Managers often encounter situations that require them to make decisions with ethical implications that affect the organization as well as the managers themselves. The issue we address in this study concerns whether the ethical consistency of managerial decisions is situation dependent. That is, are the decisions managers make ethically consistent when they are faced with different ethical situations? We hypothesize that managerial decisions will vary depending on the type of ethical situation they encounter. We also hypothesize that gender plays a role in determining the ethical consistency of managerial decisions. Results of statistical analyses support our hypotheses.

Keywords: ethics, decision making, consistency, gender, management

Incidents of unethical behavior have pervaded the business community in recent years and have led to the collapse or tainted the image of corporations like Enron, WorldCom, Tyco, Adelphia, HealthSouth, Rite Aid, and others. In addition to variations in the types of businesses in which unethical behaviors have been reported, such behaviors also vary across situations. For example, a recent CNN headline read, “Businessman Pleads Guilty to Bribing Congressman” (cf. Frieden, 2006). Another headline reported in 2006 by the Associated Press read, “Tyson Settles Discrimination Charges.” In yet another situation, the ethics or social responsibility of promoting drinking among youth through advertising has been challenged in academic studies (e.g., Snyder, Milici, Slater, Sun, & Strizhakova, 2006).
The documentation of unethical behavior in ethics-related situations such as these (i.e., bribery, discrimination, and social responsibility) is not gender specific. For example, in addition to the conspiracy and fraud convictions of male business executives such as former Enron bosses Kenneth Lay and Jeffrey Skilling, businesswoman Martha Stewart was found guilty of obstructing justice and lying to investigators about her involvement in trading inside information on a stock sale (cf. Ulick, 2003). In another case, a female purchasing manager was convicted of steering a travel contract to a politically connected firm (cf. Foley, 2006).

At least two questions arise from these examples of unethical behaviors occurring across various situations and genders: Are the decisions managers make ethically consistent when they are faced with different ethics-related situations, and does gender play a role in determining whether managerial decisions are ethically consistent in different ethics-related situations? From an ethics perspective, with respect to the first question, the “halo effect” (cf. Tucker, McCarthy, & Benton, 2003) would suggest that if managers make ethical decisions in one situation they are likely to make ethical decisions in other situations as well.

With respect to the second question, Park and Shafer (1999) would answer in the affirmative, suggesting that whether decisions can be classified as ethical or unethical for male and female managers depends on the situation. From a moral perspective, Gilligan (1982) supported this position by arguing that male morality has a “justice orientation” and female morality has a “responsibility orientation,” where the male approach to morality is that individuals have certain basic rights and one has to respect the rights of others (i.e., morality imposes restrictions on what you can do) and the female approach to morality is that people have responsibilities toward others (i.e., morality is an imperative to care for others). One might infer from Gilligan’s argument that male and female managers may make different decisions in similar ethical situations (Rao, Daneshfar, & Yeh, 1996). In contrast, other studies (cf. McNichols & Zimmerer, 1985; Serwinek, 1992) have suggested that gender does not play a major role when managers are faced with making decisions in situations that have ethical implications.

Although the extant literature makes tangential references to the issue of ethical consistency in managerial decision making, within and outside the context of gender, it does not provide clear or direct answers to the two questions we ask in this article. Subsequently, our objective in this article is to provide clear and direct answers to these two questions. Providing such answers will not only make a contribution to the field of business ethics by adding to the paucity of empirical research related to the topic of ethical consistency in managerial decision making but also bring more clarity to this important topic as it relates to gender.

In this article we first discuss three ethics-related topics that we use as the situational context for determining the ethical consistency of managerial decision making. Next, we discuss the theoretical framework for our study. Specifically, we em-
ploy the “moral intensity” (Jones, 1991) construct as the primary theoretical framework for helping us to answer these two questions and to bring some clarity to the issue at hand. The hypotheses set forth in the article were derived from this theoretical framework. After we set forth our hypotheses, we then discuss the research methods used to test the hypotheses. Once the results of these tests have been discussed, we turn our attention to the research and practical implications of our study and some concluding remarks.

SITUATIONAL CONTEXT FOR CONSISTENCY IN ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

Velasquez, Andre, Shanks, and Meyer (1988) took the following position regarding ethical consistency in different situations:

Ethics requires consistency in the sense that our moral standards, actions, and values should not be contradictory. A more important kind of inconsistency is that which can emerge when we apply our moral standards to different situations. To be consistent, we must apply the same moral standards to one situation that we apply to another unless we can show that the two situations differ in relevant ways.

