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**FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS  
OF THE ENVIRONMENT REGARDING ACADEMIC  
DISHONESTY**

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**FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF  
THE ENVIRONMENT REGARDING ACADEMIC DISHONESTY**

**By**

**Angela Lynn Todaro**

**Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
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**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE ENVIRONMENT REGARDING ACADEMIC DISHONESTY**

**By**

**Angela Lynn Todaro**

Fifteen first-year students participated in a qualitative study to determine if their academic experiences prior to and since arriving at college and their relationships with peers, family, and instructors influenced their perception of the Lyman Briggs School environment regarding academic dishonesty. The methodology utilized selected theories from the student development literature and the Bronfenbrenner human ecology model (1979) as a theoretical framework for expanding the current understanding of the problem of academic dishonesty.

Students participated in individual interviews examining their definition of academic dishonesty, academic experiences prior to college, first-year college experiences, and relationships with family, peers, and instructors as they related to shaping their perception of the environment regarding academic dishonesty. The study population consisted of first-year students enrolled in the Lyman Briggs School at Michigan State University. These students were selected because they participated in a competitive application process and preparing for careers in natural science fields.

The study found that students perceived that their current environment was not prevalent for academic dishonesty. Evidence indicated that relationships with family, peers, or instructors did not influence their perception of the environment regarding academic dishonesty. However, some evidence from the student

interviews indicated that students' prior academic experiences have influenced their perceptions of the Lyman Briggs School environment in some ways.

Additionally, the study found that although parent and sibling relationships did not influence students' perceptions of their environment, they did influence their moral development and moral decision making regarding academic dishonesty.

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ANGELA L. TODARO  
2005

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## **CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION**

The integrity of the academic process is one of the bedrock principles of postsecondary education. At the same time, academic dishonesty is one of the most complex problems for today's colleges. Academic dishonesty poses a threat to the goals of an institution (Bricault, 1998), jeopardizes the integrity of learning (Dalton, 1998), and erodes public trust in higher education (Nuss, 1988). For students, faculty, and administrators, defining, identifying, and responding to undergraduate academic dishonesty and promoting a culture of academic integrity is a central concern.

The purpose of this study was to develop a better understanding of how students' perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty developed. It was presumed that a better understanding of how students' perceptions developed was central to understanding the problem of academic dishonesty on college campuses. The study provided a means to examine students' perceptions of the environment recognizing that their perceptions were shaped by their interpretations of the environment. In turn, these collective perceptions helped shape the campus environment regarding academic dishonesty.

Research indicated that when students perceive that the social norm on campus was permissive of cheating, that students are more likely to have been accepting of cheating behaviors (Whitley, 1998) in themselves and others. Social norms permissive of cheating in collegiate environments conveyed to students that the responsibility of gaining knowledge through scholarship and the obligation



that they had to other scholars was not important (Lipson & Reindl, 2003). As a result of these cheating norms created by students' perceptions, the credibility of the work of all students and scholars had the potential to have been jeopardized.

To understand the most influential factors in developing students' perceptions several theoretical frameworks were utilized. The Brofenbrenner human ecology model (1979) was used as the primary theoretical framework. This model provided a foundation for understanding how the individual perceives and assigns meaning to each perception (Magnusson, 1995). The model also provided a framework for understanding the "interplay between the person and the environment" (Brofenbrenner, 1979, p. 16).

In addition to Brofenbrenner (1979) Kohlberg (1975 & 1984) and Gilligan's (1982) theories of moral development were utilized to understand how students' perceptions were shaped in their college environments. These theories better allowed for explanation of the role that moral development had in students' academic dishonesty decision making.

The research used interviews with students at the end of their first-year of college and examined their perceptions of the environment and the factors that have been most influential in shaping their perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty. The methodology of this study addressed the question of what factors were most influential for first time, first-year students' perceptions of the college environment regarding academic dishonesty.

The Lyman Briggs School at Michigan State University was chosen because it offered opportunities to examine students' perceptions about academic

dishonesty in useful ways. First, the Lyman Briggs School students were chosen because of their participation in a competitive admission process and because of their reputation as academically motivated students. Second, most of the students in this study were preparing for careers in the natural sciences, one of the disciplines considered most rigorous because of the research methodologies used. Finally, the Lyman Briggs School offered a residential living/learning environment where students shared classroom and living environments. This provided an opportunity to examine students' perceptions within a specific community in the context of a larger community.

This study assumes that earlier academic experiences are predictors of future decisions. For this reason, the study of academic dishonesty in natural science students was chosen because of the impact that their future career choices have on society. Chemists, physicians, dentists, veterinarians, and scientists working in private companies and government provide vital and trusted influence in how individuals conduct their lives. Consider the impact of one pharmaceutical scientist false reporting the results of a study on a new cancer medication, or an emergency room doctor unable to diagnose a patient properly.

### **Defining Academic Dishonesty**

Academic dishonesty has been in the consciousness of educators for centuries, the most significant research having been conducted in the last forty years. Academic dishonesty research during the past four decades has been generally quantitative and has reported students' self-reported behaviors or institutional policies such as honor codes.

**Bowers (1964) was the first to conduct a multi-institutional study that surveyed administrators and undergraduate students investigating students' behaviors associated with dishonesty. This study was intended to "enlarge the scope and extend the findings...of previous studies by gathering data on a nationwide basis for a more representative picture of the problem..." (Bowers, 1964, p.7). As a result of its scope (99 campuses and 5,000 students), the study established the framework for the current definition of academic dishonesty. Bowers (1964) broadly defined the problem as "...cheating on testing and exams and plagiarizing on papers and assignments..." (p. 15). This definition, although broad, led the way to a greater understanding of student cheating in college, and identified academic dishonesty as a critical issue for postsecondary educational institutions.**

**Expanding on Bowers' (1964) definition, Kibler (1993) defines academic dishonesty behaviors as "...forms of cheating and plagiarism that result in students giving or receiving unauthorized assistance in an academic exercise or receiving credit for work that is not their own" (p. 24). Kibler (1998) argued that academic dishonesty is individualistic, opportunistic, and is either an impulsive or a planned act. He indicates that cheating requires a social-active element involving two or more people who seek the opportunity to cheat, or a social-passive element that involves two or more people allowing others to cheat (Kibler, 1998). Although more complete than earlier efforts, Kibler's definition did not account for the lone student who facilitated academic dishonesty without consultation or support from other students or sources.**

The terms “academic dishonesty” and “cheating” were identified in recent literature synonymously. Academic dishonesty primarily was defined as students trying to get better grades through improper means in which four traditional forms exist. These forms included cheating, fabricating (such as telling a lie to an instructor to take a make up test or fabricating lab results), facilitating or assisting others to cheat, and plagiarism (Nuss, 1988; Pavela, 1988). Three additional contemporary forms identified by Whitley (1998) include misrepresentation, failure to contribute or collaborate on a project, and sabotage.

In recent literature, Lipson and Reindl (2003) provided an alternative perspective to previous definitions of plagiarism. They identified student behaviors based on student characteristics, suggesting that students assumed roles in academic environments that caused them to unintentionally or intentionally participate in academic dishonesty, specifically plagiarism. They characterized the student as the apprentice, someone who while trying to emulate another’s work unintentionally identified it as his or her own; the truth seeker, a student who adopted another’s ideas as common knowledge; and the rule follower, one who is easily confused by the complexity of the rules for citing others’ work. Lipson and Reindl (2003) remained among the minority in their perspectives regarding academic dishonesty because they viewed students as unintentional participants.

Academic dishonesty has been defined as taking many forms. Commonly agreed upon cheating behaviors included taking an exam for another student, forging an official document, stealing a test, plagiarizing, copying someone else’s

work, using web-based paper mills, and submitting others' work as one's own (Kibler, 1998). However, these cheating behaviors did not describe the full scope of behaviors associated with cheating. Behaviors not commonly found in the literature included using ones previously submitted work, copying notes or homework from others, and working together when not permitted to collaborate on academic work. These descriptions of behaviors have not been presented in the current literature because they appeared to have been more recently identified student cheating behaviors and these behaviors are not always seen as cheating by faculty or students. Additionally, there is not yet agreement about the scope and nature of the problem of academic dishonesty (Pincus & Schmelkin, 2003) among faculty and students. Regardless of the behavior, cheating presented serious problems for the integrity of the academic process in higher education.

Pincus and Schmelkin (2003) provided some insight into how academic dishonesty was defined in their recent research suggesting that faculty "view academic dishonesty on a continuum of severity" (p. 206). Similar to students, faculty viewed the problem on two scales, seriousness (plagiarizing an entire paper versus forgetting to cite one source) and nature (exams versus papers) (Pincus and Schmelkin, 2003).

### **Statement of the Problem**

A current understanding of the problem of academic dishonesty was useful in identifying individual and institutional characteristics. McCabe and Trevino (1996) claimed that a "...climate or culture of academic integrity on a campus may have

been the most important determinant of the level of student cheating on that campus” (p. 28). Students who felt connected to the campus community, perceived that faculty were committed to academic integrity, and had an awareness of the institution’s policies regarding cheating were more inclined to see cheating as unacceptable (McCabe & Trevino, 1996). This finding suggested that students’ perceptions of the campus environment regarding academic dishonesty were influential in their personal decision-making regarding cheating. Although McCabe and Trevino (1996) provided some information about students’ perceptions of the environment, they did not identify the factors most influential in shaping the students perceptions of the environment.

