, and (c) goal setting as a personal value.

Subtheme 1: Good understanding of personal values. Six (46%) participants said that they have a good understanding of their own personal values and ethics. Mason said,

I have a pretty good understanding of ethics and all but I think my viewpoints, I think that my viewpoints are, I don't want to say [SIC], different from other people. But they're my own viewpoints and it leans more toward trying to do the right thing…that's it.

Emma said,

Um, I think I have a good understanding of what I value and right from wrong. I feel like if I'm going to work for a company and I see that they don't do something in the way that I believe in,…I'd probably just wouldn't work for them…

Ethan stated,

Um, I think they're [personal ethics] are good, but I think there is still a lot of room for me to improve. Because you can always improve in something and I'm looking forward to finding a place where I can work and learn a lot from someone

who has more experience than me and teach me not only to become a better worker but also a better person.

Subtheme 2: Desire for an ethical workplace. Seven (54%) participants expressed a desire to work in an ethical workplace. Benjamin said,

Umm…I definitely want an ethical job. I've been actually looking into working in the healthcare industry which I struggled with for a while 'cause…you know they make a lot of money in the healthcare industry and I wasn't sure I okay with that. So I have mixed feelings on it, it's personal to me.

Dylan stated,

…Obviously, I want to be the best person I can be in all topics, issues in life. In terms of my business…moving forward into the business world you know obviously I want to keep those values because you know the better person you are…I do believe in good karma and good things happen to good people. So, you know, I like to keep how I've been molded and shaped in terms of like ethics and decisions in my life between my parents, high school and college.

William said, "Uhh…I think I have good values for the environment we live in right now. And I think I'll be able to show that in any company I am in."

Subtheme 3: Goal setting as a personal value. Three (23%) participants expressed that goal setting was a key personal value. Liam said, "I think that achievement, you need to achievement driven. If you don't set a goal then you don't have anywhere to reach…" Noah said,

…achievement and advancement... Uh, I think it's important to have that because it keeps you ambitious even if your achievement or advancement is "I want to learn how to…play a new instrument, or I want to start running one more time a day or something like that." I think it's important to have goals for yourself, to keep yourself motivated…

Theme 5: Perception of the College Business Curriculum in Relation to Students' Core Values

Questions 14 and 15 asked participants to discuss perceptions concerning the impact of the business college curriculum in relation to their core values. The subthemes were (a) better understanding of self, (b) a different perspective on ethical analysis but no change in core values, (c) realization of what is most important, (d) the relationship between value clarification and the diversity of the classroom student population, (e) an enhanced personal belief in what is ethical, (f) desire to live a balanced life, (g) desire to respect others, (h) possession of tools to handle ethical situations, and (i) a refined personal belief system.

Subtheme 1: Better understanding of self. Six (46%) participants commented that the business curriculum helped to give them a better understanding of themselves. Mason said, "Um, I guess the curriculum helped me get a better understanding and formed my viewpoints a little bit more and to detail. But it never tried to change it or set it a certain way." Emma stated,

Um, well, I think freshman year I took the intro to business course and the teacher basically explained, like, like obviously your career; that what you make of

yourself. You can't let that out rule what you believe in or what you want…I learned who I was and what I believed in throughout the years like being here; with certain courses I realized what liked and I didn't like, but I mean, a part of it was just overall experience too. Just like me growing up…

Subtheme 2: Different perspective on ethical analysis but no change in core values. Two (15%) participants felt that the curriculum helped them to develop a different perspective on ethical analysis, but there was no real change in their personal core values. Liam said, "It caused me to think about it [the business curriculum]; however, it never changed what I believed. It just allowed me to look at it from a different perspective, which was good because I wasn't able to do that before." Benjamin stated,

> I don't think they've changed my core values much, but they've kind of changed how I used them if that makes sense? Like, uh…you know your core values have always been important to me and they've not going to change but you know you can change the way I can look at things so that way those values can apply to something that they would have before…you know help society is important to me…

Subtheme 3: Realization of what is most important. Three (23%) participants commented that the business curriculum helped them to realize what is most important to them:

> Um…that's kind of a hard question, but I think it definitely has because uh…it helps you realize maybe what really is important; maybe the defining values that

may influence the other values that you thought were important. So, like

achievement and advancement, like I always knew I wanted to ambitious, whether

it's my sports or my classes. But I think the ethics and everything makes you

realize [sic]…You think about it more because you realize that maybe

achievement and advancement isn't everything if you're going to be burning

people along the way, if it's going to affect other people.

Subtheme 4: The relationship between value clarification and the diversity of the classroom student population. One (8%) participant stated that the process of value

clarification was related to the diversity of the classroom's student population.

Noah:…I think one of the biggest things is after doing this exercise is it's really the

people around that help you clarify what your values are and give you a better

understanding because everyone's coming from different walks of life, so you get

exposed, and it's just really the people, being immersed in it I think is what really helps.

Subtheme 5: Enhanced personal belief in what is ethical. Six (46%)

respondents felt the curriculum enhanced their personal belief in what is ethical.

Aidan stated,

I think I've a pretty good moral compass…some people are quicker to do just

what they have to get done. I think now that I'm older and more mature, I realize

this…I also want to be a good person, be able to sleep at night and live with who I

am and have others live with who I am. You know, I don't want to be a Bernie

Madoff and my family [TO] have to live through a horrific remainder of their

lives because they go, "You're associated with this person."

Jacob said, "I think it's deepened what I believe in and what I view as ethical."

Ethan stated, I think it has helped me a lot because, um… I wasn't aware that business is really present everywhere, so without the classes that I started to take here … it just opened my eyes to everything in the world."

Subtheme 6: Desire to live a balanced life. One (8%) participant, William, expressed a desire to live a balanced life: "…I think it made me a better person…I have to find a good balance every time. That's the thing."

Subtheme 7: Desire to respect others. One (8%) respondent, Ava, commented that the business curriculum enhanced a personal belief to respect others: "Um, well, respect is big in a classroom and listening to other's opinion, that's definitely something, you should have in the workforce because you learn off of each other."

