

Chapter 22

Consumer Ethics: An Investigation of the Ethical Beliefs of Elderly Consumers

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Introduction

As Peter Drucker (1981) has observed, ethical concerns in business have become very important to many people:

Business ethics is rapidly becoming the “in” subject ... ‘it’ is now being taught in departments of philosophy, business schools, and theological seminaries. There are countless seminars on it, speeches, articles, conferences and books, not to mention the many earnest attempts to write business ethics into the law.

Additionally, since marketing is the functional area, within business, that interfaces with the consumer, it tends to come under the greatest scrutiny, generates the most controversy and receives the most criticism with respect to potentially unethical business practices. Advertising, personal selling, pricing, marketing research and international marketing are all the subject of frequent ethical controversy (Murphy and Laczniak 1981).

In the last decade, much attention has been given to marketing ethics. Murphy and Laczniak (1981) cite well over 100 articles dealing with this topic and an update by Murphy and Priden (1987) shows several dozen more since 1981, including recent attempts to develop theoretical models in the marketing ethics area (Ferrell and Gresham 1985; Hunt and Vitell 1986; Ferrell et al. 1989). However, the marketing

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discipline has been remiss in its examination of the inextricably related phenomenon of *consumer* ethics. While various studies have examined the major ethical problems confronting marketers (e.g., Chonko and Hunt 1985 – marketing management; Tybout and Zaltman 1974 – marketing researchers; Bellizzi and Murdock 1981 – industrial sales managers; Hunt et al. 1984 – marketing researchers; and Hunt and Chonko 1987 – advertising executives), few have systematically examined the ethical beliefs and attitudes of the final consumer. Murphy and Laczniak (1981) cite only a handful of articles examining the topic of consumer ethics while Murphy and Pridgen (1987) do not report any.

Consumers have often been surveyed in ethics-related studies (e.g., Sturdivant and Cocanougher 1973; Ricklefs 1983), but usually they have been surveyed regarding their ethical perceptions of business and marketing practices, *not* regarding their ethical perceptions of *consumer* practices. One notable exception to this is a study by Wilkes (1978) that examined consumer attitudes toward consumer-initiated fraud against business. Overall, however, there is a “gap” in the marketing ethics literature concerning the ethical beliefs and attitudes of the final consumer regarding potentially unethical consumer practices.

In addition, virtually no studies have examined the ethical beliefs of elderly consumers despite the fact that this represents an important and rapidly growing segment of the population. Petre (1986) noted that in the United States, households in the elderly population are wealthier, more numerous, and more willing to spend than ever before, making this segment important as consumers. The number of people 65 years or older in the United States is currently 28 million, or 11.9% of the population. This 65-and-over group has been growing at twice the rate of the population as a whole and is projected to reach 64.6 million by the year 2030, accounting for over 21% of the population (French and Fox 1985). Further, since elderly consumers may differ from younger ones in terms of their moral thinking (see Pratt et al. 1983), it is important to examine the ethical beliefs of this segment of the population.

The present study will attempt to correct this omission in the literature by examining the ethical beliefs of U.S. elderly consumers regarding various consumer practices and by examining the ethical ideologies of elderly consumers.

Literature Review

Within the consumer behavior literature, there is little mention of consumer activities that fall beyond the boundaries of what is considered as normative or ethical, and what little there is has typically been very narrow in its scope (e.g., Davis 1979; Moschis and Powell 1986). Most models of consumer behavior focus upon one’s decision processes with respect to the acquisition, usage and disposition of products, but these models typically do not take into account the ethics component. By contrast, this research is specifically concerned with examining consumer behavior (acquisition, usage and disposition) involving an ethical component.

Previous research involving consumer ethics can be classified into six major categories. First, some authors have empirically examined a single component of “unethical” consumer behavior. The area most commonly examined has been shoplifting (e.g., Kallis et al. 1986; Moschis and Powell 1986), but even topics such as the ethics component of consumer energy conservation have been researched (e.g., Haldeman et al. 1987).