Implicit in the foregoing statement is the notion that during the course of their career, both male and female managers are likely to encounter a myriad of ethical situations that require them to make decisions that will hopefully be consistent as they attempt to resolve the particular situations.

For purposes of this research effort, our task was to determine which of these myriad situations would be most appropriate for assessing the ethical consistency of managerial decisions. In making this determination, we used several decision rules. First, the situations we considered had to have ethical implications. Second, the outcome of managerial decisions associated with the situations would likely have serious consequences for the organization if the decision made was considered to be unethical. Third, the situations had to be related to areas of ethics that are well documented in the management literature. Finally, the situations had to be current. That is, the situations had to be the topic of current academic research (i.e., within the past 3 years) or current news reports.

Using these decision rules, we selected three ethics-related topics: bribery, social responsibility, and discrimination. In the next few sections of this article we discuss these topics, with a focus on providing deeper insights into their relevance to the research questions and hypotheses we formulated for this study. In a later section, we operationalize these three ethics-related concepts to assess the ethical consistency of managerial decisions.
The Practice of Bribery

Harvey (2002) viewed bribery as prima facie unethical and stated that “any payment made to an agent is a bribe if the payment is made to the agent rather than the principal and the agent does not forward or report the payment to the principal” (p. 216). He further suggested that the advantage of defining bribery within a principal-agent framework is that it makes clear where the violation of an ethical standard comes from. That is, agents who pocket money in exchange for providing benefits to the payer are being induced to take actions contrary to their obligation as agents of a principal.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, a coalition of 36 countries (including the United States, Canada, and Britain) recognizes bribery not only as a crime but as an unethical act as well (Kaikati, Sullivan, Virgo, Carr, & Virgo, 2000). Although the combination of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act and the Sarbanes-Oxley Act encourages companies to self-report incidents of bribery (cf. Roberto, 2003), it has been suggested that incidences of bribery in U.S.-based companies have not abated much since the passing of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act in 1977 (Summerour, 2000). Indeed, as late as May 2006, cases of bribery and its consequences have been reported in the press (cf. Frieden, 2006).

In studies related to bribery in the United States, it was found that bribes to defer taxes, secure licenses, and gain permission to import materials and human resources were the most frequently cited violations (Geo-JaJa & Mangum, 2000). Sectors of the U.S. economy in which incidents of bribery are most reported include companies in agriculture, banking, finance, and civil aerospace (“Preventing Business Fraud,” 2000). Moreover, with current trends toward increasing the globalization of business (Cullen, Parboteeah, & Hoegl, 2004) unethical conduct such as bribery is likely to become more prevalent. Indeed, it has been argued that some countries appear to be so corrupt that bribery is almost unavoidable for U.S. companies doing business there (Oliverio, 2003). We would argue that globalization will inevitably bring managers from different countries into situations where they are likely to be faced with having to decide whether to accept or pay a bribe.

The Social Responsibility Issue

According to Ferrell, Fraedrich, and Ferrell (2004), the concept of social responsibility refers to an organization’s obligation to maximize its positive impact on stakeholders. In other words, managers of organizations are socially responsible for serving the interests of all those (e.g., shareholders, customers, employees, community, suppliers, government) who have a “stake” in the firm. It has been argued that managers recognize that the drive to become and remain socially responsible is as important as the drive to improve the bottom line (Bernhut, 2003). In
support of this argument, a survey conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP revealed that managers assign considerable importance to maintaining a high degree of corporate responsibility (cf. Verchoor, 2003). Results of the survey also revealed that most (68%) managers agree that social responsibility is vital to profitability and it must remain a priority.

However, social responsibility as an ethic still seems to evade some U.S. organizations. For example, alcohol use is closely tied to the three leading causes of death among African American youth. Yet African American youth continue to be inundated with more alcohol advertising than youth in the United States in general (Snyder et al., 2006). Another example is R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company’s plan to launch a new cigarette brand, Uptown, that was created specifically for the African American market segment. As reported by Balbach, Gasior, and Barbeau (2003), R. J. Reynolds’s internal documents demonstrated that Uptown represented only one visible manifestation of the company’s efforts to promote smoking among African Americans through product development and advertising.