Understanding these factors required an understanding of how students developed during their first-year of college. According to Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), “Students not only make statistically significant gains in factual knowledge and in a range of general cognitive and intellectual skills; they also change on a broad array of value, attitudinal, psycho-social, and moral dimensions” during their first-year of college (p. 557). For this reason, developing a better understanding of how the development of first-year students’ perceptions of the academic environment occurred was useful in understanding academic dishonesty. A better understanding of how students’ perceptions developed could assist in providing information about how perceptions of cheating shape future academic experiences (Whitley, 1998), how students valued the curriculum they were studying, how intellectual activity was valued, and how the nature of relationships among campus groups shaped students’ perceptions.

Understanding students' perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty required examining students' relationships with others as well as examining their academic experiences. This study deepens the current understanding of the problem of academic dishonesty by examining the problem at one institution (Michigan State University) and with a specific group of students (first-year Lyman Briggs School students) enrolled in a residential living-learning program at Michigan State University.

### **Research Question**

This study explored factors influencing first-year, traditional-aged college students' perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty while enrolled in the Lyman Briggs School at Michigan State University. Although students' perception of the problem of academic dishonesty was an important aspect of this study, emphasis was placed on identifying the relationships and experiences that have influenced their perceptions rather than the actual perceptions of academic dishonesty on campus. Specifically, this study examined the question of what factors influence students' perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty.

In examination of the factors that influenced students' perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty, this study explored the influences that students' relationships with family, peers, and instructors had in shaping their perceptions. Additionally, students' academic experiences in and out of the classroom previous to college and since the start of their first-year were explored. These relationships and experiences were examined through a human ecological

and moral developmental lens. The Brofenbrenner human ecology model (1979) was emphasized with attention given to the Kohlberg (1975 & 1984) and Gilligan (1982) frameworks for moral development.

A qualitative method was used to study students' perceptions because it provided a means for examining the problem of academic dishonesty with greater depth than previous studies. Most previous studies had only examined students self-reported rates of cheating or institutional environmental characteristics (Bowers, 1964; McCabe and Bowers, 1994, McCabe, Trevino, and Butterfield (2002). This focus had led to a gap in the literature regarding the factors influenced students' perceptions of their environment regarding academic dishonesty.

This study design was intended to explore the "social problem" (Creswell, 1998) of students' perceptions that academic dishonesty was permissible within the college environment. In particular, valuable insight was gained through the process of examining students' perceptions, though interviews. Specifically, a better understanding of the phenomenon that "[s]tudents who perceive[d] that social norms permit cheating cheat[ed] to a greater extent than students who perceive[d] a non-supportive norm..."(Whitley, 1998, p. 247).

By using The Brofenbrenner human ecology model (1979) as a theoretical framework, students' perceptions were examined in the context of "...multi-person systems of interaction" (Brofenbrenner, 1979, p. 21). Multi-person systems included individuals within and removed from the immediate environment. The students in this study represented first-year students enrolled



in a residential college at a large research institution. All of the students had clearly identified family, peer, and instructor relationships previous to college and since arriving at college.

Careful consideration was given to identifying a method of analysis that allowed for examination of students' perceptions within multi-person systems. Holstein and Gubrium's (1994) "stocks of knowledge" were identified as a best means of analysis. They define stocks of knowledge as "...resources with which persons interpret[ed] experience, grasp the intentions and motivations of others, achieve inter-subjective understanding, and coordinate actions" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1994, p. 263). The stock of knowledge perspective provided a means to interpret students' perceptions of the environment as they were developed through constructs that were "social in origin" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1994, p. 263).

This study of students' perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty was designed on the premise that students' perceptions are developed in a social context. Some perceptions had been formed prior to arriving on campus and others developed as a result of experiences during the first year in college. Although a quantitative approach could have yielded some information about students' perceptions, a qualitative approach was determined to be helpful in developing a picture of how students' perceptions developed in relation to academic dishonesty. The methodology examined students' perceptions of their environment in the context of their previous and current relationships and experiences. Additionally, the influences that these

relationships and experiences had in shaping students' perceptions regarding academic dishonesty were also revealed.

### **The Research Site and the Research Study**

The study examined the perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty among first-year students enrolled in the Lyman Briggs School at Michigan State University. The Lyman Briggs School, a residential living-learning program, within the Natural Science College was the selected site because it provided an opportunity to examine students who were enrolled in a competitive natural science undergraduate curriculum. Natural Science was selected because it is often perceived as one of the most challenging curriculums by undergraduate students.

This site also provided a means to examine students attending a large, research institution whose first-year experience was spent living in a residential learning community. Students in this study were enrolled in the Lyman Briggs School program, lived in the same residence hall, shared a common curriculum, attended classes together, and were exposed to an academic program with common faculty, staff, students, and experiences. A living learning community was ideal because it provided a means to examine the perceptions of a specific community within the context of a large community of students. Students in and out of classroom experiences were more likely to have been similar than students selected from the general student body at the institution or within the College of Natural Sciences.

The Lyman Briggs School also provided a means to examine students pursuing different career interests who shared an interest in working in a scientific or scientific related field. To understand why students in this study revealed as they have an understanding of the Lyman Briggs School was needed.

The Lyman Briggs School began in the fall of 1967 at Michigan State University. It was the second residential college at Michigan State University and was “designed to provide a residential college environment option for a segment of the students entering MSU with an interest in science and mathematics” (Dutton & Elliott, 1982, p.1). At its inception, attention was given to providing modified introductory courses that infused science and mathematics and examined their significance to the world. Additionally, new instructional methods were intended to provide a ‘community government system’ for faculty and students (Dutton & Elliott, 1982) that allowed the teaching faculty and students to determine policy and procedures for the Lyman Briggs School.

Lyman Briggs School students lived in Holmes Hall, which also housed classrooms, faculty, and administrative offices. Originally, faculty were hired, or on loan, from other academic departments to design the four-year curriculum for the school. The original curriculum evolved considerably over the years but retained its original elements of infusing the use of science and mathematics in the world while incorporating stronger elements of writing, history, philosophy of science.

Students enrolled in the Lyman Briggs School were accepted into the program after being admitted into Michigan State University. Five hundred and eight first-year students were enrolled in the Lyman Briggs School at the beginning of the research study, in the spring semester 2004. Data regarding enrollment was provided by Phillip Strong, Associate Director of Student Affairs at the Lyman Briggs School.

The Lyman Briggs School's purpose was to prepare students for careers and advanced degrees in biology, computer science, environmental science and management, biochemistry, zoology, chemistry, microbiology, and physiology. Graduates often pursue advanced degrees as medical doctors, dentists, and veterinarians. Graduates of the school have accepted positions as pharmaceutical chemists, computer programmers, environmental specialists, research and lab technicians, microbiologists, and computer training specialists.

Enrollment in the Lyman Briggs School was limited intentionally to maintain a "small college" environment (<http://www.msu.edu/couse/lbs>). The school promoted itself as "dedicated to helping students get a first class education, and assisting the faculty who provide it" (<http://www.msu.edu/couse/lbs>). The curriculum for Lyman Briggs School students included the designated courses in one of the natural science majors offered at Michigan State University. This process included assignment to a Lyman Briggs School academic advisor, an optional internship, and several core Lyman Briggs courses.

One of the core elements of the Lyman Briggs School was their policy regarding academic dishonesty. The policy included a posted honor code and

specific attention to defining academic dishonesty, the responsibility of the instructor if academic dishonesty was suspected, the process for administering academic dishonesty allegations, and the possible sanctions for individuals found in violation of academic dishonesty. The Lyman Briggs School Honor Code outline included the following language:

As a member of the Lyman Briggs School community, I vow to hold myself and my peers to the highest measures of honesty and integrity. I understand that this benchmark is set forth to advance the credibility and pride associated with our School. I will neither give nor receive an unauthorized assistance in completing my work, which includes, but is not limited to: papers, reports, exams, group-work, and classroom conduct ([http://www.msu.edu/course/lbs/144/f04/honor\\_code.html](http://www.msu.edu/course/lbs/144/f04/honor_code.html)).

The Academic Dishonesty policy used for this study remains in place today. The exclusion of questions regarding this policy was intentional in the study design. In not mentioning the academic policy the research was able to maintain a broader focus on the aspects that shaped students perceptions rather than focusing on specific aspects of the Lyman Briggs School environment.

This study expanded on earlier research studies of Bowers, 1964; McCabe and Bowers, 1994; McCabe and Trevino, 1997; Whitley, 1998; McCabe, 1999; McCabe, Trevino, and Butterfield, 1999; and McCabe, Trevino, and Butterfield, 2002. Each of these authors explored the demographic characteristics of students and the environmental characteristics of institutions where cheating was prevalent.

Previous research regarding academic dishonesty yielded significant insight into the rates of student cheating in college, the environmental circumstances that result in student cheating, and students' attitudes about cheating. A smaller,

yet comprehensive, body of literature existed regarding the role that environmental factors such as honor codes had on cheating. However, previous significant research examining the role of relationships, previous experiences, and their influence on students' perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty was not available

Although previous studies have been helpful in understanding students' self-reported rates of cheating and some aspects of their perceptions, these primarily quantitative inquiries were also limited in identifying how students developed their perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty. For this reason, a qualitative research method was chosen to examine students' perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty. This approach provided an alternative lens to view the problem of academic dishonesty.

