
Marketing Ethics: Sales Professionals Versus Other Marketing Professionals

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Both the sales profession and other marketing professions encounter situations that may be ethically troublesome. Are those in diverse marketing professions different regarding their ethical beliefs and opinions? This study compares sales professionals with other marketing practitioners with respect to various measures of ethics. The results suggest that members of the sales profession do not differ from members of other marketing professions with respect to their Machiavellianism, deontological norms, perceptions of ethical problems, and perceptions of feasible alternatives. However, the results indicate that sales professionals tend to place more importance on their personal interests than other marketing professionals.

Introduction

Society probably holds a more skeptical attitude toward marketing than toward most other professions. The relatively high visibility of marketing is partly the reason why many of the ethical questions that occur in organizations are often linked to marketing related decisions. That is, as Ferrell and Gresham (1985, p.88) pointed out, the "marketer performs a boundary spanning role for the organization ... (the) marketer links the task environment to the organization by defining consumer needs and satisfaction." Within marketing itself, the sales

profession (e.g., salesperson, sales manager, and sales director), because of its high visibility plus extremely competitive nature, may be viewed even less favorably than other marketing occupations. For instance, a 1983 Gallup Poll on honesty and ethical standards revealed that sales professionals (i.e., insurance salespeople and car salespeople) are generally perceived by the public to be at the bottom of the honesty/ethical ladder (Laczniak and Murphy 1985, p.99).

Is there, in fact, any difference between sales professionals and other marketers in terms of ethical beliefs and opinions? This study is an attempt to partially explore this question. While a plethora of studies have been conducted to examine the ethical behavior of salespeople or marketers in general (e.g., Bellizzi and Hite 1989; Laczniak and Inderrieden 1987; Caywood and Laczniak 1986; Chonko and Hunt 1985; Chonko and Burnett 1983; and Dubinsky, Berkowitz and Rudelius 1980), to date, there has been very little interest among marketing ethics researchers concerning the differences between the various marketing occupations regarding their honesty and ethical standards. The objective of this paper is to compare members of the sales profession with members of other marketing professions in terms of selected measures of marketing ethics to determine if these "perceived" differences are based on actual differences. Previous research indicates that those in marketing posi-

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tions are at least as ethical as those from other functional areas and probably more so (Lincoln, Pressley, and Little 1982; Barnett and Karson 1987). Particularly relevant to this study, Barnett and Karson (1987) found that, based on areas of work, "qualitative area" executives (including sales executives) are proportionately more ethical than "quantitative area" executives. Thus, if it can be shown that salespeople are as ethical as other marketers, we can infer that they are at least as ethical as those in other business positions. In other words, perceptions that sales professionals are less ethical than other groups would be erroneous.

Specifically, the "ethics" variables explored are: perceptions of ethical problem, perceptions of the evoked set of feasible alternatives, deontological norms, Machiavellianism, and perceived importance of self. As will be discussed in detail later, these measures of ethics were selected because of their importance as evidenced in various theoretical and empirical works in the area.

Ethics of Sales Profession

According to Murphy and Lacznik (1981), the ethics of sales personnel is one of the areas in marketing ethics that draws constant criticism. The reason, as they pointed out (p.257), is "Because almost every consumer has been pressured to buy something that she/he didn't intend to buy, sales representatives are often categorically labeled as being unethical." As alluded to earlier, the ethical problems surrounding the sales profession are partially explainable by its highly visible role. For example, supporting the position that "opportunity" is a factor of marketing ethics decision making, Ferrell and Gresham (1985) explained that:

the operating exigencies of the firm bring the marketer into contact with situations that may be judged as ethical or unethical (right or wrong). Such situations may include placing marketers in positions to use deceptive advertising, fix prices, rig bids, ... (p. 88)

Following Osborn and Hunt's (1974) position, Ferrell and Gresham went on to hypothesize that "those parts of the organization most exposed to the environment will be under more pressure to deviate" (p.88). Following this assertion, since the sales professionals' role is a more "exposed" one compared to those of other marketers, they may be more likely to "deviate" from ethical norms or ethical behavior than other marketers.

Based on a literature review, to date, the only study that examines the differences between salespeople and other business professionals is by Dubinsky and Gwin (1981). Their study was based on a survey of salespeople and purchasing personnel from trade associations in a midwestern region. In particular, the study compares the ethical perceptions of "buyers" and "sellers" by using eleven ethically sensitive situations in an industrial marketing setting. The following aspects of their findings are pertinent to the present study:

Purchasers see *more* of the situations to be ethically questionable than salespeople... Purchasing personnel feel *more strongly* than salespeople that some of the situations are ethically questionable. (p. 14)

Based on their findings, the sales profession appears to be generally "ethically" less sensitive than at least one other group of business professionals—the purchasing personnel. However, Dubinsky and Gwin (1981) cautioned against broad generalizations from the above results because of several limitations surrounding the representativeness of their samples and the sensitivity of the survey issue itself.