With the intent of minimizing or eliminating breaches of ethics/social responsibility in situations such as these, the concept of corporate citizenship has been adopted as a more specific reference to corporations’ social responsibility (cf. Matten & Crane, 2005). The currency and ethical implications of social responsibility/corporate citizenship is evident in that a number of research centers explicitly concerned with this topic have emerged. There are also a growing number of government units, consultancies, and think tanks specifically dedicated to the topic, and the Journal of Corporate Citizenship has recently been developed to address social responsibility issues (Matten & Crane, 2005). Moreover, investors are increasingly examining firms’ ethical and social responsibility/corporate citizenship record when making investment decisions (Veysey, 2003).

The Issue of Discrimination

In essence, workplace discrimination is any distinction, exclusion, or preference made on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, political opinion, ethnicity, disability, social origin, or other characteristic that has the effect of nullifying or impairing equality of opportunity and treatment in employment (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002). Discrimination in the workplace is not only illegal, it is also considered an ethical issue by most U.S. companies because it abridges the rights of employees (Ferrell et al., 2004). Despite the legal and ethical implications, it has been found that individuals belonging to underrepresented groups (e.g., women, minorities, and older employees) still face discrimination in the workplace.

For example, a U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) representative had the following to say about Cracker Barrel restaurant’s recent $2 million settlement of a race and sex discrimination suit:
These are exactly the types of systemic workplace discrimination that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act prohibits some of it obvious, some more subtle and that is what drove the EEOC’s litigation of this case and what makes a $2 million consent decree appropriate. (The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2006)

In another case, Guidant Corporation is facing a lawsuit by 61 of its former employees who are charging the medical device maker with age discrimination after they lost their jobs during a company downsizing (Swiatek, 2006).

Literature on organizational diversity has documented how women, racial minorities, older workers, and others bearing a stigmatized identity have suffered discriminatory actions such as job loss, limited career advancement, difficulty finding a mentor, and isolation at work (cf. Avery & Thomas, 2004; Clair, Beatty, & Maclean, 2005). According to Kanter (1977), a manager’s decision-making capabilities are often compromised because of company pressures, who is most likely to benefit from the decision, and other factors. However, one major conclusion drawn by Kanter is that a manager’s decision to discriminate is based on whether an employee is culturally similar to him or her. Because diversity will exacerbate real and perceived cultural differences, discrimination in the workplace will continue to provide a challenge to the ethical decision making capacity of managers.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION AND HYPOTHESES

Inferring from the work of Barnett and Vaicys (2000), ethical decisions within the situational context of bribery, social responsibility, and discrimination are influenced by managers’ perception of the degree to which these situations vary in morality. Taking this inference one step further, Jones (1991) contended that such decisions are likely to be influenced by the degree to which situations vary in “moral intensity.” The following section of this article takes a closer look at the concept of moral intensity. After we discuss moral intensity, we relate it (in the form of hypotheses) to managerial decisions across the three ethics-related concepts of bribery, social responsibility and discrimination.

The Moral Intensity Framework

As mentioned in the introduction to this article, we employ Jones’s moral intensity construct as our theoretical framework. This framework postulates that the intensity of moral issues can be rated using six characteristics. The first characteristic is *social consensus*, which is defined as “the degree of social agreement that a proposed act is evil (or good)” (Jones, 1991, p. 375). A second characteristic Jones used to define moral intensity is *proximity*, or the extent to which an ethical issue
may affect an individual personally. According to Jones, the more immediate the impact on an individual’s personal life, the closer the issue is in proximity.

A third characteristic identified by Jones is the concentration of effect, which is referred to as “the inverse function of the number of people affected by an act of given magnitude” (Jones, 1991, p. 377). For example, a decision may affect a small number of people dramatically or a large number of people less severely. A fourth characteristic, the probability of effect, refers to the “joint function of the probability that the act in question will actually take place and the act in question causes the harm (or benefit) predicted” (Jones, 1991, p. 375).

A fifth characteristic Jones identified is referred to as temporal immediacy. This characteristic refers to the period in which effects from the decision will be experienced. Jones believes that when consequences are perceived to be far away, the issue is given less significance. Finally, Jones identified magnitude of consequences as the sixth characteristic of moral intensity. This characteristic represents “the sum of harms (or benefits) done to victims (or beneficiaries) of the moral act in question” (Jones, 1991, p. 374).