### **Significance of the Study**

Students' perceptions of peers, faculty, and university policy appear to affect perceptions of the permissiveness of academic dishonesty and their self-reported rates of cheating (Whitley, 1998). Through a qualitative analysis, a deeper understanding of the role that relationships and experiences have in shaping the student's perspective of the environment regarding academic dishonesty occurred.

Students' perceptions of the quality of the academic environment were decreased if they perceived inequity in the environment or academic advantages for peers who cheat (Whitley, 1998). As a result, a perception by students of a permissive environment regarding academic dishonesty resulted in a reduced

interest in learning, increased cynicism of peers and faculty, and greater inclination for dishonest behaviors for the future (Whitley, 1998; Whitley & Keith-Spiegel, 2002).

Academic dishonesty also had an impact on the institutional environment. It violated the institution's primary purpose as a place of generating knowledge (Blackmore, 1998) and potentially increased resentment by faculty because they believed that scholarship was not valued. Dishonesty also reduced public trust in institutional self-governance, and reduced public confidence in colleges (Nuss, 1988; Whitley, 1998; Whitley & Keith-Spiegel, 2002). Finally, student learning and scholarship have been negatively affected when students perceived the environment as permissive of academic dishonesty.

This study utilized a considerable body of literature on academic dishonesty. In particular, the literature review examined studies of multiple-institution studies conducted at large institutions, and the limited studies that examined students' perceptions of their environment regarding academic dishonesty. This study was designed to examine the problem of academic dishonesty deeply with one group of students at a single institution.

## **CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review and theoretical framework identifies the current research available regarding students self-reported rates of cheating based on characteristics of students who cheat, and characteristics of institutions where cheating was prevalent. However, the current literature did not provide much insight into how students' perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty were shaped. This gap in the literature resulted in a methodological design that examined students' perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty. Through exploring the role of students' previous and current academic experiences and peer, family, and instructor relationships information about the gap in the literature was revealed.

The major proportion of research on academic dishonesty had been conducted at single institutions with only a limited number of multi-institutional studies available. Primarily, the multi-institutional studies have focused on students' self-reported rates of cheating and the characteristics of the student or the institution that contributed to the problem of academic dishonesty. A few studies have identified students' perceptions of the environment. However, no significant research had been identified that examined relationships or experiences previous to college and their influences, on students' perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty.

### **Significant Multi-Institutional Studies on Academic Dishonesty**

The current understanding of academic dishonesty in higher education was based on the original Bowers (1964) study, which provided a framework for the



McCabe and Bowers, 1994; McCabe and Trevino, 1997; Whitley, 1998; McCabe, 1999; McCabe, Trevino, and Butterfield, 1999; and McCabe, Trevino, and Butterfield, 2002 studies. Collectively, these studies identified that 60% - 70% of students' self-reported participation in academic dishonesty at least once during their college career (Whitney, 1998).

The Bowers (1964) study surveyed students about their "...values, attitudes, and behavior" (p. 9) regarding to cheating. The study considered aspects of college deans' and student body presidents' perceptions of the seriousness of academic dishonesty on their campus. Bowers' (1964) study also considered the kinds of in-class and out-of-class environments that influenced students' perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty. The Bowers (1964) study found that "...at least half of the students in the sample have engaged in some form of academic dishonesty since coming to college (p. 191)." Bowers (1964) believed that this was a conservative estimate and that the "...magnitude of the problem was grossly underestimated..." (p. 191).

The McCabe and Bowers (1994) study used similar questions as the Bowers (1964) study and surveyed 6,000 students at thirty-one institutions across the United States between 1990 and 1991. McCabe and Bowers (1994) found that the rate of self-reported cheating had remained consistent for thirty years. They also found that thirty-eight percent of students who self-reported cheating indicated that they frequently used a wide variety of cheating behaviors. Cheating behaviors included paper mills from websites, copied from a friend on a test, or copied another student's homework.

The McCabe and Trevino (1997) study examined the results of nearly 1,800 students on nine medium and large campuses. Their results were consistent with previous research which indicated that "...fraternity/sorority membership, peer behavior, and peer disapproval had the strongest influence (McCabe & Trevino, 1997, p. 391) in academic dishonesty. Additionally "...older students, women, and students with higher GPAs self-reported less academic dishonesty while students who are more active in extracurricular activities reported more academic dishonesty" (p. 392).

Whitley's (1998) review of the literature explored a wide range of factors related to academic dishonesty. Whitley (1998) found that "students who perceive that social norms permit cheating cheat[ed] to a greater extent than students who perceive[d] a non-supportive norm..."(p. 247). Additionally, Whitley (1998) found evidence from students that they were more likely to cheat in college if they had previously cheated in high school, thought of themselves as effective cheaters, rated themselves as less honest, and had a favorable attitude toward cheating. Whitley (1998) also found several factors related to lower reported rates of cheating by students. These factors included students who identified that they had advanced academic abilities, were learning oriented, attend classes, and perceived a less supportive norm for cheating in their environment.

One of the few qualitative studies of academic dishonesty was conducted by McCabe (1999) and involved thirty-two high school students participating in focus groups. This study revealed that students believed that "...cheating was a normal

part of life, and that there was little, if anything, that can be done about it" (p. 686). McCabe (1999) reported that the high school students in this study suggested that academic dishonesty could not have been changed at the school level but rather that societal attitudes must have been changed (p. 686).

McCabe, Trevino, and Butterfield (1999) carried out one of the few multi-institutional studies that provided data detailing differences between honor code and non-honor code academic environments. They surveyed thirty-one institutions, fourteen with self-described traditional honor codes intended to discourage academic dishonesty. This study involved more than four hundred participants at 30 institutions with a return rate at honor code institutions of 41.4% and the return rate at non-honor code institutions of 30.9 %. (p.212)

McCabe, Trevino, and Butterfield (1999) found that "students at institutions with honor codes frame the issue of academic integrity in a fundamentally different way from students at non-honor code institutions" (p. 224). They noted that students at institutions with honor codes were more likely to have had a greater awareness of the problem of academic dishonesty than students attending non-honor code institutions (McCabe, Trevino, and Butterfield (1999)).

Drawing from an earlier study, McCabe, Trevino, and Butterfield (2002) reported results from two previous studies of students at thirty-one primarily large, private institutions. Again, they found that students attending non-honor code intuitions were more likely to have experienced cheating. This study revealed that students self-reported fewer instances of cheating at institutions with modified honor codes versus institutions with no honor codes. This result

was attributed to students' perceptions that when fewer students cheated, students were less likely to see cheating as an acceptable behavior. (McCabe, Trevino, and Butterfield, 2002).

Each of these studies views academic dishonesty from a student or institutional characteristic perspective. They identified factors associated with academic dishonesty as including institution and classroom size, perceived degree of difficulty of the assignment, and perceived social norms regarding honesty. However, the major studies do not address specific academic majors nor do they address specific academic majors.

### **Significant Single Institution Studies on Academic Dishonesty**

A large number of single institution studies were reviewed for inclusion in the literature review. Many of the studies reviewed included methodologies that resulted in very narrow, unrelated research for inclusion in this literature review. However, several single-institution studies were identified as having enough significant relevance to this study.

One study was found that addressed academic dishonesty at the research selected research site. Renaud's (1978) study at Michigan State University surveyed students and faculty regarding observed or self-reported behaviors related to academic dishonesty. More than seven hundred students and sixty faculty members responded. Renaud's (1978) study found that students regarded academic dishonesty as a less serious concern than faculty members. Male students regarded academic dishonesty as less serious than women. Students with higher self-reported GPAs, and those studying natural sciences

viewed academic dishonesty behaviors as more serious than students with lower GPAs, and studying other academic majors.

In general, Renaud's (1978) study was helpful because it was the only known study inclusive of Michigan State University students and was consistent with the Bowers (1964) study and the later studies reviewed here. However, this study was more than twenty-five years old and students' attitudes and beliefs may have shifted considerably. Several more current studies were reviewed.

Academic dishonesty studies at military academies were reviewed because of their honor code policies. Several military colleges had programs that placed academic integrity as a core value for students. These programs responded to violations of academic dishonesty by requiring students to participate in moral educational programs. This approach is rarely found in public higher education. Studies of military institutions and academic dishonesty remains a limited area of research, however, one study conducted in the early 1990's at the United States Air Force Academy was found to be relevant for this study.

Roffey and Porter (1992) studied 162, mostly male, volunteers including twenty-four cadets who had been found in violation of academic dishonesty. This study primarily focused on the role that ethical development had in students' decision making regarding academic dishonesty. Cadets' compliance with the established honor code was not found to be related to their moral development (Roffey and Porter, 1992). The investigators found that first-year cadets' inclination to follow rules including rules about academic dishonesty was the result of meeting expectations and avoiding punishment. Only upper-class cadets

who had participated in a required philosophy course emphasizing ethics and morality demonstrated “significantly higher measured moral development” (p. 140). Significant differences were not found between men and women regarding academic dishonesty in cadets’ compliance with the honor code.

Another gap in the literature included studies involving the area of natural sciences. Most of these studies involved graduate or professional students including those enrolled in veterinary and dental schools. The study conducted by Beemsterboer, Odom, Pate, & Harden (2000) examined administrators’ perceptions of how frequently cheating occurred with dental students. This study found cheating to be more common among students earlier in their academic courses and in non-clinical classes. Although the authors claimed that the rate of predicted cheating in dental schools was less than college self-reported cheating, eighty-eight percent indicated that cheating occurred by copying during tests (p. 835). The authors’ primary concern was the correlation between cheating during dental school and fraud in dental practice, which the authors indicated was on the rise.