Subtheme 8: The possession of tools to handle ethical situations. Six (46%) participants stated the business curriculum provided ethical tools to utilize in ethical situations. Jacob said,

> I think (the college) has given me the materials. I think in any person, you need to be able to have, you know, self-control to be able to be ethic, ethical…I think (the college) HAS given me the opportunities and the tools to use and it's honestly up to me whether I want to use them.

Madison stated, "Oh, well, now I definitely assess situations a lot differently…I would sit back and assess it. So, pros and cons... Why this is the right thing, why this is the wrong thing."

Subtheme 9: A refined personal belief system. Two (15%) participants commented the business curriculum helped them to develop a refined personal belief system: Aidan stated,

> To a degree, I think I had a pretty good ethical and moral standpoint before I came in, but it refined it. I think, most people, unless there's some kind of life-changing event, I think, most people develop through their childhood and through their family life and college helps refine what, you know, what you are going to be.

> Dylan emphasized,

> I would definitely say that business ethics definitely helped broaden my idea of ethics in business 'cause business ethics is also a very tricky topic. It's just not normal and in moral ethics in real life there are a lot of gray areas. So, I would say that at (the college) between the ethics class that is required and diving into ethics and other management business classes definitely helps.

Summary

This chapter discussed the purpose of the study, the research question, the pilot study, the setting of the main study, demographics, data collection, data analysis, the handling of discrepant and nonconforming data, the evidence of trustworthiness, and results. The following question guided the work: "What is the experience of senior-level undergraduate business students regarding business coursework designed to impact ethical awareness, the recognition of ethical issues, and the evaluation of ethical concepts or points of view?"

The themes that emerged were as follows: (a) meaning of moral character development; (b) the role of the college business curriculum on students' understanding of ethics, ethical awareness, and ethical decision making; (c) perceived changes in ethical development; (d) perceptions in students' personal core values; and (e) perception of the college business curriculum in relation to students' core values approaches introduced in business courses used when faced with ethical dilemmas. Chapter 5 presents the interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications for positive social change, and the conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the perceptions of senior-level undergraduate business students regarding business coursework and curriculum activities designed to (a) impact ethical awareness, (b) affect the recognition of ethical issues, and (c) influence the evaluation of ethical concepts or points of view. Additionally, the perceptions of undergraduate business students concerning their own core values in relation to ethical reasoning and decision making were considered. The following research question guided this study: What is the experience of senior-level undergraduate business students regarding business coursework designed to impact ethical awareness, the recognition of ethical issues, and the evaluation of ethical concepts or points of view?

The themes that emerged from the data were as follows: (a) meaning of moral character development; (b) the role of the college business curriculum on students' understanding of ethics, ethical awareness, and ethical decision making; (c) perceived changes in the student's ethical development; (d) perceptions about students' personal core values; and (e) perception of the curriculum in relation to students' core values. The findings suggested that the curriculum (a) increased the students' exposure to ethical situations, (b) improved the personal growth and development of students' ethical thinking, (c) increased the students' awareness of personal decision making processes, (d) provided the students' with a good understanding of personal core values and ethics, and (e) introduced decision tools that might be useful in ethical situations. In this chapter, I

discuss the interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, and implications for positive social change. Finally, I draw conclusions.

Interpretation of the Findings

Theme 1: Meaning of Moral Character Development

The participants were asked what the term *moral character development* meant to them. Several participants commented that moral character development involved a process that happened over time. Others expressed that the term was based on an individual's perception of what is right and wrong. A few participants believed that the meaning of moral character development surrounded the use of morals and values within the decision process.

As stated in the definition of terms in Chapter 1, character development tends to be a lifelong process involving the formation of ethical virtues such as integrity, fairness, trust, respect, and empathy (Murphy, 2011). The students' perceptions concerning moral character development supported the previous findings of Concorada and Cazan (2011) who wrote that a child's moral development happens over time. It also supported the findings of Murphy and Concorada and Cazan, suggesting that children may develop the cognitive ability to understand moral rules and intent.

Theme 2: The Role of the College Business Curriculum on Students' Understanding of Ethics, Ethical Awareness, and Ethical Decision Making

The participants were asked about the role of the curriculum on their understanding of ethics, ethical awareness, and ethical decision making. Several indicated that the courses were instrumental in exposing them to ethical business situations.

Lectures and discussions on the pros and cons of ethical situations improved their perceptions of moral judgment and ethical intent. The current study supported Canarutto et al. (2010), who examined the perceptions of upper-level business students concerning the impact of lectures and classroom discussions on their moral judgment. The students felt the combination of lectures and discussions increased their levels of moral judgment and intention to commit ethical acts as well as the understanding of concepts such as fairness, equity, what constituted right and wrong, and corporate social responsibility.

Several of the students commented that the curriculum was helpful in the creation of their own ethical identity. Some of the participants felt the courses provided them with a level of knowledge to define their own ethical reasoning and provided an impetus to be ethical. These perceptions supported the past findings of Lickona (1999), who introduced a three-component morality model of character development involving cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects. The cognitive component included moral awareness and the ability to assess ethical issues. The affective component consisted of having a moral conscience and a desire to improve moral deficiencies. The behavioral component included possessing the desire to act morally as well as possessing a well-defined practice of acting ethically.

The study also reinforced Acevedo (2013), Singer (2013), and Sternberg (2015), who proposed that curricula involving ethics should be designed to raise ethical awareness, identify students' core values, and increase students' understanding of ethics. The perceptions of the students also supported Seifert et al. (2010) who examined the impact of the college environment on educational outcomes. Seifert et al. found that the

college environment may positively affect student management of emotions, the development of competence, establishing self-identity, and the development of purpose.

The participants also felt the curriculum afforded them an opportunity to apply ethical decision processes to real-world situations. The study bore out the research of Vendemia and Kos (2013) and Willey et al. (2012), who examined course models of lectures, tutorials, case studies, and group work to assess ethical situations. The models significantly improved posttest scoring on ethical reasoning.