A recent study by Bellizzi and Hite (1989) is on the sales manager's supervision of unethical salesforce behavior. Although their study focuses only on sales manager, their findings lend additional support to the potentially negative impact of the reward/punishment policy on the ethics of the sales professional and, moreover, suggest questionable ethics among the sales managers themselves. Based on their survey of sales professional members of the American Marketing Association, they concluded that *sales performance* is one of the factors that "... can affect supervisory reaction and lead to a reduced sanction ... if they are a top sales performer... These results suggest that sales managers may be less than uniform in curbing unethical salesforce behavior" (p.45). As also pointed out by Bellizzi and Hite (1989), the sales managers themselves are commonly rewarded on the basis of short-run sales performance!

Given the limited empirical works that directly compare the sales profession with other occupations in marketing or other business professionals, an examination of some conceptual literature relating to marketing ethics decision making is needed to provide additional insights into the research problem. Major theoretical works in marketing ethics recognize organizational environment as an important factor of marketing ethics behavior (e.g., Ferrell

and Gresham 1985; Hunt and Vitell 1986; Ferrell, Gresham and Fraedrich 1989). For example, the Ferrell-Gresham model specifies corporate policy and rewards/punishment as important organizational determinants of marketing ethics decision making. Also implied by the Hunt-Vitell model, the organizational environment, of which reward policy is a part, is a determinant of various components of a marketer's ethical decision making—for example, perceptions of ethical problem, perceptions of alternatives, and other elements of a marketer's deontological and teleological evaluations.

Wotruba (1990, p.29) believes that the above models in marketing ethics are more appropriate "for the broader realm of marketing management" and has proposed an integrated framework specifically for the analysis of the ethical behavior of sales managers and salespeople. Supporting a concern for more ethics in sales management, Wotruba argued that since members of a sales organization often work in isolation (i.e., little socialization with supervisors, subordinates, or peers), the "resulting impact on ethical decision making can be negative" (p.30). His argument is based on Nichols and Day's (1982) finding that group decisions are more likely to be of higher levels of moral reasoning than individual decisions. Another potential negative factor of the ethical behavior of sales professionals is the nature of their performance evaluation. Wotruba asserted that "Sales organization members face strong pressures to perform, since their performance results are more clearly measurable than in many other organizational units" (p.30). Therefore, relative to other marketers, given that the salespeople often work in isolation and that they probably face stronger pressures to perform, the salespeople may tend to be of lower "levels of moral reasoning" than other groups.

Marketing Ethics Variables

The major purpose of this study is to explore whether or not members of the sales profession have ethical beliefs and opinions that differ from members of other marketing professions. The previous literature review generally suggests that they may have different ethical beliefs and opinions because of the nature of their jobs. However, this issue deserves empirical attention. Research findings regarding the sales professionals' ethical beliefs and opinions relative to those of other marketing professionals would have significant bearings on

various aspects of salesforce management—for example, hiring and establishment of an ethics policy including ethical training within a sales organization. Therefore, as stated previously, members of the sales profession will be compared with members of other marketing professions in terms of their perceptions of ethical problems and alternatives, Machiavellianism, deontological norms, and self-importance. These specific variables are included because of their importance as evidenced in various empirical and theoretical works in marketing ethics. While behavior is not tested in this study, all of these variables impact on behavior (Hunt and Vitell 1986). Thus, they should be of as much interest to managers as behavioral variables, perhaps even more so. The following review provides the rationale behind their inclusion and the underlying basis for our research hypotheses.

Perception of Ethical Problem and Alternatives

According to major theoretical works in marketing ethics, perceptual differences of factual reality are one of the major sources of variance in ethical judgments (e.g., Hunt and Vitell 1986; Ferrell, Gresham and Fraedrich 1989). Relevant to this study, a general theory of marketing ethics by Hunt and Vitell (1986) states that the perceptual framework includes the following two constructs: perceived ethical problem and perceived alternatives. These dimensions of an individual's perception are in turn influenced by various background factors. As implied by Hunt and Vitell (1986), the construct perceived ethical problem is basically the degree to which an individual marketer perceives that a situation involves an ethical issue. Based on the general conclusion that sales professionals may have ethical beliefs and opinions that are less ethical than other marketers, the following hypothesis will be tested:

Hypothesis 1: Members of the sales profession will tend to perceive an ethical problem to be less severe than members of other marketing professions.