### **Academic Dishonesty – Student Characteristics**

In addition to the studies of institutions and academic dishonesty, student characteristics were also considered. These characteristics were examined because they provided insight into how students viewed themselves. In particular, their view of themselves as a student and the relationship between their self-reported rates of cheating were emphasized.

The first area examined was student characteristics and cheating. Whitley (1998) found that students who self-reported cheating were younger, male, and financially dependent on their parents. Additionally, these students held minimal outside employment, lived on campus, feared doing poorly in class, were high achieving but also reluctant to do hard work, had a moderate expectation of success, experienced pressure to achieve good grades, were grade versus learning oriented, experienced increased test anxiety, had a need for approval from others, and expected rewards for successful cheating.

In addition, students had a wide range of characteristics that made it difficult to identify who was most likely to self-report cheating behaviors. These characteristics included perceiving themselves as inexperienced with the task or class content, less honest people, previously succeeded at cheating (Whitley, 1998). Students who self-reported cheating also perceived a clear advantage for cheating and believed that they could control their own destiny. The four strongest correlations between characteristics of students and cheating were had moderate expectations of success, had cheated previously, studied under poor conditions, had anticipated a large reward for successful cheating (Whitley, 1998).

Hollinger and Lanza-Kuduce's (1996) single institution study of 1,700 students measured various types of academic dishonesty exhibited by college students. They found that 68.1% of the respondents admitted to cheating in some form during a 15-week semester. Forms of cheating were grouped into categories of took information (copied from others), plagiarized, misrepresented

their work or borrowed unreferenced information from others, or allowed others to cheat from them. Borrowed unreferenced information (46.7%) and plagiarism (37.7%) were the highest reported means of cheating. This study reported comparable rates as the McCabe and Bowers study (1994), finding that 42% of students copy from others' work and slightly higher than 26% failed to properly cite works.

### **Academic Dishonesty – Institutional Characteristics**

Although less frequently studied outside the context of honor code research, there are several institutional characteristics where there are higher instances of student self-reported cheating. Contributing to academic dishonesty was students' perception of greater opportunities in the testing environment, inability to identify a "victim" of cheating, and a generally perceived low risk of getting caught (Whitley, 1998). Also, when students perceive a social norm that permits cheating, have significant academic workloads, and are in competitive test environments, cheating occurred with greater frequency (Whitley, 1998, & McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 1999).

The significant body of research regarding institutional characteristics included studies involving the impact of honor codes. These studies were conducted at institutions with honor codes versus schools with honor codes imbedded into institutions without an honor code. The findings of this body of research suggest that students reported that cheating was less prevalent at institutions where academic honor codes existed.



The McCabe, Trevino, and Butterfield (1999) study was one of the few qualitative studies conducted regarding academic dishonesty. This study found that although the investigators did not specifically ask about honor codes, approximately 15% of the students at honor code institutions identified their institutions' code as significant in influencing their opinions and behaviors about academic dishonesty.

The McCabe, Trevino, and Butterfield (2002) replication study at institutions with modified honor codes was conducted from data collected in a 1999 study by the authors. The study examined five perceived areas including penalties, certainty of being reported, understanding or acceptance of policy, perceptions of peers behaviors, and academic dishonesty (p. 366-367). The findings of this study indicated that cheating was most prevalent at institutions with less structured honor codes (McCabe, Trevino, and Butterfield, 2002).

### **Academic Dishonesty – The Role of Students' Perceptions**

This study assumed that understanding student perceptions involved understanding how students interpreted the campus environment and assigned meaning to their experiences and relationships. Whitley (1998) indicated that perceptions of cheating play a large role in the construction of reality for students. For example, if student's perceptions of the amount that cheating occurring on campus was greater than the actual rate of cheating they may have been more likely to see cheating as prevalent and permissible on their campus.

McCabe, Trevino, and Butterfield (2002) investigated students' self-reported rates of cheating on a large, less academically selective campus. They found a

“significant relationship between academic dishonesty and all five of the contextual variables tested” (p. 372) including perceptions of peers’ behavior, existence of some form of an honor code, perceived certainty of being reported, perceived severity of penalties, and perceived understanding or acceptance of university policy. Although the primary intention of this study was to explore the effectiveness of honor codes, their analysis indicated that students’ perceptions of the environment were an important factor in academic dishonesty.

Contextual factors in students’ perceptions of peers’ cheating behaviors, faculty acceptance, effectiveness of policies, and perception of risk of being reported may have been important in preventing academic dishonesty. This study identified that the “...perception of peers’ behavior appear[ed] to be the single most important contextual influence on the [students’] perception of academic dishonesty” (McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 2002, p. 358).

These factors are significant elements of the designed study because they provided context for examining the questions of what factors are most influential in studying students’ perceptions. The study extended this research because it included pre-college experiences and relationships. Several additional students also provided support for this discussion.

Scanlon and Neumann’s (2002) multi-institutional study surveyed 698 college aged students on nine campuses regarding internet plagiarism. This study found that plagiarism did not appear to be on the rise when self-reporting academic dishonesty, as identified in earlier studies.

The Scanlon and Neumann (2002) study also found that students believed that other students were plagiarizing more frequently than they plagiarized. Only twenty-four percent of the study participants indicated that they believed plagiarism was cheating and eighty-nine percent were not convinced that their institution severely punished students for acts of plagiarism (Scanlon & Neumann, 2002).

McCabe's (1999) study of high school students found that most students interviewed admitted to participating in some form of cheating. However these high school students reported being less concerned about academic dishonesty than college students. Contributing to this attitude among high school students were societal values about competition, the opportunity of technology, and the belief that teachers and administrators knew cheating was occurring but were unable or unwilling to do anything about it (McCabe, 1999). This finding suggested that students may have believed that cheating was a normal part of life. Their perceptions about academic dishonesty were already well-developed before starting college.

All of these studies provided insight into limitations in the current understanding of academic dishonesty on college campuses. A considerable amount of research was available that indicated the factors that contributed to students' self-reported rates of cheating. Most notable was students' identification that if they perceived a permissive environment for cheating, they would have been less likely to see academic dishonesty as wrong and more likely to participate in cheating.

Additional study to understand students' perceptions of the environment, and more importantly, how their perceptions were shaped was needed. Figure one outlines a framework for the current known and unknown aspects of the problem of academic dishonesty. The pyramid reflects what was currently known and unknown about academic dishonesty among college students.

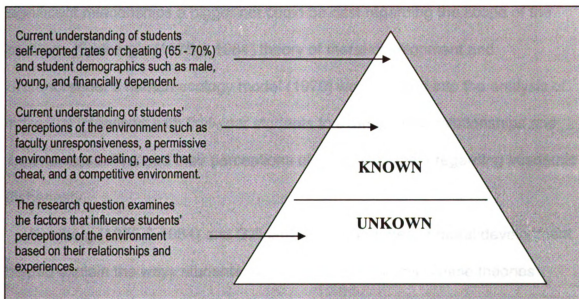


Figure 1: The research question for the study

This study specifically examines the known and unknown elements of the problem of academic dishonesty and examines participants' perceptions of the environment with an emphasis on identifying the factors such as relationships and experiences that influence their perceptions of the environment. By understanding these factors, greater insight was gained into understanding how students viewed the problem of academic dishonesty. Specifically, research into understanding the factors that influenced perceptions became helpful in the design of the research methodology for this study.

### **Student Moral Development**

To understand why the college environment regarding academic dishonesty was perceived as it was, this study examined students' relationships and experiences in their college environment. Additionally, the study also considered information beyond the scope of the students' campus experience. In allowing students perceptions of the influence that previous academic experiences and significant relationships a bigger net could be cast regarding the scope of the problem. Kohlberg's (1975 & 1984) theory of moral development and Brofenbrenner's human ecology model (1979) were infused into the analysis of individual interviews with first-year students to examine how relationships and experiences influenced their perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty.

Kohlberg (1975 & 1984) and Gilligan's (1982) theories of moral development helped explain the ways students framed their perceptions. These theories allowed an opportunity to identify the role that gender had in the development of ethical decision making (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Kohlberg (1975) describes a framework for how students made decisions utilizing six stages of human development. The first of these stages was the preconventional level where the individual's viewed the world as right or wrong and good or bad when responding to decisions about cultural rules (Kohlberg, 1975). This level consisted of two stages, the punishment and obedience orientation with an emphasis on avoiding punishment, and reciprocity and self-serving means over greater societal justice.

At the second stage, the conventional level, the individual placed value on loyalty to family and societal expectations over personal consequences (Kohlberg, 1975). The third stage involved an emphasis on good behavior that sought approval from others. This often incorporated conformity to social norms and determined behavior with an orientation towards showing respect for authority and maintaining given social order.

The final level in Kohlberg's (1975) theory was identified as the postconventional level. In this stage, the individual attempted to identify moral values apart from identification with social groups or social norms. Two stages are identified as part of the postconventional level, stage five, which places emphasis on right being a personal value and an opinion with an emphasis on a "legal point of view" (p. 112) and stage six emphasized a self-chosen ethical principle and attendance to universal principles of justice, reciprocity, equality, and respect for dignity.