Managers and Ethical Decision Making

In their research on the effects of moral intensity on ethical decision making, Morris and McDonald (1995) found that perceived magnitude of consequences and social consensus seemed to have the greatest impact on ethical decision making. Chia and Mee’s (2000) study supported this finding but also found that temporal immediacy and proximity had a significant effect as well. Generally suggested by this research is that one or more of these moral intensity characteristics become salient in different situations in which managers must make decisions that have ethical implications.

Also suggested by this research is that the three ethics-related issues (i.e., bribery, social responsibility, and discrimination) discussed in this article are likely to be perceived by managers as varying in moral intensity. A strong conclusion one might draw from this research is that whether the decisions managers make are ethical or unethical depends on their perception of the moral intensity of the situation. We would argue that at least one of the moral intensity characteristics come into play when managers make decisions about situations with ethical implications, suggesting that managers may not be ethically consistent in the decisions they make across various business situations. Based on support in extant theory and research, we set forth the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Managers in general are not ethically consistent when they make decisions across ethical situations such as bribery, social responsibility, and discrimination.
Gender and Ethical Decision Making

Research has found that male and female individuals differ in their ethical framework (Bethke, Kidwell, & Stevens, 1987). As an example, Knotts, Lopez, and Mesak (2000) examined gender differences in college students and found that gender had the biggest influence on ethical behavior. Newman (2001) also found that women are more apt to express their ethical beliefs than men. These research studies are consistent with gender socialization theory (Dawson, 1995), which suggests that men and women bring different ethical standards and values to the workplace.

Although some studies suggest that gender has no impact on ethical decision making (McNichols & Zimmerer, 1985; Serwinek, 1992), other research suggests just the opposite. For example, Park and Shafer (1999) found statistically significant differences in ethical decision making between men and women. His research also suggests that women understand the importance of ethical decision making more so than men and perceive certain situations as being more unethical than others.

Similarly, Buckley, Harvey, and Wiese (1998) found that women are more likely to make an unethical decision if they determine the result to be for the greater good (concentration of effect) or if it affects them personally (proximity). This line of research suggests that certain characteristics associated with the moral intensity construct may have an influence on the ethical consistency of the decisions that female managers make. The specific nature of this influence is suggested in the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2a: Female managers are not ethically consistent when they make decisions across ethical situations such as bribery, social responsibility, and discrimination.

Research (Knotts et al., 2000) has suggested that men, as opposed to women, do not perceive one situation as being more ethical or less ethical than other situations that may have ethical implications. Suggested here is that the moral intensity characteristic that Jones (1991) referred to as magnitude of consequences may become operational when male managers are required to make decisions about situations with ethical implications. In other words, male managers may feel that the “sum of the effects” of the decisions they make across various ethics-related situations are equal. Stated somewhat differently, male managers may perceive the decisions they make about one ethical situation as being no more ethical or unethical as the decisions they make about another ethical situation. Subsequently, the following hypothesis seems appropriate:

Hypothesis 2b: Male managers are ethically consistent when they make decisions across ethical situations such as bribery, social responsibility, and discrimination.
RESEARCH METHODS

Sample
The total sample for our study consisted of 56 first-level and mid-level managers enrolled in the distance MBA program, the evening MBA program, or the executive MBA program of a large public university. Thus, the managers were selected from a convenient sample rather than from a random sample. The managers worked full-time for a variety of different organizations while working on their MBA part-time. Surveys were mailed to the combined class of 300 practicing managers. However, only 56 of the surveys were returned, for a response rate of 18.7%. Of the 56 responding managers, 30 were male (19 first-level managers and 11 mid-level managers) and 20 were female (17 first-level managers and 3 midlevel managers). The average age for the male managers was 37.64, and the average age for the female managers was 29.65.

Survey Instrument
The survey contained three scales that measured managerial responses to different ethical situations (a list of items comprising each scale is provided in the appendix). Each item on each scale was responded to on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The first scale contained a definition of bribery and three items that required the managers to respond to statements about bribery as a managerial practice. The reliability coefficient for this scale was 0.78. The second scale contained a definition of social responsibility and three items that required the managers to respond to statements about social responsibility. The managers were asked to read a scenario before responding to the three items. The reliability coefficient for this scale was 0.69. The third scale contained a definition of discrimination and three items that required the managers to respond to statements about discrimination in the workplace. The reliability coefficient for this scale was 0.79.