A second stream of research has examined the apparent “double standard” that exists between what consumers perceive as acceptable consumer behavior and what consumers believe are acceptable business practices. Historically, consumers have tended to hold business to a higher standard than they, themselves, are willing to follow. Two studies supporting this concept of a double standard are a study by Davis (1979), which used an adult population, and one by DePaulo (1986), using a student population. A third research stream has attempted to provide normative guidelines for consumer rights and responsibilities. For example, Stampfl (1979) outlines a code of ethics for consumers.

Recommendations on how business can best cope with unethical consumer behavior and consumer abuse typify a fourth area of research. An example is a study by Schubert (1979) which developed strategies for combatting consumer abuses. A fifth stream of research has attempted to examine consumer attitudes relative to a variety of potentially unethical consumer practices. The study by Wilkes (1978) is one of the relatively few studies that can be included within this stream. In this study, the author examined 15 fraudulent retail situations in terms of consumer perceptions of how wrong each was and, also, how often one’s friends might behave in the manner described in the situation. Additionally, Wilkes asked consumers what would be the appropriate management action for dealing with each situation.

Finally, a sixth stream of research involves the development of theoretical models. An example of this stream is an article by Grove et al. (1989) which presents a model based upon the techniques of neutralization, borrowed from sociology. Their paper discusses how consumers justify non-normative consumer behavior.

Regarding the issue of the age of consumers and their ethical beliefs, very little research has been conducted. However, what research there has been tends to indicate that age does make a difference in terms of ethical beliefs, with older individuals appearing to be “more ethical” than younger ones. While this relationship between age and “ethicalness” could be a spurious one, there is evidence that these two variables are closely related. For example, a cross-cultural study by Ma (1985) found that there was a positive relationship between age and a law-abiding orientation. A study by Pratt et al. (1983) found that older individuals tended to be better organized and more consistent in their moral thinking. They tended to be more philosophically reflective than the young. Finally, Vitell (1986) found that age influenced the way in which sales executives made ethical judgments. More specifically, older executives seemed to have fewer ethical conflicts between what was ethical and what was beneficial for the firm.

The present study would tend to come closest to the “fifth stream” of research that has examined consumer attitudes concerning various questionable practices. However, this study will go beyond the previous research of Wilkes (1978) in that it

will examine the links between ethical ideologies, Machiavellianism and attitudes toward potentially unethical consumer practices. In addition, this study departs from previous research in that it examines an elderly population.

Several hundred studies have examined Machiavellianism, including several that have researched the degree of Machiavellianism among current and future business executives (Hegarty and Sims 1978; Chonko 1982; Hunt and Chonko 1984; Singhapakdi and Vitell 1990). However, no previous studies have attempted to examine the extent of Machiavellianism among consumers.

In describing Machiavellianism, Hunt and Chonko (1984, p. 30), noted that “the label Machiavellian [is] becoming a negative epithet, indicating at least an amoral (if not immoral) way of manipulating others to accomplish one’s objectives.” It would be inappropriate, however, to equate “Machiavellian” with such extreme labels like “dishonest” or “deceitful.” Christie and Geis (1970), based on their studies, cautioned against this interpretation. More appropriately, Machiavellian persons possess a kind of *cool detachment* that makes them less emotionally involved with others or with saving face in potentially embarrassing situations. Therefore, the more Machiavellian the individual, the less ethical they are and vice-versa. Thus, this is an appropriate construct to examine in relation to consumers’ ethical beliefs.

Forsyth (1980) has developed a classification system based upon one’s preferred ethical ideology. In this, Forsyth divides people into four different ethical types. “Situationists” are those who reject moral rules while asking if their actions yield the best possible outcomes given the situation. These individuals would use deception if it yielded the best possible outcome in a situation. “Absolutists” believe that their actions are moral only if they yield positive consequences through conformity to moral absolutes. They believe that deception is always wrong since it violates fundamental moral principles. “Subjectivists” are those who reject moral rules and base their moral judgment on personal feelings about their actions. They believe that deception is a personal matter to be decided upon by the individual. Finally, “exceptionists” believe that conformity to moral rules is desirable, but that exceptions are permissible. They believe that if deception cannot be avoided, then it is allowable as long as safeguards are used (Forsyth and Pope 1984).