According to Hunt and Vitell (1986, p.9), the "perception of alternatives" construct can be defined as "actions that might be followed to resolve the ethical problem." That is, given that the decision maker perceives a situation as involving an ethical issue, he/she is then likely to perceive various possible courses of remedial action to follow. Concep-

tually, the construct can be categorized into three basic dimensions: punitive action, non-punitive action, and no action. The following hypotheses were formulated with respect to these three dimensions of perceived alternatives:

Hypothesis 2: Members of the sales profession will tend to agree less with punishment as an alternative course of action than members of other marketing professions.

Hypothesis 3: Members of the sales profession will tend to agree more with a non-punitive alternative as a possible course of action than members of other marketing professions.

Hypothesis 4: Members of the sales profession will tend to agree more with a no-action alternative as a possible course of action than members of other marketing professions.

Deontological Norms

The construct deontological norms is grounded in one of the two major types of normative ethical theories referred to by most moral philosophers as "deontological theories" (the other type is "teleological theories"). Basically, deontologists make their ethics related decisions by focusing on duties and obligations relating to specific actions or behaviors—the process referred to by Hunt and Vitell (1986) as "deontological evaluation." As explained by Hunt and Vitell, deontologists evaluate the inherent rightness or wrongness of feasible courses of action for a given ethical situation by comparing them with a set of predetermined guidelines that represent personal values or rules of behavior—the *deontological norms*. The following research hypothesis regarding deontological norms will be tested:

Hypothesis 5: Members of the sales profession will tend to possess marketing-related deontological norms that are less "ethical" than members of other marketing professions.

Self Importance

The third marketing ethics variable investigated in this study is self importance. The concept has its root in teleological theories (one of the two major classes of normative ethical theories in moral phi-

losophy previously mentioned) which focuses on the consequences of one's actions or behaviors. In their general theory of marketing ethics, Hunt and Vitell (1986) depict "teleological" evaluation as an important part of a marketer's ethical judgments. Importance of stakeholders or the relative significance of each set of stakeholders to the individual marketer was specified as a key determinant of his/her teleological evaluation. The following stakeholder groups have been identified in the literature: self, company, clients, and fellow employees (e.g., Brenner and Molander 1977; Zey-Ferrell, Weaver and Ferrell 1979). This study focuses on self or personal importance—that is, the degree that a marketer perceives his/her importance relative to the importance of other stakeholder groups. Following the general conclusion that members of the sales profession may have ethical beliefs and opinions that are less ethical than members of other marketing professions, the following hypothesis was formulated with respect to self importance:

Hypothesis 6: Members of the sales profession will tend to value their personal interests, relative to other's interests, more than members of other marketing professions.

Machiavellianism

Machiavellianism is a personality variable originated by Christie et al. (1968, 1970). According to Robinson and Shaver (1973), Machiavellianism can be defined as "a person's general strategy for dealing with people, especially the degree to which (s)he feels other people are manipulable in interpersonal situations" (p.590). In his study of purchasing managers' Machiavellianism, Chonko (1982) argues that "the Machiavellian concept can be used to 'position' people in terms of persuasive and manipulative patterns of behavior in interpersonal situations" (p.15).

Several studies in marketing ethics have reported that Machiavellianism is a determinant of certain aspects of marketing ethics decision making. For example, Hegarty and Sims (1978, 1979), using a sample of graduate business students, found Machiavellianism to be a significant covariate in their studies. Specifically, they found high Machiavellian subjects to behave significantly less ethically than low Machiavellian subjects.

Machiavellianism is also one of the background variables included in a recent marketing ethics

study by Singhapakdi and Vitell (1990). Using professional members of the American Marketing Association as a sample, they found Machiavellianism to be a determinant of various components of a marketer's marketing ethics decision making. In particular, they found that Machiavellian marketers tend to perceive ethical problems to be less serious than their counterparts. In addition, they found Machiavellian marketers to be more reluctant to punish unethical behavior. The following hypothesis regarding Machiavellianism was formulated based on the general conclusion discussed earlier that sales professionals may have ethical beliefs and opinions that are less ethical than members of other marketing professions:

Hypothesis 7: Members of the sales profession will tend to be more Machiavellian than members of other marketing professions.

