

THE MANY SIDES OF ACADEMIC DISHONESTY SANCTIONS

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ABSTRACT

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In the fall of 2009, Michigan State University (MSU) implemented a new policy regarding reports of undergraduate academic dishonesty. Under the new system, instructors are required to submit an academic dishonesty report for any student that they penalize for violations of academic integrity, and these students are placed into a remediation class that I teach. I analyzed student responses from the course, compared course student responses and demographics with those of the larger MSU and national undergraduate populations, compared instructors' descriptions of the events that led to the report being filed with those of students, and performed a longitudinal analysis of course student's attitudes. Demographically, reported students appear to be very similar to those that make up the overall undergraduate population with one major exception: international students are over-represented among the reported by a factor of five as compared to their share of the MSU student population. For all students, ignorance of the rules and punishments for transgressions of the rules were the most frequently self-reported influencers of the students' actions. Student responses also showed evidence of neutralization, rational choice, strain, and poor time management as being contributors to their malfeasance. While most students admitted to some wrongdoing, they regularly did not conceptualize the incident as being as egregious or clear-cut as did the faculty. My findings indicate a frequent and sizable divide in the way reporting faculty frame the actions of reported students and the way reported students frame the actions that led to their report.

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For Audrey and Audrey's Mom

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2009, Michigan State University (MSU) implemented a new policy regarding reports of undergraduate academic dishonesty. Under the new system, instructors are required to submit an academic dishonesty report for any student that they penalize for violations of academic integrity. These reports are sent to the Office of the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education, and students are placed into a remediation class that they must successfully complete in order to finish their undergraduate program. I began teaching this course in the summer of 2010.¹ I was chosen because I had expressed interest in understanding academic dishonesty and already was quite familiar with the literature. Data derived from this unique sample of undergraduates is the cornerstone of my dissertation research.

I analyzed student responses from the course, compared course student responses and demographics with those of the larger MSU and national undergraduate populations, compared instructors' descriptions of the events that led to the report being filed with those of students, and performed a longitudinal analysis of course student's attitudes. In so doing, I have discovered insights that can be usefully added to the sociology of deviance and academic dishonesty scholarly literature. By employing a mixed-methods approach, I hope to overcome some of the methodological pitfalls of studying sensitive behaviors.

¹ In this dissertation, I will use both "I" and "we" when describing actions regarding the course/policy. This is done on purpose, as some decisions were made at my own discretion, while others I inherited or were part of collaboration.

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

The classic “so what?” question is relatively easy to answer here: cheating is happening (perhaps at an accelerated rate and/or more insidiously than previously); cheating is damaging (at the individual, classroom, institutional, and cultural levels); cheating is not just a *private trouble* but is also a *public issue*, to use Mills’ terminology; our understanding of cheating can be improved and, subsequently, the various interventions aimed at lessening cheating can be more effective.

Of course, all this may be a moot point if my research does not add or improve on the cache of scholarly knowledge on academic dishonesty and its diametrically-opposed relative academic integrity. However, due primarily to my unique sample and the context in which my research was conducted, I feel that my project presented here does add valuable insight to the field.

Why studying academic dishonesty is important

In the past few years, academic dishonesty scandals have emerged in the U.S. at almost every educational level imaginable. In July of 2011, the Georgian state government published a report that uncovered a normalized cheating practice in Atlanta public schools that had been occurring for at least a decade. Teachers colluded with principals to change answers on their students’ standardized tests, yielding higher test scores and the institutional benefits that come with them. The report also documented many teachers confessing to other behaviors that helped raise test scores, such as saying answers out loud and/or pointing to them and the strategic seating of students as to facilitate the sharing of answers (Koebler 2011).

Elsewhere students, especially those on the “elite” education track (i.e. private competitive middle and high school to the Ivy League), have been purposefully feigning sickness

and disability in order to receive a diagnosis that yields a competitive edge. A professional diagnosis of ADHD can get a student extra time for taking the SAT (Mitchell 2012). Or, if that is not a potential cheaters prerogative, he can always pay someone to take the test for him. In 2011, *The Christian Science Monitor* ran a story on six high school students who had paid over a thousand dollars for someone else to take the SAT for them who are now facing legal penalties.

While the exposure of these types of cheating is relatively rare, that does not mean that they are not indicative of widespread routines. *U.S. News and World Report* reported in 1999 that “80 percent of high-achieving high schoolers admitted to having cheated at least once,” and that “95 percent of the cheaters said they have never been caught (Kleiner and Lord 1999).”

It is not just over-stressed and ambitious high school students who engage in academic dishonesty. Medical students, MBA students, students in law school, and other post-undergraduate students have also been caught engaging in academic dishonesty. In the fall of 2011, the *Liason Committee on Medical Education*, which doles out accreditation to allopathic medical schools in the U.S., expressed that it believed that Upstate Medical College in New York state should be put on probation as the result of learning that fourth-year students were helping each other with what were supposed to be individual exams and the wake such incidences left behind them (Mulder 2011).

There have even been recent scandals involving medical residents and residency programs colluding to prop up the residents’ scores on board exams. In early 2012, CNN reported that “For years, doctors around the country taking an exam to become board certified in radiology have cheated by memorizing test questions, creating sophisticated banks of what are known as recalls (Zamost, Griffin, and Ansari 2012a).” These physicians were not supposed to be sharing test information and knew they were not supposed to engage in the behavior, but

many shared questions and answers anyway. This practice is neither new nor uncommon. CNN quoted Dr. Gary Becker, the head director of the American Board of Radiology: "It's been going on a long time, I know, but I can't give you a date (Zamost, Griffin, and Ansari 2012a)" He also reported that this practice was not an isolated incident, as it occurs all over the country, even at the most prestigious institutions. A practicing radiologist, Dr. John Yoo, commented to CNN:

From my understanding, I would say nationwide from my friends across the country who are all in the same stages of training throughout the years, everyone gets a group ... People decided beforehand what sections I will focus on, in terms of trying to recall those questions and answers. And then immediately after the examination, the residents get together and try to put these down onto paper or word processor to be able to share it with the classes coming behind you (Zamost, Griffin, and Ansari 2012a).

And it is not just Radiologists who engage in the practice. The month after the aforementioned story ran, the same team of investigators, Zamost, Griffin and Ansari (2012b) confirmed that this system was pervasive in Dermatology residency programs as well. A resident at the time wrote to the *American Board of Dermatology* anonymously:

The board needs to know that there is an organized effort year after year to, by verbatim, reproduce each and every question of the official ABD certifying examination minutes after its completion. So-called "airplane notes"...are well known to dermatology residents and are compiled, typed up and quietly distributed among residency programs across the country (Zamost, Griffin and Ansari 2012b).

While normalized cheating among medical residents might cause some to question the level of proficiency of their doctors, news of a different act of academic dishonesty might cause physicians to rethink the validity of what they have been taught. Indeed, another cheating scandal with potential widespread effect in the medical community was also unveiled: University of Connecticut researcher Dipak Dey, whose work was being subsidized in part by \$890,000 of governmental grant money was found to have fabricated data attesting to the health and longevity benefits of red wine. The University of Connecticut officially tied fraud to 26 scholarly

articles that spanned 11 journals, although the *New York Times* reported strong evidence that Dr. Days had been a part of publishing around 500 scholarly articles, around 100 of which were on resveratrol, the substance contained in red wine that is thought to help promote longevity (Wade 2012).

All of these instances may be part and parcel of a larger culture that ignores or even promotes cheating in order to “make it.” David Callahan’s popular book, *The Cheating Culture: Why More Americans are Doing Wrong to Get Ahead* (2004), illustrates how cheating has seeped into virtually all areas of a contemporary American society that both pressures people to cheat and promises little negative consequences to cheaters. Callahan spotlights white collar crime scandals, forgeries of birth certificates to get kids competitive advantages in sports and school, and the indifferent, or even complimentary, attitudes Americans have in relation to tax fraud, among many other things, to show how modern America almost requires cheating to “get ahead.” But Callahan goes even further than that by suggesting that often one needs to cheat even to essentially stay in the same socio-economic place because competitors will fabricate, lie, and steal in order to pay the mortgage, keep the corner office, or win *Major League Baseball’s* Home Run Derby.

There is no doubt that cheating is occurring throughout American culture and perhaps especially so in the nation’s educational institutions. While my study should help to understand the processes that drive cheating more generally (e.g. through showing how students express a general feeling that they must succeed by any means necessary), it is focused on the cheating of today’s undergraduates, who regularly have been documented as engaging in academic dishonesty at alarmingly high rates.

Undergraduates commit academically dishonest acts. In 1993, Sims presented evidence that 90 percent of students will cheat at least once in their undergraduate years. More recently, a *U.S. News and World Report* poll showed that “84% of college students believe they need to cheat to get ahead in the world today (Kleiner and Lord 1999).”

And cheat they do. In their 1993 survey based study of over 6,000 undergraduates, McCabe and Trevino found that over three-fourths of the students admitted to committing at least one of the twelve acts of academic dishonesty the researchers listed, and many scholars believe that the problem has just gotten worse over time (Wideman 2008). Additionally, undergraduates are certainly not immune to academic cheating scandals of their own. For example, *NPR* reported in 2004 that over 500 students at Southern University in Louisiana had paid a member of the registrar’s office to change their grades (Block 2004). In the same year, researchers Lambert and Hogan (2004) labeled college cheating as an “epidemic.”

Academic dishonesty has far-reaching negative consequences. For instance, its presence creates an inequitable environment where cheaters do better than similarly knowledgeable honest students. It also hinders students’ character development (e.g. students may be less likely to recognize the intrinsic value of a job well-done) and the transfer of knowledge (students will not learn as much as faculty and administrators think they are learning and/or wish they are learning), pollutes the esteem of the institution and higher education in general (employers and graduate programs might grow wary of hiring or admitting graduates of a certain university, or of any university, due to a lack of adequate preparation or a tendency to cut corners), and demoralizes faculty and students (it may be hard to get excited about teaching and learning if it seems as if almost everyone around you is engaging in academic dishonesty) (Keith-Spiegel and Whitley 2001).

Understanding who cheats, who gets caught, who gets reported, and why students cheat is not only a worthwhile intellectual enterprise but also a necessity in the effective development of programs and interventions that aim to reduce academic dishonesty and promote academic integrity. My unique position as an instructor for a class solely for those reported for academic dishonesty affords me a chance to make valuable contributions to the literature.

How my research adds value to the extant knowledge about academic dishonesty

Sociological research has yielded much information about human behavioral deviance. Generally, researchers in this area are divided as to whether they take a constructivist or positivistic stance and whether they focus on studying larger social structures in a macro-study or concentrate on analyzing the meanings and negotiations that emerge in small group interpersonal communication. Studies of deviance in each of these four areas and their various combinations apply directly to my dissertation, as I seek to produce quantitative and qualitative data that reflect the over-arching macro and micro causes of academic dishonesty from the perspectives of the students (who might commit academically dishonest acts), the instructors (who must decide when a violation has occurred and what to do with the violator), and administrators (who construct official policies related to what constitutes academic dishonesty and what the role of students and instructors is *vis-à-vis* these official statements).

The extant literature on deviance is inundated with studies on macro-structures and practices that illustrate differential treatment of certain types of individuals. Biases occur in micro interactions with the enforcers of rules (e.g. the reported propensity for law enforcers to pull over vehicles with black drivers more than those with white drivers; see Barak 2007) and

through policies that have disparate impact on certain groups (e.g. differences in sentencing for crimes related to powder versus crack forms of cocaine; see Blumstein 2003).

There are also actual behavioral differences across different categories of people, which are usually attributed to different life chances (e.g. Merton's *strain theory*) or participation in cultures that are at odds with the culture of those who make and enforce the rules (see Blum 2009 for an ethnographic look at differences in the way college students and administrators/faculty think about plagiarism). Previous studies in each of these areas have informed my study. For instance, Becker's (1973) groundbreaking work on jazz musicians and marihuana smokers not only provides evidence of the power of culture in influencing "deviant" behavior but also gives an example of how to compile and present qualitative research on a sensitive topic.

At the general level, my study adds to the existing research on deviance, as I know of no other study on academic dishonesty that has been produced by someone in my position with access to a sample solely consisting of those who have been reported for academic dishonesty. Thus, evidence that comes from my research supporting/not supporting the existence of a culture of cheating, prejudiced/non-prejudiced reporting practices of faculty, and biased/unbiased definitions of academic integrity will meaningfully add to our extant understanding of academic dishonesty. Additionally, my findings can be applied more generally to knowledge about deviance and even more generally to that of human behavior.

Despite the various sides of academic dishonesty that can be studied, the bulk of research on academic dishonesty seeks to figure out who cheats (e.g. by examining the relationship between demographic characteristics and self-reported cheating) and/or when people cheat (e.g. by examining the relationship between contextual variables, such as perceived attitudes of

friends and self-reported cheating). Perhaps the most reputable work on the topic, McCabe and Trevino's 1997 study exemplifies the usual mode of knowledge production in this realm, albeit in a much more rigorous way than is customary. The researchers compiled survey data from *randomly* sampled undergraduate students from *multiple* campuses in order to make inferences about the nature of academically dishonest behavior, whereas most previous surveys were from a single campus or even a single class on a single campus and were non-random. Like previous studies, the authors found cheating to be affected by many factors. The most influential contextual factors included the level of cheating among peers and peer disapproval of cheating. In fact, peer approval was the most salient predictor of self-reported academic dishonesty.

In another relevant study, Michaels and Miethe (1989) examined the predictive utility of a few theories of deviance and found significant relationships amongst cheating attitudes and behaviors and these theories: deterrence, rational choice, social bonding, and social learning. The authors advocated the use of an integrated model in trying to understand the motivations for committing academically dishonest acts. They also conceded that the theories that were tested (specifically rational choice, social learning, and social bond theory) can be applied in ways that make them almost interchangeable with one another. The choice that the actor is making must be understood by looking through the prism of his ideas, morals, and tendencies. These tendencies were learned socially, either in close connection with deviance-approving or deviance-disapproving others.

Two major leads emerged from these studies: 1) peers are an important factor to consider in assessing peoples' potentiality of committing deviant acts, which is also supported more generally in the deviance research, especially for minor violations, and (2) qualitative studies are needed to sort out ways that the various aspects of different theories of deviance act upon

individuals in the realm of academic dishonesty. As it stands, most deviance research uses qualitative methods, while most research on academic dishonesty uses quantitative methods. In this study, I pay special attention to the influence of peers. I also use qualitative analyses in conjunction with quantitative methods in order to produce more robust conclusions to my research questions and to fill in some gaps in the general sample self-report and quantitative-heavy literature.

Indeed, my dissertation will contribute to the sociology of deviance and academic dishonesty literature by providing in-depth qualitative and quantitative analysis of a unique sample of undergraduates that are not usually studied in this context (having already been reported for and received punishment for an act of academic dishonesty). The applicability of my findings to the various theories of deviant behavior will enrich and refine their scope and explanatory power.

Perhaps most importantly, my dissertation will increase our understanding of why, when, and how people cheat, how cheating is framed by faculty and students, and how interventions can best address, both proactively and reactively, academic dishonesty in hopes of lessening its occurrence.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study's aim is to build on the existing work of scholars on academic dishonesty and behavioral deviance. Specifically, I wish to accomplish four objectives. Firstly, I wish to uncover any disproportionalities between those who get reported to those who usually self-report; this has been studied intensively in other forms of deviance and sanctions (e.g. death penalty rulings, school disciplinary expulsions, etc.), but has not often, if ever, been looked at for academic dishonesty. Secondly, I will examine the differences, if any, between why those who have been reported for cheating seem to have cheated and the explanations for student cheating that are derived from studies of general student samples; there is quite a dearth of research on this comparison. Thirdly, I will compare the relative frames that faculty and students apply to the incidents that lead to reports. Differences in and the influence of frames has been a bedrock concept in sociology since Erving Goffman's famous work *Frame Analysis* (1974), and frames, or similar concepts, have regularly been used to understand deviant behavior (e.g. see Levi 1991 which unveils the frames that professional hit men use). However, they are not often, if ever, applied to academic dishonesty. Lastly, I will see how, if at all, reported students differ from general student samples with regards to their attitudes toward a hypothetical other who has cheated in various contexts. Additionally, differences in answering patterns among different groups in my sample will be examined.

Disproportionality in reports

Perhaps the most significant contribution of sociology to the study of deviance is how the field has elucidated the way that rules and the enforcement of rules (legal or otherwise) are not equally created for or applied to all categories of people. Introductory sociology textbooks

generally make note of the role race and gender, amongst other demographic variables, in determining the likelihood that a person gets suspended or expelled from school, (e.g. Skiba and Rausch 2008) detected and/or arrested, (e.g. Harris 1999, Steffensmeier 1980 cites evidence that men were ten times more likely to be arrested than women were in pre-WW2 times, while Tracy, Kempf-Leonard, and Abamoske-James 2011 show that the gap is closing although still present), shot by the police (e.g. Goldkamp 1976), and/or receive the death penalty (Hurwitz and Peffley 2010).

Of course, just because a group of students or people are reported more or less frequently than would be predicted by their relative proportions in the general population does not mean that there are reporting biases, or, if there are biases, that these biases are the result of discrimination based on race, gender, citizenship status, or some other feature. The disproportionalities may exist due to actual behavioral differences, reporting differences based on moderating variables (e.g. type of classes taken), and/or discrimination based on characteristics directly or indirectly related to demographic variables. With regards to this last point, an example of discrimination based on a characteristic that is directly related to a demographic variable would be a teacher does not believe white kids cheat, so he doesn't look at their work trying to discern evidence of cheating like he does with those from other races. An example for one that is indirectly related would be a teacher sees any deviation away from proper English academic writing as a likely case of academic dishonesty, and non-native English speakers are not sure where to put quotation marks more so than their native English speaking counterparts.

To reiterate, a particular group of students (or just people) may be more likely to get reported because the members of this group actually cheat (or steal or fight) more often and/or

more severely. Additionally, even if there are biases in reporting, these biases may be the result of ease of detection or some confounding variable such as classes/majors (jobs, neighborhoods) people of a certain demographic variable are likely to enroll in (have, live in). Thus, for many reasons, the presence of disproportionate reporting is not concrete evidence of discrimination based on race, gender, citizenship status, or some other feature.

Addressing this, scholars have aimed at gauging actual behavior rates in addition to the likelihood of punishment to provide a more robust evaluation as to whether discriminatory practices are being used by police, courts, juries, teachers, principals, etc. For instance, Skiba, Shure, and Williams (2011), looking at the sum of studies that indirectly test behavioral frequencies, concluded that the well-documented presence of racial disparities in negative school sanctions like suspension and expulsion is not the cause of the disproportionate acting out among students of color. However, I know of no studies that have combined these two variables (actual behavior rate and report likelihood) in the realm of academic dishonesty.

While I do not directly empirically assess both variables in this study (although I plan to in the near future), I can still address both. Indeed, since many existing studies, meta-analyses, and reviews have documented so much evidence about the likelihoods and frequency with which all kinds of students report cheating, my findings on who gets reported can be fruitfully compared with extant data on self-reports of general student samples in order to further scholarly understandings about what, if any, discrepancies in reporting behavior exist.

So, what have existing studies found? Employing a variety of methodologies, many studies have sought to identify which students cheat. The bulk of this work has produced quantitative data via questionnaires (e.g. McCabe and Trevino 1997), although experiments (e.g. Karlins, Michaels, and Podlogar 1988), interviews (e.g. Zito and McQuillan 2010), and content

analysis (McCabe, Trevino, and Butterfield 1999), among other types of studies, have also been conducted. In her 2008 review of the literature, Wideman (2008) reported the following generalities regarding who cheats:

Although research pertaining to why students cheat differs greatly, the research about who does most of the cheating is fairly consistent. In a questionnaire-based study of 291 postsecondary students, Szabo and Underwood (2004) confirmed earlier studies when it was determined that more males cheat than females – 68% compared to 39%. Third year students were less likely to cheat than first or second year students (Szabo & Underwood, 2004; Brown, 2002). International students or students from different cultural backgrounds (i.e. not North American) have been identified as a group who demonstrate a high level of academic dishonesty (Park, 2003; Ercegovac & Richardson, 2004). This has been attributed to differing cultural expectations around academic writing as well as a lack in language skills (Ercegovac & Richardson, 2004). Students who have an active social life are more likely to cheat (Straw, 2002). Younger students cheat more often than mature students (Straw, 2002). Some studies found that students with lower grades cheat more than those with higher grades (Cummings, et al., 2002), but other studies refute this through data that suggest no correlation between grades and cheating. In a 1994 survey of 191 nursing students in the southern USA, researchers found there was no correlation either between cheating and a student's maturity and ability level (Daniel, Adams & Smith, 1994).

In contrast to Wideman's report, an earlier review by Whitley and Keith-Spiegel (2004) challenges the notion that males cheat more than females. Additionally, Cohoon and Rogers (n.d.) did not find a correlation between cheating behavior and citizenship, although their focus-groups did show that students believed that international students cheat more than domestic students.

Since many of these studies have asked and formulated conclusions based on the self-reported answers of general student samples, my analysis of those who have been reported for cheating can be used to substantiate and/or refine the conclusions made by previous studies. Additionally, my analysis can be compared to the extant literature to see if the findings for those who get caught are consistent with those who just self-report. Also, this comparison can be used to differentiate the characteristics of instructor reported cheaters from self-reported cheaters.

Why do they cheat?

Researchers have uncovered a litany of reasons for why students seem to cheat. Michaels and Miethe (1989) examined the predictive utility of a few theories of deviance by analyzing questionnaires that were given to undergraduates. Deterrence, rational choice, social bonding, and social learning theories all acted upon the data in the expected direction.

In the same article, Michaels and Miethe (1989) put forth the notion, more than two decades ago, that students may simply be acting normatively when they are cheating. In line with this, McCabe and Trevino's (1993) thirty-one campus survey study found perception of peer behaviors was more strongly correlated with self-reported cheating than any other contextual influence they tested. The two researchers ran a similar study in 1997, and they found peer disapproval was the most salient predictive correlate of self-reported academic dishonesty. In this study, the peer disapproval variable was measured by having the respondents rate the disapproval of "a close friend" and "one of the students you go around with."

McCabe has also used qualitative methods to investigate why student cheat. In 1999 he used focus groups as means of understanding more concretely how high school students view academic dishonesty. Students spoke out on several issues including attitudes regarding cheating, the impact of technology, and school policies on cheating. The most salient idea that surfaced from these sessions was congruent with the assertion of Michaels and Miethe (1989), that cheating was a norm. Speaking of cheating as a norm, a study respondent said, "It's almost a big deal if you don't cheat." Also, in accordance with tenets of neutralization theory, McCabe found that most students blame others for the cheating that is occurring. Students in the study mentioned how "everyone cheats" as a sort of justification to cheat. The big addition that this

article made to the literature is that it allowed the respondents more freedom in expressing how they feel about cheating.

In a more recent qualitative study, Blum (2009) found that cheating, particularly plagiarism, is often committed by students who do not know what it is and/or that it is unacceptable. She asserts that modern students are living in an inter-textual world where the landscape of language usage and authorship are very differently understood than they were in the past.

Burrus et al. (2007) provided experimental proof of student ignorance in this domain. The authors examined how the presence or absence of an explicit definition of academic dishonesty affects survey results. They concluded that students were often unaware of what cheating is because the groups receiving a definition of cheating on their survey reported more academic dishonesty than those who did not have the definition.