Clearly, this typology can be related to consumer ethical beliefs as “absolutists” would tend to have the most rigid ethical belief systems while “subjectivists” would have the most flexible ones. “Situationists” and “exceptionists” would be likely to be found between these two extremes in terms of their ethical beliefs.

Specifically, the objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To determine to what extent elderly consumers are Machiavellian.
2. To determine the preferred ethical ideologies of the elderly.
3. To examine the ethical beliefs of elderly consumers concerning various questionable consumer practices
4. To examine the relationships between Machiavellianism, preferred ethical ideology and ethical beliefs for elderly consumers.

Methodology

Sample

Self-administered questionnaires were mailed to 1,600 residents above the age of 60 in one large Southeastern United States metropolitan area. Of these, 431 responses were returned for a response rate of 27% with 394 being usable for the purpose of this study. The sample ranged in age from 60 to 79 with a mean of 68.

Seventy-two percent of the respondents were married with 70% being male. Thirty-three percent of the respondents were retired, while 20% held either part-time or full-time jobs. A comparison between this sample and population characteristics taken from the Statistical Abstracts of United States (1989) for this metropolitan area, shows this sample to be more educated and to have less retirees. The percentage of retirees among the elderly population were 86% and the levels of education for the elderly population showed that 10% had only a high school diploma. In other respects the sample is representative of the population from which it was drawn.

Measures

Machiavellianism was measured using the MACH IV scale developed by Christie and Geis (1970). This scale contains 20 items with 10 items worded in a Machiavellian direction and 10 items worded in the opposite direction. These items appear in the [Appendix](#). Each respondent was asked to indicate the extent of his or her agreement or disagreement with each of the 20 items using a five-point Likert scale. A Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.623 was obtained for this scale. This compares to one of 0.76 obtained by Hunt and Chonko (1984) in a study of marketing practitioners and split-half reliability of 0.79 reported by Christie and Geis (1970) using a student sample.

A second construct measured was one's predominant ethical perspective. This was measured using the Ethics Position Questionnaire (EPQ) developed by Forsyth (1980). The EPQ consists of two scales, each containing 10 items (see the [Appendix](#)). One is designed to measure idealism and the second is designed to measure relativism, or the rejection of universal moral principles. Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with each item using a five-point Likert format. Cronbach's coefficient alpha for the idealism scale was 0.849 and for the relativism scale it was 0.830.

These two scales were then used to classify respondents into one of four ethical ideologies. The mean score of one's responses to the idealism scale and the mean score of one's responses to the relativism scale are combined to determine one's ethical ideology. Respondents who had high scores on both scales are considered "situationists." Those who are high on the idealism scale but low on relativism are

Table 22.1 Factor analysis for consumer ethics scale

Dimension name and items	Factor loading	Cronbach's alpha
I. Actively benefitting from illegal activity		0.760
Drinking a can of soda in a supermarket without paying for it	0.788	
Using a long distance access code that does not belong to you	0.740	
Giving misleading price information to a clerk for an unpriced item	0.682	
Reporting a lost item as "stolen" to an insurance company in order to collect the money	0.536	
Changing price-tags on merchandise in a retail store	0.532	
II. Passively benefitting		0.755
Not saying anything when the waitress miscalculates the bill in your favor	0.817	
Getting too much change and not saying anything	0.773	
Lying about a child's age in order to get a lower price	0.715	
Moving into a new residence and finding that the cable TV is still hooked up, and using it rather than signing up and paying for it	0.713	
III. Actively benefitting from questionable action		0.730
Stretching the truth on an income tax return	0.732	
Using a coupon for merchandise you did not buy	0.655	
Using an expired coupon for merchandise	0.600	
Not telling the truth when negotiating the price of a new automobile	0.548	
IV. No harm/no foul		0.747
Taping a movie off the television	0.747	
Returning merchandise after trying it and not liking it	0.722	
Recording an album instead of buying it	0.681	
Using computer software or games that you did not buy	0.618	
Spending over an hour trying on different dresses and not purchasing any	0.596	

classified as "absolutists." Respondents low on idealism but high on relativism are "subjectivists," and those low on both scales are considered "exceptionist."