Methodology

The Sample

This study used an American Marketing Association (AMA) mailing list of members with stated fields of professional interest in marketing management and sales management as the sampling frame. A self-administered questionnaire was chosen as the data collection method for this research. A total of 1,998 respondents were sampled from a list of 8,592 members. Of the 1,993 delivered, 529 persons responded for a response rate of 26.54%. The response rate is comparable to those of previous marketing ethics studies that have also used AMA practitioners as a sample. For example, Hunt and Chonko (1984) and Hunt, Chonko and Wilcox (1984) obtained a response rate of 25.1% in their studies using an AMA mailing list. In another survey of AMA practitioners, Myers, Massy and Greyser (1980) obtained 28.5% response rate.

After the cut-off period of approximately six weeks, a follow-up telephone call to a random sample of 50 "non-respondents" was conducted to test for bias due to non-response. Two demographic characteristics—number of years of formal education and number of years of business experience—were measured for this purpose. A total of 39 non-respondents were successfully contacted by telephone. A comparison test (via T-test) between the "respondent" and the "non-respondent" groups with respect to the selected variables shows that there are no statistical differences between the two groups.

It should be pointed out that the two demographic variables selected for testing non-response bias are related to the types of constructs measured in this study. For example, a study by Singhapakdi and Vitell (1991) shows that the number of years of business experience is significantly correlated with both Machiavellianism and deontological norms. Additionally, level of education has been found to be positively related to one's ethical ideology by Vitell, Lumpkin and Rawwas (1991).

Of the 529 persons that responded to the survey, 117 respondents did not classify themselves as either a marketing executive, a sales professional, or any other marketing professional and, thus, were excluded from this study. Of the 412 remaining respondents, 98 respondents (23.8%) are sales professionals. Slightly more than half of the 412 remaining respondents (54.9%) are men. Many of the respondents (40.1%) are between 30 and 39 years old. The majority of respondents are generally well educated (e.g., 94.4% have at least an undergraduate education or higher). Consistently, the annual compensation as a whole is high, with more than half of the respondents (57.4%) reporting their income at \$40,000 or higher per year. The respondents of the survey are relatively, evenly scattered throughout the United States. Most respondents (34.3%) are in manufacturing or construction, with 30.3% working in companies with 100 to 1,000 employees. With respect to their business experience, 33.6% reported to have at least 15 years experience. A detailed profile of the sample is given in Table 1.

Measures

Since responding to ethical questions can be a sensitive matter, it was deemed appropriate that a scenario be used to enhance accuracy in measurement. The scenario for studying marketing ethics suggested by Hunt and Vitell (1986) was adopted for this study. The scenario is an industrial selling situation depicting a typical moral dilemma of using cash payments to increase sales (see Appendix A). The operationalizations of perceived ethical problem and perceived alternatives are based on the marketing ethics situation depicted in this scenario.

Perceived Ethical Problem was operationalized by asking respondents whether the industrial selling scenario involved an ethical issue or problem. Each respondent was asked to express his/her agreement or disagreement with this statement:

- Generally speaking, the situation described above involves an ethical issue or problem.

Table 1
Profile of Sample

Factors	Percentage	Factors	Percentage
Sex		Geographic Region	
Male	54.9%	West	15.9%
Female	45.1%	North Central	37.3%
		Northeast	20.3%
Age		South	26.5%
Under 30	28.4%	Industry	
30 to 39	40.1%	Wholesale or Retail	8.5%
40 to 49	22.8%	Manufacturer or Construction	34.3%
50 to 59	7.0%	Services	19.6%
60 and over	1.7%	Communications	11.2%
Education		Advertising & Marketing Research	17.2%
Some college	5.6%	Other	9.2%
Bachelor's degree	32.4%	Size of Company	
Some graduate school	16.6%	Less than 100 employees	24.9%
Graduate degree	45.4%	100 to 999 employees	30.3%
Annual Compensation		1,000 to 9,999 employees	29.1%
Under \$30,000	22.3%	10,000 employees and over	15.7%
\$30,000-39,999	20.3%	Years of Business Experience	
\$40,000-49,999	18.1%	Less than 5	16.8%
\$50,000-59,999	12.7%	5 to 9	28.0%
\$60,000-69,999	8.4%	10 to 14	21.6%
\$70,000-79,999	4.5%	Over 14	33.6%
\$80,000-89,999	5.0%		
\$90,000 and up	8.7%		

Responses were measured by a seven-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (score of 1) to strongly agree (score of 7).