Theme 3: Perceived Changes in Ethical Development

The participants were asked to address their perceived changes in ethical development. All of them felt that the curriculum caused a change in their ethical thinking to an extent. The study upheld Morgan and Neal (2011), who compared the ethical perceptions of freshman level and junior/senior level information systems students. The students examined real-world situations typically found within the information systems industry. Morgan and Neal found that the upper-level students judged the unethical behavior within the scenarios at a significantly higher level than did the freshman students.

All of the present study participants revealed that they experienced changes in their present attitude toward ethical behavior. The results of the study did not confirm the work of Kennedy (2010), who examined the impact of a business ethics course on business students. Kennedy found no significant difference in the ethical decision making of business students, based on the results of pretest and posttest scores.

Some of the participants experienced limited changes in their personal view of ethics. Their experiences confirmed the research of Burns and Gupta (2015) who studied undergraduate students at two universities to assess the overall effectiveness of business ethics education. The results showed that the integration of ethics throughout the university curriculum had no significant effect on the students' ethical attitudes. However, the students' perceptions were that this result did not confirm the research of Lau (2010), who examined undergraduate students at a major research university to determine the relationship between ethics education and the students' ethical awareness and moral reasoning. Lau found that ethics education significantly improved the students' level of ethical awareness and moral reasoning.

In the current study, senior-level business students commented on various approaches they would consider in assessing ethical situations. Some of the approaches mentioned included cost-benefit analysis and the implementation of situational ethics. The students' comments confirmed the work of Gill (2012, Harkrider et al. (2013), Gu and Neesham (2014), and Mitchell and Yordy (2012) which considered such decision approaches as the experiential learning approach, case-based instruction, identity-based ethics, and the use of ethical dilemmas to affect ethical awareness and the identification of ethical dilemmas.

The senior-level business students also reflected on the approaches they would have considered in assessing ethical situations as freshmen or when they first entered the college. The participants seemed to be more willing to act unethically as freshmen or when they first came to the college. Their perceptions confirmed the research of Fletcher-

Brown (2012) who examined incoming freshman business students to establish a baseline

of ethical reasoning. The results of the pretest found the students' baseline scores were at

a level of moral reasoning that suggested they would tacitly accept unethical behavior.

Generally, freshman students exhibited weaker ethical beliefs than did senior-level

students. The present analysis also confirmed the studies of Alleyne et al. (2010), Elias

(2011) Oakley (2011), who found that age significantly impacted the ethical perceptions

of undergraduate students. However, the study rejected the findings of Mack (2010), who

found little difference in the ethical attitudes of students by age.

Theme 4: Perception of Students' Personal Core Values

The participants were asked to discuss their thoughts about their personal values

and ethics, as new people about to begin their professional lives. Several of the

individuals felt they had a good understanding of their own personal values and ethics.

The dissertation confirmed Searight and Searight (2011), who found that students who

had undergone a values clarification process were clearer about their personal values.

Several of the participants commented that because of their personal values, there

was a desire to work in an ethical environment. The study confirmed the current research

of Mayer et al. (2013), who examined supervisory ethical leadership and its association

with ethical behavior, including whistle blowing. These researchers found that ethical

leadership positively related to the reporting of unethical behavior, particularly when the

coworkers were perceived to be ethical.

Some of participants felt that goal setting was a key personal value. The students

perceived there was a relationship between goal setting and success. The perceptions

confirmed Seifert et al. (2010), who found that the liberal arts college environment

fostered the development of such personal characteristics as confidence and purpose.

Theme 5: Perception of the College Business Curriculum in Relation to Students'

Core Values

The participants were asked to discuss perceptions concerning the impact of the

coursework in relation to their core values. Several felt the curriculum gave them a better

understanding of themselves. The study backed the work of Sentell (2013) who found

that curricula were impactful when the courses provided opportunities for personal

reflection, along with the ability to assess changes in perceptions toward ethical attitudes.

The study also confirmed Simola (2010), who found that curricula with problem-solving

approaches emulating real-world circumstances increased the students' understanding of

their personal behavior and higher levels of ethical awareness.

Some of the participants commented that the curriculum allowed them to develop

a different perspective on ethical analysis, but they experienced little or no change in

their personal core values. Murphy (2014) and Nelson et al. (2014) proposed that ethics

courses ought to be designed to (a) raise ethical awareness, (b) identify students' core

values, (c) increase students' understanding of ethics, and (d) increase students'

understanding that ethical development or maturation is an ongoing process. However,

the students' perceptions seemed to confirm Mack (2010) and Onyebuchi (2011), who

found that the students' major field of study had little effect on their ethical perceptions.

The analysis did not confirm the work of Alleyne et al. (2010) and Pressley and Kennett-

Hensel (2013) whose findings showed that major field of study had a significant impact on ethical perceptions.

A few of the students commented that because of the participation in the curriculum, they had come to realize what is most important in their lives. The study supported Simmons et al. (2013) considered the effects of a business ethics course on the students' personal values and attitude toward organizational ethics and social responsibility. Simmons and his colleagues found that the students were significantly more willing to support the stakeholder view of business. However, the research did not support Murphy (2011) who found that the business faculty perceived the value of teaching business ethics more highly than business students. The faculty also believed they had a greater responsibility to teach business ethics than the business students. One of the participants felt that the clarification of their personal values was enhanced by the diversity of the classroom's student population. This student's perception about values clarification seemed to confirm Searight and Searight (2011) who found the clarification process may influence behavioral change in college students.

Several respondents stated that the curriculum enhanced their personal belief in what is ethical. Their perceptions supported Kucher (2012), and Lau (2010), who found that undergraduate students seem to have an increased level of awareness and moral sensitivity to questionable ethical behavior. Several of the participants expressed a desire to live balanced lives. This need seemed to confirm the work of Jagger and Volkman's (2014) holistic approach of ethics which encouraged students to develop ethical knowledge as well as their personal value systems. The students' perceptions also

confirmed the work of Erikson's (1968) eight-stage development model that included the possible search for meaning and a chance to make a difference in society. One of the participants felt the curriculum enhanced her desire to respect others within the classroom environment and that her desire to respect others would extend to the workplace. The student's comments appeared to confirm Nair Rajeev (2012), who considered the changes in the ethical perceptions of upper-class business students. They found that ethics lectures and discussions increased levels of moral judgment and ethical intention.