RESULTS
The research questions we posed for this study are stated as follows: Are the decisions managers make ethically consistent when they are faced with different ethics-related situations? Does gender play a role in determining whether managerial decisions are ethically consistent in different ethics-related situations? The ethical situations we used as a context for providing answers to these questions included situations related to bribery, social responsibility, and discrimination. We used one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test for consistency of managerial deci-
sions across these three ethical situations. Results of testing hypothesis number one provided an answer to our first research question. This hypothesis, which is supported by extant theory and literature, states that managers in general are not ethically consistent when they make decisions across the three ethical situations.

To test this hypothesis, we conducted ANOVA (using the total sample of 56) to test for differences between the mean responses to items comprising the three scales. The purpose of this test was to see if their responses were consistent across the scales. As shown in Table 1, the $F$ value of 8.830 ($p < .001$) indicates that statistically significant differences exist between the means of at least two of the measurement scales, suggesting that the managers are not consistent in how they would respond when faced with having to make decisions across the three ethical situations.

To test for dyadic differences between the managers’ responses to the scales, we conducted Scheffé post hoc analyses. Results of these analyses are provided in Table 1. As indicated in this table, statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) exist between the managers’ mean responses to the bribery and social responsibility scales and the bribery and discrimination scales. However, no significant difference was found between the managers’ mean responses to the social responsibility and discrimination scales. Overall, the combined ANOVA and Scheffé post hoc analyses provide strong support for Hypothesis 1 and suggest that the first research question be answered in the affirmative; that is, managers in general are not ethically consistent when they make decisions across various ethical situations.

We also used an ANOVA to test Hypotheses 2a and 2b. Respectively, these hypotheses stated that female managers are not ethically consistent when they make decisions across the three ethical situations and that male managers are ethically consistent when they make decisions across the three ethical situations. Results of these tests are presented in Tables 2 and 3. The $F$ value of 7.970 ($p < .0001$) in Table 2 indicates that statistically significant differences exist between the means of at least two of the measurement scales, suggesting that the female managers are not consistent in how they would respond when faced with having to make decisions across the three ethical situations.

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Bribery</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Social responsibility</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Discrimination</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>$ns$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $F$ value = 8.830, $p < .001$. $n = 56$. $ns$ = not significant.  
*p $p < .05$. 
To test for dyadic differences between the female managers’ responses to the scales, we also conducted Scheffé post hoc analyses. Results of these analyses are provided in Table 2. Similar to the results for the total sample, statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) exist between the female managers’ mean responses to the bribery and social responsibility scales and the bribery and discrimination scales. No significant difference was found between the female managers’ mean responses to the social responsibility and discrimination scales. Overall, the combined ANOVA and Scheffé post hoc analyses provide strong support for Hypothesis 2a and suggest that female managers are not consistent in how they would respond when faced with having to make decisions across the three ethical situations.

The $F$ value of 3.040 shown in Table 3 indicates that no significant differences (at the $p < .05$ level) exist between the mean responses of the male managers on the measurement scales. This result suggests that the male managers are consistent in how they would respond when faced with having to make decisions across the three ethical situations. This result provides support, albeit weak ($p < .10$) for Hypothesis 2b.

To complete our analyses, we conducted post hoc tests for intra-item differences for both the male and female managers. Our purpose was to see if there was consistency across the items within each scale. Results for the male managers indi-
cated a significant difference ($p < .05$) between the mean responses of two items on the bribery scale. The significant difference was between the first item (“I would not use bribery even if it is common practice in the country where I am conducting business”) and the second item (“I would not use bribery in countries where it is common practice even if it meant my company would be forced out of business, causing many employees to lose their jobs”) on this scale.

In addition to intra-item differences on the bribery scale, differences were also found between items on the discrimination scale for the female managers. Most notably were differences between the first item (“As a manager, if I had the choice of hiring, promoting or retaining a minority or a non-minority, I would choose a minority”) and the second (“As a manager, if I had the choice of hiring, promoting or retaining a male or a female, I would choose a female”) and third items (“As a manager, if I had the choice of hiring, promoting or retaining a younger person or an older person, I would choose an older person”) on the scale. Results of ANOVA tests, Scheffé post hoc tests for dyadic differences, and the post hoc tests for intra-item differences suggest that the second research question also be answered in the affirmative; that is, gender does play a role in determining whether managerial decisions are ethically consistent in different ethics-related situations.