Ignorance and peer influence were also some of the causes of student cheating identified in Wideman's (2008) review of the literature. In addition to those two, she stated that researchers had found that things like "opportunity, "the desire to get a good job," and "procrastination" were reasons for why students cheated. Whitley's (1998) review, which tabulated findings from 107 studies on collegiate academic dishonesty between the years of 1970 and 1996, found that perceiving that social norms support cheating and holding positive attitudes toward cheating were the strongest predictors of cheating behavior. Other lesser predictors included demographic characteristics, ability indicators, academic beliefs, academic behavior, extracurricular activities, and personality variables, among others. Whitley (1998) created a model that considers several variables that can simultaneously be used to understand the antecedents of academically dishonest behavior.

Whitley's review also illustrated that since so many studies only consider a few variables at a time, it is hard to determine if a correlation is spurious or not. Also, like most of the research on academic dishonesty including that which I have mentioned here, Whitley's review states that almost all of the 100 plus studies he looked at offer evidence of only correlations. Thus, Whitley demonstrates the need for more rigorous studies that seek to determine causation.

Ultimately, although an abundance of information has been gathered and analyzed regarding why students cheat, there is still much worry about the validity of the conclusions drawn from self-report studies asking students if they committed an act (which they may not remember or remember accurately, and which, even if they did remember, they may not know constitutes academic dishonesty) and analyzing why they may have committed their act (either by correlating answers about acts with other answers provided, which may lead to spurious associations, or by asking students directly why they did something, which they may not be able to accurately answer). In regards to these studies, Wideman (2008) concluded that students "have checked the appropriate box for the reasons behind the cheating as defined by the researcher, yet the issue remains perplexing and unresolved."

In adding to the general knowledge about the reported students' reasons for cheating and to the aggregate of acquired knowledge on the subject, my work can be especially beneficial because students are asked about their cheating in a different context than they are normally asked in. In my study, students may be more likely to remember the situation, and I can ask about a particular act. This certainly will yield different results than asking in innocuous contexts about less vivid or hypothetical acts.

Faculty vs. student frames

The literature shows that students and faculty sometimes do not agree as to what constitutes academic dishonesty (Burrus 2007; Hard 2006). For instance, overall, students are less likely than faculty to feel that acquiring and studying exams from earlier iterations of the course is a violation of academic integrity (Whitley and Keith-Spiegel 2002), although faculty are also somewhat split on this issue, with those more likely to act against student cheating behavior being more likely to view recycling old work as a form of plagiarism (Bennett, Behrendt, and Boothby 2011)). Still, it has been found that faculty hold a more encompassing view about what constitutes cheating than do students (Livosky and Tauber 1994).

Considering that there is some incongruence in the literature regarding this, my analysis comparing instructors' report comments to students' recountings of the events can lead to a more refined knowledge on how the two groups differentially frame certain actions. Of course, the external validity of my analysis may not extend past those large university professors that will perceive and report cheating and those large university students that will do something that leads to a report. However, due to the unique circumstances in which the instructor reports and student retelling take place and the qualitative nature of the data, I can fruitfully add to the literature, as most existing studies are quantitative and based on some hypothetical incident, rather than one that has actually occurred (even if this "reality" is disputed by the parties involved).

Student responses regarding the behavior of a hypothetical potential cheater

A common technique used in studying certain behaviors is to determine how acceptable individuals feel it is for themselves or some hypothetical other to act in a certain way. Presenting a situation in vignette form and then asking a series of questions based on the vignette has been

used to assess attitudes towards abortion (Belton et al. 2009), attitudes towards health care coverage (Gollust and Lynch 2010), and academic dishonesty (Rettinger and Kramer 2009), among many other topics. However, most of these studies have been conducted using either random or convenience samples from some general population that is not especially concentrated with people possessing a particular characteristic that is closely related to the topic being studied. Thus, the aforementioned advantages of studying my specific sample hold true when using this method of inquiry.

In their survey and vignette study, Rettinger and Kramer (2009) found that perception of peer behavior was strongly related to one's own likelihood to cheat on an exam but that the strongest predictor was neutralizing attitudes, which help the transgressor rationalize away some of the pungency of their act. Would these findings, which were derived from a convenience sample of a general undergraduate population (a religious school), hold constant for my particular sample? Rettinger and Kramer (2009) also mention the need for their findings to be tested on different samples (since their findings were from a religious school) in order to measure generalizability and for these factors to be tested on high-risk cheaters (i.e. those that are uniquely positioned to be more likely to entertain cheating), as it may be that this group can most identify with the circumstances presented in the vignette.

The major predictor of exam cheating found by Rettinger and Kramer (2009) is also corroborated by findings derived from other methods of inquiry. For instance, many studies argue that actors engaging in deviant behavior often justify their acts by employing neutralizing attitudes, such as by accusing the accuser (Bolin 2004, based on Sykes and Matza 1957).

Rettinger and Kramer (2009) also used type of motivation (intrinsic or extrinsic) as a variable in their vignette study, finding that subject's felt that those who are extrinsically

motivated are more likely to cheat. The differences between those that are extrinsically versus intrinsically motivated have long been a focus of social psychological research (see Ryan and Deci 2000 for a summary of 20th century research involving this variable). Because those who are extrinsically motivated are more likely to cheat (which has also been documented by Keith-Spiegel and Whitley 2001), the academic dishonesty literature points towards the development of student intrinsic motivation (although this may be seen as a completely paradoxical and impossible undertaking) as an effective way to decrease the prevalence of academic dishonesty. Additionally, discerning the relative motivations of students who have been reported for academic dishonesty may more specifically and fruitfully inform future interventions.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

The goal for this study is to use my unique sample of reported students and the unique context in which I gather data to show another perspective, validate/invalidate existing understandings, and to carve out new ideas regarding the scholarly community's understanding of academic dishonesty. In this section, I will delineate the various methods I have employed in collecting data for this study.

SUBJECTS AND SETTING

For each part of this study, I drew from the population of students that had been reported from Fall 2009 through Summer 2011. Characteristics of sampling frames and response rates are presented individually for each portion of the study, as these numbers did vary. Once again, the subjects were the students who were reported for academic dishonesty at MSU during the aforementioned time period and, for one portion, the instructors who did the reporting.

Characteristics of the students are shown in Tables 1.1 through 1.4.

Gender	
Female	204 (49.4%)
Male	209 (50.6%)
Total	413

Table 1.1 Gender of Reported Students

There were approximately 100 more citizens reported than non-citizens in this time period (See Table 1.2).

Citizenship Status	
Citizen	259 (62.7%)
Not Citizen	154 (37.3%)
Total	413

Table 1.2 Citizenship Status of Reported Students (Note that 12 “Permanent Residents” were treated as non-citizens for this analysis.)

Looking at ethnicities, the most frequently reported student was White (non-Hispanic).

Please note that many ethnicities were either non-reported or non-requested (See Table 1.3).

Ethnicity	
American Indian/Alaskan Native (non-Hispanic)	2 (.5%)
Asian (non-Hispanic)	53 (12.8%)
Asian / Pacific Islander	4 (.1%)
Black or African American (non-Hispanic)	59 (14.3%)
Hispanic Ethnicity	15 (3.6%)
Not Reported	14 (3.4%)
Not Requested	112 (27.1%)
Two or more races (non-Hispanic)	4 (.1%)
White (non-Hispanic)	150 (36.3%)
Grand Total	413

Table 1.3 Ethnicity of Reported Students

Table 1.4 shows year in school data for reported students at the time the report was created.

Class Status	
Freshman	104 (25.2%)
Sophomore	92 (22.3%)
Junior	115 (27.8%)
Senior	102 (24.7%)
Total	413

Table 1.4 Class Status of Reported Students

Table 1.5 shows the different offenses that the students were reported for. Instructors were told to check at least one box and were allowed to check multiple boxes for the same report. How often each type of misconduct or combination of misconduct types were reported are shown.

	Misconduct Type	Count of Misconduct Type
1	Academic Misconduct on a Quiz, Test, Midterm, or Final Exam	76
2	Academic Misconduct on a Quiz, Test, Midterm, or Final Exam, Academic Misconduct on any other Assignment	2
3	Academic Misconduct on a Quiz, Test, Midterm, or Final Exam, Academic Misconduct on any other Assignment, Other	1
4	Academic Misconduct on a Quiz, Test, Midterm, or Final Exam, Academic Misconduct on any other Assignment, Plagiarism	2
5	Academic Misconduct on a Quiz, Test, Midterm, or Final Exam, Falsification of Data or Results, Other	1
6	Academic Misconduct on a Quiz, Test, Midterm, or Final Exam, Other	2
7	Academic Misconduct on a Quiz, Test, Midterm, or Final Exam, Plagiarism	7
8	Academic Misconduct on a Quiz, Test, Midterm, or Final Exam, Plagiarism, Unauthorized Collaboration	1
9	Academic Misconduct on a Quiz, Test, Midterm, or Final Exam, Unauthorized Collaboration	7
10	Academic Misconduct on any other Assignment	56
11	Academic Misconduct on any other Assignment, Falsification of Academic Records, Falsification of Data or Results	1
12	Academic Misconduct on any other Assignment, Falsification of Data or Results, Plagiarism, Other	4
13	Academic Misconduct on any other Assignment, Other	2
14	Academic Misconduct on any other Assignment, Plagiarism	47
15	Academic Misconduct on any other Assignment, Plagiarism, Unauthorized Collaboration	6
16	Academic Misconduct on any other Assignment, Unauthorized Collaboration	6
17	Falsification of Academic Records	4
18	Falsification of Data or Results	2
19	Falsification of Data or Results, Other	1
20	Other	3
21	Plagiarism	127
22	Unauthorized Collaboration	55
	Total	413

Table 1.5 Reported Students' Misconduct Types

Table 1.6 shows the penalty types. Once again, instructors were asked to check at least one box corresponding with a particular type of penalty but were allowed to check as many boxes as they wished in a single report. Note that official MSU policy states that instructors must report students that have received a penalty grade of any type as the result of academic dishonesty.

	Penalty Type	Count of Penalty Type
1	Failing Grade – Assignment	152
2	Failing Grade - Assignment, Failing Grade – Course	13
3	Failing Grade - Assignment, Failing Grade - Quiz/Test, Failing Grade – Course	1
4	Failing Grade – Course	47
5	Failing Grade - Midterm/Final Exam	19
6	Failing Grade - Midterm/Final Exam, Failing Grade – Course	4
7	Failing Grade - Quiz/Test	26
8	Failing Grade - Quiz/Test, Failing Grade – Course	1
9	Failing Grade - Quiz/Test, Failing Grade - Midterm/Final Exam	2
10	Reduced Grade – Assignment	35
11	Reduced Grade - Assignment, Failing Grade – Assignment	14
12	Reduced Grade - Assignment, Failing Grade – Course	1
13	Reduced Grade - Assignment, Reduced Grade – Course	3
14	Reduced Grade – Course	58
15	Reduced Grade - Course, Failing Grade – Assignment	8
16	Reduced Grade - Course, Failing Grade – Course	1
17	Reduced Grade - Course, Failing Grade - Quiz/Test	4
18	Reduced Grade - Midterm/Final Exam	14
19	Reduced Grade - Midterm/Final Exam, Failing Grade - Midterm/Final Exam	3
20	Reduced Grade - Quiz/Test	6
21	Reduced Grade - Quiz/Test, Reduced Grade - Midterm/Final Exam, Reduced Grade – Course	1
	Grand Total	413

Table 1.6 Reported Students' Penalty Types

DATA COLLECTION

In this section, I will describe the specific ways I gathered data in the various parts of this study.

Disproportionality in reports

To assess disproportionality in reporting, I compared official MSU undergraduate enrollment statistics for any given semester with those based on the students the instructors reported. For certain demographics, I was able to find overall MSU undergraduate enrollment statistics for each of the semesters I had data for and, in those instances, the aggregate data from all semesters (Fall 2009 to Summer 2011) is compared to my aggregate data from all reports submitted during that time period. However, in some instances I was able to procure MSU data for only certain semesters. In these cases, I compared the MSU data from certain semesters only to my data from the same semesters.

The MSU data on Gender and Race/Ethnicity was gathered from the Michigan State University Office of Planning and Budgets (http://dev.opb.msu.edu/institution/documents/CDS0910_pageB.pdf) and comparisons were made for each semester from Fall 2009 to Summer 2011 (and just for the Fall 2009 semester for Race/Ethnicity) as well as the aggregate of all those semesters. I was able to obtain MSU international student enrollment characteristics for only Fall 2009 and Fall 2010, so those were the semesters of reports that I used as a comparison. I gathered the MSU international data from The Office of International Students and Scholars (http://oiss.isp.msu.edu/documents/statsreport/10pdfs/1971_2010.pdf). The remaining MSU data for each semester Fall 2009 – Summer 2011 was taken from MSU's Registrar's Office (http://reports.esp.msu.edu/ReportServer/Pages/ReportViewer.aspx?%2fRORReports2005%2fUE-ComparisonStudentEnrollments&term_seq_id=1114).

Why do they cheat?

I analyzed 312 student course responses to the question, “What, if anything, would have stopped you from committing your act of academic dishonesty?” This question was presented to students in the module for the third week of the class entitled “Academic Integrity and Society.” The previous modules involved an introductory survey and vignette questions and readings, a video, and questions about the definition of academic dishonesty. Specifically this question comes after readings and question sets that speak of the social implications of academic dishonesty. The last of these is a commentary about “What is wrong with cheating?,” an assigned short essay written by Michael Bishop (1993) that mentions the former University of Maryland policy of placing the names of those who violate the academic integrity code in the school newspaper, which some students mention in their responses.

The answers I analyzed were all submitted by students who were enrolled in the seven iterations of the course stretching from Spring 2010 to Summer 2011. Most students were added to the course that started the semester after they were reported, but in special instances, students started earlier or later. There were some instances of non-response, twenty-four students, just seven percent of the total number of students enrolled in the course. The great majority of the students that did not answer this question did not complete any coursework, and, other than for this fact (which is certainly noteworthy), did not seem to differ meaningfully from the sample of answerers in gender distribution, penalty type, year in school, citizenship status, etc.

Faculty vs. student frames

For this section, I analyzed the ways faculty and students conceptualize the situation that led to an official report of academic dishonesty, paying particular attention to the instances in which accounts differ.

Using reports spanning from Fall 2009 to Summer 2011 and student responses from the subsequent iterations of the course they were enrolled in on the basis of these reports, I was able to identify general trends that speak to the overall differences between the way students and faculty view the incidents in question. Additionally, I was able to compare individual student accounts of their particular act and the account submitted by the instructors regarding the same act.

When instructors fill out the online academic misconduct reports (which MSU policy says they must do if they give any sort of penalty grade as the result of academic dishonesty), they are asked to check one or more boxes related to the misconduct type and penalty type they are reporting. Additionally, instructors are asked to “Please provide a detailed description of the incident and retain any documentation for your records.” I used these descriptions, which are created at the time of the report, for my analysis.

I analyzed student answers to a survey question, which was part of a survey they were asked to complete as part of the first module of the course *vis-a-vis* the corresponding faculty reports. Educationally, the goal of this survey is to encourage them to think about academic integrity in general and their encounters with it more specifically. The tenth question of twelve is “What act of academic dishonesty did you commit?”

Student responses regarding the behavior of a hypothetical potential cheater

The vignettes (which are presented below) were randomly presented to students, as part of a required module at the beginning and ending of the course. For each item, I had around 170 responses. These are students that were enrolled in Fall 2010, Spring 2011, or either of the Summer 2011 sessions. Only a few students did not complete the pre-vignettes and around 10 did not complete the post-vignettes. I specifically manipulated three dichotomous variables in the vignettes: perceived professor behavior or attitude, intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation, and strain (time-crunch). I included perceived professor behavior or attitude (operationalized by whether or not it seems as if the professor cares about student learning) as previous research has noted that professors and students differ in their definitions of academic dishonesty (Burrus 2007).

Here is an example of one of the vignettes with the parenthetical statements providing the alternative operationalization of the variables that the students may have received:

Carefully read the following vignette, and then answer the questions that follow to the best of your ability.

Jessie, a sophomore at MSU, is enrolled in a class that has an exam coming up soon. Jessie's professor in this course seems to really care about student learning (Jessie thinks his/her professor in this course only cares about his paycheck and is not concerned with whether or not his students learn). Jessie likes learning for the sake of learning and enjoys the stimulation the class provides. Jessie is more concerned with learning the material than with getting a good grade in the class (Jessie is only concerned with getting a good grade in the class. Jessie does not care about learning the material.). Jessie knows that his/her peers cheat on their school work all of the time. Jessie has little else going on this semester and has a lot of time to devote to this course (Jessie has a full-time job this semester and has little time to devote to this course). During the exam, Jessie notices the answer key has fallen onto the floor in front of him/her. Jessie can easily see all of the exam answers and is quite sure that neither the professor nor the other students in the class are aware that the answer key is right in front of him/her.

The questions posed to the students based on each vignette, with the bottom four employing a Likert-like scale of response choices, are as follows:

- 1) If Jessie were to copy the answers, would you consider this to be an act of academic dishonesty, NOT an act of academic dishonesty, or are you not sure?
- 2) How likely is it that Jessie copy the answers? (Very Likely, Likely, Neither Likely nor Unlikely, Unlikely, Very Unlikely)
- 3) If you were Jessie, how likely is it that you would copy down the answers? (Very Likely, Likely, Neither Likely nor Unlikely, Unlikely, Very Unlikely)
- 4) How acceptable is it for Jessie to copy down the answers? (Very Acceptable, Acceptable, Neither Acceptable nor Unacceptable, Unacceptable, Very Unacceptable).
- 5) If you were Jessie, how acceptable would it be for you to copy down the answers? (Very Acceptable, Acceptable, Neither Acceptable nor Unacceptable, Unacceptable, Very Unacceptable)

Responses to the first question of the first eight vignettes (there was one vignette featuring each combination of the three dichotomous variables) were treated as categorical variables. Answers to the other four questions were placed on a Likert-like scale of values ranging from 1 to 5 (Very Likely = 5, Very Acceptable = 5, etc.), and these data were treated as having equal numerical distances between them. In the future, in order to mitigate the inaccuracy caused by treating ordinal values as true scales, I hope to employ Rasch analysis.

In addition to the vignettes testing the previously stated variables, each set also included four vignettes written by MSU faculty member Dr. Danielle Devoss and were used in the course with permission. These vignettes have the same answer choices as question one above. The vignettes (marked as 9-12) are as follows

- 9) An art history professor is reviewing a student's paper and notices that the sophistication of the sentences shifts. One sentence is good, but a bit rough. The next

sentence is incredibly complex and grammatically perfect. She jumps online and heads to Google (<http://www.google.com>) to search using one of the complex sentences from the paper. From the list of hits, it's obvious that the student lifted entire sentences from several different online essays. The student has woven the lifted sentences in with her own ideas.

10) Jim, an English major, recycles his high school honors thesis paper for use in an undergraduate course. The original paper was his own work. However, Jim submits the paper in nearly its original form, with only minor revisions.

11) A history teacher discovers that one of her better students, Isabel, has used two direct quotations in a paper (entire sentences), but without using quotation marks. Isabel did, however, identify the source for the quotation in her bibliography.

12) Julie, an undeclared freshman, completes her IAH term paper by finding many articles about the topic. She then cites these articles and copies and pastes various paragraphs from the articles on to her own paper. Before she submits her paper, she is sure to replace most of the words from the other articles with synonyms.

DATA ANALYSIS

I used two sample tests of proportion to see if there were significant differences between the demographics of reported students and those of the overall undergraduate population.

Additionally, to investigate whether disproportionalities might be associated with tendencies among different groups of reported students, I ran tests of proportion comparing the percentage of citizens versus non-citizens who were reported for plagiarism, whose responses were coded for ignorance, and who were male versus female.

As the instructor of the course, I had previously read the responses of the students to the module question, "What, if anything, would have stopped you from committing your act of academic dishonesty," and discussed the general characteristics with other academics, including the former instructor of the course, Dr. Shell Veenstra. Dr. Veenstra had also used some responses from this question in her executive summary of the first iteration of the course. Thus, I already had some sense of what the data might show, specifically that students were often espousing ignorance in response to this question.

I compiled all course responses independent of demographic characteristics or other identifiers (besides those that may be present in the responses themselves) and read through them making note of any categories that might emerge, following the *Grounded Theory* approach originally outlined by Glaser and Strauss in 1967, although my previous interactions with the data certainly mitigated the pure applicability of this approach. The major themes that I found were the following: students were pleading ignorance of the rules constituting academic dishonesty and the consequences/seriousness associated with violating a code of academic integrity; students tended to deflect blame, usually by saying that their professor could have done something differently; students did not feel they had enough time, resources, and/or skills to get the desired result *without* taking responsibility for this lack of time, resources, and/or skills; students felt they did not manage their time well *with* accepting the blame for the poor time management; a bad grade was not an option; and their peers could have affected their actions.²

Then, I went through the responses again and coded them to see how many categories each response showed evidence of. It should be noted that I placed the responses in which students deflected blame in the *neutralization* category as to provide a bridge to the extant research on deviance; likewise, I placed the responses in which students expressed a lack of time, resources, and/or skills in the *strain* category. Almost all responses, 88%, fit into at least one of the aforementioned categories, and several fit into multiple categories. Next, I looked at all the responses coded for a particular category and tried to find sub-themes. For example, some mention that they would have been motivated by knowing they would have to take my class if

² Responses from these last two categories seemed to fit most parsimoniously into other sections and so they were presented in one of the other sections, and I did not produce a stand-alone analysis of these two areas.

they cheated or other extrinsic penalties, while others talked about how knowing that they would feel the shame they do post-incident would have motivated them to behave differently. After this, I added the appropriate demographic (year in school, race, gender, ethnic code, and citizenship status) and contextual (class report originated from, category of report, and penalty type) variables to each answer and attempted to locate any significant relationships these variables had with the responses. In the end, I chose not to include *race* in my analysis, as I did not have racial information for almost half of the students. For all other variables, demographic information was made available to me for 298 of the student respondents out of a total of 312 total responses. I followed this same process in analyzing the instructors' descriptions of the incidents, the student accounts of the incidents, and the comparison of the two.

For the vignettes, I gathered the basic descriptive characteristics of student responses. Additionally, I aggregated questions 2-5 in vignettes 1-8. I also performed mean two-sample t tests with equal variances comparisons for different groupings of students, i.e. Citizens vs. Non-Citizens, Men vs. Women, those who were reported for just plagiarism vs. those reported for anything else, and underclassmen vs. upperclassmen. These comparisons were run separately for the pre and post-vignettes. I also compared the means of the aggregated means of question 2 versus question 3 from the first 8 vignettes. Furthermore, I compared the question 2 aggregated means for those vignettes that exhibited intrinsic motivation versus those that exhibited extrinsic motivation. Lastly, I compared the change in aggregated means of questions 2-5 for vignettes 1-8 from the pre-vignettes to the post-vignettes for the entire class and for certain types of individuals within the class.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

DISPROPORTIONALITY IN REPORTS RESULTS

My analysis shows that men were more likely than women to get reported, as 50.6 percent of my class was male compared to 46.9% of undergraduates. However, this difference was not significant at the $P=.05$ level (see Table 1.7 and 1.8 below). This murky finding is consistent with the ambiguity found in the literature as to whether or not men cheat more than women, with some arguing that men do, like Wideman 2008, while others say that there is no sex difference, like Whitley 1998.