Some of the participants claimed that the curriculum provided decision tools to handle ethical situations, which resulted in refined personal beliefs. These perceptions seemed to confirm the research of Nelson et al. (2014) involving the impact of undergraduate education on the moral awareness of accounting, finance, and business management students. While the analysis focused on differences by gender, the results showed increases in moral awareness and moral intention, which are critical components of the decision process.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical framework of the study was based on Astin's (1985, 1993) student development theory, which centers on the environmental effects on learning. The theory focuses on an input-environment-outcome (1993) model, which includes the following elements: (a) inputs which contain such factors as the student's socioeconomic status, background, and experiences prior to college; (b) the environment, which includes the student's educational experiences while in college, including curricular and extracurricular activities; and (c) the outcomes of the educational experiences, including

levels of satisfaction, changes in cognitive growth, ethical or moral development, and career aspirations.

In this study, Astin's (1993) theoretical framework was applied to the model's environmental and outcome components to assess the effectiveness of business ethics training and instruction. The environmental component focused on the students' classroom experiences and the outcome component considered the students' perceptions of their character development, ethical reasoning, and personal values. Additionally, the students' perceptions of their character development, ethical reasoning, and personal values were often affected by their experiences prior to attending college.

Several inputs or influences impacted the participants' attitudes toward ethical behavior before college. The primary inputs included their parents, family circumstances, a Catholic upbringing, and personal life experiences. These influences confirmed the research by Astin and Antonio (2004), which identified college experiences within the curriculum, as well as extracurricular activities that may have affected character development. It was found that the importance of family, religious principles, and regular involvement in religious activities impacted character development.

Numerous classroom experiences contributed to the participants' outcomes: perceptions of their character development, ethical reasoning, and personal values. The experiences that affected these perceptions included the interaction within specific business courses, particularly the professors, and, in some cases, a diverse student population. Some of the professors provided opportunities to effect ethical development, either with lectures, case studies, ethical scenarios, the implementation of codes of

conduct, and the exposure to ethical theories and concepts. The students' perceptions confirmed Beggs (2011) and Slocum et al. (2014) that classroom discussions concerning ethical issues, particularly cases with real-world situations, were positively related to the moral competence of students.

The study also supported Ryan and Bisson (2011), who found both stand-alone ethics courses and curricula that incorporate ethical discussions throughout were beneficial to the ethical development of students. The students mentioned several business courses that contributed to their understanding of ethics, ethical awareness, and ethical decision making. The Business Ethics course and the Organization and Management of Human Resources course were identified by several students as major contributors to their understanding of ethics. Table 10 lists the business courses identified.

While the majority of the participants felt the curriculum positively affected their understanding of ethics, some students had differing outcomes. A few of the individuals commented that no courses affected their ethical reasoning. Additionally, some felt there was no change in their personal view of ethics. The students' perceptions confirmed the findings of Burns and Gupta (2015) that business ethics instruction had a minimal impact on ethical perceptions. The study also disconfirmed Lau's (2010) conclusions that ethics education significantly improved students' level of ethical awareness and moral reasoning.

Table 10

*Courses Contributing to Understanding of Ethics, Ethical Awareness, and Ethical
Reasoning*

Course	No. of participants (13) mentioning the course
Business ethics	6
Organization and Management of Human Resources	3
Macroeconomic Principles	1
Managerial Accounting	1
Marketing Research	1
Law and the Business Enterprise	1
International Business	1
Introduction to Business	1
Principles of Finance: Money and Banking	1
Principles of Management	1
Strategic Management	1

Note. Business course mentioned by at least 1 participant ($N = 13$)

In this study, the AAC&U ethical reasoning VALUE rubric was utilized to assess

learning outcomes related to ethical reasoning. The ethical reasoning VALUE rubric was

used as an instrument that allowed the senior-level business students to assess self-

awareness of ethics, to understand various ethical perspectives, to recognize ethics, to

apply ethical perspectives/concepts, and to evaluate different ethical

perspectives/concepts. Table 11 lists the learning outcomes of the participants.

In the self-identification of Factor 1, Ethical self-awareness, the learning outcomes ranged from Milestone 3 to Capstone 4, with eight participants attaining the capstone level. The remaining students commented that their ethical awareness was between Milestone 3 and Capstone 4. All felt they possessed the ability to discuss their core ethical beliefs and the origins of their beliefs. In the self-identification of Factor 2, Understanding different ethical perspectives/concepts – the learning outcomes ranged from Milestone 2 to Capstone 4, with four participants attaining the capstone level. Students who identified themselves at the capstone level felt that they were proficient at naming ethical theories, along with the meaning of those theories. Several of the students lacked sufficient knowledge to name specific ethical theories, and some students were not clear on their meanings.

In the self-identification of Factor 3, Ethical issue recognition – the learning outcomes ranged from Milestone 3 to Capstone 4, with ten participants attaining the capstone level. The students who attained Milestone 3 and the capstone level felt they were able to recognize complex ethical issues and related issues. In the self-identification of Factor 4, Application of ethical perspectives/concepts - the learning outcomes ranged from Milestone 3 to Capstone 4, with seven participants at the capstone level. Students who perceived they were at the capstone level felt that they possessed the ability to apply various ethical perspectives to ethical issues or questions as well as to consider the implications of their decisions. The remaining respondents identified themselves at Milestone 3. While they were able to apply different ethical perspectives to a particular issues or question, they would not always consider the implications.