The third construct used in the study measured one's beliefs regarding 20 consumer situations having potentially ethical implications. This "consumer ethics" scale was developed by Muncy and Vitell (1989). Respondents were asked to rate whether they perceived these actions as being wrong (unethical) or not wrong (ethical) on a five-point scale.

Principal components factor analysis with a varimax rotation was performed on the data yielding a four factor solution. The results appear in Table 22.1. Two of the

questions did not load on any of the four factors; however, the factor structure for the remaining items was consistent with the Muncy and Vitell study. The first factor might be labeled as “actively benefitting from an illegal activity.” The most distinguishing characteristics of these actions are that they are all initiated by the consumer (e.g., changing price tags on merchandise in a store) and they are all likely to be perceived as illegal by most consumers. Five questions loaded on this factor, with the coefficient alpha being 0.760.

The second factor can be labeled as “passively benefitting at the expense of others.” Here the consumer benefits from the seller’s mistake (e.g., getting too much change and not saying anything) rather than his own actions. The coefficient alpha for this factor was 0.755 with four items loading on it. The third factor might be labeled as “actively benefitting from a questionable, but not necessarily illegal, action.” Here, as in the first factor, the consumer initiates the action, but these are not as likely to be perceived as illegal (e.g., not telling the truth when negotiating the price of a new automobile). The four items loading on this factor yielded a coefficient alpha of 0.730.

The fourth factor can be labeled as “no harm/no foul.” These are actions that consumers perceive as not resulting in any harm and, therefore, at least some consumers perceive them as acceptable actions. The five questions loading on this factor have a coefficient alpha of 0.747.

Findings

Elderly Consumers and Machiavellianism

The MACH IV scale was used to determine the extent to which elderly consumers might be Machiavellian. To compare the results of this study to previous ones using the MACH IV scale, 40 points were added to all scores so that a score of 100 would represent the neutral point. After doing this, the mean score for the sample was 90.9 with overall scores ranging from a minimum of 70 to a maximum of 126.

Comparing this result to previous studies indicates that elderly consumers are somewhat *more* Machiavellian than those in other groups. For example, in examining the degree of Machiavellianism among marketing professionals, Hunt and Chonko (1984) obtained a mean score of 85.7, and in researching Machiavellianism among an adult population, Christie and Geis (1970) obtained a mean of 84.5.

This result is somewhat unexpected as younger people are generally considered to be less “ethical” and, therefore, more Machiavellian. However, based on only one study, it would be premature to claim that elderly consumers are more Machiavellian than their younger counterparts, especially since it may be inappropriate to compare this sample to previous ones. Nevertheless, the results, if supported in future research, could have significant implications for marketers who are concentrating their efforts towards elderly markets.

Elderly Consumers and Ethical Ideology

The Ethics Position Questionnaire (EPQ) was used to determine the dominant ethical ideologies of respondents. The mean score on the idealism scale was 40.4 and on the relativism scale it was 26.0. Since the neutral point for each scale is represented by a score of 30 (scores range from 10 to 50), it appears that elderly consumers generally believe that morally “right” behavior leads to good or positive consequences (idealism scale). It also appears that they do *not* reject the notion that absolute moral principles do exist (relativism scale). This relatively high position on the idealism scale and low one on the relativism scale tends to indicate that the elderly are relatively “ethical” as a group. This result is consistent with the previous research involving age and ethics (Ma 1985; Pratt et al. 1983; Vitell 1986).