Perceived Alternatives was operationalized by means of an evoked set of feasible alternatives ranging in the degree of severity of actions from "dismiss the salesperson" to "do nothing." Each respondent was asked to express his/her agreement or disagreement with each of the alternatives as a feasible course of action on a seven-point scale (ranging from 1-strongly disagree to 7-strongly agree). The *punitive* dimension consists of these two alternatives:

- Dismiss the salespeople.
- Issue an order stopping future excessive gifts and reduce the salespeople's pay in an amount equal to their commissions on the sales gained as a result of the gifts.

The scores for the punitive dimension of perceived alternatives were computed by summing the scores

of these two statements.

The *non-punitive* and *no-action* dimensions were operationalized by the following statements respectively:

- *Non-punitive*: "Issue an order stopping future excessive gifts."
- *No-action*: "Say and do nothing."

Deontological Norms, following Hunt and Vitell's (1986, p.9) conceptualization, are predetermined guidelines "representing personal values or rules of behavior." According to them, deontological norms can range from very general (e.g., beliefs about honesty, stealing, and cheating) to very specific (e.g., beliefs about deceptive advertising, product safety, and sales "kickbacks"). For the present study, the construct was operationalized by using a set of seven "deontological" statements developed from the American Marketing Association (AMA)'s code of ethics (1986). Since the respondents for this study are AMA members, the operationalization was

Table 2
Analysis of Variance Between Sales and Other Marketers*

Variables	Grand Mean	Sales	Means Others	F-Ratio	Sig Level
Perceived Ethical Problem	5.72 (1.46)	5.84 (1.40)	5.68 (1.47)	0.720	.397
Perceived Alternatives					
Punitive	4.86 (2.69)	5.04 (2.78)	4.80 (2.66)	0.603	.438
Non-punitive	5.64 (1.70)	5.64 (1.69)	5.64 (1.71)	0.000	.985
No-action	2.01 (1.68)	1.81 (1.44)	2.08 (1.75)	1.694	.194
Deontological Norms	44.59 (4.44)	44.12 (3.96)	44.74 (4.57)	1.428	.233
Self Importance	21.45 (6.72)	22.64 (6.43)	21.08 (6.77)	4.076	.044
Machiavellianism	86.74 (12.83)	86.79 (11.42)	86.73 (13.26)	0.002	.968

* The MANOVA F-test was not significant ($F = 1.234, p = .267$) indicating that members of sales profession and members of other marketing professions are not different on combination of these measures of marketing ethics. Standard deviations are given in parentheses.

judged to be a "sensible" one.

In an attempt to have a good representation of AMA's code of ethics, the DN items were selected evenly from the exhaustive topics included in the AMA's code. In particular, one item is from the topic "responsibilities of the marketer," two from "honesty and fairness," three from "rights and duties of parties in the marketing exchange process" and one from "organizational relationships" (see Appendix B). A seven-point, Likert type scale was used. Detail of the factor analysis along with some descriptive statistics of the DN scale have been summarized in Appendix C. As can be seen, factor analysis produced only one factor. As a result, no items were eliminated. In order to assure that any findings from this study are meaningful, a reliability assessment of the DN scale was carried out. The Cronbach's coefficient alpha for the deontological norms scale is .76. This degree of reliability is judged acceptable for this early stage of research (e.g., Peter 1979).

The deontological norms score was computed by summing the scores of all statements. Accordingly, a high value indicates that the respondent is more "ethical" in a deontological sense or may be considered as higher in his/her level of belief with regard to relevant guidelines, values, or rules of behavior.

Self Importance was operationalized by asking each respondent to rate his/her importance relative

to other stakeholders if faced with a hypothetical dilemma where his/her personal best interests are not the same as those of other relevant parties. The pertinent stakeholders used were company, clients, and fellow employees. A seven-point, Likert type scale was used for this purpose. The personal importance items are given in Appendix D. A summary of the principal components analysis of the scale along with detail of the composition of self importance based on the factor analysis are also given there. The Cronbach's coefficient alpha for this construct is equal to .86.

Machiavellianism. This study, like most studies in marketing ethics (e.g., Chonko 1982; Hunt and Chonko 1984; Singhapakdi and Vitell 1990), uses Christie et al.'s (1968) "Mach IV" scale to measure Machiavellianism (see Appendix E). The scale has ten items worded in the "Machiavellian" direction and ten items worded in the opposite direction. Each respondent was asked to indicate his/her extent of agreement or disagreement with each of the twenty items. Following Christie et al.'s (1968) suggestion, a seven-point Likert type scale was also used. For this study, the Cronbach's coefficient alpha for Machiavellianism scale is .74. The value is generally comparable to those from past studies. For example, the alpha value for the "Mach IV" scale reported by Hunt and Chonko (1984) was .76 using a sample of the American Marketing Association's members.