Table 11

Ethical Reasoning VALUE Rubric Learning Outcomes

Factor	Range of Learning Outcomes for Seniors	No. of participants (13) self-identification at the capstone level
Ethical Self-Awareness	Milestone 3 to Capstone 4	8
Understanding Different Ethical Perspectives/Concepts	Milestone 2 to Capstone 4	4
Ethical Issue Recognition	Milestone 3 to Capstone 4	10
Application of Ethical Perspectives/Concepts	Milestone 3 to Capstone 4	7
Evaluation of Different Ethical Perspectives/Concepts	Milestone 3 to Capstone 4	9

Note. AAC&U ethical reasoning VALUE rubric for self-identification of participants

In the self-identification of Factor 5 – Evaluation of different ethical perspectives/ concepts – the learning outcomes ranged from Milestone 3 and Capstone 4, with nine participants at the capstone level. The students who were at the capstone level felt they were able to voice their position on various ethical perspectives/concepts, and adequately defend their position. Those at Milestone 3 felt they were also able voice their position on ethical concepts, but they felt they were not able to always defend their position.

In sum, in the assessment of four of five factors in the Ethical Reasoning VALUE rubric, the majority of the students perceived themselves at the capstone level or, at least,

attained Milestone 3. However, in the assessment of Factor 2 – Understanding different ethical perspectives/concepts – the students perceived themselves as less proficient, with some participants remaining at Milestone 2, due to the inability to recall specific theories, and could not present the meaning of those theories. The study seemed to confirm Lau's (2010) research that ethics education significantly improved students' level of ethical awareness and moral reasoning.

Rath et al.'s (1978) values clarification theory and Kohlberg's (1969) theory of cognitive moral development are subordinate theories that were utilized to reinforce the assessment of student perceptions related to personal values and ethical reasoning. In the study, the values clarification process was implemented to help the participants bring clarity to the personal values that impact their life decisions. The participants were asked to identify their top five core values. The core values mentioned most often included: achievement, family happiness, competition, health, and caring. Table 12 lists the core values identified. The values clarification exercise supported the work of Horton-Deutsch et al., 2010; Poff, 2010; and Yang, Chen, Chao, and Lai, 2010. That is, values are considered by undergraduate students during the educational process. Additionally, values clarification may influence behavioral changes in college students.

Table 12

Core Values Identified During the Values Clarification Exercise

Core Value	No. of participants (13) mentioning the core value
Achievement	7
Family happiness	7
Competition	5
Health	4
Caring	3
Economic security	3
Leadership	3
Loyalty	3
Wealth	3
Challenge	2
Cooperation	2
Help others	2
Knowledge	2
Pleasure	2
Responsibility	2
Spirituality	2
Wisdom	2
Autonomy	1
Creativity	1
Excitement	1
Help society	1
Inner harmony	1
Integrity	1
Intellectual status	1
Location	1
Power	1
Recognition	1
Stability	1

Note. Core Value mentioned by at least 1 participant ($N = 13$)

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Kohlberg's (1969) theory of cognitive moral development is a subordinate theory used here to reinforce the assessment of student perceptions related to ethical reasoning. Kohlberg's three-stage model represents ethical development in relation to age and cognitive growth. The study participants commented about the changes in ethical reasoning from their freshman year or upon entering the college to their senior year. Several of the participants felt that maturation or "simply growing up" was one of the reasons for the change in ethical reasoning. The research seemed to confirm the recent research of Alleyne et al. (2010), Elias (2011), and Oakley (2011) that age significantly affected the ethical perceptions of undergraduate students.

However, there were students who felt no change had occurred in their ethical reasoning ability between their freshman and senior year of college. The respondents commented that they had already reached a specific level of moral development and felt that they experienced no further growth in ethical reasoning. The students' perceptions confirmed the recent research of Mack (2010), in which no significant differences were found in ethical reasoning ability of senior level students, by age. While the results of the study were mixed, the students' perceptions seem to support past and recent research, which suggests age impacts the perceptions of undergraduate students regarding questionable ethical practices in business.

Limitations of the Study

The limitation of the study involved senior-level undergraduate business students at one college in the United States. There were no expectations of generalizing the results, for this was a phenomenological study. Despite this limitation, the study was

useful in addressing the gap in the literature concerning the efficacy of business ethics training and instruction.

Recommendations

The findings of the study suggest the undergraduate business curriculum (a) increased the students' exposure to ethical situations, (b) increased the personal growth and development of students' ethical thinking, (c) increased the students' awareness of personal decision making processes, (d) provided the students with a good understanding of core values and ethics, and (e) introduced decision tools that may be useful in ethical situations.

The qualitative phenomenological approach was chosen to address the gap in the literature regarding the effectiveness of business ethics training and instruction (Guyotte & Piotrowski, 2010; Jazani & Ayoobzadeh, 2012; Willey et al., 2012). The findings began to address the gap in the research concerning the efficacy of different curricular instructional methods to increase ethical reasoning in the areas of awareness, recognition, judgment, and behavior. The study accomplished this goal through an examination of the ethical reasoning and moral character development of senior-level undergraduate business students by using in-depth interviews and value clarification exercises. Based on the study's limitation, the following are recommendations for future research.

The work was conducted with a sample from a small Catholic college in the Northeastern United States. Conducting a comparable study in another geographic region may (or may not) produce different findings. Another recommendation is to conduct a study utilizing a pretest and posttest design. The pretest could be administered prior to beginning the major field of study, followed by the posttest after completing the course curriculum of the major. The pretest-posttest design may provide qualitative or quantitative data regarding possible changes in ethical reasoning, core values, and character development.

Finally, this study utilized Astin's I-E-O model as the theoretical framework, with a particular focus on the classroom environment and the related outcomes regarding the perceived changes in ethical reasoning and character development. Future researchers may consider the entire model, which identifies the inputs at the entrance to the college (interests, values, and personal traits); the college experiences (classroom, athletic and recreational programs, and organizations, and the relationships within the environment, with students, faculty, and administration); and the outcomes associated with ethical development.

<center>**Implications for Positive Social Change**</center>

I examined the perceptions of senior-level undergraduate business students concerning their own ethical belief systems and changes that may have occurred in their level of ethical awareness, the ability to recognize ethical issues, and the capacity to evaluate ethical concepts or points of view: (a) The first implication for social change involves the potential development of individual decision processes to affect ethical

reasoning. Several participants indicated the curriculum exposed them to real-world ethical situations, positively affected the personal growth and development of their ethical thinking, increased their awareness of personal decision making processes, and provided them with a good understanding of personal core values and ethics. With the introduction of decision tools that are useful in ethical situations, the students are equipped to enter the workforce with moral competencies and ethical decision-making skills that may positively impact America's work environments.