However, these results are somewhat in conflict with the finding that elderly consumers are relatively Machiavellian since it would be expected “that highly Machiavellian persons would endorse ethical beliefs that were more relativistic and less idealistic than low Machs” (Leary et al. 1986, p. 76). However, respondents in the present study, even though they scored fairly high on the MACH IV scale, seem to be *more* idealistic and *less* relativistic.

When respondents are grouped into the four ethical ideologies, the picture becomes clearer, however. Of the 394 respondents, 78 (19.8%) are exceptionists, 81 (20.6%) are subjectivists, 122 (30.9%) are absolutists and 113 (28.7%) are situationists. If one examines just the subjectivists, since they are the most likely to be Machiavellian due to their rejection of moral rules, one observes a MACH IV score of 96.2. This is considerably higher than the overall mean for the other three groups (89.5), and higher than the mean for each individual group: 87.2 for absolutist; 90.4 for exceptionists; and 91.2 for situationists.

These results indicate that there is a significant group of elderly consumers who tend to be high Machiavellian subjectivists. At the same time, however, the majority of elderly consumers seem to accept the tenets of idealism while rejecting relativism. This majority is about average, or slightly higher, in terms of its Machiavellianism. Thus, while most elderly consumers appear to be relatively ethical, a significant segment exists that believes ethics are a matter of personal feelings.

Elderly Consumers and Consumer Ethics

One factor generated from the consumer ethics scale was comprised of those activities where one “actively benefits from an illegal activity.” Respondents overwhelmingly believed that these activities were unethical as the mean for the five items was 1.19, with 1 corresponding to “definitely wrong” and 5 to “definitely not wrong.” The mean for these same five items in the Muncy and Vitell (1989) study was 1.42, indicating that elderly consumers tend to be less accepting of this type of behavior than the general population.

A second factor generated from this scale was described as “passively benefitting at the expense of others.” The mean for the four items of this factor was 1.51 indicating that, while these activities were still considered unethical, they were somewhat less unethical than those where one *actively* does something to benefit oneself. The mean for these same four items in the Muncy and Vitell (1989) study was 1.98. This, again, indicates that elderly consumers tend to also view these behaviors as being more unethical than do consumers in general.

“Actively benefitting from a questionable, but not necessarily illegal, action” described the third factor generated from the consumer ethics scale. The mean for the four questions related to this factor was 1.69. Thus, these activities too were clearly viewed as unethical by elderly consumers. However, in the Muncy and Vitell (1989) study, the average mean of these same items was 2.16, indicating that, at least some, younger consumers must have viewed these behaviors as being somewhat acceptable.

Finally, five questions formed the factor, “no harm/no foul.” These were the least unethical practices as viewed by elderly consumers with the mean of these being 2.86. Thus, overall, elderly consumers were somewhat neutral as to whether these were ethical or unethical behaviors. As before, the mean for the same items in the Muncy and Vitell (1989) study was higher (3.38).

In summary, it appears that elderly consumers are more inclined to view all types of “questionable” consumer activities as more unethical than are younger consumers. This result is consistent with the previous research on age and ethics. However, as mentioned, the comparison of this sample with previous ones may be inappropriate. The relative relationships between the various factors was the same for elderly consumers and for younger consumers, however.

Determinants of Ethical Beliefs

Finally, multivariate analysis of covariance was performed with the four dimensions of the consumer ethics scale as dependent variables and the EPQ ideologies as an independent variable with Machiavellianism and age as covariates. In addition, gender was included as an independent variable in the analysis.

The purpose of this analysis was to determine whether or not one’s ethical ideology and the extent of one’s Machiavellianism would have any impact on one’s ethical beliefs relative to various consumer practices, and whether or not this would vary depending upon the type of consumer practices involved. Gender and age were included to see if there might be any differences in ethical beliefs based on these demographic variables. Even though this was an elderly population, it was felt that there was a sufficient age distribution to warrant an examination of this variable.