Results

In light of the hypotheses and the measurement level of the variables involved, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was utilized. The ANOVA results along with the group means for all marketing ethics variables investigated have been summarized in Table 2. As can be noticed from the table, the only measure of "ethics" that shows a significant difference between sales professionals and other marketing professionals is self importance. The remaining variables tested, namely perceived ethical problem, the three dimensions of perceived alternatives, deontological norms, and Machiavellianism, are not significant. It should be noted that a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) for the seven measures of ethics tested was not significant ($F = 1.234$, $p = .267$). The results indicate that members of the sales profession are not different from other marketing practitioners based on the combination of these measures of ethics.

According to the ANOVA results, the hypothesis concerning the perception of ethical problem construct (Hypothesis 1) is not tenable. That is, we can not conclude that members of the sales profession will tend to perceive an ethical problem to be less severe than members of other marketing professions. There is no significant difference in how the two groups of marketers perceive the ethical dilemma depicted in the sales management scenario.

Recall that the perceptions of feasible alternatives were categorized into three basic dimensions: punitive action, non-punitive action, and no action. The ANOVA results indicate that none of the hypotheses formulated for these three dimensions of perceived alternatives (i.e., Hypothesis 2 to Hypothesis 4) can be supported. In particular, we can not conclude that members of the sales profession will tend to agree less with punishment as an alternative course of action than members of other marketing professions. Regarding the non-punitive type of feasible action, contrary to the hypothesis, we can not conclude that members of the sales profession will tend to agree more with a non-punitive alternative as a possible course of action than members of other marketing professions. Also, according to the statistical evidences, we can not conclude that members of the sales profession will tend to agree more with a no-action alternative as a possible course of action than members of other marketing professions.

The ANOVA results show no significant difference

between the two groups of marketers with respect to their deontological norms. Accordingly, hypothesis Hypothesis 5 is rejected. That is, the empirical evidence does not support the hypothesis that members of the sales profession will tend to possess deontological norms that are less "ethical" than members of other marketing professions. In other words, we can not conclude that salespeople have ethical beliefs and opinions, in a deontological norms sense, that differ from other marketers.

As stated earlier, the only statistically significant variable is self importance. Based on the ANOVA results, the mean for the self importance measure of sales professionals is significantly larger than that of other marketers. Accordingly, hypothesis Hypothesis 6 is supported. We can conclude that members of the sales profession will tend to value their personal interests more than members of the other marketing professions.

Recall that the personality variable Machiavellianism represents the degree of one's "general strategy for dealing with people, especially the degree to which he feels other people are manipulable in interpersonal situations" (Robinson and Shaver 1973, p.590). According to the ANOVA result, the hypothesis regarding this measure of "ethics" (Hypothesis 7) is not supported. That is, the results indicate that the two groups of marketing practitioners are not different in their degrees of Machiavellianism. We can not conclude that members of the sales profession will tend to be more Machiavellian than members of the other marketing professions.

Conclusions and Limitations

The findings of this study should be viewed cautiously because of certain limitations. One limitation concerns the use of the American Marketing Association (AMA)'s mailing list as sampling frames for both sales professionals and other marketing practitioner groups. One can argue that members of the AMA are not "typical" marketers. That is, similarly to what Hunt and Chonko (1984, p.39) argued in their study of marketers' Machiavellianism, AMA members could be more ethical because they may be "more likely to view marketing as a *profession* than 'just a job.'" However, Hunt and Chonko believed that any systematic bias can go either way. As they explained, "joining an association such as the American Marketing Association may be precisely the kind of behavior a Machiavellian would

engage in" (p.39). Another limitation was that respondents (sales and others) had fairly high incomes (77% over \$30,000) and, therefore, probably work at higher levels. Perhaps those from lower levels or with lower incomes would have responded differently.

Another limitation of this study concerns the fact that only one sales management scenario was used. For future research, it would be interesting to use other ethical scenarios depicting various selling situations. Additionally, some non-selling, marketing scenarios (also portraying different actors—sales and other marketing professionals to account for possible position bias) should be tested. Future research might examine the ethical beliefs and opinions of non-marketers as well. Also, the findings should be viewed cautiously because of the fact that the respondents (sales and non-sales) may have similar educational and professional backgrounds. Potentially, this may explain for the relative lack of significant differences between the two groups. Accordingly, the influences of such background variables as nature of formal education, previous job position, and number of years in current position should be investigated in future research as well. Also, research relating variables such as nature of competition, type of industry (including various aspects of industrial environment), reward system (including type of pay—e.g., salary vs. commission), and various organizational factors to ethical beliefs and opinions is warranted. Finally, research comparing salespeople with sales managers at different levels should prove to be useful.