Another implication for social change involves the potential development of effective learning environments that affect ethical reasoning. Several students identified the ethics courses as one of the primary influences affecting a positive change in their ethical reasoning ability. The college's implementation of a stand-alone ethics course, as well as the infusion of ethical content throughout the program, seemed to raise the students' understanding of their personal behavior and improved the students' level of ethical awareness, moral reasoning, ethical intention in relation to fairness, equity, and a desire to live an ethical life. Stand-alone ethics courses and the integration of ethics throughout the curriculum have been found to benefit moral awareness and ethical sensitivity (Chawla et al., 2013; Graham, 2012; Jazani & Ayoobzadeh, 2012; Kleinrichert et al., 2013; Klimek & Wenell, 2011; Martinov-Bennie & Mlandenovic, 2015; May et al., 2014; Mohamed Satt et al., 2012; Nair Rajeev, 2012; Nelson et al., 2014; Ryan & Bisson, 2011; Simmons et al., 2013; Slocum et al., 2014). Ethics instruction may have a significant impact on student development when the concept of ethics encompasses the entire learning community by implementing codes of conduct, by having ethics as the

foundation of the course work, and by maintaining collaborative classroom environments (Beggs, 2011; Gu & Neeshan; 2014; Jagger & Volkman, 2014; Lukea-Bhiwajee, 2010; Mitchell & Yordy, 2012; Vendemia & Kos, 2013).

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to examine the perceptions of senior-level undergraduate business students regarding business coursework and curriculum activities designed to impact ethical awareness, affect the recognition of ethical issues, and influence the evaluation of ethical concepts or points of view. Additionally, the perceptions of undergraduate business students were considered concerning their own core values in relation to ethical reasoning and decision making. This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of 13 senior-level undergraduate business students at one northeastern Catholic college in the United States. The results provided the essence of their experiences related to moral character development and the role of the curriculum on how they see themselves as future business leaders who involve ethics in decision making. Cameron and O'Leary (2015, Lau (2010), Martinov-Bennie and Mlandenovic (2015 and Nelson et al. (2014) found ethics education significantly improved the levels of students' ethical awareness and moral reasoning. As Rest (1986) wrote, ethical awareness is the first component of ethical decision making, followed by the recognition of what ought to be done, the contemplation of an effective solution, and, finally, the attainment of a suitable moral action or response.

The experiences of the participants supported the findings of other researchers. The study differed from past work with the use of the AAC&U ethical VALUE rubric to assess learning outcomes related to ethical reasoning. The rubric was designed to be used at the institutional level to evaluate student outcomes. With the application of the VALUE rubric at the student level, the participants were able to identify their personal development along five elements: ethical self-awareness, ethical issue recognition, understanding different ethical perspectives and concepts, the application ethical principles, and the evaluation of ethical perspectives and concepts. The results suggested that the curriculum increased the students' awareness of personal decision making processes, provided the students' with a good understanding of personal core values and ethics, and introduced decision tools that may be useful in ethical situations. The findings may be utilized by academics to devise effective learning programs to provide students with the intellectual tools to make ethical decisions. The implications of social change may not only impact the lives of the participants but also positively affect the academicians responsible for developing learning environments to impact ethical reasoning.

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Appendix A: Student Interview Protocol

Time:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of interviewee:

The interviewer will provide a brief description of the study

1. What does the term "moral character development" mean to you?

2. Look at the AACU ethical reasoning VALUE rubric and, in your opinion, tell me which definition most closely represented your ethical reasoning as a freshman.

3. Look at the AACU ethical reasoning VALUE rubric and, in your opinion, tell me which definition most closely represents your ethical reasoning as a senior.

4. Based on the definition selected from the rubric, how would you describe the role of the university's business curriculum on your view of yourself, as a new business person entering the workforce?

5. What are some of the influences that have, in your opinion, impacted your present attitude toward ethical behavior?

6. Please tell me about the influence that has had the greatest impact on your present attitude toward ethical behavior?

7a. Have you been exposed to specific ethical theories during your time as an undergraduate (e.g., Utilitarianism, Kant's ethical theory, and virtue ethics),

7b. If so, has your exposure to any of these theories caused any significant changes in the way that you think about ethics?

7c. Related questions: Which ethical-theoretical viewpoint, if any, do you most identify with? Is there anything in your undergraduate education that has caused you to most identify with this ethical-theoretical viewpoint?

8. I am now going to read to you an ethical situation which requires you to give me your reasoning on how you would react and what you would do if you were placed in that situation. (Read the scenario aloud).

9. What are, in your opinion, some of the things you have learned in your undergraduate years that will help you in dealing with a situation such as this?

10. How would you have reasoned about this differently as a freshman?

11. What, in your opinion, caused the changes in your ethical thinking?

12. I am now going to present you with a values clarification exercise. The exercise will allow you to identify your top ten core values, and ultimately your top five values. After you complete the exercise, I will ask a set of clarifying questions, allowing you to explain your choices and the reasons for your choices.

13. As you begin your professional life, what are your thoughts on your personal values or ethics?

14. What are your perceptions concerning the impact of the college curriculum in relation to your core values?

15. In your opinion, how has the 4-year undergraduate business experience impacted your set of personal core values?

16. In your opinion, how has the 4-year undergraduate business experience impacted your decision to live according to ethical standards and codes of behavior?

At the end of interview I will thank the person for participating in the study. Additionally,

the individual will be reminded that there is the potential for a follow-up interview.