Kohlberg (1975) identified several key characteristics of these stages. First, stages are viewed as "structured wholes" (Kohlberg, 1975, p. 111) where individuals are "consistent in their level of moral thought" (Kohlberg, 1975, p. 111); and movement was always forward; the individual progressed through each stage, never skipping a stage; and finally stages are "hierarchical integrations", meaning that an individual in a particular stage incorporated "lower-stage thinking" (Kohlberg, 1975, p. 111) in their decision making. He also suggested that moral maturity was not linked to intelligence but that advanced moral reasoning does require advanced logical reasoning (Kohlberg, 1975).

Additionally, Kohlberg (1975) suggests that mature moral reasoning does not mean that an individual's behavior would have been consistent with their moral behavior (Kohlberg, 1975).

Most relevant in Kohlberg's (1975 & 1984) theory was the idea that as individuals developed, their reasoning became less concrete, more abstract and incorporated justice, equality, caring, and empathy (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). However, Kohlberg's (1975) earliest theory was limited as a study exclusively of adolescent males. Gilligan (1982) offers an alternative perspective regarding how "women's concepts of self and morality" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) developed.

Specifically Gilligan's theory positioned that women valued relationships differently than men. She argued that women were more likely to consider the nature of the relationship with others in their moral decision-making. Gilligan (1982) argued that the "common thread" (p. 65) among the women in her study was "the wish not to hurt others and the hope that in morality lies a way of solving conflicts so that no one will be hurt" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 65). Gilligan (1982) described a moral person as "...one who help[ed] others, goodness was service, and meeting ones obligations and responsibilities to others if possible without sacrificing oneself" (p. 66).

Kohlberg (1975) and Gilligan (1982) interviewed students for these studies decades ago. To understand how their theories applied to today's student, Standfort and Haworth's (2003) study was examined. Although several studies exist identifying the trends of today's generation of students, this study was highlighted because it involved interviews with seventy-five high school students

in 1999 and examined their attitudes and beliefs toward family, education, and their peers (Standfort & Haworth, 2003). Students in this study identified increasingly non-traditional family units, pressure from their parents to plan for their careers, and strongly held values of marriage and family. A college degree was defined as a means to have a more stable and happier life versus the alternative of struggling financially and not liking ones'employment. Relationships with peers were not specifically analyzed but students' attitudes about greater societal issues were explored.

Nuss (1988) cautions that although moral judgment does not necessarily equal moral action because moral judgment was necessary for moral action. Additionally, the more advanced a person was in their moral development, the more consistent their behaviors were likely to be. These behaviors are most likely consistent with their previous judgments, beliefs, and values (Nuss,1998).

Nuss (1998) cautioned against "attempting to generalize from studies with relatively straight-forward choice situations, such as cheating studies, to behavior in less structured decision making situations" (Nuss, 1988, p. 13). For this reason, Kohlberg (1975 & 1984) and Gilligan's (1982) positions are used here in a limited scope for several reasons. First, continued debate remains regarding the applicability of these theories in moral development among current college students. Additionally, the purpose of this study was not to determine students' moral positions but rather their perceptions of the environment for academic dishonesty. Finally, gender differences were not an element of the original research design for this study, but rather a finding that occurred as a result of the



equal response rate of men and women and the nature of their responses to the questions asked.

One study of academic dishonesty utilizing Kohlberg and Gilligan's theories was found. This study conducted at the United States Air Force Academy administered the Defining Issues Test (DIT) and the USAFA Issues Survey (Roffey & Porter, 1992). These paper and pencil tests were administered to cadets and scored with their respective tools separately and then each participant's individual score were pooled together into a single score.

This study found that Kohlberg's theory may "over-simplify the cognitive processes involved in balancing individual rights with social contacts" (Roffey & Porter, p. 142). The authors' postulated that the closeness of the social contact such as the tendency not to report a close friend had too many variables to consider the nature of the relationship as the only factor in determining decision making regarding academic dishonesty. For this reason, an additional set of theories providing broader relationship and environmental contacts over time that may influence students' perceptions of their environment regarding academic dishonesty were examined.

### **The Brofenbrenner Human Ecology Model (1979)**

Given that moral development theories had some limitations for the study of students' perceptions of the environment, human ecology theory was also utilized. Human ecology theories defined as the study of "the interrelationships between organisms of life and the environment, both organic and inorganic" (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993, p. 419). Human ecology has evolved to find a place in

**“explaining and understanding human social organization” concerned with “interactions and interdependence of humans” (p. 421). Grounded in home economics, human ecology theories have important elements important for this study. They are defined as “holistic and interdisciplinary”, “grounded in science”, and focused on home and family (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993, p. 421).**

**Bubolz and Sontag (1993) identified assumptions that underlay the basic premise of the ecological theories. The family environment, the setting of the environment, and process between them “must be viewed as interdependent and analyzed as a system” (p. 426) that are connected to living and nonliving environments. Families are viewed as systems that interact with multiple interacting, inter-influencing environments. These interactions are guided by two sets of principles, physical and biological laws of nature and human derived norms (p. 426). Decision making was central to the lives of families but have limited control regarding their environmental interactions. (p. 426).**

**The student’s perception of the campus environment regarding academic dishonesty was best understood through a model that provided an opportunity to view the relationship between the individual and the environment. The Brofenbrenner human ecology model (1979) provided a perspective to view the “developing person, the environment, and the interaction between the two” (Brofenbrenner, 1979, p. 3). In particular, the “form, power, content, and direction of the proximal processes” (Brofenbrenner, 1995, p. 621) were examined. The proximal processes, or the regularly occurring experiences, over an extended period of time were relevant in shaping their perceptions of the environment**

regarding academic dishonesty. Crucial to shaping their beliefs were students' relationships with family, peers, and instructors, and experiences in the classroom, the residence hall, and academic environments prior to college.

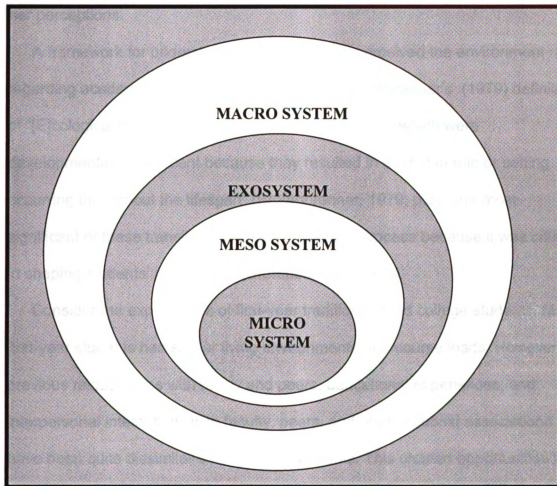


Figure 2: Ecological Development in College Students – The Bronfenbrenner Human Ecology Model (1979)

A conceptual picture (*figure 2*) provided a view of the nested structures (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) or the levels of relationships that an individual experiences in his or her environment. This model provides an interpretation of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) framework that explored the micro, meso, exo, and macro-systems through a lens that assumed the inner circles of the micro and meso systems were the most influential in shaping perceptions. This lens also

assumed that the exo and macro-system have an impact on the student's development, which was closely associated with the environmental context where the student made meaning of his or her experiences and developed his or her perceptions.

A framework for understanding how students perceived the environment regarding academic dishonesty was based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) definition of "[E]cological transitions" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 6), which were developmentally significant because they resulted in a "shift in role or setting occurring throughout the lifespan" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p.6). The most significant of these transitions was the proximal process because it was critical in shaping students' perceptions (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Consider the experiences of first-year traditional aged college students. Many first-year students had similar living environments and course loads. However, previous relationships with family and peers, educational experiences, and interpersonal interactions with faculty, peers, and organizational associations have been quite dissimilar among these students. This created opportunities for different perceptions of the environment, which had different impacts on behavior. Students with seemingly similar first-year experiences had vastly different perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty because of their past experiences.

The microsystem consisted of classroom environments including classmates, faculty, and academic advisors. Out-of-class contacts within a residence hall environment included roommate(s), floor mates, staff members, work colleagues,

and student organization involvement. This includes academic advisors, supervisors, and organization advisors. Family support included parents, siblings, and extended family which completed the microsystem.

The Bronfenbrenner human ecology model (1979) assumed that as the relationship between the individual and the environment spiraled inward towards the microsystem, it caused an impact on the individual's development and initiates "...a lasting change in the way in which a person perceive[d] and deal[t] with his environment" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 3). This caused the individual to experience complex developmental processes, involving many factors operating simultaneously and in a nonlinear fashion (Magnusson, 1995). Framing this process for Lyman Briggs School students was important to understanding how their development had influenced their perception of the environment regarding academic dishonesty.

The mesosystem included the interconnections between these environments, such as when parents meet roommates for the first time and involves multiple microsystems that "provide[d] a variety of forces and resources that affect[ed] identity development" (Renn, 2003, p. 389).

The exosystem included environments not directly experienced by the student. However, these environments still had an influence on the student's behavior. An example of exosystem components included new policy developed by the student's academic college that influence the student but is largely unaccounted for in the student's daily life (Renn, 2003).

Finally, the macrosystem involved larger overarching forces such as cultural expectations or social forces (Renn, 2003) and included the preceding circles in their entirety. This level involved the blending of each of the environments along with the student's societal values as shaped by their multiple socialization processes. This study assumed that the forces in the various systems were influential in shaping the students perceptions related to academic dishonesty.