The fundamental objective of this study was to compare members of the sales profession with other marketing practitioners on selected measures of "ethics" cited in the marketing ethics literature. Concerning the perception of ethical problem, contrary to the hypothesis, members of the sales profession are as "sensitive" as other marketing practitioners to the ethical predicament depicted in the sales management scenario. In terms of perceived feasible alternatives for resolving the ethical problems depicted, there is no difference between the two marketing groups. The members of the sales profession are as likely as other marketers to use punishment or non-punishment to remedy unethical behavior.

We also found the sales professionals to be as agreeable as the members of other marketing professions to deontological norms. That is, both groups

of marketers are equal in their degrees of belief with regard to relevant guidelines, values, or rules of behavior in their works. Moreover, we did not find salespeople to be more "Machiavellian" than other marketers. As may be recalled, the only significant measure is perceived importance of self. That is, relative to other categories of marketers, the sales professionals are more likely to place their own personal interests higher than those of other stakeholders (i.e., company, clients, and fellow employees).

Both the sales profession and other marketing professions encounter certain situations that may be ethically troublesome. Are these marketers different regarding their ethical beliefs and opinions? In terms of the various measures of ethics tested, the differences between members of the sales profession and members of other marketing professions appear to be more apparent than real. As the overall results of this study indicated, sales professionals are not better nor worse than other marketing practitioners on almost all measures of "ethics" tested. Therefore, based on the findings of this study, the "perceived" differences between the sales profession and other marketing occupations are generally not based on actual differences.

While placing somewhat more importance on self than other marketing professionals do, sales professionals appear to be no less ethical than their contemporaries in other marketing positions. The difference for "importance of self" may, in fact, be explained by the fact that salespeople are very independent and self-reliant individuals, especially those that are most successful. Given that ethical behavior of an individual, in theory, can be partly explained by individual differences and perceptions (e.g., Ferrell and Gresham 1985; Hunt and Vitell 1986), the results of this study suggest that some of the criticism directed at sales professionals may be unjustified. As the results of our comparative study of selected individual difference and perceptual variables of marketing ethics indicated, sales professionals are not better or worse than other marketing professionals.

Implications

Contrary to some common perceptions and contrary to previous research (e.g., Dubinsky and Given 1981; Bellizzi and Hite 1989; and Wotruba 1990), there appears to be very little, if anything, which is

inherent in a sales career or in the personalities of those attracted to sales careers that causes them to have different ethical beliefs and opinions from other marketers. That is, sales professionals are not different from other marketers in terms of their Machiavellianism, their ethical norms, and their perceptions of ethical problems and remedial alternatives. If there were something inherently less ethical in the sales career or in the people attracted to sales careers, it would make it extremely difficult for firms to influence the ethics of their sales organizations. However, with those in sales positions having essentially similar ethical beliefs and opinions as those in other marketing positions, it should be no more difficult to influence the ethics of one's salespeople than any other marketing personnel. This does not mean that this task is easy, but it certainly should ease the implementation of an ethics policy within a sales organization.

Since there is little difference between these in sales positions as compared to those in other marketing positions, firms do not need to be overly concerned that those who are attracted to sales jobs are somehow any less ethical than applicants attracted to other positions. Thus, whatever precautions work in hiring others should be sufficient for use in hiring and screening sales personnel. This does not mean that firms need not be concerned with the ethical beliefs and perceptions of sales professionals, only that they need not take any additional precautions in hiring salespeople as compared to other marketing personnel.

A final implication is that the sales profession may not have done a very good job of "marketing itself." That is, based on the findings of this study on certain ethical beliefs and opinions, the common perception of salespeople as being the least trustworthy of individuals may not be accurate. Yet, sales continues to be perceived in this manner. Therefore, future research should also examine the relative influences of Machiavellianism, deontological norms, perceptions of ethical problems, and perceptions of feasible alternatives on ethical behavior or behavioral intention of salespeople. In addition, a direct comparison between salespeople and other marketers in terms of their ethical behaviors should be carried out by future research. If the findings from the future studies are consistent with that of this study, then the sales profession should do something to alter this misperception.

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Appendix A Ethical Content Scenario

You are a 52-year-old regional sales manager for a large industrial supply company. For several years sales have been declining dramatically in your region. After the vice president of sales expressed "grave concern" about this decline, you informed your salespeople that they had better increase their sales "or else drastic steps would be taken."