Appendix B: Ethical Dilemma

Perceptions of Business School Students About Character Development and Ethical

Reasoning

Larkey Mays III

Making the Sale

You are a relatively new salesperson for The Dakota Company, a $30 million manufacturer of western wear. Your territory covers Virginia and the two Carolinas, and during your first year in this territory, you have performed relatively well, but not as well as the salesperson who previously had the territory. You have a decision to make. Your biggest customer is the W. D. Pender Company, a large regional department store chain, which buys all of its private label blue jeans from The Dakota Company. Pender is one of Dakota's larger regional accounts, and you have improved Dakota's position with Pender a great deal. Now, Pender has rotated a new buyer into deal with the Dakota Company. This buyer, a successful twelve-year veteran with Pender, has made it clear that a valuable present is expected from you to maintain good relations. You understand this to mean that the order may very well be lost if you do not come up with a really good present. The orders from Pender are worth $300,000 ($100,000); one order per year in sales to Dakota and $3000 ($1000) a year in commission to you. The market for western wear is tight this year, so it is not likely that either you or Dakota can replace the lost sales (in fact, layoffs may even be required).

Appendix C: Values Clarification Exercise

The following is a values clarification exercise. Below you will find 36 core values. You have the liberty to add any values that come to mind, that are not on the list. Please take a total of 7 minutes to select your top 10 values with a check mark, and then pare down the top 10 list of values by selecting your top 5 values with a second check mark.

_____ Achievement (sense of accomplishment by means of skills, practice, perseverance, or exertion)

_____ Advancement (moving forward in your career through promotions)

_____ Adventure (work which frequently involves risk)

_____ Aesthetics (involved in studying or appreciating the beauty of ideas, things, etc.)

_____ Autonomy (working independently, determine the nature of work without significant direction from others

_____ Caring (love, affection)

_____ Challenge (stimulates full use of your potential)

_____ Change and Variety (varied, frequently changing work responsibilities and/or work settings)

_____ Competition (pit your abilities against others where there is clear win/lose outcomes)

_____ Cooperation (opportunity to work as a team toward common goals)

_____ Creativity (being imaginative, innovative)

_____ Economic Security (having enough money)

_____ Excitement (experience a high degree of, or frequent excitement in your work)

_____ Family Happiness (being able to spend quality time and develop relationships with family of origin, or family by marriage)

_____ Friendship (develop close personal relationships)

_____ Health (physical and psychological wellbeing)

_____ Help Others (be involved in helping people in a direct way, individually or in a group)

_____ Help Society (do something to contribute to the betterment of the world)

_____ Inner Harmony (being at peace with oneself)

_____ Integrity (sincerity and honesty)

_____ Intellectual Status (be regarded as an expert in your field)

_____ Knowledge (understanding gained through study and experience)

_____ Leadership (influence over others)

_____ Leisure (have time for hobbies, sports, activities, and interests)

_____ Location (a place conducive to your lifestyle and allows you to do the things you enjoy most)

_____ Loyalty (steadfastness and allegiance)

_____ Pleasure (enjoyment)

_____ Power (authority)

_____ Precision (work in situations where there is little tolerance for error)

_____ Responsibility (being accountable for results)

_____ Recognition (getting acknowledged for your contribution

____ Stability (work routine and duties that are largely predictable, not likely to change over a long period of time)

____ Spirituality (the internal process of seeking personal authenticity, genuineness, and wholeness, deriving meaning purpose, and direction in life)

____ Time Freedom (work according to your own time schedule, no specific work hours required)

____ Wealth (profit, gain, making a lot of money)

____ Wisdom (understanding based on accumulation of knowledge)

Courtesy of the MIT Careers Office – http://web.mit.edu/career/www/

Appendix D: Participant Debriefing Form

During this study, all participants were asked to take part in face-to-face open ended interviews to answer questions pertaining to ethical values and moral reasoning. The study focused on the perceived changes in the level of character development during the traditional 4-year Catholic college experience. You were asked to consider the AACU Ethical Reasoning VALUE Rubric and select the definition which most closely described your ethical reasoning as freshman and your ethical reasoning as a senior. You were also asked to describe the influence of the college's business curriculum on your attitude toward ethical behavior. Additionally, after reading an ethical scenario, you were asked to comment on what you have learned in your undergraduate years that would help you in dealing with a similar type of ethical situation. Lastly, you were asked to participate in a values clarification exercise, in an effort to identify your top five core values. The interview was concluded with a short personal information survey including gender, age, and major of study. A follow-up interview may be scheduled if there is a need for to receive clarification on any information that is unclear or nor fully understood.

If you would like more information on the issue of ethics, please feel free to visit the   following sites:

- http://www.ethics.org/

- http://business-ethics.com/

- http://ethisphere.com/

- http://josephsoninstitute.org/

If you are interested in the final results of the study, please provide me with your email address and the findings will be sent to you at the completion of the entire study. If you have questions or concerns about this research, please contact the author of the study at:

Larkey Mays III   Dr. James S. Bowman
PhD Candidate   Faculty Supervisor
Walden University   Walden University

Thank you for your participation.

Appendix E: Ethical Reasoning Value Rubric

The VALUE rubrics were developed by teams of faculty experts representing colleges and universities across the United States through a process that examined many existing campus rubrics and related documents for each learning outcome and incorporated additional feedback from faculty. The rubrics articulate fundamental criteria for each learning outcome, with performance descriptors demonstrating progressively more sophisticated levels of attainment. The rubrics are intended for institutional-level use in evaluating and discussing student learning, not for grading. The core expectations articulated in all 15 of the VALUE rubrics can and should be translated into the language of individual campuses, disciplines, and even courses. The utility of the VALUE rubrics is to position learning at all undergraduate levels within a basic framework of expectations such that evidence of learning can by shared nationally through a common dialog and understanding of student success.

Definition

Ethical Reasoning is reasoning about right and wrong human conduct. It requires students to be able to assess their own ethical values and the social context of problems, recognize ethical issues in a variety of settings, think about how different ethical perspectives might be applied to ethical dilemmas and consider the ramifications of alternative actions. Students' ethical self identity evolves as they practice ethical decision-making skills and learn how to describe and analyze positions on ethical issues.

Framing Language

This rubric is intended to help faculty evaluate work samples and collections of work that demonstrate student learning about ethics. Although the goal of a liberal education should be to help students turn what they've learned in the classroom into action, pragmatically it would be difficult, if not impossible, to judge whether or not students would act ethically when faced with real ethical situations. What can be evaluated using a rubric is whether students have the intellectual tools to make ethical choices.