	Fall 2009	Spring 2010	Summer 2010	Fall 2010	Spring 2011	Summer 2011
MSU total						
undergraduates						
Women	18858	17850	8840	18459	17616	8845
Men	17013	15963	6635	16965	16153	7043
Total	35871	33813	15475	35424	33769	15888
Students reported						
Women	36	45	14	35	62	12
Men	59	40	5	36	54	15
Total	95	85	19	71	116	27

Table 1.7 Gender Enrollment Characteristics (MSU undergraduate statistics are based on data from http://dev.opb.msu.edu/institution/documents/CDS0910_pageB.pdf)

Fall 2009 – Summer 2011	Men	%Men	Women	%Women	Total
MSU total undergraduates	79772	46.9%	90468	53.1%	170240
Students reported	209	50.6%	204	49.4%	413
Two sample test of proportion	p>0.05		p>0.05		

Table 1.8 Gender Composition of Undergraduates at MSU versus those Reported (MSU undergraduate statistics are based on data from

http://dev.opb.msu.edu/institution/documents/CDS0910_pageB.pdf)

I was able to find race/ethnicity data for about two-thirds of students reported in Fall 2009. Table 1.9 below depicts these data vis-à-vis comparable data from the overall undergraduate population. Due to the high percentage of missing values, I did not run significance tests comparing race/ethnicity differences from Fall 2009 reports to overall enrollment characteristics from the same term. However, since most of the missing values were for international students, I was able to sort them out of the instructor reported student group and then usefully compare the race/ethnicity characteristics of the domestic students in the overall population to those in the revised instructor reported group. Put differently, I compared the racial categories of U.S. citizens that were reported to the racial categories of U.S. citizens in the overall population. The far right column shows the results of the two sample test of proportion. Note that I did not remove the “alien” category in the overall population from the analysis. As indicated in the chart, the only difference significant at the P=.05 level is that there are fewer white students reported than would be predicted by their population amongst all undergraduates. Here, better data is needed for more meaningful analyses.

Ethnicity	Fall 2009 MSU	% of total MSU	Students reported Fall 2009	% of total Students reported	Students reported Fall 2009 with international students sorted out	% of Students reported Fall 2009 with international students sorted out	Two Sample Test of proportion
Alien	2,636	07.22	0	0	37 sorted out	n/a	-
Black	2,930	8.03	12	12.63	11	18.97	p>.05
American Indian	246	0.67	1	1.05	1	1.70	p>.05
Asian	1,867	5.12	15	15.79	10	17.24	p>.05
Hispanic	1,044	2.86	3	3.16	3	5.17	p>.05
White	27,075	74.2	31	32.63	30	51.72	p<.05*
Unknown	691	1.89	0	0	0	0	-
Not Reported	0	0	3	3.16	2	3.45	p>.05
Not Requested	0	0	29	30.53	0	0	
2 or more	0	0	1	1.05	1	1.70	p>.05
Total	36,489		95		58 (with international students sorted out)		

Table 1.9 General Undergraduate Race/Ethnicity differences compared to those of Reported Students, Fall 2009

(MSU undergraduate statistics are based on data from

http://dev.opb.msu.edu/institution/documents/CDS0910_pageB.pdf)

Tables 1.10 and 1.11 below show the relative distributions of students by class status.

The only significant difference was that seniors were significantly, at the P=.05 level, less likely to be reported for academic dishonesty than would be predicted if the reports were done at random.

MSU year in school/class status	Fall 09	Spring 2010	Summer 2010	Fall 2010	Spring 2011	Summer 2011	total
1	8,949	6,780	807	8,839	6,880	839	33,094
2	7,920	7,379	2,414	7,688	7,192	2,579	35,172
3	8,871	8,651	5,435	8,868	8,597	5,478	45,900
4	10,131	11,003	6,819	10,049	11,100	6,992	56,094
total	35,871	30,758	15,475	35,424	33,769	15,888	167,185
Reported students' year in school							
1	16	35	4	17	30	2	104
2	18	17	1	20	34	3	93
3	32	23	8	17	26	8	114
4	29	10	6	17	26	14	102
total	95	85	19	71	116	26	412

Table 1.10 Class Status enrollment by semester in overall Undergraduate Population and in Reported Students

Year in School	% of MSU undergraduate student body (Fall 2009 – Summer 2011)	n	% of all students reported (Fall 2009 – Summer 2011)	n	Difference	Two sample test of proportion
Freshman	19.8	33,094	25.2	104	5.4	p>0.05
Sophomore	21.0	35,172	22.6	93	1.6	p>0.05
Junior	27.5	45,900	27.7	114	.2	p>0.05
Senior	33.6	56,094	24.8	102	8.8	P<0.05*

Table 1.11 Comparing Proportions of Individuals representing different Class Statuses in the overall Undergraduate Population to those in the Report population

This slight statistical difference is corroborated by the literature that usually finds that younger students cheat more (Wideman 2008); however, this could also be the result of the different types of classes earlier year students take in comparison with older year students, because older year students are more savvy cheaters, earlier year cheaters tend to leave the university or are dismissed prior to reaching their senior year, etc. One potential reason for this discrepancy is that younger students are more ignorant than older students since, as is shown in the “Why do they cheat?” section of this dissertation, the number one reason that students essentially said they cheated is that they were ignorant of the rules which constitute academic dishonesty, of their consequences, or of both. To see if ignorance seems to be a major mediating factor in facilitating the inverse relationship between year in school and likelihood of getting reported for academic dishonesty, I looked at the percentage of responses that were coded for ignorance of rules within each class status. The results are below in Tables 1.12 and table 1.13. No significant differences were found.

Students Reported Year in School	Total	Ignorance of rules	response %
Freshman	64	22/64	34%
Sophomore	67	20/67	30%
Junior	87	22/87	25%
Senior	80	23/80	29%

Table 1.12 Percentage of Responses coded for Ignorance of rules within each Class Status

	Freshman 34% (N=64)	Sophomore 30% (N=67)	Junior 25% (N=87)	Senior 29% (N=80)
Freshman		p>0.05	p>0.05	p>0.05
Sophomore			p>0.05	p>0.05
Junior				p>0.05
Senior				

Table 1.13 Two Sample Tests of Proportion for Reported Students claiming Ignorance of Rules From:

http://reports.esp.msu.edu/ReportServer/Pages/ReportViewer.aspx?%2fROReports2005%2fUE-ComparisonStudentEnrollments&term_seq_id=1114

By far, the biggest difference between the characteristics of the sample of reported students and the characteristics of the overall undergraduate population is that international students were around five times more likely to be reported than would be expected by chance. I had reliable data for the percentage of international students in the overall population for only the Fall semesters of 2009 and 2010. So, I compared data from only those two semesters. See Tables 1.14 and 1.15 below.

MSU	MSU Fall 2009	MSU Fall 2010
U.S.	33,235	32,432
non-U.S.	2,636	2,992
% non-US	7.35%*	9.23%*
	Reported Fall 2009	Reported Fall 2010
U.S.	58	42
non-U.S.	37	29
% non-US in class	39.58%*	40.85%*

Table 1.14 Tests of Citizenship Status Proportions

*Test of proportions across all groups yields significant differences, $p < .001$, between the percentage of non-U.S. citizens in the overall undergraduate community compared to the percentage that have been reported for academic dishonesty,

MSU data from http://oiss.isp.msu.edu/documents/statsreport/10pdfs/1971_2010.pdf

This finding is congruent with a wealth of literature that shows that international students are more likely than domestic students to transgress the rules of academic integrity (Wideman 2008). One specific reason for this difference put forth by scholars is that many international students come from collectivist cultures that do not have the same sense of individual private property as do the U.S. and U.S. academia. Thus, it is believed that international students are more likely to plagiarize, and there has been some evidence of this (Hayes and Introna 2005). To see if international students were more likely than domestic students to have plagiarized, I looked at the likelihood that each group of reported students were reported for plagiarism in the Fall of 2011. Surprisingly, among reported students, international students were *less likely* to be reported for only plagiarism. That is, among reported students, instructors were more likely to check only the plagiarism box on the academic dishonesty report for domestic students than they were for international students. See Table 1.15 below.

Fall 2011	Reported	N=137
Citizens	63	
Non- Citizens	74	
	Plagiarism	
Citizens	24 of 63	38.1%*
Non- Citizens	15 of 74	20.3%*

Table 1.15 The Proportion of Reported Citizens and non-Citizens who were reported for only Plagiarism

*proportions significantly different from each other at the $P=.05$ level.

Another idea that may explain some of the overrepresentation of international undergraduates is that if a higher proportion of international students than domestic students are male, and if males cheat more (which has generally been found (Wideman 2008)), then

international students would be more likely to cheat than domestic students. I found some support for this hypothesis in Table 1.16, where I uncovered that reported international students were much more likely to be male than were reported domestic students.

Comparing citizenship status by gender

Citizenship	Gender		Total	Proportion
	Female	Male		Male
Citizen	139	120	259	120/259 46.3%*
Non-Citizen	65	88	154	88/154 57.1%*
Grand Total	204	209	413	

Table 1.16 Comparing Citizenship Status by Gender

*significant at $P=.05$

DISPROPORTIONALITY IN REPORTS DISCUSSION

International undergraduates were much more likely to get reported for academic dishonesty than were domestic students. This was by far the biggest demographic discrepancy when comparing the individuals receiving academic dishonesty reports to those of the entire population of undergraduates. This finding is not too surprising considering that it is in line with much of the literature that not only presents this disproportionately high likelihood of international students studying in the U.S. to get reported for academic misconduct but that also offers several explanations for why this difference might exist.

Cultural beliefs and norms surrounding academic integrity, intellectual property, rules of attribution, and even the very notion of *private* property are commonly and widely reported to vary across time and space (e.g. in Belk 1984). In line with this, students from collectivist and/or non-Western cultures seem to violate or be willing to violate the conventions of westernized academic integrity more often than students who have been primarily socialized into the individualistic and attribution-heavy rules of the academies of the West. For example, Rawwas,

El-Kahtib and Vitell (2004) reported that Chinese marketing students found cheating behaviors to be more acceptable than did their American counterparts, and Grimes (2004) yielded a similar conclusion in comparing U.S. business undergraduates to students studying in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Grimes' study reached the conclusion that American students value and expect more honesty in their academic lives than did the European and Asian students. This differential cultural conditioning seems to be associated with an individual's propensity to act in academically dishonest ways, with international students being more likely to cheat than U.S. students (Ercegovic and Richardson 2004).

Of course, U.S. students are part of their own cultures that both mystify academic integrity and also foster blatant dishonesty and disrespect for the laws governing intellectual property. In her ethnographic study of some modern American undergraduates, Susan Blum (2009) reveals a sub-culture where sharing and quoting without attribution are established norms of conduct. In this world, individuals regularly quote movies, songs, and TV shows in everyday speech, and part of thriving in this culture rests on one's ability to seamlessly integrate his own thoughts with popularly known phrases and bits from the fashionable media of the time. In addition to this hyper-sharing reality that many of today's college students live in, the students are also embedded in an overarching American culture where honesty does not seem very valued, especially when being dishonest can get one "ahead." In David Callahan's popular book *The Cheating Culture* (2004), he convincingly presents a portrait of contemporary American culture that not only passively accepts cheating, corruption, and lying but also actively fosters it, through fierce winner-take-all competitions for prestige, money, and inclusion, among other things.

However, as Callahan admits, cheating also regularly occurs in cultures with economic and social systems different from the United States. The watchdog group, *Transparency International*, reports that the greatest concentration of corruption across the globe occurs in the more communally-structured, socialistic countries (Crittenden, Hanna, and Peterson 2009 citing Hodess and Wolkers 2004). Perhaps in this ever-globalizing world, these cross-cultural differences will become a moot point in the future as college students from all over the world will have been exposed to the same worldwide hyper-culture as everyone else. In support of this future being now, Crittenden et al. (2009) did not find any meaningful differences between how tolerant business students from the less corrupt U.S. were of cheating and how tolerant business students from more corrupt countries were. Despite this, the researchers *did* find a significant difference in *student likelihood of cheating* between students from the U.S. and those from more corrupt countries (e.g. China, Bolivia, Turkey, Vietnam).

Cohoon and Rogers' (n.d.) mixed-methods study of computer science students offers some qualitative evidence of the association between corruption and cheating behavior. For example, an international student studying in the U.S. is quoted: "*I'm from Ukraine ... [where cheating is] not a negative thing at all. People [there] expect students to want to "cheat."*" Note that in 2011 *Transparency International* ranked Ukraine 152nd out of 183 countries.³ In addition to the reports garnered directly from international students about the, at times, pro-cheating culture of their home countries, many U.S. domestic students espoused a belief that international students were prone to cheating behavior, especially organized cheating behavior. Cohoon and Rogers quote a U.S. citizen explaining why he felt he must cheat:

³ <https://www.kyivpost.com/news/nation/detail/117944/>

“The Russians had the Computer Science department on lock. And if anybody here who disagrees with me (laughter), tell me because the Russians have all the tests, all the answers. ... They have everything and they work as a good unit. Indians too, and the Asians. Everybody has their own niche. And like me, ... I’m the only black guy in there , and it just leaves me out, you know. I have to join a circle ... I joined up with the Russians in [an advanced programming class], and they helped me through the class. They gave me all the exams from last semester. I’m not saying: I’m taking the fifth on the cheating part, but they gave me all the exams from the last semester. They gave me all the notes. They had everything, and they distribute it to all their friends, the whole circle. – And if you’re not in a niche or a group, or maybe you don’t cross the barrier [into a group], you’re going to fail.”

Russia’s 2011 ranking by *Transparency International* was 143 out of 183.⁴

In light of these qualitative findings, Cohoon and Rogers report something unexpected: their data, writ large, does *not* point to a relationship between citizenship and cheating behavior. To substantiate this, the authors state that there was also no significant relationship between the proportion of international students in a department and that department’s self-reported problems with cheating. Thus, it may *not* be that international students cheat more but that their cheating behaviors are more salient to others and perhaps to themselves as well.

The large overrepresentation of international students in my class may not be an indicator of differences in the *actual* frequency and egregiousness of academically dishonest behaviors, but rather an indication of differing perceptions about the cheating likelihood of various categories of people. This hypothesis fits well with Howard Becker’s famous *labeling theory* and the various established tenets of social psychology that illustrate the power of perception and perceptual salience in remembering, focusing, and deciding to act (e.g. see Cialdini and Goldstein 2004).

⁴ Ibid.

Of course, it can be both. Perhaps, instructors, domestic students, and international students are all primed with the idea that international students cheat more than others. So, instructors are more likely to look for cheating behavior amongst international students and due to this disproportionate surveillance and sifting, a greater proportion of international students are turned in, which just substantiates the idea that they are more likely offenders, creating a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy. Adding to this, if, as Becker and others have thought, the international students internalize the label given to them, they may be more likely to act out in accordance with that label. In this case, they may cheat more.

Another factor besides actual cheating differences that may account for some of the differences in reports by citizenship status is the ease of detection. Although it is difficult to find untarnished data on the total number of acts of academic dishonesty occurring at any given time, the bulk of self-report studies indicate that a much higher number of cheaters and cheating incidents exist than are ever officially reported for academic dishonesty. For instance, in the late 1990s, one survey of high achieving high school students indicated that only 5% of the cheaters were ever caught (Crittendon, Hanna, and Peterson 2009 from Kleiner and Lord 1999). So, if the great majority of acts are never caught and even less are reported, it may be that a key determining factor in who gets caught is how easy they are to catch and/or how much proof an instructor has. It is certainly easier to notice a non-native speaker writing in perfect English one paragraph and very broken English in the next than it is to notice the copying and pasting of a native English speaker, although this is also true for some domestic students with poor writing skills.

Extending this last thought, if ease of detection were a powerful influencer of likelihood of reports *and* if it is generally easier to detect international students' plagiarism, we could

expect that more international students than domestic students would be reported for plagiarism. Table 1.15, which was presented earlier in this section, shows the opposite: of those reported, domestic students were *more likely* to have been reported for plagiarism. However, since international students are so much more likely to be reported than domestic students, my findings suggest that it is more likely that an international student in the general population will be reported for plagiarism than a domestic student from the general population would be. Thus, the widely reported notion that international students plagiarize more than domestic students and get reported more often for plagiarism is partially supported by my data.

Still, many other factors may be at play. Religiosity has sometimes been found to inversely correlate with cheating likelihood (e.g. in Bloodgood, Turnley, and Mudrack 2008), and in the places where international students tend to come from (e.g. China, where 38% of international students enrolled at MSU in the Fall of 2009 were from, see <http://news.msu.edu/story/8214/>), there is generally less religiosity than in the United States. Additionally, McCabe (2005b) found that male undergraduates self-report more serious cheating than do female undergraduates. So, if more gratuitous acts of cheating are more likely to spur a report and males tend to commit more of these acts than females and there is a higher proportion of males in the overall pool of international students compared to the percentage in the overall domestic student population (and in the Fall of 2009, 53% of international students were male, see <http://news.msu.edu/story/8214/>), some of the variance in report likelihood between domestic and international students may be explained by the different gender compositions of the groups.

WHY DO THEY CHEAT?

Employing a variety of methodologies, many studies seek to explain why students cheat. The bulk of this work has produced quantitative data via questionnaires (e.g. McCabe and Trevino 1997), although experiments (e.g. Karlins, Michaels, and Podlogar 1988), interviews (e.g. Zito and McQuillan 2010), content analysis (McCabe, Trevino, and Butterfield 1999), amongst other things, have also been conducted, yielding quantitative and qualitative conclusions. Most of these studies have asked and formulated conclusions based on the answers of general student samples. Once again, my sample of those who have been reported for cheating can be used not only to substantiate earlier research to see if findings are true for those who get caught and those who just self-report but also to differentiate the situational characteristics of reported cheaters from self-reporters.

Another thing that can be taken from this is the addition to the triangulation process that comes from asking students in a different context than they are normally. In my study, students may be more likely to remember the situation, and I can ask about a particular act. This certainly will yield different results than asking in innocuous contexts. So it is important to list the specific context of the question here.

I present here a description of my findings and an analysis of how they connect with the larger literature. The student quotes provided have not been edited or altered in any way.

Table 2.1 shows the number of responses that mentioned each category. *Ignorance of the consequences* of cheating was the most common response, followed by *ignorance of rules* and *neutralization*. I opted for a coding approach that allowed one response to be marked as containing evidence of several categories, one category, or in rare cases, no categories.

Ignorance of consequences	99
Ignorance of rules	87
Neutralization	86
Time Pressures (with responses that accepted responsibility for lack of time <i>and</i> those that externalized blame)	50
Bad grade not an option	30
Strain	21
Peers	18

Table 2.1 Reasons given for cheating

There were more citizens than non-citizens who responded, but compared to the overall student population, the non-citizens were overrepresented at roughly a 5 to 1 rate. Males and females were equally represented in this sample (see Table 2.2 below). Additionally, there more upperclassman respondents than there were underclassmen respondents. No statistically significant differences were found between the demographics of the respondents versus those of the larger population of reported cheaters.

Gender	Citizenship Status		
Male	149	U.S. Citizen	191
Female	149	Not U.S Citizen	107

Table 2.2 Gender and Citizenship Status of Sample (N=298)

As this is primarily a qualitative examination, I will not spend much time in summarizing the shape of the data. Still, there are a few interesting relationships that I wish to comment on. Scholars have reasoned that early year undergraduates are more likely to be ignorant of the rules of academic integrity (e.g. Sims 1995). As seen in Table 2.3 below, there is a slight difference in

the likelihood that a student's response is coded as showing ignorance as predicted by year in school, with the later year students being less likely to express ignorance of the rules.

Year in School	Ignorance Response %		
Freshman	64	22/64	34%
Sophomore	67	20/67	30%
Junior	87	22/87	25%
Senior	80	23/80	29%

Table 2.3 Occurrence of Ignorance of Rules response by Class Status (N=298)

The literature is full of studies and commentaries that assert that international students enter the U.S. with a different notion of the rules of attribution, authorship, and plagiarism than domestically schooled students. This cultural and curricular difference is reasoned to lead to a higher proportion of cheating among international students when compared to domestic students, due to international students being more ignorant than their domestic counterparts. While I did find that international students were disproportionately reported for academic dishonesty, among all reported students, international students wrote about ignorance of rules *less* often than their domestic counterparts. Still, if considering the entire undergraduate community, my research shows that any randomly selected international student would be more likely than any randomly selected domestic student to get reported for cheating and plead ignorance of rules (see Table 2.4).

	Ignorance of consequences		Ignorance of rules	
U.S. citizen	53/191	27%	61/191	32%
non-U.S. citizen	44/107	41%	26/107	24%

Table 2.4 Occurrence of Ignorance Response by Citizenship Status (N=298)

As seen in Table 2.1, the most common response revolved around ignorance (seen in 164 out of 312 responses, with only 20 shared responses of ignorance of rules and ignorance of consequences). Students often stated that knowing what is considered cheating and what its consequences were would have made them less likely to cheat.

The literature shows that some students claim ignorance about the characteristics of academic dishonesty (e.g. Wideman 2008; Burrus, McGoldrick, and Schuhmann 2007), although the concept of *ignorance* is not usually explicitly studied and/or found to be a powerful predictor of academically dishonest acts or relatively favorable attitudes towards cheating. It may be that my specific sample of students who have been reported are more likely to have transgressed based on ignorance than the average cheater taken from the overall population. It may also be that my sample of students are more likely to plead ignorance in hopes of securing no further punishment for their act, although this seems unlikely since it is made explicitly clear that the initial punishment is in taking the course and to be honest in course answers.⁵

Ignorance of definition

Almost a third of all respondents claimed ignorance of what constitutes academic dishonesty. Of interest, it was not just plagiarizers claiming that they did not know the rules. In

⁵ In coursework, several students have spontaneously expressed detailed accounts of the incident that led them to be placed in the class, and many have also given responses that indicated that even after their incident they do not grasp what constitutes academic dishonesty. Of course, it is difficult to definitively check the veracity of student responses. It may be the case that students feel that the only way to get through the class is to admit to a transgression, much like the professionals in Rosenthal's famous study of a mental hospital, often named *On Being Sane in Insane Places* and to agree to being crazy in order to eventually be released. However, in course materials we make it clear that they may have not been intentionally cheating when they committed their act, which makes it unlikely that they would feel the need to admit intention, even if they still feel pressure to admit to the act.

fact, of the 90 students reported for just plagiarism who responded to this question, only 28 responses were coded for ignorance of rules. Put differently, it was not just plagiarizers who plead ignorance, and only 28 out of 90 plagiarizers pled ignorance. It appears that students that get reported and plead ignorance are not just ignorant of the rules of writing, citing, and the like.

My analysis of open-ended course responses buttresses evidence derived from the pre- and post-course vignettes (to be analyzed later in this dissertation) that shows that many students reported for academic dishonesty claim/show that they were ignorant about what constitutes a violation of university code and about how serious their institution takes violations of academic integrity. For instance, Issac, a male senior U.S. citizen who was reported for cheating on a quiz, test, or final exam in a computer science course expresses the following (and note that the forthcoming student quotes have not been altered in any way and contain various spelling and grammatical errors):

If I knew what I was doing was wrong I wouldn't have done it plain and simple. I wish I could say I wish I never cheated but it is not that simple because at the time of my incident I was unaware that my behavior was wrong.

Students also claimed that they misunderstood the rules of citation, attribution, and quoting and that this led to non-purposive cheating that would have not occurred had they simply known. Another senior U.S. citizen, Julie, who was assigned a failing grade in an upper level psychology course for an incident of plagiarism asserted the following:

If I would have known that what I was doing was wrong I would have not done it. It was fine line between plagiarism and not being such and I crossed it. Being more informed on this subject would have helped me.

Mike, a male freshman citizen, also expressed frustration about the definition of plagiarism:

“I would have not committed my act if I had implicitly been told that citing information to the wrong source is just as bad of an offense as plagiarizing the entire paper.”

Although the above students spoke of their ignorance without explicitly assessing blame to any individual including themselves, most students whose responses claimed ignorance of the definition of ignorance placed a portion of the blame for their ignorance on an external person or entity or themselves. In line with Sykes and Matza's (1957) neutralizing technique of *condemning the condemners*, the reporting instructors were most often the target of blame.