### **Examining Students' Perceptions of the Environment**

Brofenbrenner's (1979) theory provided a lens to explore the differences in students perceptions about how many students cheated on campus versus the number of students who were actually cheating. This theory provided an understanding how students perceived the environment regarding academic dishonesty utilizing Brofenbrenner's theory was determined to be of more benefit than a study of students' self-reported rates of cheating. Brofenbrenner (1979) suggested that to explore this aspect of perceived reality, "[o]ne needs to discover empirically how situations are perceived by the people who participate in them" (p 24). Brofenbrenner's (1979) theory was grounded in the belief that to understand behavior, one first needs to understand how individuals made meaning of their environment (Brofenbrenner, 1979).

Clues about how students perceive the environment regarding academic dishonesty have been found in exploring their "ongoing activity" (Brofenbrenner, 1979, p. 24). Exploration of ongoing activity included examining the interconnection between individual students and their environments, past or present, and their interpretation of their role in their past and present

environments. Through this examination a context to view the individuals as they developed more awareness of their interactions within the environments was provided.

Three elements were of particular importance in using a human ecology model. First, human development was viewed as a process that occurs through time and space and was applied with some degree of continuity. Second, developmental changes took place in the individual's perception and behavior. Finally, the individual could incorporate information about the environment beyond what they are actively participating (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

One recent research study used the Bronfenbrenner human ecology model (1979) with college students and one used to examine racial identity development (Renn, 2003) and peer culture in college students (Renn & Arnold, 2003). Specifically, Renn and Arnold (2003) pointed out that a human ecology model "provide[d] a lens for understanding individuals in multiple, layered, and interacting environments"(p. 264). Renn and Arnold (2003) advocated for additional models in higher education research that examined "full person-process-context-time (PPCT)" (p. 282) suggested that there were current gaps in our ability to understand student development in higher education environments given the present developmental theories. These elements provided the strengths and limitations of using a human ecology model to examine students' perceptions.

Bronfenbrenner's human ecology model (1979) had typically been used in studies exploring individual development, most commonly with children. As a

result, the Brofenbrenner human ecology model (1979) presented some challenges for utilizing this theory to examine perceptions in college students.

	<b>Influences shaping students' perceptions since arriving at college</b>	<b>Influences shaping students' perceptions prior to arriving at college</b>
<b>Microsystem</b>	Includes: roommate, floor mates, faculty and instructors fraternity/sorority peers, and classroom, residence hall, campus employment, and student organization experiences.	Includes: parents, teachers, peers, siblings, and classroom, co-curricular, after school employment, church, etc.
<b>Mesosystem</b>	Includes: The combination of formal education experiences prior to college and the blending of classroom, peer, student organization, campus employment, and faculty interaction experiences, since arriving on campus.	Includes: the combination of classroom, peer, and parent interactions throughout their formal education, prior to college.
<b>Exosystem</b>	Includes: academic and curriculum development , etc.	
<b>Macrosystem</b>	Includes: current events, historical accounts, cultural expectations, and social forces.	

Figure 3: Forces influencing students' perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty

Specifically, the construction of analysis presented limitations in examining students' perceptions for several reasons. First, the origins of students' perceptions were difficult to identify because of the multiple complicating factors that caused perceptions to develop. Second, an examination of students' perceptions in purity required an isolation of the environment that was not possible in this study. Brofenbrenner's human ecology model (1979) called for a degree of control within the environment to analyze the data, which was not possible in this study.

However, the Brofenbrenner human ecology model (1979) provided a means to examine the origin of students' perceptions within the context of how the



student perceived the importance of their relationships or experiences as shaping their perceptions. Figure 3 explains how the elements of the Brofenbrenner human ecology model (1979) model are applied to the study of academic dishonesty.

### **Brofenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems**

Brofenbrenner (1995) identified individuals as "...active agent[s]" (p. 634) influencing their environments. His position was that "developmentally instigative characteristics" in individuals drew them to interactions in their environments. He believed that this draw to engagement in the environment is sustained throughout the lifespan and became "...increasingly guided by evolving conceptions of the environment and the self and are expressed through differential interests, values, belief systems, and goals in relation to persons, objects, and symbols in the environment and in relation to the self" (Brofenbrenner, 1979, p. 634). This perspective provided a means and motive to examine academic dishonesty through a human ecology lens. The first step in viewing academic dishonesty through a human ecological lens was to examine the properties of Brofenbrenner's human ecology model (1979).

#### ***The Microsystem***

The innermost nested structure in the Brofenbrenner human ecology model (1979) was the microsystem. This structure was defined as "...a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics" (Brofenbrenner, 1979, p. 22). Brofenbrenner (1979) identified the microsystem as

the key element of development in the individual. In particular, experiences and relationships "...that have meaning to the person in a given situation" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22) are significant in influencing the individual. The meaning that individuals assigned to these relationships or experiences was significant in shaping the students' behaviors and development.

As an example, the reality of a campus community had been that small numbers of students cheated on tests or exams. However, if a first-year student with limited campus experience had a class in which he or she perceived cheating as prevalent their perception may result in academic dishonesty, believing that cheating was commonplace.

The students' microsystem perceptions were emphasized in this research design. Each of the elements in the interviews were intended to examine the participants' perceptions of the environment as well as identify the factors that were influential in shaping their perceptions of the environment. Specifically, the study examined students' experiences in and out of the classroom with an emphasis on relationships with peers and faculty members before and since attending college in the first year. These experiences were intentionally limited to family, friends, high school and college, so that the study could focus on the relationships and experiences that are considered most recent and influential for first semester college students. A limitation of the themes of the study includes an inaccurate account of the role of other factors such as spiritual beliefs, cultural influences, and special experiences in the lives of students.

### ***The Mesosystem***

The next system in Brofenbrenner's human ecology model (1979) was the mesosystem. This level "comprises[d] the interrelation among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participate [d]..." (p. 25). The mesosystem incorporated perceptions of multiple new environments for the first time college student to include new peer relationships, the classroom, the residence hall, and new co-curricular experiences. These environments will likely present challenges in identifying if a particular environment or a relationship had influenced the students' perceptions. As expected, more often a combination of microsystems experiences and relationships influenced students' perceptions.

### ***The Exosystem***

The exosystem in the Brofenbrenner human ecology model (1979) was identified as "...one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occurred that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person" (p. 25). In the lives of students, this included any number of settings impacting the student's experiences, including department offices that developed academic dishonesty policies, selection processes for a student's potential teaching assistant, or the development of a program by a residence hall staff.

This aspect of the Brofenbrenner human ecology model (1979) was not specifically addressed in this study. The research design assumed that in discussion, some students revealed aspects of the exosystem. However, first time, first-year students were not likely to have been able to interpret these

aspects of the campus environment that included university policy or academic department practices. For this reason, and to intentionally limit the scope of the study, greater attention was given to the influences of various microsystems on the students developing perception of the environment.

### ***The Macrosystem***

The final level in Bronfenbrenner's human ecology model (1979) was the macrosystem. This level "...refers to the consistencies, in the form and content of lower-ordered (micro-, meso-, and exo-) systems that existed, or could exist, at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology underlying such consistencies" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 26). He suggested that although there were seemingly similar systems between environments, how an individual experienced the relationships between them was different. For example, although all first-year college students had some type of preparatory schooling, the social experiences of a student attending a public high school were vastly different than someone who had been home schooled.

How students experienced the campus environment from one college to the next were also vastly different, even when considering system similarities. However, within the same institution students had different perceptions of the environment because of their varying relationships with others. For example, students who were in different academic units, living environments, or co-curricular activities had different attitudes about academic dishonesty than their peers.

The Brofenbrenner human ecology model (1979) provided a means to explore students' perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty because it provided some flexibility in examining multiple systems of interaction and allowed for current and previous experiences to have been examined. Specifically, in this study, the interaction that students had with the campus environment, including their relationships with peers, faculty, staff, and family, was explored. In addition to their relationships, the study examined the meaning that students assigned to academic experiences on campus as well as academic experiences prior to college.

This study attempted to examine the problem of academic dishonesty through a human ecology lens. In particular, it drew on Brofenbrenner's (1979) frame and considered elements of the impact of perceptions developed over time, the influence that environmental change had on students' perceptions and most importantly, how the individual incorporated elements of their environment into the development of their perceptions. Additionally, this frame could also be used in future studies that examine student development in the context of behaviors associated with academic dishonesty or students' moral development.

### **CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY**

The dissertation study was composed of only first time, first year, traditional aged students enrolled in the Lyman Briggs School at Michigan State University. Traditional aged was defined as students who were not more than two years post high school graduation. Students who had completed preparatory education for more than one full year may have had other factors influencing their perceptions of the environment. Preparatory education included public or private high school, home school, military academies, or preparatory education abroad. It was assumed that most participants in the study would have attended a traditional public or private high school and graduated during spring 2003.

Permission to conduct the study with Lyman Briggs students was secured by Phillip Strong, Associate Director of the Lyman Briggs School during the fall of 2003. After final committee approval was secured, an application was submitted to UCRIHS (University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects) for approval to conduct the pilot study interviews. UCRIHS approval was granted and three pilot study interviews were conducted in mid February 2004.