The results appear in Tables 22.2 and 22.3 and indicate that one’s ethical ideology is a significant overall determinant of a consumer’s ethical beliefs. More specifically, univariate tests indicate a significant relationship between the EPQ and both “passively benefitting at the expense of others” and “no harm/no foul” activities. An examination of the means for the different EPQ ideologies indicates that for all four

Table 22.2 Results of Mancova analysis – independent variables

Source	F-test
I. Multivariate tests	
Ethical ideology	2.04*
Gender	4.65**
Interaction	ns
II. Univariate tests	
A. Dependent variable – actively benefitting from illegal activity	
Ethical ideology	ns
Gender	ns
Interaction	3.21*
B. Dependent variable – passively benefitting	
Ethical ideology	3.55*
Gender	ns
Interaction	ns
C. Dependent variable – actively benefitting from questionable action	
Ethical ideology	ns
Gender	14.43**
Interaction	ns
D. Dependent variable – no harm/no foul	
Ethical ideology	4.35*
Gender	ns
Interaction	ns

* $p=0.05$; ** $p=0.01$
 Note: ns = not statistically significant

Table 22.3 Results of Mancova analysis – covariates

Source	T-test
I. Univariate tests	
A. Dependent variable – actively benefitting from illegal activity	
Machiavellianism	2.53*
Age	ns
B. Dependent variable – passively benefitting	
Machiavellianism	3.68**
Age	ns
C. Dependent variable – actively benefitting from questionable action	
Machiavellianism	5.99**
Age	ns
D. Dependent variable – no harm/no foul	
Machiavellianism	2.58**
Age	-2.40*

* $p=0.05$; ** $p=0.01$
 Note: ns = not statistically significant

categories of consumer activities, “subjectivists” are the ones who most believe that these activities *are* ethical. In addition, “absolutists” are consistently those who most believe these activities to be ethical. These results are as expected since subjectivists and absolutists are relative “extremists” with subjectivists rejecting moral rules, on the one hand, and absolutists believing in moral absolutes, on the other.

The multivariate main effect for gender was significant. However, univariate tests show that gender was only significant in determining beliefs for those consumer practices described as “actively benefitting from a questionable, but not necessarily illegal, action.” In this instance and for the other three categories of consumer practices as well, women tended to find these as more unethical than men. This may be explained, in part, by the fact that men tended to be somewhat more Machiavellian than women.

Machiavellianism was a significant covariate for each category of consumer beliefs, with those who were Machiavellian believing the practices to be more acceptable than their less Machiavellian counterparts.

Finally, age was only a significant covariate in relation to the “no harm/no foul” behaviors with older consumers believing that these practices were more unethical than younger consumers. The fact that an elderly population, with a limited diversity in age, was used might explain why this variable had no impact on the other categories of consumer practices.

Conclusions and Implications

Overall the elderly consumers sampled are somewhat more Machiavellian than the general population as reported in previous research. However, it appears that it is a small, but significant segment that are Machiavellian with the majority of those surveyed being about the same as the rest of the population in terms of this particular personality variable.

In terms of their ethical ideologies, the largest single group (30.9%) was “absolutists,” or those who strictly conform to moral absolutes and norms. A second group, “exceptionist,” represent 19.8% of the sample. These are individuals who believe in conformity to moral rules, but who further believe that under certain extraordinary circumstances exceptions are permissible. Thus, a majority of elderly consumers have strong ethical norms that guide their behavior.

Additionally, the second largest group of respondents (28.7%) was “situationists” who, while they do reject moral rules, judge the ethics of a situation by the consequences and outcomes of the situation. Most of these individuals are probably utilitarians who seek out those alternatives that generate the greatest good for the greatest number of individuals.

Only the “subjectivists” (20.6%) have questionable ethics since these are the consumers who not only reject moral rules, but base their ethical judgments on personal feelings. This was supported by the finding that the “subjectivists” were the ones who consistently felt that each of the four groups of questionable consumer activities were “less wrong” as compared to the beliefs of other elderly consumers.