**DISCUSSION**

We hypothesized in this study that managerial ethical decision making is situation dependent and is influenced by managers’ perception of the moral intensity of the situation. Extant theory and research supports the idea of inconsistency in the ethical decisions made by managers; however, much of this research support is anecdotal. The purpose of our study was to empirically test theory suggesting the existence of ethical inconsistencies in the decisions managers make when faced with different ethical situations. The results of our study provide empirical evidence that managerial decision making is not ethically consistent across various situations that have ethical implications.

The results of our study are also consistent with literature (cf. Buckley et al., 1998; Rao et al., 1996) suggesting that male managers may be more ethically consistent than female managers in the decisions they make across various ethical situations. In addition to being more inconsistent than male managers in the ethical decision making, our results also indicated inconsistencies in the female managers’ responses to individual items comprising the discrimination scale. Of particular interest was the difference found between the item that relates to discrimination against minorities and items related to discrimination against women and older employees. This finding might be partly explained by the proximity dimension of moral intensity identified by Jones (1991).
As discussed earlier in this article, this dimension is described as the extent to which an ethical issue may affect an individual personally; the more immediate the impact on an individual’s personal life, the closer the issue is in proximity. In their research on gender and age-based discrimination, Duncan and Loretto (2004) found that the issue of age discrimination was more salient to women than men because of a perceived disadvantage of being “too young” or “too old” when it comes to women being fairly treated in the workplace. Suggested by their research is that there is a correlation between being female and making decisions that are perceived to have a bias against discrimination against the aged and other women.

Because the issue of gender discrimination is close in “proximity” to female managers, they may be more flexible (inconsistent) in their decisions regarding age and gender discrimination but perhaps neutral in decisions involving discrimination against minorities. This logic is consistent with Newman’s (2001) research suggesting that women are more apt to express their moral beliefs than men, especially if the situation has a direct impact on them. This explanation is also consistent with research (cf. Buckley et al., 1998) suggesting that the decisions women make are more likely to vary from situation to situation if they determine the result to be for the greater good, in one situation over another, or if the decision can be justified legally.

Limitations and Research Implications

Our interpretation of the results provided in this article is done so knowing there are several factors that may have imposed limitations on the results. First, as mentioned in the Research Method section of this article, the sample of managers selected for our study was a convenience sample rather than a random sample. Thus our ability to generalize the results may be limited. However, Henry (1990) suggested that convenience sampling can be useful when a researcher wishes to describe a particular group in an exploratory way.

Another possible limitation relates to the fact that the managers were exposed to the same professors and thus to a “common body of knowledge” that may have created common response bias. Moreover, our sample was generally homogeneous in terms of ethnicity. As a result, there is a possibility that some individual bias exists with respect to the managers’ responses to survey items related to inner-city Black youth (social responsibility scale) and race (discrimination scale). In addition, some of the respondents may have misinterpreted the questions, misinterpreted the scales, or made certain assumptions about the situations presented to them.

Finally, sample size places limitations on our results, not only in terms of the total sample but also in terms of the size of each subsample (i.e., 36 male managers and 20 female managers). Thus, our ability to generalize the results may be limited by the small size of our sample. However, Tabachnick and Fidell (2001) suggested that in a univariate analysis of the mean, a sample size less than 20 is poor, a sample...
size of 20 adequate, and a sample size greater than 20 is good. They also suggest that in more complex analyses a minimal sample size between 15 and 30 is necessary to satisfy the central limit theorem, in terms of the use of means for non-categorical or interval-ratio data.

Despite these limitations, the results provide valuable insights into ethical decision-making behavior of managers both as a collective group and as gender groups. However, these limitations do provide clear directions for future research efforts. Such efforts are likely to yield results that can be generalized and more robust if the sample was (a) larger in terms of both male and female managers, (b) randomly selected from different locations, and (c) more ethnically diverse. Although we provided strong justification for selecting the three ethics-related situations presented in this article, there are other situations that may also have major ethical implications for organizations. Future research might identify these other situations and test the ethical consistency of managerial decisions across each of these situations as well. Finally, managers at higher levels in the organization might be selected for inclusion. Because these executive-level managers set organizational values, it would be interesting to determine whether their decision making is ethically consistent.