The rubric focuses on five elements: Ethical Self Awareness, Ethical Issue Recognition, Understanding Different Ethical Perspectives/Concepts, Application of Ethical Principles, and Evaluation of Different Ethical Perspectives/Concepts. Students' Ethical Self Identity evolves as they practice ethical decision-making skills and learn how to describe and analyze positions on ethical issues. Presumably, they will choose ethical actions when faced with ethical issues.

Glossary

The definitions that follow were developed to clarify terms and concepts used in this rubric only.

• Core Beliefs: Those fundamental principles that consciously or unconsciously influence students' ethical conduct and ethical thinking. Even when unacknowledged, core beliefs shape students' responses. Core beliefs can reflect students' environment, religion, culture or training. A person may or may not choose to act on their core beliefs.

• Ethical Perspectives/concepts: The different theoretical means through which ethical issues are analyzed, such as ethical theories (e.g., utilitarian, natural law, virtue) or ethical concepts (e.g., rights, justice, duty).

• Complex, multi-layered (gray) context: The sub-parts or situational conditions of a scenario that bring two or more ethical dilemmas (issues) into the mix/problem/context/for student's identification.

• Cross-relationships among the issues: Obvious or subtle connections between/among the sub-parts or situational conditions of the issues present in a scenario (e.g., relationship of production of corn as part of climate change issue).

AAC&U's email:

Thank you so much for your email. This email serves as confirmation that AAC&U VALUE rubrics- including the ethical reasoning VALUE rubric- are in the public domain and so you have our express permission to use the rubrics as part of your research. We just ask that you credit AAC&U using the following permission statement: "Reprinted with permission from Assessing Outcomes and Improving Achievement: Tips and Tools for Using Rubrics, edited by Terrel L. Rhodes. Copyright 2010 by the Association of American Colleges and Universities."

Table 13
AAC&U Ethical Reasoning Value Rubric

	Capstone 4	Milestones 3	2	Benchmark 1
Ethical Self-Awareness	Student discusses in detail/analyzes both core beliefs and the origins of the core beliefs and discussion has greater depth and clarity.	Student discusses in detail/analyzes both core beliefs and the origins of the core beliefs.	Student states both core beliefs and the origins of the core beliefs.	Student states either their core beliefs or articulates the origins of the core beliefs but not both.
Understanding Different Ethical Perspectives/Concepts	Student names the theory or theories, can present the gist of said theory or theories, and accurately explains the details of the theory or theories used.	Student can name the major theory or theories she/he uses, can present the gist of said theory or theories, and attempts to explain the details of the theory or theories used, but has some inaccuracies.	Student can name the major theory she/he uses, and is only able to present the gist of the named theory.	Student only names the major theory she/he uses.
Ethical Issue Recognition	Student can recognize ethical issues when presented in a complex, multilayered (gray) context AND can recognize cross-relationships among the issues.	Student can recognize ethical issues when issues are presented in a complex, multilayered (gray) context OR can grasp cross-relationships among the issues.	Student can recognize basic and obvious ethical issues and grasp (incompletely) the complexities or interrelationships among the issues.	Student can recognize basic and obvious ethical issues but fails to grasp complexity or interrelationships.
Application of Ethical Perspectives/ Concepts	Student can independently apply ethical perspectives/concepts to an ethical question, accurately, and is able to consider full implications of the application.	Student can independently apply ethical perspectives/concepts to an ethical question, accurately, but does not consider the specific implications of the application.	Student can apply ethical perspectives/concepts to an ethical question, independently (to a new example) and the application is inaccurate.	Student can apply ethical perspectives/concepts to an ethical question with support (using examples, in a class, in a group, or a fixed-choice setting) but is unable to apply ethical perspectives/concepts independently (to a new example.).
Evaluation of Different Ethical Perspectives/ Concepts	Student states a position and can state the objections to, assumptions and implications of and can reasonably defend against the objections to, assumptions and implications of different ethical perspectives/concepts, and the student's defense is adequate and effective.	Student states a position and can state the objections to, assumptions and implications of, and respond to the objections to, assumptions and implications of different ethical perspectives/concepts, but the student's response is inadequate.	Student states a position and can state the objections to, assumptions and implications of different ethical perspectives/concepts but does not respond to them (and ultimately objections, assumptions, and implications are compartmentalized by student and do not affect student's position.)	Student states a position but cannot state the objections to and assumptions and limitations of the different perspectives/concepts.

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Appendix F: Demographic Survey

Demographic Questions
Please mark the following questions with your response:
1. What is your gender?
- Male
- Female

2. What is your age?

- 18 or under
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24 or over

3. What is your major course of study?

- Accounting
- Business Administration
- Management
- Marketing
- International Business, Language, and Culture

4. Have you ever taken an ethics course in your undergraduate study?
- Yes
- No

Appendix G: Recruitment Flyer

Chestnut Hill College
Senior Level Business Students Wanted
For A Research Study
Study Title: "Perceptions of Business School Students about Character Development and Ethical Reasoning"

As part of my dissertation at Walden University, Minneapolis, MN, I am conducting a research study to explore the perceived level of character development of senior level business students at Chestnut Hill College.

The purpose of the study is to understand what aspects of the undergraduate business education contributed to changes in your character development during your 4-year Catholic college experience.

Assessing your perceptions may be beneficial in the development of effective course content, designed to provide students with the intellectual tools to make appropriate ethical choices, particularly, as future business leaders.

Participants must be (a) in the senior year at Chestnut Hill College; (b) pursuing a degree in the traditional undergraduate business program, with a major in one of the following programs: accounting, management, marketing, or international business, language, and culture.

A $20 Wawa Card is being offered in return for your time. Interviews will be in person and will last about 40 minutes to 1 hour.

If you are interested or want more information, email ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ ▮▮▮▮▮▮. This study has been reviewed and approved by the Chestnut Hill College IRB.

Larkey Mays III	**Dr. James S. Bowman**
Ph.D. Candidate	**Faculty Supervisor**
Walden University	**Walden University**