Hannah, a senior female citizen reported for plagiarism in an upper level psychology course (not the same one as Julie), thought that her professor did make an effort to talk about academic integrity but that she missed certain elements that would have been helpful. Hannah, still accepting much of the responsibility for her incident, replied to the question:

I think if i had read the part about academic dishonesty closer maybe i would have taken more time to look up about plagiarism and what it really is .I feel that teachers stress cheating on exam and things like that but they dont not stress about plagiarism as much. I know it is using someone elses workds as your own but there is alot more than that. citing something wrong using the wrong page number etc.. . I should have paid closer attention to my syllabus. if i knew i would be sitting here retakign a class and taking this development class i would have paid closer attention to the fine print.

Other students seemed to place a greater proportion of the blame on their instructors. In a freshman writing course, Sara was accused of falsifying data:

I just feel like the professor needed to be more clear on how to cite research papers correctly. I'm not saying ignorance is an excuse but it's the professor's duty to expose us to the proper way of doing things.

Another female US citizen, sophomore June, believed that her professor could have prevented her unauthorized collaboration if the professor would have made the directions of the assignment clearer. Specifically she argues:

If I would have been informed earlier on in my college career that what I did was in fact considered cheating. My professor did an extremely poor job of informing the class where the line was drawn adn what was acceptable. I think that there are a lot of gray areas within assignments and projects that professors need to do a better job at stating there expectations.

A senior female US citizen nursing student expressed a similar sentiment:

I would have been stopped from committing my act of academic dishonesty if I knew that I was not supposed to work with another student on this assignment. If my teacher had been clearer about the extent to which we could work with another classmate I think I would have not had this issue.

International students also found some culpability in the actions or lack thereof of their professors, even if in the sample of reported cheaters they did not blame their professors as often as their domestic counterparts. Wuyenz, a sophomore accused of plagiarism stated this: “If my professor explained more about it i sure i did not do my act. People do not give information about integrity in academic way so some times people make mistakes.” Not surprisingly, students who at the time of question were still denying their violation blame those who, in their mind, erroneously reported them. A female senior U.S. citizen, Mary, who was reported in a management course, although not accepting the validity of her report, does reason about how a misunderstanding could lead to a report:

I didn't commit an act of academic dishonesty but I understand why so many students do. I think that if the consequences and punishment is clear and evident then less students will be prone to cheating and committing dishonest actions in their academics. In my situation if the professor made clear of the expectations of the work that is required from their students (such as group work or non-collaborative homework) then honest students like myself will not be accused if the directions are made clear- because i have no desire motive or intent to commit misconduct. It simply is not my nature to do so.

Professors, although the most popular source of blame-placing, were not the only group that students reasoned aided in them ultimately getting reported for academic dishonesty. For example, Haley, a sophomore U.S. citizen, cited a structural/cultural problem at the university level:

Although I did not realize I was committing an act of academic dishonesty when I did as cliché as that may sound I think that to combat academic dishonesty in general the university needs to rethink how it is approached ... Too often classes work you to the ground and when others are cheating and doing better than you it is hard as a student to continue spending the time and effort. I think that sometimes college is too focused on

how much work you can bust out or how well you do on impossible exams rather than creating intelligent members of society who have sets of morals and values that condone a healthy society.

Others, perhaps due to being new to college, assigned blame to their previous educators. Henry, a first year student accused of plagiarism in an introductory writing course responded with this:

If I would have had more knowledge on how to read information and cite that information correctly I would have not had any plagiarism problems. My prior knowledge was next to zero when it came to citing sources. High Schools should prepare students more when it comes to research papers this would prevent some acts of plagiarism.

Despite the noted presence of diffusion of blame and/or condemnation of the condemners, either proximately (professors) or more distally (the university, college life, high schools, etc.), 64% of students whose responses were coded for ignorance of what is considered cheating *did not* place blame on some external person or entity. In fact, many accepted blame for their ignorance. Of interest, again, is the finding that among all who expressed ignorance about what is considered cheating, international students were more likely to accept the blame for their transgression than were domestic students. A junior international student simply said, “If I read the syllabus clearly I would not be in this position.” A sophomore international student provided a similarly themed yet more abstract, answer: “Being conscious of cheating is as crime and stealing other honest people's work. Ant the most important is it is just fooling myself.”

Of course, some U.S. citizens did not outsource blame. Clara, a junior, said this:

Being more in tune to what is actually considered cheating would have stopped me from committing my act of academic dishonesty. It didn't even occur to me that I was cheating until it was shown to me in black and white.

Jason, a freshman, wrote this:

I would not have done it had I known that it was considered an act of academic dishonesty. I was not well informed on what was considered cheating and I made a mistake that I have learned from.

Josh, a junior, asserted the following:

Understanding more clearly that what I was doing was wrong if I had known the rules more clearly I wouldn't have done what I THOUGHT was right but was a misinterpretation of the guidelines.. I didn't read in depth enough

Gary, a senior, had similar beliefs, saying, “the act on my part was due to incorrect formatting. If I had learned how to properly cite my work in text I would not be in this situation.” Although one might be apt to interpret these remarks as being flippant, on the surface the students keep the locus of control, stating that they (the students) could have done something differently.

Why ignorance of definition?

The literature shows that some students claim they are not aware of the characteristics of academic dishonesty (e.g. Wideman 2008; Burrus, McGoldrick, and Schuhmann 2007), although the concept of *ignorance* is not usually explicitly studied and/or found to be a powerful predictor of academically dishonest acts or relatively favorable attitudes towards cheating. This may just be due to the highly intertwined nature of the explanatory variables that are usually present in the studies. Maybe my findings here are just unveiling something that exists to the same degree in the entire population, i.e. around a third of the population cheats out of ignorance, but those who do not get caught will not self-report their cheating behavior and motivation because they will not view it as cheating. Or, perhaps my unique sample of students who have been reported are more likely to have transgressed based on ignorance than the average cheater taken from the overall population (i.e. it is easier to catch someone who does not know they are doing anything wrong). It is also possible that my sample of students is more likely to plead ignorance in hopes of securing no further punishment for their act, although this seems unlikely

since it is made explicitly clear that the initial punishment is in taking the course and to be honest in course answers).

In favor of the idea that ignorance about academic dishonesty exists to a relatively high degree in the general population is research that asks students to identify if certain “paraphrasing” of a passage was plagiarism or not. Mahmood (2009) illustrates that students often could not identify plagiarism and that they were more confident in their ability to accurately identify plagiarism than their own abilities dictated they should be. In addition, researchers have argued that cheating is so prevalent that it may even be normative (e.g. Jensen et al. 2002), and studies have shown strong correlations between one’s own self-reported cheating behavior and that which they report about their peers (Beasley 2009, Hard et al. 2006). My findings in this study both indirectly and directly support this notion. For instance, Rita, a junior international student wrote the following:

Anything at all to be honest. I had seen people sign in a friend's name for attendance so many times and seen professors consciously turn a blind eye to the situation that I never realized it was really cheating. looking back it obviously was a type of falsification of data" but I had never heard it put in a negative light before and therefor didn't even realize it. If a professor student colleague etc had even once said to me that don't let someone else use your I-clicker for you I would probably not have done it."

If it is the case that, as Jensen et al.’s (2002) article’s title suggests, “Everybody Does It,” then it may be hard for students, especially students encountering an entirely different culture with its own laws, customs, traditions, etc. to sort out which sorts of things are allowed and which sorts of things are not. This grouping need not only include international students, as many domestic students grow up in places that bear little resemblance socially and structurally to what is found at a large university. It may be hard for the newcomers to, upon entering Rome, “NOT do as the Romans do,” and perhaps harder yet to realize that the pervasive actions of seemingly everyone around them violates various regulations. And, while the metaphor using the Roman analogy

may not explain much of why people cheat in general (after all, the cultural explanation also points toward international students coming to the U.S. equipped with values that lead to more cheating, and various other theories point to non-ignorance), it may help explain why certain people cheat, get caught, and are reported, as it is hard to avoid these things if one does not know what to avoid.

Following this notion, we would expect that underclassman would be more likely to plead ignorance once reported than upperclassmen, and I did find some weak evidence of this to go along with the statistically significant finding that seniors were less likely to be reported than would be expected if reports were submitted at random. I looked at the effect of year in school on likelihood to get reported, and the underclassmen undergraduates in my class were slightly more likely than the upperclassmen to cite ignorance, although this relationship was not significant (See Table 3). However, this is far from conclusive as too many variables that may affect both cheating likelihood and ignorance pleading likelihood were not able to be controlled. For instance, upperclassmen may be less likely to cheat/plead ignorance brought upon by culture shock but may be more likely to plead it due to the specific expectations of their professors in the smaller, more intimate classes that they are more likely to take in their upperclassmen years.

Looking only at student behavior and student culture is not sufficiently inclusionary in an analysis of why ignorance about what constitutes academic dishonesty exists, as it is faculty members and administrators that make and enforce the rules that students may or may not be aware of. Indeed, following constructionist perspectives on deviance (see Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2009 for a recent take on this concept *vis-à-vis* moral panics), we must look at those who shape the rules whose violation constitutes deviance.

Faculty members do not always agree on what is considered academic dishonesty or on how or when to punish it (Bennett, Behrendt, and Boothby 2011). So, it could be that some of the variance between the sample of reported students and the general population is the result of differential faculty behavior. Cohoon and Rogers (n.d.) performed a qualitative study that included asking faculty how they handled cheating in their courses. The responses were wide-ranging. Some faculty refused to take on the task of surveillance, others purposively changed the structure of their assignments in order to minimize cheating opportunities, while still others took a very active role in policing transgressors. Exhibiting these differences in computer science faculty at 18 different departments, Cohoon and Rogers (n.d.) provide the following instructor quotes:

“We just don’t have the resources to really make sure that everyone learns everything. You have 100 students in the class, the onus is on them to actually do the homework rather than just copy it from a friend, do some minor modifications and submit it. Certainly you have no idea whether the students are just cloning their homework, or whether they’re actually doing it (pg 10).”

“On the mid-term, you bring your program to class. And there is a very worthwhile question on the exam, or possibly two, that asks you to make small changes in your program, or answer a question with respect to your program. And if you haven’t written that code, you won’t be able to do it (pg 10).”

“I announce ... We will run your programs through the plagiarism detection. When I give the quizzes, I have {the students} record their ID which row they were in, how far from the left they were, and the ID of the person to their right. And that lets me reconstruct the seating pattern in the room. I pick [the quizzes] up in that order, and then the TAs are instructed to look for students who are sitting side by side and have the similar pattern of wrong answers (pg 11).”

One reason researchers have identified that helps explain why faculty have different beliefs about how to treat academically dishonest behavior in their courses is that faculty have varying perceptions about the frequency in which academically dishonest behavior occurs, with those who perceive that cheating is occurring more frequently tending to take action against it

more often (Hard 2006). Instructor reporting behavior also varies by their definition of academic dishonesty, with those considering more acts under the umbrella of cheating behavior being more likely to file a report, although we should be wary of this type of relationship as it could be largely, or even exclusively, tautological (Whitley and Keith-Spiegel 2001).

Considering this variance in behavior and beliefs on the part of faculty, we can see how a student might get reported for an act that she thought was fine because she had been doing it, perhaps along with everyone else in other classes, perhaps even very publicly. This type of reporting may also explain why it seems that reported students are more likely to plead ignorance than general self-reported cheaters, i.e. students who have not been reported but who would plead ignorance if turned in do not self-report anything because they do not feel they are cheating. Here is a more tangible example of how differential professor behavior may lead to a student cheating out of ignorance:

A student has used an instructor's test from a previous year's section of the course to study for an upcoming test in the same course, the student, depending on the professor's idiosyncratic rules regarding this behavior, may be reported for a violation. In a different earlier class, the same student has used his friend's old exams from that particular course to study, and the professor of that course, fully aware of this practice, may have not cared or may have even encouraged it.

This example illustrates how a student might come to claim ignorance when he is reprimanded for the former case because he was so used to the latter case. This may be even more likely to occur than chance would dictate considering Whitley and Keith-Spiegel's (2001) finding that those faculty members who consider the most types of things academic dishonesty also do the most reporting of academic dishonesty.

In continuing to flush out the creation of deviance from a constructionist point of view, we must also be aware that institutional policies play a role in faculty reporting behavior.

Indeed, various policies governing departments, colleges, and the university as a whole play a

role in informing faculty and student action in this domain. Although it is hard to measure the exact effect of policies on behavior, it stands to reason that the presence of a faculty divided over the particulars of academic integrity is especially likely in institutions that have adopted vague and abstract policies that, as Abasi and Graces (2008) put it, “mystify academic writing” among other things.

To assess the level of student ignorance regarding academic dishonesty, researchers generally avoid directly asking students if they know the rules governing academic integrity. Instead, they generally choose to undertake experimental methods that prove that students conceptualize the boundaries of academic dishonesty/integrity in varying ways, depending on the perceived context of the potential violator (e.g. stress level, whether everyone else is thought to be doing it) and the information provided to them at the time of the decision (e.g. whether the school’s academic integrity policy is printed on the survey). Indeed, some of the variance found in the literature on self-reported academic dishonesty frequencies may be the result of the variety of definitions of what constitutes cheating that students have prior to completing the survey and also how the researcher conceptualizes academic dishonesty on the actual survey instrument (i.e. some just ask “have you cheated?,” some ask about certain behaviors, etc.). Through manipulating these variables and performing meta-analyses, many scholars have demonstrated that faculty and students do not agree on the degree of acceptability of certain acts, e.g. recycling one’s old paper for use in a new class (Jensen et al. 2002).

For example, Whitley and Keith-Spiegel (2001:37) provide a detailed list of the percentage of faculty and the percentage of students that found a certain act to constitute academic dishonesty. While there were some similarities, illustrated by the fact that over 90% of both faculty and students felt that using crib notes on a test was cheating, there were also big

differences. “Reading a condensed version of a novel, play, and so on, rather than assigned full version” was seen as being academically dishonest by between 50 to 74% of faculty but by less than 25% of students. Similarly, “allowing someone to copy homework” was seen as a transgression by between 75 to 89% of faculty but by only between 25 to 49% of students. Perhaps some of these differences, and especially the last one, can be attributed to the fact that students find potential cheating behaviors more acceptable if they are pro-social than if they were just done for reasons like the challenge of beating the system (Jensen et al. 2002).

Whitley and Keith-Spiegel (2001) also report that this chasm between faculty and student beliefs was especially wide when American faculty members were compared to international students. Certainly, cultural differences can play a large role in students getting reported for acts they thought were not considered cheating, and all the previously mentioned cultural differences in the chapter comparing demographics are relevant to the analysis of not only why students cheat but also why these particular students cheated, got caught, and got reported.

Ignorance of consequences

Students reported being ignorant of the consequences that they would face after getting caught cheating. Most often they cited that had they known about the various penalties that are likely to be levied on a person for transgressing the bounds of academic integrity, they would have been less likely to cheat. The consequences that most students referred to involved disciplinary action taken by some arm of MSU (e.g. professor’s discounting grades, holds on their account placed by the central administration of the university, having to take my course, etc.). However, students also mentioned consequences related to personal feelings (e.g. shame, disappointing friends and families, hurting future life chances, loss of learning, tarnishing the

way the reporting professor and/or academic department sees them, etc.). In addition, many mentioned consequences in a more generalized, abstract way.

Concordant with the rational choice perspective, which asserts that people choose to act or not after weighing the likelihood and intensity of the expected costs and benefits of acting or not acting (see Piquero and Tibbett's 2002 book that summarizes how the concept has been treated in the sociological literature throughout the 20th century), several students seem to believe, once made aware of the institutional penalties incurred after being reported for cheating (or even once they knew people actually get caught/they are caught), that the costs outweigh the benefits. If a student perceives this to be so, then the student will not perform the action. Judging on the surface, philosophers might say that these people exhibit a morality consistent with *social contract theory*, which stipulates that people try to maximize their own gains, or *Machiavellianism*, which adds the willingness to squash others in one's own pursuit of gains (Granitz and Loewy 2007). While it seems that some students may have a moral compass congruent to the aforementioned perspectives, some may be *utilitarian* morally, i.e. believe that what is best is what benefits the most people to the highest degree, and thus acting in a way that they think accrues the biggest net-gain for everyone, even if this thinking does not account for the negative externalities caused by one's cheating (Granitz and Loewry 2007).

Ultimately, the literature shows that people are somewhat motivated by avoiding consequences. However, their perceptions about the likelihood, severity, and celerity (how quickly the punishments manifest) of these punishments might be skewed away from the actual (or the most commonly accepted and heralded version of reality, if coming from a pure constructionist perspective) likelihood, severity, and celerity of the consequences. So, following the tenets of *Social Norms Theory* (Berkowitz 2004), rational actors who misperceive the reality

of the consequences (for instance, because people who give out penalties do so discretely) might choose to cheat more than they would if they accurately perceived the “actual” consequences. My results show that several students seem to have misperceived the seriousness of academic dishonesty and say they never would have done it if they had known what the consequences were for any student and/or what the consequence would be for the particular student.

Still, many members of the academy feel that this class and the compulsory account hold that comes with it is a very mild punishment. In addition, perhaps the students are exaggerating the consequences (e.g. some students talk about being kicked out of the university, which is extremely unlikely to occur for one report of academic dishonesty). But the fear the students feel is real. So, it is possible that the students who note a realization of the harsher nature of the consequences upon getting reported and being placed in the class accurately perceived the reality of the consequences prior to the incident but after being reported believe that the penalties are more severe than they actually are.

Knowing the consequences can also inform a person’s morality. If a person looks to external forces to help shape their morality, then a misperception might lead to an assuagement of the perceived immorality of cheating (e.g. “if no one gets in trouble, it must not be that wrong.”) There are actually many benefits to this type of thinking, as most socialization occurs in just this way, and it helps people learn what sociologist William Sumner (2002) called *folkways* (the unwritten , informal normative rules regarding behavior).

This study offers evidence that students both misperceive consequences and use what they see and hear in their everyday lives to partially inform their morality. Due to this, perhaps the academy might want to try and make the consequences more salient to all students, although this could backfire if some students currently overestimate the consequences and would be

encouraged to cheat upon learning of the actual consequences. Still, highlighting the issue at all levels (instructors, administrators, student leaders, etc.) can lead to less cheating, due to more awareness/reminders about the benefits of academic integrity and the costs of academic dishonesty, as well as affect student morality in a way that the university desires (i.e. towards a general feeling that cheating is wrong).

Still, we know that lots of people cheat and never get detected and not all who are detected get reported. Kleiner and Lord (1999) reported that 95 percent of high-achieving high school cheaters never get caught. This is 95 percent of individuals, each of whom may cheat many times. So the validity of the notion that the consequences are not that severe might not be off base (i.e. if the average student believes the average institutional consequences for cheating are very low, the evidence supports his belief). It may just be that the group of students that get reported feel the weight of the consequences and recalibrate their perception to believe that reports and penalties are more common and more severe, even though in general, the extrinsic benefits of cheating may outweigh the costs because the costs are hardly ever manifested. In addition, if only a tiny minority of transgressors face penalties, the uneven detecting and reporting by faculty across the university might make it more likely that students are ignorant of the definitions and consequences related to academic integrity violations. After all, cases of detection, report filing, and the levying of consequences are unusual, uneven, and quiet.⁶

⁶ There are exceptions to this rule. For instance, Michael Bishop (2001) relays information about a former University of Maryland directive that supposed that everyone in trouble for academic dishonesty have their names and offenses printed in the school newspaper. Bishop felt that this was one way that students could realize that their peers do get caught and punished for cheating at times.

Rational choice

The student belief that had they known how bad the repercussions were going to be they would have not cheated is congruent with the rational choice perspective (Coleman and Fararo 1992). Students who underestimated the severity of the consequences, including the likelihood of detection and report, would have been more likely to feel that the expected benefits of the act outweigh the expected costs.

Consequences are perceived as more severe than previously thought

Some students mentioned that they did not know how bad the consequences were for cheating, even if they did not explicitly say what about the consequences surprised them. Katy, a freshman citizen who was accused of plagiarism in an introductory writing course said she would have been less likely to cheat “if the seriousness and consequences were brought to my attention ahead of time.” Dominik, a sophomore international student, wrote, “if I have known that it would be this bad I wouldn't have done it in the first place.” Wu, a junior international student, said this: “If I was realizing how serious the consequences are going to be I did submit my assignment and just missed 4 instead of this.”

Some students did explicitly state what consequences they were unaware of and expressed that knowing these consequences would have likely stopped them from committing this act. This reasoning occurred even if the consequences mentioned were of the type that many faculty and administrators would see as lenient (e.g. having to take a remediation class or receiving a zero on an assignment). For example, Eric, a sophomore citizen, wrote, “only if I knew the consequences and that if I know I would have to go through semester load of work.” Another male citizen said this:

If a student were properly informed of the great consequences of academic dishonesty ahead of time I believe he would be sure to think twice about committing even the smallest act of dishonesty. This includes the penalty grade the course on academic dishonesty as well as the blemish on transcripts.

Bob, a junior citizen, wrote about the consequences in regards to time management: "If I know I would have to take this class and take up time from my studies I would had worked harder to avoided my situation." Andy, a sophomore citizen, lamented the addition to his work load brought upon by his violation: "Only if i knew the consequences and that if I know I would have to go through semester load of work." Larry, a junior citizen reported for plagiarism, felt similarly about having to take the remediation course. He wrote that "if I knew I would be in trouble for it and had to take this class I defiantly would have done my work by myself." Chris, a junior citizen agreed by saying "knowing that i would have to do a web class like this." Chenji, a sophomore international student, mused "if i cant graduate i will definetly dont cheat."

Dennis, a junior citizen reported for misconduct in an upper level class stated this:

If i would have known all of the repercussions that came with me committing my act of academic dishonesty i would have not done it. By this i mean if i would have known it shows up on my permanent records and that my grade in the class would drop from a 3.5 to a 2.0 and that holds would be put on my account and lastly i would have to take this class. If i new all this before i committed academic fraud i would have never committed it.

Alexis, a junior non-citizen who received a zero on an assignment due to plagiarism said, "I i had known there would be very serious implications about what i did and severe consequences for my actions." A sophomore male international student who also received a failing grade for an assignment as the result of plagiarism stated, "if I have known that it would be this bad I wouldn't have done it in the first place." Brandi, a sophomore citizen, said, "if I had known the consequences could be as severe as they were I probably would not have cheated."

Not knowing people who have gotten caught and/or reported

Another major way in which students underestimated the consequences associated with cheating was in not knowing people who have been caught and punished in the past. Rational actors with imperfect information may choose to cheat if they believe that the chance of detection and punishment is much more unlikely than the gains they expect to accrue as the result of the act. This may be true even if the actual chance of detection and punishment are actually high enough that they would deter the individual from committing the act had the individual known the actual chance of detections and punishment. Jose, a first year citizen accused of plagiarism in a History course wrote that he would have been less likely to cheat “if I would have saw the number of students suspended and expelled for this.”

Amy, a sophomore citizen stated this:

If I knew of a friend that had got caught and punished for cheating before I would have not done it. I never had seen or heard of anyone getting caught for it so I did not realize how serious of a matter it was.

Don, a citizen senior accused of plagiarism in a criminal justice course, said, “I believe that I would have been more careful if the professor would have instructed that cheating would not be tolerated and gave a statistical count of how many of his students were caught cheating.” Mariah, a junior citizen said the following:

If the professor would have talked to me about it. I also have never seen it as a serious problem i never see people get committed and have actions upon them for that. If i would have seen those things i would be more aware.

Two citizen seniors, who received a failing grade on an assignment as the result of plaigairism gave the following statements.