#### **The Pilot Study**

Participants in the pilot study included two males and one female student. Students were invited to participate in the study through e-mail invitations (Appendix B) sent to first-year students enrolled in the Lyman Briggs School with the assistance of The Associate Director of the Lyman Briggs School. Sixteen

students responded indicating an interest in participating in the pilot study. Four students were selected randomly.

Random selection of participants included initiation of participant information sheets (Appendix C) for each of the sixteen potential participants. They were shuffled, turned upside down and every fourth participant was contacted. All of the first four participants contacted by the interviewer met the criteria for participation and agreed to schedule an interview; one of the participants did not meet for the scheduled interview.

Each participant with a scheduled interview received a copy of the informed consent form (Appendix D) prior to the interview and a confirmation of the interview time and location. Participants not selected received a notice via e-mail that they were not selected for the pilot study and the interviewer requested that they consider participating during the interviews for the study scheduled to occur later in the semester.

Interviews (Appendix E) were conducted in the Kennedy Room, a small conference room in Holmes Hall in February 2003. At the start of each interview, participants were asked to review the informed consent form, sign it, and asked if they had any questions. Each interview lasted between thirty and forty-five minutes in length. At the end of the interview, participants received a ten dollar MSU Bookstore gift certificate. Each audio tape was transcribed and reviewed for accuracy. The interview questions were revised, reordered, and resubmitted to UCRIHS for approval to complete the study.

The interview instrument (Appendix E) was designed to examine three areas of students' perceptions. First, the student was asked to describe why they choose Michigan State University as a "warm up" question intended to be non-invasive, non-threatening question.

The first set of questions examined students' definitions and understanding of academic dishonesty and their interpretation of any changes in the environment since high school. The second set of questions examined their relationships and the influence that family, peers, and instructors had on shaping their perceptions of academic dishonesty. The third set of questions addressed students' experiences in the classroom, with homework, and in competition with peers. These questions were designed to examine how academic experiences before and since college shaped their perceptions of the environment.

One set of questions was excluded from the study. Students were not asked if they had cheated or if they knew other students who had cheated. Although some participants offered this information during the interview, these questions were viewed as unnecessary in examining students perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty and problematic in achieving honesty among participants.

### **The Dissertation Study**

At the conclusion of the pilot interviews, each interview was transcribed and the interview instrument was revised. The introductory question and the questions asking students to define academic dishonesty were changed slightly to allow for clearer questions of the participants. The questions asking about



student's experiences were moved ahead in the interview and the lead question was rewritten to ask about students' perceptions of the environment. The final set of questions asked students about the influence that relationships with family, peers, and instructors had in their perceptions. One additional question about prospective graduate schools and employers' perceptions was added. This set of questions became the revised interview protocol (Appendix F).

After final approval was received on the revised interview questions (Appendix F), a second set of e-mails encouraging students (Appendix B) to participate in the study was sent and flyers (Appendix A) were posted in Holmes Hall in early April 2004. Additionally, the remaining students who had responded to the pilot study also received an e-mail (Appendix B) asking if them to participate in the study. One female student who responded to the pilot study request, agreed to participate. This student was contacted and determined to have met the criteria for prospective participants and an interview was scheduled.

The Initial response by students to participate in the remainder of the study was very low. Several factors may have influenced the lack of response. Primarily, lack of interest in participating in an interview may have resulted because the request was made in April 2004 and the initial request was sent via the general student list serve as a mass mailing. This initial request resulted in two interviews being scheduled, including one participant from the original pilot interview request. A third interview was scheduled with a student who

volunteered to participate while interviews were being conducted in Holmes Hall. All students in the study met the criteria established for participants.

A second e-mail was sent to Lyman Briggs School first-year students, by Phillip Strong, Associate Director of Lyman Briggs School, requesting their participation in the study. Eight students, four male and four female responded to the second request. Seven of these students met the criteria to participate in the study and were scheduled for interviews. Phillip Strong's role in encouraging students to participate in the study was noted. As the Associate Director for Student Affairs, he had direct access to students through academic advising. Additionally, his role during the students' application and orientation to the campus had created a dynamic where students respect his opinion and have established an ongoing relationship. As a result, he may have been an influential force in the number and type of student who agreed to participate in his study. As a result, it was possible that this study had captured Lyman Briggs School best and brightest students who do not represent the general student body of the program.

Each of these students received the informed consent prior to the interview and again at the beginning of the interview they were asked to read the informed consent, asked if they had questions, and asked to sign the form. Five participants were interviewed during the second round of the study interviews. Each student was given a ten dollar bookstore gift certificate.

A final effort was made to identify students by being available during the last week of the semester of spring 2004. An announcement was made and signs

were posted that interviews would be conducted at a social event hosted by Holmes Hall Residence Life staff. Three students, two female and one male, were identified at the event and agreed to participate in the study. Each of these three participants reviewed the informed consent form, were provided an opportunity to ask questions, and participated in an interview. One of these students declined to be audio taped but did agree to allow handwritten notes to be taken. Several additional potential participants agreed to participate in the study but did not meet the criteria established.

Each of these interviews, as well as the previous interview audio tapes were transcribed and reviewed for accuracy. All participants were assigned a pseudonym and identifying information was separated from the transcripts and notes taken during interviews.

Because it was determined that only minor revisions were needed to the interview questions, a decision was made to include the three pilot interviews in the study. In total, fifteen interviews were included in this study. All fifteen interviews were included in figure four, the study participants.

During the fall of 2004, participants received an opportunity to provide final comments on the study after receiving a copy of their respective direct quotes via e-mail. Several participants provided comments via e-mail prior to the final written draft that had been incorporated into the final analysis. Additionally, all student quotations and literature quotations were confirmed as accurate from their original source before being included in the final analysis. This was determined to be an important step in avoiding any unintentional plagiarism.

## The Participants

The study of fifteen participants includes eight women and seven men. Each of the students participating in the study were first year, first time student at Michigan State University. Additionally, all participants were enrolled in the Lyman Briggs School at the time of the interviews.

Participant Pseudonym	Study Status (In order of interview)	Gender	Type of High School	Academic Major
Fred	Pilot (1)	Male	Public	Microbiology/Virology
Lucy	Pilot (2)	Female	Public	Premed
Barry	Pilot (3)	Male	Public	Biochemistry/Zoology
Donna	Dissertation (1)	Female	Public	Math Education
Monica	Dissertation (2)	Female	Public	Physics, changing to Pre-dental
Steve	Dissertation (3)	Male	Private	Premed
Jan	Dissertation (4)	Female	Public	Zoology
Bobby	Dissertation (5)	Male	Public	Physics
Saundra	Dissertation (6)	Female	Public	Science and Technology Studies
Greg	Dissertation (7)	Male	Private and Public	Nutrition and Food Science
James	Dissertation (8)	Male	Public	Chemistry, changing to Physics
Jamie	Dissertation (9)	Female	Public	Pre-nursing
Robbie	Dissertation (10)	Male	Public	Genetics, changing to studio art and computer graphics
Phoebe	Dissertation (11)	Female	Public	Declaring physics
Gina	Dissertation (12)	Female	Public	Premed

Figure 4: Study participants' overview

All of the participants attended public school and one participant attended both public and private high schools. Participants varied in academic major and career plans but most indicated plans to attend graduate or professional school. Most students were preparing for careers where they would be working with

science directly. One student was preparing to teach science and another had decided to transfer out of the Lyman Briggs School. All of the participants indicated that Michigan State University was a second school choice. However, all of the students identified that they were satisfied with their experiences in the Lyman Briggs School. Nearly all of the students indicated that they were not supportive of environments where academic dishonesty was prevalent.

Fred was a first-year Lyman Briggs School student planning on studying microbiology and specifically virology but also identified interests in neurobiology and the human psyche. Michigan State University was a second choice school for Fred who selected the school because he was offered admission to the Lyman Briggs School and saw it as "the most favorable option." Fred was planning on graduate school and hoped to teach at the collegiate level. Fred identified himself as very independent from his peers, parents, and instructors. Although he identified some positive attributes of his experience at Michigan State, he also noted some dissatisfaction with the quality of the lectures, instructors, and assignments.

Lucy planned to apply to medical school with a desire to be a plastic surgeon. Although she had initially been considering an out of state college, she admitted to an agreement with her parents where she would attend an instate college in exchange for their support for her to study abroad later. Ultimately, Lucy's decision came down to Michigan State and the University of Michigan. She chose Michigan State University because of what she described as less competitive environment and because she liked the convenience of living in the

same hall where her classes were held. Lucy expressed satisfaction with the Lyman Briggs School but was also cautious noting that she was at the beginning of her academic journey. She anticipated many more years of school and the possibility of transferring to another college.

Barney was a first-year biochemistry/zoology major planning to attend graduate school, earning a Ph.D. and conducting research. He chose Lyman Briggs School because it offered a small school environment at a large university. He believed that MSU “would have more fun ‘cause it’s not as competitive as U of M but I consider it as good of an education here and felt I would be able to enjoy my time at college more.” He described a positive experience indicating that he was “...really having fun and have made lots of friends.”

Donna was a second generation MSU student. She only applied to Michigan State University and the University of Michigan. She decided on Michigan State University after campus visits to both schools. She described that Michigan State University felt less competitive stating “...one of the things I didn’t like was how competitive Michigan was and how it is like so rigorous. Like, even the easiest classes are so, like, stressful and everyone is working all the time.” She indicated that she was very happy at Michigan State stating that “I am just so happy I look around and I just love this place.” Donna was planning to teach math and coach high school sports when she graduated. She hopes to return as a teacher to the high school from where she graduated.