Practical Implications

Results of the interscale comparisons indicate that the female managers in our sample were not consistent in their ethical decision making across the three ethics-related situations. Specifically, their decisions were inconsistent with regards to discrimination; the results indicated inconsistencies in the female managers’ responses to individual items comprising the discrimination scale. As discussed earlier in this article, because the issue of gender discrimination is close in “proximity” to female managers, they may be more flexible (inconsistent) in their decisions regarding age and gender discrimination but perhaps neutral in decisions involving discrimination against minorities.

This result has practical implications for the types of training and programs organizations might offer to sensitize their female managers to other forms of discrimination, such that the decisions they make within this context are consistent with the decisions they make in regards to age and gender. For example, cultural diversity training might include an ethics component that focuses on helping female managers understand their moral reasoning and the importance of being consistent in their reasoning when making decisions that involve discrimination.

Although our results indicated that the male managers are consistent in how they would respond when faced with having to make decisions across the three ethical situations, the intra-item differences results for male managers indicated inconsistencies in their responses to items on the bribery scale. Although training in
this particular area may be beneficial to these managers, the broader implication is that strategic for reasons, organizations should seek ways of encouraging ethical decision making across any situation managers might encounter that has ethical implications. In what form does such encouragement take? The answer to this question might be found in an organization’s culture. In other words, a culture that is perceived to be imbued with ethical values will encourage ethical decision making, situation notwithstanding (Kickul, 2001). If the organization’s corporate culture is not already perceived to be imbued with ethical values, the issue becomes the length of time it takes to change the culture such that it is perceived to be imbued with such values.

It has been noted that corporate culture can be a difficult thing to change (cf. Grover, 2005; O’Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991). A drawn-out cultural change for the purpose of properly aligning ethical values with societal/business expectations may well have severe implications for organizations. Subsequently, waiting for such an alignment to take effect may not be the appropriate strategic action to take. To produce more rapid results, the establishment of a code of ethics may be the most appropriate strategic action to take. Research (cf. Messick & Bazerman, 1996) has suggested that managerial propensity to make ethical decisions is influenced by personal characteristics.

However, other research (cf. Adams, Tashchian, & Shore, 2001) has suggested that externally imposed moral codes (i.e., organizational codes of ethics) can also influence this tendency. This research found that such codes promote awareness and sensitivity as to the importance of ethical decision making. At the very least, it seems that codes influence ethical decisions by creating dialogue among employees about moral issues. With respect to consistency in managerial decisions, if organizations are able to identify ethics-related situations that have strong strategic implications, they can develop and encourage an ethical code appropriate to anticipated situations.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Managers will inevitably encounter different ethical situations that will require decisions to be made. An organization’s reputation and strategic success often hinges on the decisions made by its managers when faced with such situations. Therefore, it is important to have reasonable assurance that managers will act in accordance with certain ethical standards across a wide range of circumstances. We hope that the results reported in this article will provide organizations with some insights into what directions they might take and strategies they might formulate to promote consistency in the decisions made by their managers that have ethical implications.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX

Bribery Scale Items

Item #1: I would not use bribery even if it is common practice in the country where I am conducting business.

Item #2: I would not use bribery in countries where it is common practice even if it meant my company would be forced out of business, causing many employees to lose their jobs.

Item #3: If I caught one of my employees using bribery in a country where bribery is common practice, he/she would be fired.

Social Responsibility Scale Items

Scenario: A major athletic shoe company uses professional basketball stars to advertise and promote its highest priced style of shoe. Although management of the company is aware that young black men who idolize these athletes (and who cannot afford to purchase this style of shoe) are resorting to robbery and sometimes even murder to get a pair of these shoes, they continue with their advertising and promotional strategy.

Item #1: Continuing their advertising and promotional strategy, knowing that the strategy might be contributing to illegal acts on the part of these young black men, constitutes unethical behavior on behalf of management of the company.

Item #2: Suspending the sale of this shoe style would be the ethical thing for the company to do, even if the company loses millions of dollars.

Item #3: The company is in the business of making a profit for its shareholders and using this advertising and promotional strategy to increase profits for its shareholders, despite its consequences, is legal and therefore should not be considered unethical. (This item was reverse coded.)

Discrimination Scale Items

Item #1: As a manager, if I had the choice of hiring, promoting or retaining a minority or a non-minority, I would choose a minority.

Item #2: As a manager, if I had the choice of hiring, promoting or retaining a male or a female, I would choose a female.

Item #3: As a manager, if I had the choice of hiring, promoting or retaining a younger person or an older person, I would choose an older person.