Jon said this:

Looking back at the outcome of my personal events I think there is something that could have been done to prevent me from committing academic dishonesty. I think if I would

have first and foremost known exactly what was plagiarism instead of a misconstrued definition I possessed in my head then I would have better of known what exactly to cite and how to do so. Secondly I think if I would have better known the consequences of academic dishonesty I would have gladly taken the lower grade to a zero without the side effects that was the case. I guess I was under a false perception due to the fact numerous other kids did the same thing I did after talking with them and got a slap on the wrist in return. I misjudged the seriousness of one paper valued at 15% of a grade in relation to 4 years of work. I now know that it is this false perception that needed changing and glad to know I'm aware of it myself to be able to change.

Joey wrote this:

If I would have known the implications. If I would have recognized how unfair it is to myself and my university. I have every reason why I should not have been fraudulent. I think more people should know about these facts it means a lot more than the professor saying 'cheating will not be tolerated' people need to be made examples of and I think that this is a perfect way. People will cheat but when they get caught they should be well aware of the consequences that they face.

Not realizing the severity and/or likelihood of tangential or latent consequences

Not all the consequences of cheating involve official punishment from the academic community. After committing their act, students experienced a lot of other negative effects that they did not anticipate: shame, mourning the loss of learning, feeling bad due to hurting classmates and professors, lamenting hurting their own job and school prospects, etc. Henrietta, a senior international student stated the following:

If anything would have stopped me from committing my act of academic dishonesty it would have been the disappointing look on my mothers face if I would have thought she would find out about me cheating in college

Darnicia, a sophomore female international student, was also surprised at how the reaction of others affected her:

Some of my friends found that I had problem with academic dishonesty. I feel very shamed when they found out. If other people know about this It will be very shocked and we have to stop right there.

Trystan, a senior international student who was given a zero on a mathematics exam as the result of academic dishonesty stated this:

The consequence of dishonest integrity and the main purpose of learning. The purpose we study at college is we want to learn about more knowledge. Also we should understand how serious about cheating.

A sophomore non-citizen accused of unauthorized collaboration said, "I will not do the same mistakes twice. At least i know cheating is unfair to honest students." Juan, a senior non-citizen wrote this:

If I had understood the process of receiving academic dishonesty on my record I would have thought twice before cheating. Also if I had thought twice about the morality of clicking in for someone else I would not have cheated.

Lindsay, a freshman citizen reported for plagiarism, stated the following:

Well I didn't purposely commit my act of dishonesty so nothing. But I think for others I think a bigger fear of getting in trouble. I don't think people realize the how much trouble you can actually get in and whats at stake. I think if they knew they would not even attempt to cheat.

Some students admit to being caught up in the moment and not making a sound choice that reflects their usual assessment of the morality or cost-benefit calculus. This is similar to many of the subjects in sociologist Jack Katz's *Seductions of Crime* (1988) and also resonates with one of the main tenets of Sykes and Matza's *Techniques of Neutralization* (1957): deviance often occurs when individuals justify and take short term vacations from their usual moral boundaries in order to commit an act that they would have otherwise found against their moral code. Jillian, a freshman citizen accused of plagiarism in an introductory writing course expressed that "I would have stopped my academic dishonesty if I would have thought about the repercussion before I did it." Jody, a junior citizen reported for plagiarism in a history course said this:

I wish I would have stop and thought about the actions of my dishonesty before I did anything. I was just so stressed and I was hoping someone would have just realize how

stressed I was before I did something stupid. I believe if I knew how MSU treated students who have dishonest the honor code would be more aware than I would have thought more about my actions but since many people don't know what the process of getting caught cheating in college can lead to expect for expulsion many students will continue to do so until they see someone they are close to or famous set an example. For example the trial with the football team I believe it's setting an example to other schools and to other teams at MSU.

Neutralization

In response to the deterministic and sweeping statements made by early criminologists that asserted that deviant, criminal actors are categorically and perhaps inherently different than non-deviant, law-abiding individuals, Sykes and Matza (1957) created their theory on the *Techniques of Neutralization* that individuals employ. This theory explained deviant behavior while also accounting for the observation that most people who commit deviant acts do so as an aberration; most people, who on occasion perform deviant acts, are non-deviant most of the time. *Neutralization* proposes that a person, as a precursor to acting in a deviant way, justifies or rationalizes why it is okay for him to perform that act in this particular situation; furthermore, that said person generally agrees that committing the act in question is wrong, as does greater society.

In addition, most conceptualizations of the theory argue that the justification made by the individual must be one that is not seen by larger society as a valid reason for transgressing the legal, moral, or normative boundaries of that society. An example of a technique of neutralization called "appealing to higher loyalties" is when a person who is generally against murder kills someone and justifies the isolated event as something he had to do because his friend asked him to, and you should "always have your friend's back." The recognition is congruent with control theory (Hirschi 1969) because the ability for a person to grant herself episodic release from societal moral values shows that she is not firmly fastened to society. It

can also be seen as being compatible with differential association (Sutherland and Cressey 2003) and social learning theory (Akers 1977) as these justifications were most likely learned socially through relationships with others who hold “favorable definitions” toward deviant acts in certain contexts (Akers and Jennings 2009).

Researchers have regularly sought to understand academic dishonesty from the perspective of neutralization (e.g. Zito and McQuillian 2010; Storch, Storch, and Clark 2002; Granitz and Loewy 2007, Jordan 2001). Zito and Mcquillian (2010) employed qualitative methods to assess if and how middle school students justify cheating behavior and found that the students tended to rationalize student unethical behavior in line with three of the techniques put forth by Sykes and Matza: condemning the condemner, appealing to higher ideals, and denying responsibility. It should be noted that students were not asked to talk about their own acts. Like my study, Granitz and Loewy (2007) studied college students who had been officially reported for academic dishonesty (in this case, plagiarism). Amongst other things, they found that students use situational ethics, a concept closely aligned to neutralization, to justify their cheating behavior. It appears that most researchers using *Techniques of Neutralization* to understand school cheating found evidence to support its applicability.

However, we should be cautious in our interpretation of the bulk of these studies. As Bouville (2007) points out, there are fundamental flaws with the way many researchers apply the theory and the evidence that is used to support the theory. Firstly, he argues that there is hardly a modicum of empirical evidence that fulfills one of the necessary elements of the theory, that is transgressors believe in and accept the rule when they are not using a technique of neutralization that allows them the temporary cognitive freedom to break it. So, all that is left is evidence that

some people sometimes cheat in school, which in and of itself tells us little about how or why that cheating occurs.

Another critique of the studies that use neutralization to understand student cheating is their tendency towards tautological reasoning. A simplified version of the argument at the heart of many of these studies follows: premise *A* is that all people agree cheating is wrong and idea *B* is conditionally accepted given *A* and the evidence that some people cheat, and if *A* and *B* exist, there must be *C*, which is that there must be a way that an actor who does not accept cheating cheats and that way is by employing some sort of mental chicanery. According to Bouville, the whole argument falls apart because most studies do not make a sufficient case proving the premise *A* exists.

This deficiency is especially salient in studies that apply the concept to data derived from closed-ended surveys that asks questions about the frequency and acceptance of cheating. For example, Carpenter et al. (2006) ask students whether or not a series of acts constitute academic dishonesty and find that student responses vary; some acts are considered cheating and others are not. But this just shows the relativity of morality, culture, belief, etc. It only becomes neutralization if we assume that everyone believes that cheating is wrong, including the people who cheat, except when the occasional cheaters are in situations that make them believe that it is okay to cheat. Plus, these situations must not be seen by the majority as justifiable reasons for doing the act.

Other problems in this literature pointed to by Bouville (2007) are that authors mistake simple contextual effects or “incoherence” as evidence of neutralization. Sure there is discord between student response about is it ever okay to cheat (many say “no”) and responses to “would you cheat to save someone’s life?” (almost all will say “yes”). But this need not be indicative of

any cogent and overarching belief system; it may just be how the questions are asked or the information the questions provide in and of themselves.

Adding to this, McCabe and Trevino (1997) have shown that contextual variables are more powerful predictors of academically dishonest acts or approving beliefs than are dispositional variables. Perhaps if our goal is to find a theory that works reasonably well in a probabilistic sense, there is value in understanding the contexts individuals perceive as allowing them to shift their definition of cheating or right and wrong. Sykes and Matza's (1957) original account of the techniques of neutralization talked about how they allow a person to shift definitions. Answers to overlapping questions with varying contexts and specificity need not be treated as only "incoherencies," as Bouville might suggest because they do not reflect some underlying stability or reasoning. While it is true that evidence of inconsistent or contradictory answers is not sufficient to *prove* that neutralization is the mechanism allowing such inconsistencies to exist, this does not mean that our understanding of academic dishonesty cannot improve from noting these inconsistencies. If we wish to proceed with a goal of being better equipped to predict the factors that lead to cheating, discovering the variables that affect this likelihood, whether or not they reflect clear and provable cases of neutralization, is valuable. However, since, as Bouville illustrated, it is so easy to inappropriately apply neutralization tautologically and/or without any evidence that one of the basic premises is met, we should be wary of its over-application. For instance, evidence of students shifting definitions about what they consider to be cheating given different contexts might just be an indication that they are ignorant about university policies.

With all of this stated, some of my qualitative data seems to fit well with the idea of neutralization, even if there may be an assumption among some respondents that I am asking for

something that could have happened differently *independent* of the student's actions. Similar to what others have found in general (Zito and McQuillian 2010), I found that my students did often condemn the condemners and show evidence of shifting/not accepting blame when asked about what might have stopped them from cheating.

Condemning the condemners and shifting blame

The responses in this category are certainly very similar to those that I placed in the *ignorance of rules* category, which showed many students placing blame on their professors for their own ignorance. In this section, the students are also blaming others, usually their professors, but are not pleading ignorance. Thus, even if the students seem to know the rules, they still condemn those that condemn them when asked about what could have been done so that they would not have cheated.

Many students made comments about how the actions, or lack thereof, of their professors helped cause their actions. Neutralization in the strict sense critiqued by Bouville involves a temporary justification of going against one's own general beliefs, which are congruent with larger society. Students in the course were asked about an event that had occurred previously, thus it is hard to know if they neutralized at the time, still neutralize, etc.

Nevertheless, when asked, students placed some of the blame on professors for creating situations with expectations that the students were unable to fulfill without cheating, even if the professors had little influence on the expectations that many students felt pressured to fulfill (e.g. getting a 4.0, getting into medical school, keeping a scholarship, etc.). Still, the students often did perceive that their professors were culpable for creating "ends" that were impossible to reach

without cheating. One particularly agitated student, Deena, a senior citizen, found some culpability in a computer science professor's rules and assignments:

If the teacher didn't have these ridiculous expectations that each and every individual is an Einstein who can generate proofs in a couple days that researchers spent large amounts of time developing then I would have been much more inclined to work alone and not with the help of my peers. We all will need to bounce ideas off of each other the MLC wouldn't exist if we weren't allowed to get help from each other and yet this professor claimed to the whole class that any idea which was not originally our own is plagiarism. How then does the idea of RESEARCH" and citing sources exist?"

Others agreed that the expectations professors had for students were much too high, even if they deny their own wrong-doing. Alison, a junior citizen reported for plagiarism stated this:

If the intensity and amount of work for the course was much less meaning much suitable for average students I would have not cheated. The course was rediculously hard. I am not saying I have done nothing wrong I do admit my dishonesty which I have done. And I highly regret it. However the amount of work for the class was rediculous unless you had the brain of Bill Gates or Steve Jobs.

Students blamed their instructors for not only what the instructors did but also what he or she did NOT do. Respondents wrote about faculty who ignored them, did not understand them, did not care for them, did not stress to them the importance of academic integrity, did not monitor exams, were a bad exemplar of academic honesty, among other things. Juliana, a citizen senior, offered a strong critique of the environment created by her professor:

Cheating is something that has always seemed like an impossible resort to me in my career. In fact I have had instances where I have had to pick between a friendship and the security of my integrity. Never in my academic career though have I ever encountered a course where I felt so pressured I felt like I had absolutely no way of learning. Even if my encounter was an accident and not intentional on my part I do believe that had the professor cared enough for the student's learning process more than her deadlines being met (void of ANY teaching or guidance provided) maybe less students would have resorted to "short cuts". I think this professor has implied numerous times that cheating is wrong yet used other professor's material in their own class without EVER posting material of their own. In fact some questions of theirs were verbatim off of online material from other courses or websites for professors to refer to. I never felt like this professor cared to give their students time to actually understand the material. In fact the professor laughed at their own inability to explain the material. I cannot repeat enough times how harmful this is to the student's point of view. In addition there are multiple

errors on the exams on a daily basis that the professor themselves do not catch until students reach utmost infuriation and have to speak up. And at that point the professor establishes personal biases and calls out students who may write a definition as asked for in the assignment from the book. This entire atmosphere is that of a battlefield rather than a wisdom ground. I feel like if there was a presence of more maturity and enthusiasm for the student's acceleration in the course; situation would be at the onother polar end. It is no wonder there were numerous mass emails to the class about academic dishonesty rising in this professor's course.

Similar to the ideas expressed in the ignorance category, some students felt that it was what the professors did NOT do that was the culprit (e.g. by not giving a reminder, by not trying to provide surveillance during classroom work, or, as we have seen, by not teaching the principles of academic integrity). "One thing that i feel as of right now would of stopped me from committing academic dishonesty would be support from the professors," a student plainly stated. Another said that "having more time and clearer instructions from the professor would have been a big factor." Stephen, a junior male nursing student, felt a professor's assignment of tasks outside of the classroom ultimately contributed to his academic dishonesty:

If we had been given time in class to view our videos I would have watched it in class and just gotten through it. That way the professor could have seen then that I had watched it. I wouldn't have had to remember to watch it at home in time.

Lin, an international senior who received a failing grade on an assignment in an upper-level business class as the result of plagiarism, cites his professor's lack of response when he asked for help as something that contributed to his act of misconduct:

- 1.If I were given the help that I needed in my class I wasn't going to be in this situation.
2. Professor shouldn't ignore students' emails when they ask for help. My professor did this to me. I emailed him two weeks in advance asking for help. He ignored me. I met him in person and asked for help and he shut me up. This was totally unfair to me. I am not blaming the entire situation on my professor but I believe that the professor was not interested in my success.

Many students believed that if their professors would have mentioned the seriousness of cheating, especially right before tests or assignments, that they might not have committed their

offense. Joni, a citizen senior accused of plagiarism, wrote that she may have not cheated “if the professor talked more about how important it is not to cheat and not just saying the university makes me say this...” A sophomore international student, Ryu, shared the sentiment: “Probably if the propessor had kept reminding us the consequences of cheating rather than telling us in the first day of class to go over the rule book.” Xavier, a freshman citizen who received a failing grade on a midterm or final exam as the result of plagiarism, also mentioned it might have helped if his professor would have made a bigger deal about academic integrity at the beginning of the course:

Well I knew that MSU frowned down upon cheating and I knew there were severe consequences to cheating. The pressures of being a good student really influenced me and I was running out of time on an assignment. The idea of turning in something late was more of an issue to me than cheating. I think if my professor really had talked about cheating in class instead of just saying Here is the syllabus and the second page has some information on academic dishonesty please read over that." Sometimes its hard to make aware what happens to students that cheat. I learned from this because my career was put on the line which was the most important thing to me. I had to decide what was more iportant saving my career or taking the easy way out."

Frank, a citizen senior accused of plagiarism in an upper level criminal justice class, similarly felt that the teacher could have deterred academic dishonesty by increasing the awareness of its seriousness:

I believe that I would have been more careful if the professor would have instructed that cheating would not be tolerated and gave a statistical count of how many of his students where caught cheating.

Matthew, a freshman citizen who failed an exam as the result of being caught cheating, relayed this:

I wish my professor would have spoken of cheating before the exam. Just a simple reminder of the high consequences for she handed out the exam. That definitely would have made me second guess doing anything dishonest or unacceptable in the classroom. I deeply feel that that reminder would have kept me out of the circumstance that I am in today.

Although many faculty and administrators may feel that it should/is the student's responsibility to know and remember not to cheat, this method of providing a salient reminder before an assignment has been established in the literature as a worthwhile strategy in decreasing incidences of cheating. These reminders often come via honor codes, which Donald McCabe (2001) touts as useful devices that promote academic integrity, perhaps especially so when students are reminded of the code directly prior to an examination. For what it is worth, I also talk about how I really do not want students to cheat prior to giving any exams in the classes I teach.

Sometimes, it is not that the instructor is not trying but maybe that he or she is not focusing on the right information. Riana, a senior who failed an assignment in an upper level psychology course as the result of plagiarism believed this:

I think if i had read the part about academic dishonesty closer maybe i would have taken more time to look up about plagiarism and what it really is .I feel that teachers stress cheating on exam and things like that but they dont not stress about plagiarism as much. I know it is using someone elses workds as your own but there is alot more than that. citing something wrong using the wrong page number etc.. . I should have paid closer attention to my syllabus. if i knew i would be sitting here retakign a class and taking this development class i would have paid closer attention to the fine print

Others just wished that their professor would have given more specific instructions. Lenka, a sophomore international student who failed a math text as the result of academic dishonesty stated the following:

If the instructions for my online exam would have been clear and defined then I would have not committed an act of dishonesty. It did not state clearly that you could not take the exam with someone. All it said was no notes books or internet sites allowed.

Amelia, a citizen senior, stated this:

I would have been stopped from committing my act of academic dishonesty if I knew that I was not supposed to work with another student on this assignment. If my teacher had

been clearer about the extent to which we could work with another classmate I think I would have not had this issue.

So, these students believe that if the professor would have taken action prior to their incident that their incident may not have happened. Certainly, it is hard to impugn professors based on these students' thoughts, and many faculty members would say that it is not their job to babysit, but we must remember that students cannot seek out answers they might need to successfully complete an assignment without cheating. After all, how could students know what they do not know enough to take proactive steps to strip away their ignorance?

Lazzy-faire attitudes and actions of professors

Students also felt that their perception that the professor did not really care about cheating influenced their decision to cheat. Some of this perception is based on the things the instructor says or does not say, as stated above, but students also bemoan faculty they feel do not take actions to make sure cheating does not happen. Yiwung, a female senior international student who received a penalty grade in an accounting course expressed this:

If the professor can stop anyone from cheating in the whole semester or she can warn someone in the exam I won't do it absolutely. Because I saw many students are cheating in the exam but she said nothing.

Hilary, a freshman citizen, stated the following:

I think that in my circumstance I would not have gotten in trouble for looking at another paper if the teacher had confronted it right when she saw it. The teacher said she thought I was looking at a paper and I did not realize that I was doing it as I was just thinking of my own answer. I think it would have been good if my teacher had confronted it right then and made me switch seats or just brought my attention to the problem. Also I might have thought more about not looking around while I was thinking if they had addressed it before the quiz.

Antonio, a junior citizen, expressed this:

If my professor would be walking around the classroom more than just standing in the front of the classroom talking to the TA. This will make feel more guilty and also I would know that the professor is looking at me and I won't even try to cheat.

Zhe, a female senior international student, relayed this:

If the professor can stop anyone from cheating in the whole semester or she can warn someone in the exam I won't do it absolutely. Because I saw many students are cheating in the exam but she said nothing.

Another female international student believed more could have been done to lessen the potential for students to cheat during exam. She reasoned that the University could act differently:

Basically there are two things can stop me doing wrong action of misconduct. First one is if I can control my time more efficient and schedule my study plan more effective I would be well-prepared for every quiz/exam/paper/assignment. If I am confident enough to do them obviously I would not choose to be dishonest and just trust myself. The second one is university offering some ways that no chance to be dishonesty. For example give exams to students individually different with the student's picture on the top and set the position to sit for students. Then there would be no chance for student to start think how to do misconduct.

Professors do not understand students

Another way that students, when responding to this question, condemned the condemners and shifted blame away from themselves was by stating that their teachers do not understand where they are coming from, what their life is like, what sort of help they need, etc. Tara, a citizen senior, stated the following:

Some professors teach to fast which makes students fall behind. If professors made sure that their students understood the material and are more comfortable moving on to the next subject the option of cheating would be limited. The need for professors to care more about there students and education is needed in our universities.

Louise, a junior citizen accused of plagiarism, seemed to believe she was forced into plagiarism because her instructor did not understand the nature of her sickness:

If the professor would understand that having swine flu (doctor's note justified) takes longer than 2 days to recover. If she would have give me the time to do it myself. I am a

good student. I work very hard to get to do well in my classes. This I did not deserve. She definitely does not have my respect which is partially the reason I changed my major.

Santino, a junior international student, seemed to believe not only that having had a teacher that was understanding would have made it less likely for him to cheat but also that having a great teacher would serve as a deterrent. When asked what would have kept him from committing his act of academic dishonesty he replied, “a great teacher who understands his students and teaches well.” Other students also believed they would have been less likely to cheat had the class been better.

Professors do not make class good enough

Kenneth, a junior international student who received a failing grade on an assignment as the result of plagiarism in a university required general education course, believed “if the class professor was more enthusiastic or the class was more attractive I could tried to study instead of cheat.” Another student accused of plagiarism, Kelsie, a citizen senior, stated this:

If I had understood the material I was writing about or maybe if I had enjoyed learning about the material and valued it in some type of way I wouldn't have turned to consulting outside sources to use for my paper.

A third student, who was accused of plagiarism and failed a course because of it, felt this:

If my professor had discussed her rules" about academic dishonesty that may have had an impact on if I had committed an act of academic dishonesty. Also the class was not something that I found interesting and all I wanted was to get by with a passing grade. "

Condemning the system

At times students referenced the “unrealistic” expectations placed on them by a larger, more abstract entity, such as the University or higher education as a whole. Ariel, a senior

international student who received a failing grade on an assignment as the result of plagiarism wrote the following:

Diversified judgment system is a good way to stop students from committing acts of academic dishonesty. If universities can consider the daily academic performances such as class discussion and social practice as an aspect of giving a final score instead of a single test or paper it will be helpful to reduce the cheating and plagiarism. Professors or Universities should open a class to teach students how to write the qualified paper in my point of view it's very important to international students. Due to the different teaching pedagogy and education system no high-school students in China know how to write a paper which always becomes a barrier in their abroad study. If I can get instructions and guidance in this kind of class for example what should be include in a paper and how to make it logical it will be quite helpful definitely. In addition faculty also should think over to give students moderate test since unintelligible questions may exacerbate cheating.

Others also felt that there should be a class that covers the basics of academic integrity prior to the start of one's college career. Naomi, a senior female citizen, stated this:

If I had known more about what exactly is considered plagiarism or cheating I would have never committed this act. I would have liked to have taken this course as a freshman in college or as a course over the summer before entering college. Overall most of it is common sense. However in my incident I wish specific instances would have been discussed because then I would have never committed the act of academic dishonesty.

Another senior female citizen, Jess, answered the following:

I think that if the student population as a whole received a class on academic dishonesty before the start of the school year or each semester then students would be more aware of their actions and be less prone to cheating.

Swathi, a sophomore international student who failed a course as the result of her academic dishonesty, did not pinpoint who exactly she felt should make changes to the way college functions, but she did seem to feel that a change may have helped her avoid cheating. She wrote the following:

If the pressure of doing so well wasnt as high. If the due dates of assignments or options of taking exams at a different time were more lenient it would stop me from committing my act of dishonesty.

These responses show that some students who have been reported, when prompted weeks to months later, will shift blame to others, usually to those that condemned them. However, when analyzing these responses, we cannot assume that this is purely positivistic, that these individuals broke some sort of static rules that are real and accepted. It takes many people to create a deviant act, and it could be a difference in definition. If students think it is acceptable to xyz in abc circumstances, then that could be socially learned, cultural, could reflect lack of bonding to “good” society, etc.