Total sales for your region during the last six months have increased dramatically. However, you have just found out that several of your most successful salespeople have been providing gifts to purchasing agents in order to increase sales. These gifts have been beyond the normal lunches, dinners, and small promotional items; the gifts were in the form of cash payments in amount of \$100 to \$200. To the best of your knowledge, salespeople in your region have never before used cash gifts. These gifts do *not* violate any laws.

You must decide what to do about this situation (if anything). As regional sales manager, your pay raises and promotions will be based in large part upon the overall sales level in your region.

Source: Hunt and Vitell (1986)

Appendix B Deontological Norms Scale*

- DN1: The marketer's professional conduct must be guided by the adherence to all applicable laws and regulations.
- DN2: Being honest in serving consumers, clients, employees, suppliers, distributors and the public.
- DN3: Communication in a manner that is truthful and forthright.
- DN4: All parties intend to discharge their obligations, financial and otherwise, in good faith.
- DN5: Rejection of high pressure selling tactics such as the use of associates to mislead or the use of bait and switch to manipulate.
- DN6: Not manipulating the availability of a product for purpose of exploitation.
- DN7: Meet their obligations and responsibilities in contracts and mutual agreements in a timely manner.

*AMA's Selected Codes of Ethics (1986)

Appendix C
Principal Components Analysis^a and Descriptive
Statistics of Deontological Norms Scale

Items	Factor ^{bc}	Mean	Standard Deviation
DN1	.57751	6.28	1.05
DN2	.82605	6.55	0.65
DN3	.79263	6.44	0.71
DN4	.61521	6.18	1.26
DN5	.63707	6.47	1.10
DN6	.60873	6.17	1.15
DN7	.65487	6.49	0.73

^aPrincipal components analysis was judged appropriate because this study is interested in the minimum number of factors to account for maximum amount of variance.

^bEigenvalue = 3.23, 46.1% of variance explained.

^cBased on the analysis, only one factor was extracted. Therefore, no rotation was necessary.

Appendix D
Self Importance Scale

- IMP1: I would often place my own personal interests above my company's interests.
- IMP2: I would often place my own personal interests above my clients' interests.
- IMP3: I would often place my own personal interests above my fellow employees' interests.
- IMP4: I would often place my company's interests above my own personal interests.
- IMP5: I would often place my clients' interests above my own personal interests.
- IMP6: I would often place my fellow employees' interests above my own personal interests.

Principal Components Analysis^{a,b}

ITEMS	FACTOR 1 ^c	MEAN	S.D.
IMP1	.80776	3.32	1.55
IMP2	.83928	3.02	1.46
IMP3	.71599	3.66	1.52
IMP4	-.76745	4.32	1.50
IMP5	-.77389	4.47	1.47
IMP6	-.63287	3.77	1.35

Composition of Self Importance^d

$$\text{Self Importance} = \text{IMP1} + \text{IMP2} + \text{IMP3} + [\text{IMP4}] + [\text{IMP5}] + [\text{IMP6}]$$

^a Principal components analysis was used because this study is interested in the minimum number of factors to account for maximum amount of variance.

^b Eigenvalue = 3.46, 57.6% of variance explained.

^c Based on the analysis, only one factor was extracted. Therefore, no rotation was necessary.

^d [] signifies that the corresponding statements are the reversed score items.

Appendix E
Machivellianism Scale (Mach IV)^a

Never tell anyone the real reason you did something unless it is useful to do so.

The best way to handle people is to tell them what they want to hear.

^b One should take action only when sure it is morally right.

^b Most people are basically good and kind.

It is safest to assume that all people have a vicious streak and it will come out when they are given a chance.

^b Honesty is the best policy in all cases.

^b There is no excuse for lying to someone else.

Generally speaking, men won't work hard unless they're forced to do so.

^b All in all it is better to be humble and honest than to be important and dishonest.

^b 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.

^b Most people who get ahead in the world lead clean, moral lives.

Anyone who completely trusts anyone else is asking for trouble.

The biggest difference between most criminals and other people is that the criminals are stupid enough to get caught.

^b Most men are brave.

It is wise to flatter important people.

^b It is possible to be good in all respects.

^b Barnum was wrong when he said that there's a sucker born every minute.

It is hard to get ahead without cutting corners here and there.

People suffering from incurable diseases should have the choice of being put painlessly to death.

Most men forget more easily the death of their father than the loss of their property.

^a Christie (1975).

^b Reversed Item.