Given the percentage of “subjectivists,” we might conclude that the vast majority of elderly consumers are relatively ethical. This fact was supported by the finding that elderly consumers tended to view each of the four groups of consumer activities as “more wrong” than did the general population. One’s beliefs concerning the ethicalness of the various consumer practices examined was a function of one’s ethical ideology, the extent of one’s Machiavellianism and one’s gender. This latter finding showed that elderly women were somewhat more ethical than elder men in terms of their ethical beliefs.

Overall, the results of this study tend to show that elderly consumers, while generally being more ethical than younger consumers, are quite diverse in terms of their ethical beliefs. They are represented by a variety of ethical ideologies; their numbers include both Machiavellians and those who are not; and they possess very divergent beliefs about selected consumer practices. Just as it would be a mistake to consider elderly consumers as a homogeneous group in terms of their general attitudes and beliefs, it would be a mistake to consider them as homogeneous in terms of their ethical beliefs.

Appendix

List of scale items

Machiavellian scale

1. Never tell anyone the real reason you did something unless it is useful to do so.
2. The best way to handle people is to tell them what they want to hear.
3. One should take action only when sure it is morally right.
4. Most people are basically good and kind.
5. It is safest to assume that all people have a vicious streak and it will come out when given the chance.
6. Honesty is the best policy in all cases.
7. There is no excuse for lying to someone else.
8. Generally speaking, people won’t work hard unless they’re forced to do so.
9. All in all, it is better to be humble and honest than to be important and dishonest.
10. When you ask someone to do something for you, it is best to give the real reasons for wanting it rather than giving reasons which carry more weight.
11. People who get ahead in the world lead clean, moral lives.
12. Anyone who completely trusts others is asking for big trouble.
13. The biggest difference between criminals and others is that the criminals are stupid enough to get caught.
14. Most people are brave.
15. It is wise to flatter important people.
16. It is possible to be good in all respects.
17. Barnum was wrong when he said that there’s a sucker born every minute.

18. It is hard to get ahead without cutting corners.
19. People suffering from incurable diseases should have the choice of being put painlessly to death.
20. Most people forget more easily the death of their father than the loss of their property.

Ethics position questionnaire (EPQ)

I. Idealism scale

1. A person should make certain that their actions never intentionally harm another even to a small degree.
2. Risks to another should never be tolerated, irrespective of how small the risks might be.
3. The existence of potential harm to others is always wrong, irrespective of the benefits to be gained.
4. One should never psychologically or physically harm another person.
5. One should not perform an action which might in any way threaten the dignity and welfare of another individual.
6. If an action could harm an innocent other, then it should not be done.
7. Deciding whether or not to perform an act by balancing the positive consequences of the act against the negative consequences of the act is immoral.
8. The dignity and welfare of people should be the most important concern in any society.
9. It is never necessary to sacrifice the welfare of others.
10. Moral actions are those which closely match ideals of the most “perfect” action.

II. Relativism scale

1. There are no ethical principles that are so important that they should be a part of any code of ethics.
2. What is ethical varies from one situation and society to another.
3. Moral standards should be seen as being individualistic; what one person considers to be moral may be judged to be immoral by another person.
4. Different types of moralities cannot be compared as to “rightness”.
5. What is ethical for everyone can never be resolved since what is moral or immoral is up to the individual.
6. Moral standards are simply personal rules which indicate how a person should behave, and are not to be applied in making judgments of others.
7. Ethical considerations in interpersonal relations are so complex that individuals should be allowed to formulate their own individual codes.
8. Rigidly codifying an ethical position that prevents certain types of actions stand in the way of better human relations and adjustment.
9. No rule concerning lying can be formulated; whether a lie is permissible or not permissible totally depends upon the situation.
10. Whether a lie is judged to be moral or immoral depends upon the circumstances surrounding the action.

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