What we do not know is what occurred in the moment. It could be that some students who accept blame now and know it is wrong (whether as the result of time passing, of taking and being in this Academic Integrity course, both, or something else) did not think it was wrong while they were doing it. Perhaps it is those private inner conversations that could truly reflect what Sykes and Matza (1957) initially referred to as temporary moral vacations, i.e. when stress, time, appealing to the higher loyalties of getting a good grade, converge and cause someone to violate a personal code or a societal code they may or may not believe in. Note that hardly anyone mentions that he or she should have just taken the grade he or she would have gotten without cheating.

Katz’s *Seductions of Crime* (1988) is also informative here, as he illustrated convincingly how people who may not intend or approve of certain transgressions, like murder or spousal abuse, still commit them in the heat of moment. Perhaps the individuals that Katz studied do not think their acts are wrong when they are doing them but do think they are wrong when they are over. Indeed, the fact that many perpetrators of domestic homicide called the police and waited for them to arrive after the killing, as reported in *Seductions of Crime*, shows how people may go against their beliefs in certain contexts. Also, I am asking my students to speculate about what

would have stopped them from committing their acts, and one of the fundamental tenets of social psychological research is that humans are fallible in recalling what they did and, more so, why they did it. Nolan et al. 2008 show how normative influence is usually under detected by people; cognitive biases like the *fundamental attribution error* muddle our understanding of our own behavior and that of others. The data provided here are not suitable to truly show neutralization in its strictest characterization. The hidden nature of much human influence may be the reason why hardly any student mentioned peer behavior or attitudes as a powerful variable in affecting their cheating actions, even though peer influence has regularly been found as the one of most powerful predictor of academic dishonesty (McCabe and Trevino 1997).

Of course, these limitations do not negate the utility of this research in conjunction with that already in existence. Although the responses analyzed here may not be accurate articulations of what would have, *in actuality*, stopped the students from committing their acts, the responses were provided in a context that has not often been the setting for research on the motivations for academic dishonesty. Specifically, I asked about the particular incident they were reported for as opposed to some hypothetical or unguided remembrance. This may be more accurate as the incident may be more salient in the students mind, although it may also have extra skewing due to the actions taken in reference to the incident since it occurred. I asked the students about their malfeasance after penalties had already been levied upon them, and I asked students for self-reported motivations that would have usually been excluded from provided information as many were unaware they had transgressed. Thus, the findings presented here can be integrated with the extant literature through triangulation to find the most consistent and valid reasons students cheat.

Strain

Strain theory, originally created by Merton (1938), has been applied to a wide range of deviant behaviors: gang life (Taylor 1990), school dropouts (Thornberry et al.1985), and drug usage (Hoffman and Su 1997), among many others. The basic idea is that the societally approved ends are not equally attainable to everyone. Therefore, people who are not positioned to reach the accepted ends with the accepted means will be more likely to use unaccepted means to reach the goal. This may be particularly true in a competitive and individualistic society, such as the U.S., that emphasizes the value of the ends more than the means.

Some students responded in ways that illustrated that they felt as though they could not “succeed” in the class due to not having the right options available to them. Yoni, a freshman international student, expressed that he felt like he could not succeed in all of his tasks through the “right” means (i.e. studying and asking for help) due to being inundated with other responsibilities:

If I wasn't so overwhelmed and pressed for time with other classes and work I would have been able to put forth adequate effort to honestly achieve the grade I desired by studying more and seeking help from the professor and TA in areas where I needed more clarification. I would have avoided this terrible mistake by lightening my courseload and taking more time to practice the material from lecture.

Darnice, a sophomore who failed an economics course as the result of her act of academic dishonesty, also wrote about the pressure that multiple classes can put on a student:

If the pressure of doing so well wasn't as high. If the due dates of assignments or options of taking exams at a different time were more lenient it would stop me from committing my act of dishonesty.

Darnice seemed to implicitly accept the society's approved and “proper” ends, which involve taking exams when they are scheduled and doing well on them, but she is unable to meet those

ends with the “proper” means of doing your own work and taking the test on time, so she *innovated* a way to meet the ends given the constraints on the means available to her (limited time, knowledge, excuses, etc.)

Jared, a citizen senior, also felt the need to innovate when his situation, a computer crashing, led to him searching for alternative ways to meet the acceptable ends. When asked what could have prevented his cheating, he replied, “had my computer not crashed and I had not been crunched for time I would not be in this course. A bad circumstance led to an even worse decision on my part.” Another student shared, “I am mother worker and student if I had more time in 24 hours I could do respectful and decent work in my education. I know this is not a justifiable excuse.” This mom, part of an ever-growing contingent of non-traditional students, did not feel like she could do “respectful and decent work” in her situation, so in lieu of other options like dropping the class, she tried to create a way to get the much revered and economically beneficial end product of a college degree.

Many students explicitly wrote about the intense stress they felt in trying to perform well in this and other areas of life. Although these students explicitly wrote about the various demands on their time and resources, most did not write about the possibility of eradicating this stress by setting an easier goal for themselves (e.g. not to get all 4.0s, not to be a mom, worker, *and* student, etc.). Merton identified that in America the strong emphasis on making money and the things that money buys supersedes the importance of using legitimate means to get that money. With a college degree seen as a ticket towards a better and higher paying career as well as something that brings prestige in itself, it is no surprise that many students would rather give up trying to use the “correct” means in getting there than give up the goal due to a perceived lack of ability to reach it in honest and appropriate ways.

Scholars have theorized that the tension between misaligned means and ends causes an individual to experience stress and anger, especially when the individual does not feel in control of his or her life (Agnew and Brezina 2010 review this literature). Stress may be the key symptom of someone strained by societal expectations. Layla, a citizen senior accused of plagiarism in an upper level science class, related this:

Again what I did was completely unintentional and it did stem from being overwhelmed with school work. If I had more time to work on my paper I know that I would not have ended up in this mess. Stress levels on science majors are excessive and sometimes push us to making bad decisions even if we have been good students all along.

Gloria, a citizen junior, stated the following:

Honestly I committed academic dishonesty out of sheer panic upon realizing how close my deadline was and how far i was from completing my project. Sadly I doubt that anything my professor had said in the beginning of the year would have changed my mind right then and there short of one of my personal acquaintances dealing with punishment through the semester.

A previously mentioned junior citizen who received a failing grade on an assignment as the result of plagiarism, expressed how the stress of the situation got to her:

I wish I would have stop and thought about the actions of my dishonesty before I did anything. I was just so stressed and I was hoping someone would have just realize how stressed I was before I did something stupid

Annabelle, a citizen junior, expressed this:

What would have stopped me is if I would have taken a deep breathe and thought about what I really knew about the exam I was taking. I had been studying I knew the information quite well and I was even interested in the material. If I would have just considered those few thoughts I would have been able to think hey I know this stuff I don't need to cheat...there would be no point" but I didn't and I put myself in a bad situation when it could have been totally preventable if I would have just stopped relaxed and got a grip."

Students often expressed that there just was not enough time to complete all of their tasks without cutting corners. Alyssa, a domestic senior, stated this:

I feel that more time and an easier schedule would have stopped me seeing that I would have had adequate time and a clearer mind to complete the assignment. Moreover having educators be more lenient and understanding about students running around hectic and being overly exhausted would have helped me.

Yvette, a citizen junior accused of plagiarism, stated the following:

More time would have stopped me from committing my act of academic dishonesty. As a college student there are a lot of things that I try to juggle before I graduate and sometimes I feel that there is not enough time of the day to do the things that need to be done and to also have time for myself so that I can be focused on things that need to be done so that I won't burn myself out.

Time

Whereas not having enough time was a salient feature of responses coded as strain, in this section not managing one's own time well enough is the theme. The difference between the two rests in the relative perceptions of individual control. Depicted in the quotes above and consistent with *strain theory*, some students felt that not enough time existed or was available to them that could allow them to successfully reach the ends that they and overarching society demanded. However, not all students who cited time characterized it in that way. In fact, many students felt that they could have done a better job managing their time.⁷ Dilshani, a sophomore international student who failed a course as the result of plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration, stated the following:

⁷ Note that the module that includes time management strategies occurred after the module that had the question about what could have been done to prevent the act of academic dishonesty.

Time management was critical to my offense. The challenges of being a student athlete at MSU compounded with medical problems at the time created intense amount of stress and pressure which I had a hard time dealing with to meet assignment time lines. Copying two sentences from another student to complete a report at the deadline was the easy way out. Looking back on it now that was the worst academic decision I have made. The result was failure in my case yet it was common knowledge that others in the same course cheated on a quiz and were reprimanded without any other consequences.

Austin, a junior citizen who also received a failing grade in a course as the result of academic dishonesty, wrote this:

Something that would have stopped me would have been proper time management from the beginning. Besides that factual information concerning what constitutes academic dishonesty might have made me consider my actions before lying to my professor.

Gertrude, a sophomore domestic student accused of plagiarism, wrote this:

I should have never thought to look for information on my paper topic online in the first place but the fact that I tend to procrastinate things and because I had a hard time with the assignment I thought to do that. If I would have allowed myself more time for the assignment I could have made an appointment with the professor and gotten help understanding the material and not think to look for help through the internet.

Minnie, a freshman citizen, stated this:

I believe if I had been less stressed during finals week I would have spent more time studying and more time taking the online exam that I failed. I was in such a hurry to study for other exams that I rushed through the online exam and did not even realize that i was being academically immoral. I also think I would not have done it if the professor had said straight out that we will get a zero if we use the internet to help with any questions

Anfernee, a sophomore citizen, wrote the following:

Poor time management ultimately led me to ?lift? some portions of a scholarly article without properly citing them. Had I properly scheduled and allotted even amounts of time to each of my subjects last semester I would not have engaged in the academically dishonest acts that I did. This experience has taught me to refine my time management skills so that I am never pressed for time again. I now understand the severe repercussions of cutting corners in my academic education and by working hard and dedicating time and effort to my assignments I can complete them all with integrity

Marcus, another sophomore citizen, wrote this:

If I had had more time to work on the project I would not have cheated. I'm not saying the professor didn't allot enough time. It's because I waited until it was too late to finish it. So I did what I thought it was I had to do and copied an old solution. It was no one's fault but my own.

Melony, a senior international student reported for plagiarism, stated this:

I think if I had manage my time properly and had interest in what I was writing it could have prevented me from committing the act of academic dishonesty. If I acting base on my logic and not on how I feel I would have not committed the act.

Other students also quipped about poor planning and the tendency to procrastinate putting them in the situation that ultimately led to a cheating act. These students were usually wishing that they had started the project earlier and had not put themselves in such a pressurized situation. Of course, a pressurized situation does not need to lead to academic dishonesty; just because there is not enough time to finish something well does not mean a student should cheat. However, as we saw in the *strain* section, these students usually do not mention the possibility of taking the honest path (which may yield a lower or failing grade) once they are in that time-crunched, pressurized situation. Put differently, in general, the students see more malleability in the means than in the ends, so when asked what they could have done differently, they talk mostly about ways to change their means (e.g. starting the work earlier) rather than their ends (e.g. dropping the class, accepting a lower grade). Still, some students did state that they should have accepted the discounted ends as opposed to trying to innovate new and dishonest means. Ethel, a sophomore citizen who received a failing grade on an assignment due to plagiarism, stated this:

If I had had more time to complete the assignment I would've made a more honest effort to complete my own work. I know this is no excuse but at the time the most important thing to me was just completing the assignment on time. Now I know how serious MSU is about academic dishonesty and I would've done my own work and turned in the assignment a little late for less points. It still would've been better than the 0 points I received on this assignment for cheating.

Gloria, a citizen senior, wrote this:

The big thing that would of stopped me from my act of turning a homework assignment given to me by my friend is if I was not in such a time crunch. I wished I had more time that week. But most importantly I wished I would of just remember that it was okay to turn it in late and get some points marked off it had slipped by mind.

While useful, this research on why students say they cheat has various limitations.

Researcher subjectivity and the external and internal validity of the responses are the most salient. In the coding process, I no doubt let various subjectivities and/or idiosyncrasies seep into my establishment of categories, my selection of the various responses into the categories, and the way I presented the materials. My position as an instructor of this course may have primed me to code and analyze data differently than I would have if I were new to the data/concepts. Still, I have tried to be extremely transparent in my presentation of the data. So while having more coders against which to test my categorizations and placements would add confidence as to the universality of my interpretation, no scientist can escape some level of subjectivity, especially in the analysis of qualitative data. Also, to address this criticism, I have provided many student responses verbatim as to allow others to interpret and, if need be, disagree with my analysis.

One of the most difficult issues researchers face when asking subjects about sensitive behaviors is in getting respondents to fully and truthfully disclose the information that the researcher is seeking. While my analysis is not immune to such critiques, there is reason to believe that my students may display more veracity than student respondents drawn from a general population asked about cheating behaviors, as my students have already had punishments levied upon them and have been told no other punishment is forthcoming regarding the act they were reported for. Also, even if my students did not feel comfortable being completely truthful, they are still answering this question about cheating in a different context than are student

responders from other studies. By providing a new angle at which to view this phenomenon, my research can be applied to the findings of previous studies to provide a more complete picture of the phenomenon.

Even if my students are answering truthfully, they may not truly remember what was occurring emotionally and socially when they committed their act. Indeed, modern science offers compelling evidence that our memories are far from tape recorders which record all we sense and that we have access to if we think hard enough. Instead, our memories are based on the initial situation, other similar situations we have been in, other situations we may have read about, etc. Furthermore, they are changed each time we think, talk, or are told about the incident.

Further complicating the validity of the answers provided by my respondents in this particular analysis is the fact that people are neither good at predicting what they are going to do nor why they did a particular thing in the past, and thus do a poor job stating what differences would have led them to act differently in the past. Once again, however, compared to many studies that ask students about a cheating incident that they must conjure up without prompt, I am able to ask about a particular act that is probably quite memorable, considering the effect it has had on their life. Still, interactions with me, conversations with their professors, other students and parents, and their experience in this class, among other things, have shaped their remembrance of the situation and what they think could have changed their behavior. Once again though, my study can be used in conjunction with the findings of other studies in shaping our understanding of the reasons students cheat.

Findings documented here should not be generalized to all college students, all MSU students, or even all students who cheat and/or are reported for cheating. However, this lack of

external validity is part of the research design. This analysis was completed to shed light on why people who had been reported for academic dishonesty cheated and what could be done to make it less likely, leaving fertile ground for comparative analysis with studies that seek to understand individual and contextual influences in general student cheating. So, while my findings do not represent the MSU student body, or, more generally, undergraduates as a whole, they do offer information regarding the thoughts and characteristics of people that have been reported who most likely differ from those who do not cheat and those who cheat and do not get reported.

Conclusion

Students at MSU who have been reported for academic dishonesty believe that having had more information about what constitutes cheating and what penalties exist would have been the most likely deterrent from committing their act. In analyzing these responses, I acknowledge that humans are bad at predicting behavior, as illustrated by Milgram's famous shock experiment when subjects found out how far they might go in physically harming someone when ordered to do so, and that people often misattribute causes of their behavior (Nolan et al. 2008). In addition to ignorance, students cited ideas consistent with neutralization and strain theories and reported that a lack of time was a major culprit in ultimately causing them to cheat. This study joins many others that have attempted to discern the myriad of reasons that individuals act in academically dishonest ways.

Some others, taking the lead of Hirschi's *control theory* (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990), have focused their analysis on why people do not cheat. Well aware of the notion that rules for behavior have to be made in order for people to break them and the arguments asserting that it is the rule/lawmakers that create deviance, this section examined academic dishonesty at the

transgression level. I will later do analysis on the way instructors define and enforce rules regarding academic dishonesty; some of this will be done in a forthcoming section of this dissertation. The extant research has yielded some primary causes of academically dishonest behavior: strain (for a review of Merton's theory, see Farnworth and Leiber 1989), the cheating culture (Callahan 2004), ignorance (Jocoy and DiBiase 2006), and peer influence (McCabe 2001).⁸

My qualitative analysis presented here generally supports previous findings, although the degrees with which the aforementioned variables and others seem to have affected my students (or more accurately, the ways my students believe they were affected) seem to differ from findings that result from self-reports of samples drawn from the general population. For example, in my sample, there appeared to be little difference between how domestic and international students felt about academic dishonesty and why they committed their specific acts, while the literature points to a distinct difference. This may call into question some of the existing understandings of cultural differences and academic dishonesty.

One explanation of these difference is that my sample is not representative of the larger undergraduate population usually studied in that it is only made up of those that get reported for their cheating actions. A second explanation is that my students may be less swayed by social desirability (or at least, swayed in a different direction) and fear of reprimand (or at least, fear of initial reprimand) than samples taken from general populations. Because my sample consists of students who have already been caught and had their punishments levied upon them, I can expect a higher level of veracity among them. Then again, this expected truthfulness might be negated

⁸ See Wideman (2008) for a good and recent review of this literature.

by a potentially higher than average propensity towards deceit amongst my sample, although the many seemingly sincere claims of ignorance (including showcasing insufficient paraphrasing and citation skills within the course) and acceptance of punitive actions leads me to doubt this possibility.

Faculty vs. student frames

In this section, I will delineate the characteristics of the instructor reports, including their description of the incidents. Then, these reports will be compared to student reports in order to ascertain the degree of harmony and specific differences with which students and faculty viewed the event.

Instructor reports

When instructors filled out the online academic misconduct reports, they were asked to check one or more boxes related to the misconduct type and penalty type they were reporting. Additionally, instructors are asked to do the following: “Please provide a detailed description of the incident and retain any documentation for your records.” I used these descriptions, which were created at the time of the report, for my analysis.

Instructors tended to give very detailed accounts of the events and generally focused on the proof that they had incriminating the students. The instructors also frequently cited previous academically dishonest acts performed by the students in which the instructors warned the individual or used the transgression as a “teaching moment,” rather than reporting the student to the administration and issuing a penalty grade.

Evidence

Electronics aided the instructors in gathering evidence of the alleged transgressions. Some instructors used third party cheating detection software (r.g. *Turnitin.com*) in order to detect and/or validate their claim that improper cheating, usually plagiarism, had occurred. Additionally, many instructors pointed to incriminating records produced by the course management systems the students are required to work through in an individual course (e.g. documentation that the same IP address turned in two assignments at the same time helps further the case that the two assignments were not produced individually). In the following quote, the instructor uses both means:

CheatCheck system reported a high degree of similarity to a Project 2 Part 2 submission by [the other student]. The submissions were virtually identical. I met with the student and he admitted to having copied her work when she left her computer logged on. Electronic records support that [the other student] did leave her computer logged on unattended. A grade of zero for Project 2 was assigned.

The reporting instructor's regular referencing of hard evidence may just be a sign of the times; course management systems and internet submissions are ubiquitous in the modern undergraduate experience. Additionally, an introductory level computer class produced more reports of academic dishonesty than any other course; most instructors in these courses pointed to hard evidence of plagiarism of computer code. Naturally, whether this was the result of more cheating, more detecting, more reporting, or some combination of the factors cannot be determined from the reports alone.

Two other potential reasons why instructors so often documented electronic proof must be considered. First, perhaps instructors, probably due to horror stories (real or, more likely, exaggerated) of accused students steadfastly fighting the charge against them through institutional channels (e.g. by soliciting the help of the ombudsman, by requesting a hearing in

front of a judiciary board, or by seeking out legal representation) felt that they needed hard and compelling evidence if they were going to officially report a student. So, the instructors gathered abundant evidence upon realizing that the transgression had taken place. Or it may be that instructors who are more likely to use electronic surveillance are more likely to detect cheating (and care about it) and render sanctions as the result of this detection. Certainly, not all professors submit their students' essays to online plagiarism detection devices or check the IP addresses from where assignments originated. One reporting instructor wrote about how he has his teaching assistant run Google searches on random sentences of each student essay that is submitted in order to find noticeably similar strings of thoughts and words online. MSU has thousands of different instructors that teach classes every year; most do not submit a single report.

Some instructors relied on non-electronic means of detecting/validating cheating instances. For instance, some reporting faculty asked colleagues to judge the degree of similarity between papers, generally asking their peers to look at a handful of papers and see which, if any, seem to indicate plagiarism. Other times, faculty teaching large lecture hall classes would ask their teaching assistant(s) to write if they noticed any suspicious behavior. If all proctors pegged the same individual for the same malfeasance, then action was taken. One detailed example of this sort of low-tech method comes from a section of Introduction to Psychology:

In an examination administered to the class on March 4, 2010, the student was observed by two proctors, the course graduate assistant, and the course undergraduate assistant directly viewing the test materials of others in his proximity. He was given feedback about the need to discontinue that behavior. A short time later, [the GA] observed him again viewing the test materials of students in his proximity. She offered him the option of coming to the front row to complete the test or simply handing it in at that point. After he argued briefly with [the GA] he moved to the front row and completed the examination.

On Thursday, April 1, 2010 another examination was given. Prior to our distributing the

text materials I cautioned students about behavior that could be perceived as cheating. They were instructed to absolutely avoid speaking to anyone, using any type of electronic device, or viewing the test materials of others. The exam began at 12:40 pm and at approximately 1:15 pm, [the GA] drew my attention to the student and noted that she had just observed him tapping the desk of the student to his immediate left and then speaking to him. When I then began observing the student, I saw that he was directly viewing the test materials on the desk of the person to his immediate left. The course undergraduate assistant and two proctors also observed this behavior.

I approached the student about this behavior and asked for his test materials while discussing the situation with him. I had misunderstood to whom [the GA] observed him speaking and asked a student if the student had spoken to him. The student said he had not, but unfortunately I was not aware of my mistake until it was too late to ask the student to whom the student had been observed speaking. I explained the problematic nature of the student's behavior and the student said that while he may have seen other people's work, that behavior was not different from the behavior of everyone else in the class and that he had not cheated. When I reminded him of his confrontation with [the GA] at the previous exam, he stated that he had been involved in no such situation. I allowed him to complete the exam, pending further review and consideration of the situation.

After everyone had completed the exam on 4/1, I consulted with one of the proctors, the course graduate assistant, and the course undergraduate assistant. They confirmed the account described above and indicated that they had made note of the student's name at the time of the previous examination and were not simply basing their recall on visual recognition.

It seems likely that instructors that make more of an effort to detect and gather firm evidence of cheating occurrences are more likely to detect and report cheating actions; this group of instructors may also be more likely to find cheating to be more pernicious and/or prevalent than others, and thus be more apt to take action. Of course, knowledge about the characteristics and habits of non-reporting instructors is needed in order to see if any of these plausible differences are firmly empirically supported. Moreover, a longitudinal field experiment may be the best way to begin to sort out the causalities of reporting behavior (e.g. whether increased monitoring comes before or after increased cheating detection), although interviews with reporting and non-reporting instructors will be helpful as well. To this end, in a future project I plan to carry out instructor interviews on this topic.

Warnings come first

As was the case in the introductory psychology class above, instructors frequently noted that their student had previously been warned about his or her cheating behavior. Sometimes instructors stated that the student was warned multiple times, even multiple times regarding cheating on the same test or paper that ultimately led to the instructor's official report. For example, an instructor in a writing intensive course decided to warn a student who apparently plagiarized an early draft of a paper in hopes that the student would turn in a non-plagiarized assignment. According to the instructor, the student not only plagiarized the paper that she had been warned about but also lifted large parts of two other papers she had submitted. The instructor wrote the following:

one of the drafts submitted by the student appeared to me to be a paper which is available both for free and at cost on the internet . . . accordingly i sent her the following message: "this paper is available on the internet both as a freely accessible website and as a paper for purchase . . . because i do not grade the outline part of the technoscience paper assignment, i do not intend to do anything about the fact that you submitted work that was not your own; i consider it done and forgotten . . . if this were one of the assignments to be graded, i would assign you a failing grade for the course and report your academic dishonesty to the university administration" ...nevertheless, the student subsequently submitted papers for three of the major assignments that appear to include to a significant extent text that she did not originally create and that is not attributed to another source ...

In the same report the instructor goes on to describe the characteristics of the different papers in question, including stating that an introduction of one of the papers "is from a research paper that is commercially available on two sites on the internet...the opening paragraph of the paper includes text that is not visible on the internet without purchasing the paper." The student received a penalty of failing the course for these acts.

A similar circumstance led to a report of another student for plagiarism. The instructor in this instance described the situation as follows:

In the midst of grading final essays, I discovered [the student's] essay was directly taken from the internet. I had previously had an individual conference with her on the "draft," during which I told her that the essay was clearly not in her voice, and was too well-researched and sophisticated to have been done in such a short period. I did not accuse her of plagiarism then, but did bring up the fact that there were elements that pointed to this. She had explanations for why the draft looked polished, and said she'd make appropriate revisions and put things in her own words. However, she submitted the same plagiarized paper as her final copy, with a few minor changes from her "draft." (The "draft" was identical to the document I found on the internet.)

While the instructor did ultimately report the student, he was not writing her off. In his description of the incident, he said, "in general, this student worked very hard, participated in class, and did well. But I think she felt under stress at the end of her first semester her [sic], and really wanted to succeed."

One explanation for why students transgress even after being warned is that the students are not quite sure what they should avoid. However, what is illustrated in the above quotes is that the student felt stressed and strained (Merton 1938) and, perhaps due to her high internal academic standards, decided to cut corners. Of course, it may be that stress and/or strain elicits the individual's motivation to neutralize/rationalize her actions and to accept these mind tricks. After contacting the student, the reporting instructor above said that she admitted her malfeasance. The student told the instructor, "I definitely didn't give it my all on the last paper and I didn't want to turn in a paper that was unworthy."

In other incidents where instructors gave warnings before taking action, the students engineered impromptu methods for avoiding future detection. A report from an upper-level marketing course tells of one such instance of sharing answers during an examination:

After walking walked by to get a closer look at what they were doing, [the TA] saw that both students had their scantrons filled out and in full view of each other. He told them if they were done they could turn in their exam, and asked them to keep their scantrons covered. They covered their scantrons for a little while with their calculators. [The TA] came by later and noticed that their scantrons were uncovered again and that changes had been made to their scantrons (eraser smears were now evident). [the TA] reminded them

a second time to keep their scantrons covered. While watching them after this, [the TA] also noticed that [one student] would write on his exam and put it on his desk in view of the other student. When he walked over to get a closer look, [one student] flipped the page.

To check the validity of his claims, the teaching assistant analyzed the two exams and found very compelling incriminatory evidence. The report continues as follows:

- They both had answers to questions written in large letters in the margins, some of which were crossed out as well as lists of numbers to questions written in the margins
- [The Student's] exam booklet had two sections of partially erased characters
 - o A Chinese doctoral student translated the characters and said that it roughly says (missing parts illegible) "I will _____ write down" and later "You will _____ number of questions" and "You are sure _____ make circle of problems"
- Both students had identical scores on the exam and missed the same questions.

Comparing student accounts to faculty reports

Although not completely disharmonious, the student accounts characterized the events differently than the faculty did. Of course, the context in which the faculty and students were asked about the events differed, and this difference might explain some of the variance in answers. For the student responses, I analyzed their answers to a survey they were asked to complete as part of the first module of the course *vis-à-vis* the instructor reports. Educationally, the goal of this survey is to get them to think about academic integrity in general and their encounters with it more specifically. The tenth question of twelve is "what act of academic dishonesty did you commit?"

This question does not explicitly ask for a description of the incident, as the question posed to faculty does. This difference in question is no doubt partially the reason student responses were much less detailed and shorter than those of the faculty. Thus, responses were not

analyzed based on their complexity or style; rather, I concentrated on substantive differences between the two types of account. Also, the question to students is a loaded in that it assumes the student did commit an act of academic dishonesty, although a large minority of students used wording like “I was accused of...” or “my professor thinks I...,” deflecting acceptance of their culpability. At any rate, the different contexts in which the accounts were generated should be taken into consideration.

Students admit some culpability

When comparing the instructor reports to the student accounts of the events, a distinct trend emerged: students felt that both what they did and its related seriousness was not as bad as instructors reported. Most students did not deny their acts, but they did frame them (a concept introduced in Erving Goffman’s 1974 book *Frame Analysis*) quite differently than the instructors. For example, in the above scenario involving the marketing students sharing answers on an exam, according to the instructor one student did the following:

admitted to collaborating with the other student, saying that they had compared answers after taking the exam but before turning their exams in. He admitted changing “3 or 4” answers after viewing the other student’s exam, but expressed surprise that their exam responses were identical and stated that he had turned his exam in first. He further stated that he knew that his actions were wrong and that he was sorry, but that they both had not done well on prior exams and wanted to get a better grade on the last exam.

When asked what form of academic dishonesty he committed, the student wrote that “we compared the answer after we done the exams. So it caused we get the same answer for some reasons. it also shock me in a certain degree.”

A student accused of plagiarizing in a general education arts and humanities course admitting some wrong-doing on his part but did not seem to share the professor’s conceptualization of the incident. The faculty member describes the incident as follows:

The student clearly cut and pasted a writing assignment from internet sources found through a google search. Some material was plagiarized from Spark Notes, others from page 23 of Robert Young's book 'Personal Autonomy: beyond positive and negative liberty.'

The student wrote, "I plagiarized in my IAH class because I forgot to quote a line from one of the books that I used as a reference." It is possible that this trend of students' admissions to some malfeasance while denying or leaving out the severity of the transgression (if we are to believe faculty reports) is a face-saving strategy. Since students are in the class, they feel that they must admit to something that would put them in the class but that they do not have to admit to, or write about, every part of their transgression(s); doing a little wrong is better than doing a lot wrong, both in the eyes of others and also internally. Of course, the disparities in the characterization of the degree of malfeasance between the faculty and student responses may just be illustrating that the faculty and students actually see the situation differently. This idea is in line with the evidence from the previous section of this dissertation, which illustrates that students seemed to cheat mostly out of ignorance.

Here are a few other examples of student's admitting to lesser acts than the faculty reported:

The student submitted a paper (Project 3, Disciplinary Literacy) that included paragraphs copied word for word from Wikipedia without using quotation marks and without providing any citation within the paper itself or in the Works Cited list.

The student reported that "I used some information off a internet site and did not site the source."

A different faculty member reporting a different student stated this: "Student submitted exactly same homework as other students." The student wrote that "I worked on a homework assignment with other individuals and apparently had similar answers / analysis of tables that we had to give specific explanations on."

Sometimes students denied parts of the accusations made about them at first and later admitted to the actions previously denied. Consideration of the loaded nature of the question posed to students is paramount here, considering the vast evidence of false confession manufactured by police interrogations. Still, this setting is quite different from the interrogation room (e.g. the students are told repeatedly that their punishment has already been levied upon them).

One case of denial and then admission involves impersonation during an online test. The instructor described the situation when the report was filed as follows:

Another student came to take an online test for the student. He had [the student's] MSU ID card, his netID and his password and was able to log in as the student. The proctor refused to validate his login to the test since the student did not look like the student and the proctor had been proctoring that section all semester. The [potential impersonator] then logged out and left. the student disavows all knowledge of the incident, claiming that he was sick that week and didn't bother to come to take the test. However, he did admit that he did not have his ID card, as his fraternity had taken the ID cards away from their pledges.

Whereas the student denied his involvement in the impersonation scheme when initially discussing the incident with the professor, by the time he reached the survey in module 1 of the course, he seemed ready to admit to a larger role. He responded that the he was in trouble for “attempting to have another student take an exam for me.”

Most students who admitted to a less egregious act than their professors accused them of did not change their story as quickly as the fraternity student above did. In fact, some continued to deny wrongdoing throughout the class. However, the great majority of students who did not assert their responsibility for the whole of the malfeasance reported by the faculty member did eventually admit to more wrongdoing. This was evident when comparing the pre- and post-surveys, in their final papers, and, occasionally, in other course responses. Future analysis should seek to separate the effects of the academic integrity course versus merely the passage of time to

get a clearer idea of the mechanism(s) operating to change the students' responses. Due to University protocol, I was not able to run a field experiment with course content as my independent variable and with random assignment of students.

Many of the disparities in instructor and student reports related to the acceptability of using others' work in one's own writing. This student's responses about this particular incident (which show up in the faculty report and the student's survey) illustrate that her conception of proper writing greatly differs from the standards of academia. The professor wrote this:

My suspicion of plagiarism arose when the first sentence of her paper was phrased in the manner of a concluding sentence. When I did a simple google search on a phrase from that sentence, I found that the entire first page of her paper was lifted from the following review of the book of essays from which our course readings were drawn. The relevant citation is Ravi Vasudevan, "The Meanings of 'Bollywood'," from the **Journal of the Moving Image,** found at http://www.jmionline.org/jmi7_8.htm. I approached the student at the exam and she first said that it was only the first sentence of the paper that was copied. When I showed her that was not the case, she said that she did not understand that external research was not expected. In our email exchange following this conversation, she made it clear that she routinely "rephrases" outside documents as a method for "writing" her papers. She complained that such "rephrasing" was more difficult for her than other students because she is not a native English speaker.

I tried to explain to her in my reply that such "rephrasing" is not the same thing as writing, and that it was not an acceptable approach to academic work. I also explained that she would be allowed to continue in the course after taking a zero on this assignment because the majority of the other grades in the course were from in-class exams, which would of course measure her own work without allowing her to take materials from the internet.

The student wrote "plagiarism in paper. (Using outside source and forgot to quote them)."

Clearly, if we are to trust the instructors report, it was not just a matter of leaving out a couple quotation marks.

Sometimes, students did not explicitly debate the facts their professor's presented, but rather argued that they did not do their act on purpose. In the following case, this denial seems

contrary to the evidence presented by the faculty. It is hard to imagine the following was done unintentionally. The instructor reports this:

[Student A and Student B] each completed a research paper assignment. This assignment was an individual (non group or team) assignment. When grading the papers I noted identical sentences and paragraphs in each of the student's research papers. [Student A's] research paper contained 51% of the same content in the form of identical sentences and paragraphs that [Student B's] paper contained. The bibliographies for both student's papers were identical as well.

Student A simply wrote "Unintentional Collaboration," while Student B did not respond at all.

Another example of a student claiming that the act was an accident comes from a computer science course. The faculty wrote the following:

The student submitted old files belonging to another student (who had taken CSE 101 in an earlier semester) on one of his online tests instead of his own files. He told me that the student had given him the files to "help" him in the course, but that he had not intended to actually use them on the test.

The student stated this:

I got help from a freind for a CSE 101 test. To help me he gave me his document and I used it to answer the test questions I had previously to study for the next test. Well when I took the test I opened his document Instead of my own because they where both named credit.xlsx I then used that document to complete the test. So I did all the work for the test but used the wrong document. I didn't think this was cheating as much of a mistake on my part If I would have used my document I probably could have passed the test.

Along with admitting to a less severe transgression and claiming the act was unintentional/the result of ignorance, some students admitted that they committed academic dishonesty but argued that it was not noteworthy as the assignment they cheated on was worth very few points. The instructor tells of noticing something during the proctoring of a class quiz:

the student was sitting in the back of the room taking Quiz #5. I was walking around the room (which is a normal procedure during exams and quizzes) and I noticed that the student was using an ipod touch which was located in the top of his calculator case. I looked on the screen and he had homework solutions pulled up that were posted on our class ANGEL site - he was viewing the solutions while working on the quiz. The quiz was not a homework problem, but was similar in nature to the homework. I told the

student that I would take the ipod, picked it up and placed it in the front of the room with my material.

The student's survey answer: "Cheating on a quiz almost no points."

Another example of a student denying the accusation levied against them in the face of very concrete evidence comes via a student who admits to only a few tiny mistakes: "plagerism i forgot to site two of my sources in myy responce paper that got deleted and i retyped it and did not put all sources back." The instructor believes the act was much more blatant:

On a course writing assignment, [the student] committed a blatant act of academic dishonesty by plagiarizing a website. He will receive a failing grade for the assignment and an additional 3% reduction off of his final grade in the course. Any further acts of academic dishonesty will result in a failing grade in the course and a request for additional sanctions.

Question:

Drawing on the reading from this week (first 50 pages), describe the social and physical structure of the village of Kanthapura.

Plagiarized Answer:

The story is set in a small, sleepy and remote village of Kanthapura on the banks of river Himavathy, some where in the Western Ghats in Karnataka, around 1930s. The story, narrated by an old lady of Kanthapura, is about the change the India's fight for freedom led by Mahatma, brings into the lives of the people of Kanthapura. I remember reading Ms Pearl S Buck point out the rise of leaders from all walks of life and the significant role they played in the struggle as one of the unique features of India's freedom path. This village is a microcosm of the traditional Indian society with its entrenched caste hierarchy. In Kanthapura there are Brahmin quarters, Sudra quarters and Pariah quarters. Despite stratification into castes, however, the villagers are mutually bound in various economic and social functions which maintain social harmony. The enduring quality of the Indian village is represented as ensuring an internal tenacity that resists external crises, its relationship to past contributing a sense of unity and continuity between the present and past generations. Kanthapura may appear isolated and removed from civilization, but it is compensated by an ever-enriching cycle of ceremonies, rituals, and festivals. With it being so many characters i still find it easy to follow.

Source Texts1:

<http://www.srikanthmanda.com/2009/03/kanthapura.html>

The story is set in a small, sleepy and remote village of Kanthapura on the banks of river Himavathy, some where in the Western Ghats in Karnataka, around 1930s. The story, narrated by an old lady of Kanthapura, is about the change the India's fight for freedom led by Mahatma, brings into the lives of the people of Kanthapura. I remember reading Ms Pearl S Buck point out the rise of leaders from all walks of life and the important role they played in the struggle as one of the unique features of India's freedom struggle. The protagonist of this book is one such leader named Murthy.

The instructor's report also offers additional examples mirroring the student's text with others found online.

A common trend was that students seemed to believe that copying and pasting from the internet without quoting, perhaps with citing or even without it, was an acceptable way to write research papers and/or do homework. At times, like the case above, the students implemented a few small wording or phrase changes and added a few sentences of their own. The literature usually refers to this method of writing as *patchwork plagiarism* (e.g. see Cooper 2007), and it is something that I have found while teaching the class that gives reported students a lot of trouble. Many of them believe that replacing words with synonyms, changing sentence structures, and the like is "putting it into your own words." An example of this is shown in the following the instructor report:

The student submitted a research paper for the ISB 201L course that was largely copied and pasted from a variety of on-line resources. This is not an appropriate method by which to complete this assignment and is considered plagiarism.

The student answers the question about what kind of academic dishonesty he or she committed with this: "Plagerising. Even though I cited all my work for my paper The professor didn't want that type of format for that particular assignment but I was unaware of that at the time."

In this next example, the student admits to some wrongdoing but still does not seem to realize the full scope of the problem. She admits to forgetting to cite a source but does not

mention anything related to improper quoting and paraphrasing. The instructor in this case wrote the following:

In "Barn Burning," the story is a little different but the theme remains the same. Faulkner depicts a child, who finds himself cut off from the larger social world of which he is growing conscious; this sense of alienation takes root, moreover, in Sarty's relation with his father, who should be the moral model and means of entry of the child into the larger world. Because of his father's criminal recklessness, Sarty finds himself, in the first part of the story, the object of an insult, and he attacks a boy who, in more ordinary circumstances, might be a school-companion or a friend.

This what I found at <http://www.bookrags.com/studyguide-barnburning/themes.html>:

In "Barn Burning," Faulkner depicts a child, on the verge of moral awareness, who finds himself cut off from the larger social world of which he is growing conscious; this sense of alienation takes root, moreover, in Sarty's relation with his father, who should be the moral model and means of entry of the child into the larger world. Because of his father's criminal recklessness, Sarty finds himself, in the first part of the story, the object of an insult, and he attacks a boy who, in more ordinary circumstances, might be a school-companion or a friend.

The student wrote that "I didn't cite a work that I took of the internet. SO plagerism."

Another professor gave over thirty examples of where a student's paper matched an online document. Here are the first five:

Parallels between [the student]'s work and comments in Sparknotes on the books she discusses.

1. [the student]: "two distinct modes through which man engages the world."
Sparknotes: "two modes of engaging the world."

2. [the student]: "experience, the mode used almost exclusively by modern society."
Sparknotes: "experience...the mode modern man almost exclusively uses."

3. [the student]: "the object of his experience, the It"
Sparknotes: "the object of experience (the It)"

4. [the student]: "a collection of qualities and quantities"
Sparknotes: "a collection of qualities and quantities"

5. [the student]: "something to be utilized or put to some purpose"
Sparknotes: "a thing to be utilized ...or put to some purpose"

The student did not complete the survey.

Students completely deny wrongdoing

So, we do not know why the above student believes she committed her act, or what act she believes she committed (e.g. forgetting a few citation, improper paraphrasing, etc.). It may be the case that she denies any wrongdoing. Indeed, several students did not admit to any malfeasance when asked. Instead they either mentioned their instructor's perception of the event, seemingly alluding to their instructor's perception, logic, or proof being flawed or they directly say they did not do what they were accused of. Of particular interest is the finding that, in my opinion, the allegations that were not even partially admitted to by students did not seem like they were based on shakier evidence than those that were at least somewhat admitted by the students. In fact, students denied doing anything wrong even in the face of concrete evidence. Often this evidence came in the form of finding extreme similarities between multiple documents. For instance, an instructor wrote this:

[the student] has provided as a final paper for my class an edited version of an academic paper, "The Eurosystem, the US Federal Reserve, and the Bank of Japan: Similarities and Differences" (Gerdesmeier, Mongelli and Roffia, 2007, Journal of Money, Credit and Banking). [the student]'s paper edits out references to Japan as well as the more technical aspects of the academic work cited above, but is otherwise the same (word by word, paragraph by paragraph).

I have asked [the student] to come see me and explain how he wrote his paper. He claims that his girlfriend has turned in the wrong paper for him (also writing his name on the plagiarized paper), and that the paper he has turned was downloaded from a sharing website - rapid share. From all [the student] has told me, or what his girlfriend told me, I cannot make a clear assessment that what happened was an honest mistake and cannot accept another paper from him to serve as a final paper assignment in my class.

The student wrote that "my instructor came to a conclusion that I tried to present someone else's work as mine."

Some students that were accused of patchwork plagiarism still believed they had done nothing wrong after their encounter with the reporting faculty member. If we are to believe the students, it would seem that reported students may be especially ignorant when it comes to patchwork plagiarism. This notion is supported by my findings presented in the previous section on what would have stopped students from cheating. In the following case, the student seems to not understand what constitutes plagiarism. The instructor wrote this:

The student plagiarized on an essay assignment for HST 413. This assignment required students to view and analyze a film in terms of family life, function, and structure. The student chose a film based on a novel and utilized words, phrases, ideas from sparknotes (a website providing summaries, character description, and analysis of novels) to complete the assignment. She paraphrased and quoted the website without acknowledging the source of her information nor did she indicate that the ideas were not her own. At the beginning of the semester, this student (and the entire class) signed a document acknowledging that she understood what plagiarism meant and MSU's academic integrity policies. When confronted about the paper, the student stated she did not understand "how" she plagiarized. After explaining it to her and showing her the evidence, she showed no remorse and refused to take responsibility for her actions.

The student wrote that "my professor believed I plagiarized a movie assignment."

Examples of strain and neutralization

Similar to the analysis of student responses to the question "what, if anything, would have stopped you from committing your act of academic dishonesty?," both students and faculty often pointed to strain (usually manifested as a time-crunch) and less often, to student employment of neutralization as things that led to cheating. One instructor reported this:

[the student] was called up during the homework review in the microteaching portion of [teacher education course]. He was asked to discuss the answer he had written to the problem. Not unlike many other days and other students, he stated he needed some time to look at it and remember what he did. He described part of what he did. The students in the role of teachers asked the class if they had any questions. One student asked a question. [the student] responded by saying, "I don't know, I got the table from you. Maybe you could answer your own question." Motioning to the back of the room where [two other students] were sitting, he said, "You aren't supposed to be hearing this." Then

he continued to state that since it was close to the deadline of 4 pm when he went to work on it, he did not have sufficient time to complete the homework himself. Instead, he stated that he opened other people's already submitted homework posted on the wiki and copied parts of each one (he pointed to three different people in class) and then pasted them into one document and uploaded it as his own homework.

The student seemed to feel that given his lack of time, he was unable to accomplish the desired end (i.e. a complete assignment) with the approved means (i.e. doing your own work), so he innovated by copying. The choice to copy was probably made easier by the student's perception that the assignment was a minor one. The student wrote that he "copied a computer drawing that would have taken too much time and looked to see what a person did before the due date of a minor assignment."

Another example of how students feel that they do not have enough time to properly finish their work and seek other means of completing their assignments comes via a case in which a teaching assistant noticed plagiarism in a student paper:

[The TA] discovered the instance of plagiarism on May 6 at 5:00 PM, after typing a random sentence from the essay into a google search, as he does for every essay he grades. This website came up:
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4816107>

The NPR article contains an excerpt from Blair Tindall's *Mozart in the Jungle: Sex, Drugs and Classical Music* from Atlantic Monthly Press: New York (2005). Specifically, it addresses chapter 4, "New World Symphony." This is the title [the student] chose for his essay as well. The entirety of the article (minus the additions [the TA] suggested after reading the rough draft) is plagiarized from Tindall's text. After consulting, [the TA and faculty of record] agree that the assignment deserves a grade of 0/300.

The student wrote the following:

I plagiarized a small paper for a class. It was the last homework assignment I had in college and I was desperate. I had too many other things to worry about and I should have put the paper on a higher priority from the beginning

There were also several examples of students, even though not explicitly asked to, writing about appealing to higher loyalties (one of Sykes and Matza's techniques of neutralization) in telling

for what act they were reported. In the following situation, the instructor has very strong evidence against the students:

[two students] submitted assignments which were identical in content word for word indicating the final answers were not completed independently of each other but copied. Also by looking at the Word document properties I can see that the two documents were created at precisely the same time on the same date.

One student's characterization of the event is as follows:

I only did one because my friend forgot to complete the take-home assignment and before the due time he called me and said he didn't have time to complete this and need my help to help him to submit. and the submitted assignment is the copy of mine. and in the end of the semester the professor didn't give us point.

Conclusion

My analysis of the student and faculty accounts of the events points toward students, once again, not fully understanding what (or agreeing with what faculty and the administration thinks) constitutes academic dishonesty and the relative severity of certain acts. In addition to ignorance, students also spontaneously wrote about a lack of time, a lot of stress, and commitments to others causing them to commit their transgressions.

The faculty members were generally very detailed and proof oriented in their reports and stated that they had often warned students before they committed the act that led to them being turned in. As most faculty do not submit reports, the faculty that do may be just as atypical of a sample as that of the students. In other words, the faculty members seemed to go above and beyond the usual in attempting to deter, identify, and document cheating behaviors.

This section offers support for the idea that this group of students is ignorant of what cheating is, even after they have been reported for it. Still, most students seem to take responsibility for their actions, even if they are not entirely sure what about the actions was wrong. Additionally, this section presents a glimpse of a faculty that seems to feel they have to

be very detail- and proof-oriented in order to turn students in, perhaps as the result of hearing scary anecdotes about students fighting reports via institutional and/or outside legal channels. Perhaps, knowledge of how few students actually contest reports will make other instructors more likely to turn in cheating students.

Student responses regarding the behavior of a hypothetical potential cheater

Vignettes (presented below) were randomly presented to students as part of a required module at the beginning and ending of the course. Here is an example of one of the vignettes with the parenthetical statements providing the alternative operationalization of the variables that the students may have received:

Jessie, a sophomore at MSU, is enrolled in a class that has an exam coming up soon. Jessie's professor in this course seems to really care about student learning (*Jessie thinks his/her professor in this course only cares about his paycheck and is not concerned with whether or not his students learn*). Jessie likes learning for the sake of learning and enjoys the stimulation the class provides. Jessie is more concerned with learning the material than with getting a good grade in the class (*Jessie is only concerned with getting a good grade in the class. Jessie does not care about learning the material.*). Jessie knows that his/her peers cheat on their school work all of the time. Jessie has little else going on this semester and has a lot of time to devote to this course (*Jessie has a full-time job this semester and has little time to devote to this course*). During the exam, Jessie notices the answer key has fallen onto the floor in front of him/her. Jessie can easily see all of the exam answers and is quite sure that neither the professor nor the other students in the class are aware that the answer key is right in front of him/her.

The questions posed to the students based on each vignette, with the bottom four employing a Likert-like scale of response choices (assigned numerical values are also listed after response option), are as follows:

- 1) If Jessie were to copy the answers, would you consider this to be an act of academic dishonesty, NOT an act of academic dishonesty, or are you not sure?

- 2) How likely is it that Jessie copy the answers? (Very Likely=5, Likely=4, Neither Likely nor Unlikely=3, Unlikely=2, Very Unlikely=1)
- 3) If you were Jessie, how likely is it that you would copy down the answers? (Very Likely=5, Likely=4, Neither Likely nor Unlikely=3, Unlikely=2, Very Unlikely=1)
- 4) How acceptable is it for Jessie to copy down the answers? (Very Acceptable=5, Acceptable=4, Neither Acceptable nor Unacceptable=3, Unacceptable=2, Very Unacceptable=1).
- 5) If you were Jessie, how acceptable would it be for you to copy down the answers? (Very Acceptable=5, Acceptable=4, Neither Acceptable nor Unacceptable=3, Unacceptable=2, Very Unacceptable=1)

Responses to the first question of the first eight vignettes were treated as categorical variables.

Answers to the other four questions were placed on a Likert-like scale of values ranging from 1 to 5 (Very Likely = 5, Very Acceptable = 5, etc.), and these data were treated as having equal numerical distances between them

In addition to the vignettes testing the previously stated variables, each set also included four vignettes written by MSU faculty member Dr. Danielle Devoss and were used in the course with permission. These vignettes have the same answer choices as Question 1 above.

Below are the basic descriptive statistics of the answers for each of the vignettes. In parentheses following the vignette number are descriptors of which side of the three dichotomous variables was in that particular vignette. The mean for Question 2 in all eight modules is the highest in both the pre and post-vignettes, and the scores generally get lower from pre (vignettes presented as part of the first module of class) to post (vignettes presented as part of the last module of class). Vignette 8 (professor does not care, student is extrinsically motivated, student has little time) produced the highest means (where a higher score means expecting oneself and others to cheat more and finding cheating more acceptable than a lower score).

	Pre-Response	Post-Response
Yes	157	161
No	2	2
I'm not sure	14	2
Total	173	165

Question	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
2	2.37	1.18	2.20	1.11
3	1.90	.95	1.46	.73
4:	1.44	.70	1.32	.65
5	1.53	.74	1.27	.50

Table 3.1 Vignette 1 (*professor cares, student is intrinsically motivated, student has lots of time*)

	Pre-Response	Post-Response
Yes	153	161
No	2	1
I'm not sure	18	3
Total	173	165

Question	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
2	2.47	1.22	2.10	1.20
3	1.94	1.05	1.47	.72
4	1.53	.74	1.31	.56
5	1.53	.74	1.30	.59

Table 3.2 Vignette 2 (*professor cares, student is intrinsically motivated, student has little time*)

	Pre-Response	Post-Response
Yes	154	160
No	1	1
I'm not sure	16	3
Total	171	164

Question	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
2	2.20	1.16	1.94	1.12
3	1.80	.92	1.44	.72
4	1.51	.73	1.33	.60
5	1.50	.71	1.32	.59

Table 3.3 Vignette 3 (*professor does not care, student is intrinsically motivated, student has lots of time*)

Pre-Response		Post-Response
Yes	158	162
No	1	0
I'm not sure	14	2

Question	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
2	2.42	1.27	2.07	1.21
3	1.85	.96	1.60	.79
4	1.57	.82	1.32	.58
5	1.51	.73	1.34	.62

Table 3.4 Vignette 4 (*professor does not care, student is intrinsically motivated, student has little time*)

Pre-Response		Post-Response
Yes	160	159
No	1	0
I'm not sure	12	3

Question	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
2	2.87	1.45	2.56	1.38
3	1.98	1.07	1.56	.90
4	1.53	.80	1.32	.63
5	1.47	.70	1.32	.56

Table 3.5 Vignette 5 (*professor cares, student is extrinsically motivated, student has lots of time*)

Pre-Response		Post-Response
Yes	160	161
No	2	0
I'm not sure	10	4

Question	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
2	2.89	1.39	2.71	1.48
3	1.95	1.04	1.59	.91
4	1.55	.83	1.38	.68
5	1.50	.72	1.33	.56

Table 3.6 Vignette 6 (*professor cares, student is extrinsically motivated, student has little time*)

	Pre-Response	Post-Response
Yes	160	159
No	2	1
I'm not sure	10	3
Total	172	163

Question	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
2	2.83	1.38	2.61	1.42
3	1.97	.92	1.60	.93
4	1.60	.84	1.34	.58
5	1.49	.70	1.32	.56

Table 3.7 Vignette 7 (*professor does not care, student is extrinsically motivated, student has lots of time*)

	Pre-Response	Post-Response
Yes	160	161
No	2	0
I'm not sure	10	3
Total	172	164

Question	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
2	2.95	1.50	2.78	1.54
3	1.96	1.09	1.56	.88
4	1.61	.91	1.37	.62
5	1.52	.74	1.35	.63

Table 3.8 Vignette 8 (*professor does not care, student is extrinsically motivated, student has little time*)

The next set of vignettes required the students to answer only about whether they thought the illustrated behavior was academic dishonesty, NOT academic dishonesty, or if they were not sure. These cases are more ambiguous than the ones above, but most professors and administrators find them to be acts of academic dishonesty. The results show a small improvement pre to post. Vignette 10 depicts a situation in which previous research has found disagreement between students and faculty as to whether or not the act is appropriate (Burrus 2007). In my sample, more students answered “No” than in any of the other four vignettes

below. Vignette 11 had the second most discord in responses, although the post-responses for each vignette showed less evidence of this discord.

Vignette 9

An art history professor is reviewing a student's paper and notices that the sophistication of the sentences shifts. One sentence is good, but a bit rough. The next sentence is incredibly complex and grammatically perfect. She jumps online and heads to Google (<http://www.google.com>) to search using one of the complex sentences from the paper. From the list of hits, it's obvious that the student lifted entire sentences from several different online essays. The student has woven the lifted sentences in with her own ideas.

	Pre-Response	Post-Response
Yes	165	167
No	0	0
I'm not sure	8	2
Total	173	169

Table 3.9 Vignette 9

Vignette 10

Jim, an English major, recycles his high school honors thesis paper for use in an undergraduate course. The original paper was his own work. However, Jim submits the paper in nearly its original form, with only minor revisions.

	Pre-Response	Post-Response
Yes	83	147
No	49	12
I'm not sure	41	10
Total	173	169

Table 3.10 Vignette 10

Vignette 11

A history teacher discovers that one of her better students, Isabel, has used two direct quotations in a paper (entire sentences), but without using quotation marks. Isabel did, however, identify the source for the quotation in her bibliography.

	Pre-Response	Post-Response
Yes	89	133
No	40	25
I'm not sure	44	11
Total	173	169

Table 3.11 Vignette 11

Vignette 12

Julie, an undeclared freshman, completes her IAH term paper by finding many articles about the topic. She then cites these articles and copies and pastes various paragraphs from the articles on to her own paper. Before she submits her paper, she is sure to replace most of the words from the other articles with synonyms.

	Pre-Response	Post-Response
Yes	132	150
No	12	11
I'm not sure	29	8
Total	173	169

Table 3.12 Vignette 12

In addition to the descriptive statistics, I aggregated some responses (questions 2-5 in vignettes 1-8) and compared this aggregated sum for different groupings of students: Citizens vs. Non-Citizens, Men vs. Women, Those who were reported for just plagiarism vs. those reported for anything else, underclassmen vs. upperclassmen. These comparisons were run separately for the pre and post-vignettes. For the pre vignettes, a significant difference on the aggregate measure was NOT found between citizens and non-citizens, those who were reported for just plagiarism and all others reported, men and women, underclassmen and upperclassmen. Testing the differences on the aggregate measure for the aforementioned groupings yielded only one significant difference ($P < .01$): non-citizens had a lower aggregate score in the post test than citizens did.

Two-sample t tests with equal variances

	Sum	Std. Error	Std. Deviation
Citizens (n=102)	60.67	2.18	21.98
Non-Citizens (n=63)	60.57	2.45	19.53
All (165)	60.63	1.64	21.01
Difference between Citizens and Non-Citizens	.10	3.38	t= .03 Degrees of Freedom = 163

Table 3.13 Pre-Vignette Comparison of Aggregate Measure Sums by Citizenship

	Sum	Std. Error	Std. Deviation
Just Plagiarism (n=62)	61.00	2.37	18.64
Other (n=103)	60.41	2.21	22.41
All (165)	60.63	1.64	21.01
Difference between Just Plagiarism and Other	.59	3.39	t= .17 Degrees of Freedom = 163

Table 3.14 Pre-Vignette Comparison of Aggregate Measure Sums by Act

	Sum	Std. Error	Std. Deviation
Male (n=76)	58.34	2.02	17.59
Female (n=89)	62.58	2.49	23.47
All (165)	60.63	1.64	18.12
Difference between Males and Females	4.24	3.28	t= 1.30 Degrees of Freedom = 163

Table 3.15 Pre-Vignette Comparison of Aggregate Measure Sums by Gender

	Mean	Std. Error	Std. Deviation
Underclassmen (n=80)	60.03	2.22	19.88
Upperclassmen (n=85)	61.20	2.40	22.13
All (165)	60.63	1.64	21.01
Difference between Underclassmen and Upperclassmen	1.18	3.28	t= .36 Degrees of Freedom = 163

Table 3.16 Pre-Vignette Comparison of Aggregate Measure Sums by Year in School

	Mean	Std. Error	Std. Deviation
Citizens (n=92)	55.67	1.66	15.94
Non-Citizens (n=58)	47.76	2.67	20.34
All (150)	52.61	1.48	18.12
Difference between Citizens and Non-Citizens	7.92*	2.98	t= 2.66 Degrees of Freedom = 148

Table 3.17 Post-Vignette Comparison of Aggregate Measure Sums by Citizenship
 *= P<.01

	Mean	Std. Error	Std. Deviation
Just Plagiarism (n=57)	54.33	2.65	20.02
Other (n=93)	51.56	1.75	16.89
All (150)	52.61	1.48	18.12
Difference between Just Plagiarism and Other	2.77	3.05	t= .91 Degrees of Freedom = 148

Table 3.18 Post-Vignette Comparison of Aggregate Measure Sums by Act

	Mean	Std. Error	Std. Deviation
Male (n=68)	52.16	2.37	19.52
Female (n=82)	52.99	1.88	16.99
All (150)	52.61	1.48	18.12
Difference between Males and Females	.83	2.98	

Table 3.19 Post-Vignette Comparison of Aggregate Measure Sums by Gender

	Mean	Std. Error	Std. Deviation
Underclassmen (n=70)	52.8	2.43	20.34
Upperclassmen (n=80)	52.45	1.88	16.06
All (150)	52.61	1.48	18.12
Difference between Underclassmen and Upperclassmen	.35	2.98	t= .12 Degrees of Freedom = 148

Table 3.20 Post-Vignette Comparison of Aggregated Measure Sums by Year in School

I also wanted to test the differences in the answers from questions where students were asked to talk about themselves versus when they were asked to talk about the hypothetical student. Thus, I compared the means of question 2 (how likely is Jessie) to the means for question 3 (how likely would you be). Significant differences at the $P < .001$ level were found for the question comparisons in both the pre- and post-vignettes.

Pre-Vignettes (N=8)	Mean	Standard Deviation
Aggregated Question 2 Responses	2.63	.29
Aggregated Question 3 Responses	1.91	.06
Difference of Means	.72*	Standard Error = .11 t=6.72 df=14

Table 3.21 Pre-Vignette Comparison of Aggregated Question 2 and Question 3 Responses

*= $P < .001$

Post-Vignettes (N=8)	Mean	Standard Deviation		
Aggregated Question 2 Responses	2.37	..33		
Aggregated Question 3 Responses	1.53	..07		
Difference of Means	.84*		Standard Error = .12	t=7.06 df=14

Table 3.22 Post-Vignette Comparison of Aggregated Question 2 and Question 3 Responses

*=P<.001

Additionally, I compared question 2 responses (how likely is Jessie) for vignettes that illustrated intrinsic motivation to those that illustrated extrinsic motivation. In both the pre and post conditions, question 2 responses for vignettes expressing extrinsic motivation were significantly higher (P<.001) than question 2 responses for vignettes expressing intrinsic motivation.

Pre-Vignette	Mean	Standard Deviation		
Intrinsically Motivated Question 2 Responses (Vignettes 1-4)	2.37	.12		
Extrinsically Motivated Question 2 Responses (Vignettes 5-8)	2.88	.05		
Difference of Means	.41*		Standard Error = .06	t=8.15 df=6

Table 3.23 Pre-Vignette Comparisons of Questions 2 Responses for Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation Vignettes

*=P<.001

Post-Vignette	Mean	Standard Deviation
Intrinsically Motivated Question 2 Responses (Vignettes 1-4)	2.08	.11
Extrinsically Motivated Question 2 Responses (Vignettes 5-8)	2.67	.10
Difference of Means	.59*	Standard Error = .07 t=8.06 df=6

Table 3.24 Post-Vignette Comparisons of Questions 2 Responses for Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation Vignettes

*=P<.001

I also wanted to see how responses changed from pre- to post-vignettes and to see if these changes varied by demographic characteristics. Here, I used the aggregated sum of questions 2-5 on vignettes 1-8 as the dependent variable. Both citizen and non-citizen scores decreases significantly from pre to post (P<.001), although the change was much greater for non-citizens.

	Mean	Std. Error	Std. Deviation
Citizen Pre (n=102)	60.66	.21	2.17
Citizen Post (n=92)	55.67	.17	1.66
Change	4.99*	.28	t=17.84 degrees of freedom=192

*=P<.001

	Mean	Std. Error	Std. Deviation
Non-Citizen Pre (n=63)	60.57	.31	2.17
Non-Citizen Post (n=58)	47.75	.35	1.66
Change	12.82*	.47	t=27.54 degrees of freedom=119

Table 3.25 Pre to Post Change in Aggregated Measure Sums for Citizens and Non-Citizens

*=P<.001

	Mean	Std. Error	Std. Deviation
Total Sample Pre (n=165)	60.63	.13	2.17
Total Sample Post (n=150)	52.61	.12	1.66
Change	8.02*	.18	t=45.70 degrees of freedom=313

Table 3.26 Pre to Post Change in Aggregated Measure Sums for Entire Sample

*=P<.001

DISCUSSION

Perhaps the most salient trend I found is the fact that there were so many “non-findings.” Year in school, gender, and the type of act committed did not significantly predict student responses, despite the vast literature that asserts that these variables (especially year in school and gender) affect cheating propensity and student attitudes toward cheating (see Wideman 2008). This lack of congruence between existing understandings of student attitudes and behaviors and the results of this particular study may be due to the difference in the samples that are usually studied and the one that is utilized here. Maybe among people most likely to get reported for cheating, there are no gender or year-in-school differences in student understandings and attitudes about academic dishonesty. To test this idea, I plan to administer these vignettes to a random sample of all undergraduate students at MSU.

Rettinger and Kramer (2009) also found that students judged the individual in the vignette to be more likely to commit academic dishonesty than they themselves would; their sampling frame was the entire undergraduate population at a small religious school, and they had a high degree of non-response. In my study, for each of the 8 vignettes, the students, on average, reported that they would be less likely to cheat than the person in the vignette would be. Not only does my finding substantiate Rettinger and Kramer’s (2009) result, but it adds a new wrinkle in

that even those who have been reported for cheating feel as though a hypothetical student is more likely to cheat than they are. My study also found that students tended to believe that others who are extrinsically motivated are more likely to cheat than those who are intrinsically motivated.

Vignettes 9-12 offer some evidence that students are ignorant about what constitutes academic dishonesty. This finding corroborates with the sections of this study that asked students to write about something that might have stopped them from cheating and the accounts provided by students and faculty about the events that led to the reports. Administering these questions to a random sample of MSU students will help in determining whether or not those who get reported for cheating are less likely to be ignorant of the rules of academic integrity than all undergraduates are in general.

Student scores changed toward the desired end of the scale from the pre to post-vignettes. This suggests the course is somewhat effective, although this change may just be the result of the students having already taken the pre-test, experimental mortality, or increased social desirability bias (i.e. the students might be more likely to know what I want in the post test than in the pretest), among other things.

While the average aggregated response scores became significantly lower (which was desired) from the pre to the post test, non-citizens improved more so than citizens, even though there was no difference in the aggregate scores of the two groups in the pre surveys. One possible explanation is that non-citizens were more ignorant of the rules to begin with, while citizen students were more attitudinally lenient toward academic cheating begin with, and the class did more to rid ignorance than to change moral attitudes. However, my qualitative analysis of “why they cheat” shows that among students in the class, citizens are more likely than non-citizens to cite ignorance. Still, a non-citizen student in the general undergraduate population is

more likely to be reported and cite ignorance than is a citizen in the general undergraduate population. Another possible explanation for these findings is that non-citizens have a bigger incentive to pass the course and not cheat again as negative outcomes may lead to them being forced to leave the country. So, in line with the rational choice perspective, they will put forth more effort and/or be more willing to change, think they will change, or state that they have changed their attitudes and behaviors toward academic dishonesty. A third possible explanation is that non-citizens felt more shame about their acts and wanted to rectify the situation to mitigate this shame. Anticipated shame has been shown to be a powerful predictor of academically dishonest attitudes and behavior (see McCabe and Trevino's 1997 multi-campus investigation where the authors found that perceived potential peer disapproval was more strongly correlated with self-reported academic dishonesty than a slew of other individual and contextual influences). Additionally, shame seems more important and more present for students from collectivist cultures. Furukawa, Tangey, and Higashibara (2012) found this to be true, although they also note that there is more cross-cultural similarity in these areas than there are differences. Future research should be done to get a better understanding of this difference in improvement.

LIMITATIONS

There are some key limitations to this vignette study. Firstly, I cannot be sure that student responses to the vignettes mirror how the student might respond to a real life situation like the ones portrayed in the vignettes. The main culprits here are external and internal validity. Saying that an individual does not have much time most likely does not produce the same emotions and cognitive chicanery as actually feeling that there is no time to fulfill obligations.

This may be especially true in this study as it seems that many of my students did not premeditate their cheating. Rettinger and Kramer (2009) stated a similar critique of their own work's external validity.

Even if the vignettes served to affect the students in the same way as an actual situation would, students still may not supply accurate and/or honest information. Since this is a class that is graded (using a Pass/Fail system), the students may be trying to appease me with their answers rather than trying to give honest information, although the facts that I am looking for honest answers and that their answers will not get them in any additional trouble is mentioned several times throughout the course, including before the pre-vignettes. Furthermore, if students are truly ignorant, they may not know how to respond in a way that is socially desirable. Additionally, students were asked to answer questions concerning 12 vignettes (44 questions total), many of which were very similar. This may have fatigued the students and caused them to answer without the full consideration of the nuances of the vignettes, questions, and answer choices.

The answer choices were also contrived. We do not know how students' definitions of response choices like "Very Likely" and "Likely" vary from other students' views and from my own. Furthermore, assigning numerical ratio values to these choices and performing statistical analyses, although common, is inauthentic as we do not know if a choice like "Very Likely" is the same distance from "Likely" as "Likely" is from the neutral answer. In the future, using Rasch measurement techniques will help in correcting this limitation.

The aggregated measure, which combined answers from questions 2-5 on vignettes 1-8, is certainly affected by this assumption of ratio qualities to ordinal variables. The aggregated measure is also made up of questions about the students *and* questions about the hypothetical

student in the vignettes, with lower scores meaning that the respondent views him or herself *and* the hypothetical student as being less likely to cheat and less likely to approve of cheating. Still, the extant research documents the pervasive finding that perceptions about peers strongly correlate with one's own behavior and attitudes (see Beasley 2009; Berkowitz 2004).

Lastly, although I originally intended to use the perception of peers' cheating behavior as a variable in the vignettes, I had to omit it to save time. However, I mistakenly left the sentence relating to peers in the vignettes, so that each vignette says that the student knows others cheat often. This may have swayed vignette answers and been a cause of the self-other discrepancy found in the answers. Additionally, this may have caused answers to be higher than they would be otherwise, although it should be noted that the peer behavior sentence was treated the same way in the pre and post vignettes.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Over the last couple years, hundreds of students have been reported for academic dishonesty. Demographically, these students appear to be very similar to those that make up the overall undergraduate population with one major exception: international students are five times more likely to be reported than they would be if the reports were done at random. This finding is congruent with the vast literature that points to cultural differences in how students were primarily socialized as a key determinant of their views and actions regarding academic integrity/dishonesty.

However, when students were asked about what they could have done differently to have avoided committing their act of academic dishonesty, reported international students cited ignorance of the rules governing academic integrity *less* often than reported domestic students. Overall, ignorance of the rules and punishments for transgressions of the rules were the most frequently self-reported influencers of the students' actions. Additionally, student responses showed evidence of neutralization, rational choice, strain, and poor time management as being contributors to their malfeasance.

While most students admitted to some wrongdoing, they regularly did not conceptualize the incident as being as egregious or clear-cut as the faculty did. This was especially salient in plagiarism cases, where students believed they committed a small mistake (e.g. by forgetting to cite one source) and faculty believed the students did something much more malicious (e.g. copying the entire paper verbatim off an internet site). My findings indicate a frequent and sizable divide in the way reporting faculty frame the actions of reported students and the way reported students frame the actions that led to their report.

Overall, based on my findings, I believe it is vitally important for institutions to bridge the divide between students' knowledge about academic integrity and that of professors; this is especially so for international students and instructors of international students. Part of the problem seems to be uneven enforcement and rules that students face as they move from class to class and from professor to professor. At an extremely large and highly decentralized institution such as MSU, this may be a tall task. However, even if uniformity of rules and enforcement cannot be reached, the individual units and professors could strive to be extremely transparent about what their rules are and how they will enforce them.

Unveiling the complexities of academic integrity and regularly illuminating its importance (e.g. at orientation, on the first day of class, before tests and term papers, and in dormitories) may also serve to create a culture where cheating is looked down upon and seen as dangerous. Indeed, as my findings and the literature shows, extrinsically motivated people are more likely to cheat and be perceived to cheat. So, without a culture that promotes intrinsic motivation for completing one's academic career with integrity, not only will more people cheat but also more people will be perceived as cheating, creating a reinforcing loop toward cheating becoming normative. This same reasoning may be one reason honor codes have been shown to be successful.

Still, the reported students may just represent the tip of the iceberg of the total population of cheaters. It stands to reason that those who have not been caught may be more savvy cheaters and less ignorant than those who have been caught. In a future project, I plan to carry out very pointed research that assesses the level of congruence between my findings derived from reported students and reporting professors and the attitudes and behavior of non-reported students and non-reporting faculty.

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