Monica, originally planned on physics as a major, but has since clarified her career goals. She is now planning to pursue dentistry or possibly training to be an orthodontist. She originally chose MSU because of the opportunities that the cyclotron offered to physics majors. However, she indicated that "...I ended up changing majors but I still love MSU. I would never ever switch colleges, I love it here." However, she did indicate that she was somewhat disappointed having to live in the living learning community during her first year. She planed to live elsewhere on campus next year.

Jan was a zoology major who planed to pursue graduate school. She planed to conduct research on "big cats." She shared "...I didn't think I would find a close to home college that also had a zoology program with credentials." Jan also believed that the Lyman Briggs School could offer her opportunities after graduation and that it had a reputation for being a "great community."

Bobby chose the Lyman Briggs School because it "...offer[ed] the small liberal arts setting with the resources of a larger campus...." He had been undecided between the University of Michigan and Michigan State but decided on MSU after visiting the campus and determining that the atmosphere was right for him. Bobby was a physics major who was also exploring other majors because he was not sure what the career options for physicists were at the time.

Saundra chose Lyman Briggs School because of her interest in science. Originally, Saundra was majoring in Biology but since declared science and technological studies as a major. Saundra was still thinking about medical school as an option but was open to other possibilities such as research or teaching.

She learned about Lyman Briggs School from another student at her high school and then after a conversation with her high school guidance counselor, she began to explore the Lyman Briggs School seriously. She indicated that “I choose MSU because I wanted to go to a college, a big college, where there was a lot of people, and a good chance to meet a lot of people, and my sister went here so, and I liked it so it worked out well, I guess.”

Greg was a first-year Lyman Briggs School student who considered both Hope College and Michigan State. When he settled on biology as a major, he decided that the Lyman Briggs School at Michigan State could offer him greater opportunities if he decided to change his major later. Now a nutrition and food science major, he was pleased with his choice indicating “...I don’t even think the program exists at Hope.” Also Greg’s decision was influenced by two other Lyman Briggs School students academically ahead of him as well as his parents’ encouragement of him to consider Hope College over MSU. Greg was still undecided about what to do after college but indicated that he was leaning towards working in the food science industry for a few years and then considering osteopathic medicine as a career option.

James was a chemistry major who was considering physics as a major. James planned to attend graduate school and possibly pursue his Ph.D. He expressed an interest in working for the government where he identified it as “more interesting” physics work than private companies. In particular, James cited an interest in space physics and NASA. James was looking for a small college but also wanted to go to Michigan State. In particular, he liked the



curriculum that offered the opportunity to live and take classes in the same residence hall. Additionally, his aunt, a high school guidance counselor, recommended the Lyman Briggs School.

Steve was a first-year Lyman Briggs School student planning to attend medical school. He believed that Michigan State gave him the best chance for getting into medical school. His decision was influenced by the size of the campus and that his brother was a recent graduate. He noted that his girlfriend was also attending Michigan State but indicated that it was not a significant influence in his decision. Steve's primary interest was to be a pediatric neurologist and he indicated that he would like to work at a special school. His career path was conceived at an early age when he spent time in the hospital with a minor form of epilepsy.

When Jamie was considering colleges, she knew she wanted a big university and considered the University of Michigan and Michigan State. Jamie had concerns about how University of Michigan students are perceived. According to Jamie, she applied to the Lyman Briggs School as a competition with a friend who applied first. Jamie wanted to see if they could both be admitted they both were. Jamie was a Lyman Briggs School, no coordinate major, planning to pursue admission to the nursing program. Originally, Jamie was planning to attend medical school but reconsidered after a conversation with her grandmother, a former nurse, and determined that she wanted more patient interaction.

Robbie was a first-year Lyman Briggs School genetics major. He chose Michigan State University because he felt it would have been a good fit for him and that Michigan State University offered a diverse environment. Although family members attended in the past, Robbie did not feel pressure from family to attend Michigan State University. Robbie had reconsidered his career goals and planned to transfer out of Lyman Briggs School to become a studio arts and computer graphics major.

Phoebe was originally considering an out of state school, the University of Michigan and Michigan State University. She decided to attend Michigan State University because "...more doors started opening here." She cited several small scholarships and a Professorial Assistantship as the primary reason to attend the Lyman Briggs School. Currently she was a Lyman Briggs School no coordinate major but was considering physics. She planned to conduct research in the private sector. Phoebe indicated that she had not decided how much education she wants to pursue at the time of the interview.

Gina was a first-year Lyman Briggs School premed student and was undecided on a specific major. She was planning on attending graduate or medical school. Gina indicated that she was still confused about her next steps, now that she had realized the work load involved and her own level of motivation to be a Lyman Briggs School major. Michigan State University was her second choice having not been accepted to the University of Michigan.

## **Research Methodology**

The individual interview was used to determine how participants' perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty are shaped. Elements of the participants' relationships with peers, faculty, and family, and their present and previous experiences that have influenced their views of academic dishonesty and the environment regarding academic dishonesty were examined.

Prior to these interviews, a phenomenological approach to the research was determined as the best means to investigate the phenomenon of academic dishonesty. Creswell (1998) describes this approach as "the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon" (p. 51). This approach allowed for the "...underlying meaning of the experience..." (Creswell, 1998, p. 52) and provided a means to study how "...ordinary members of society constitute the world in everyday life" (Creswell, 1998, p. 53). In particular, a phenomenological approach helped to interpret the meaning that students gave to their individual experiences as central to interpreting the environment regarding academic dishonesty.

A phenomenological approach was used in treating the students' perceptions as active in their construction of knowledge of the environment (Holstein & Gubrium, 1994). The students' constructed "stocks of knowledge" (1994) have been explored as typifications. This approach was chosen because it made it possible to account for students' experiences in their relationships with others and the exploration of the meaning they have assigned to each experience in the development of their perceptions. Typifications allowed the researcher to

organize the participants' meanings in general categories by theme and provided some flexibility in sorting participants in their construction of knowledge of the Lyman Briggs School environment and their perceptions of academic dishonesty.

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

In exploring students' perceptions, several assumptions are identified. This study assumed that students' perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty were more significant than the prevalence of actual cheating on campus. For example, if a student believed that most or all of their peers were cheating, they were more likely to believe that cheating was more prevalent in the environment than may actually have occurred. This perception may have been influenced by multiple factors including the student's relationships with peers, family, faculty, and administrators, and previous experiences. By developing a better understanding of the student's social interactions and their construction of meaning (Holstein & Gubrium, 1994, p. 263) related to their perceptions of the environment, the study provided valuable information for educators about how students interpreted the environment regarding academic dishonesty during their first year of college.

### **Data Management and Analysis**

A considerable amount of data was collected as a result of the individual interviews. Transcriptions of the audio recordings (destroyed at the end of the project) were stored in an Access database in the private files in the researcher's residence. The database was developed by the researcher to categorize information in a sequential order. An Access table was preferred because of the

categorizing, sorting, finding, and data management abilities. Additionally, the software offered considerable flexibility to add or delete categories or rearrange as needed. Finally, Access was preferred because of its availability of the researcher's familiarity, and comfort with the software.

The original design for analysis provided for a primarily deductive approach to analyzing the data. However, after transcription of the interviews, it was determined that an indicative approach would have been better suited for analysis.

This approach allowed for identifying themes from the data rather than utilizing the structure of the interview set to determine the themes. Analysis of the data involved allowing themes to rise to the surface across interview sets. This approach allowed for a broader view of the data in aspects undocumented in previous research.

As a result, new themes emerged that were distinctly different from the established academic dishonesty research. In particular, new themes arose regarding students relationships with peers, faculty, and siblings. Additionally, an inductive approach to analysis provided a means to interpret students' pre-college academic experiences and their role in shaping students perspectives of their current academic environment.

## **CHAPTER FOUR PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA**

The methodology for this research allowed for several themes to be revealed about students' perceptions of the environment for academic dishonesty. Some themes were consistent with the academic dishonesty research available while a few of the themes deviated from the research. Students revealed insights into how Lyman Briggs School students defined academic dishonesty; interpreted the atmosphere for academic dishonesty; how the environment was shaped through everyday occurrences; and the ways that peers, faculty, and family influenced the environment.

### **Defining Academic Dishonesty**

Academic dishonesty was described by Barry as "...doing something that isn't, um, generally accepted by, the um, professor or other students to get a better grade than you would have [received] doing normal things like studying." Robbie defined it simply as "not actually doing your work." Although these students provided general definitions for academic dishonesty, either students noted specification including plagiarism, copying during tests, homework, and the competitive environment in their definitions of academic dishonesty.

Most prominent in students' interviews was discussion about the cost of students' dishonest behaviors. They described that academic dishonesty provided an unfair advantage to those who cheated. Unfair advantage was not identified as specific behaviors but rather as it impacted students personally. Monica offered an example noting "...when someone doesn't come to class and then they come to you and they want to like know what happened in class." Gina

provided support when referring to students who looked off other students' papers; she stated, "I don't like it when other people do it; I'm annoyed that they didn't study."

Plagiarism was defined as taking credit for others work and appeared as an example in most students' definitions of academic dishonesty. Lucy defined plagiarism as, "if you're writing a paper and, you know, you're just taking other peoples work and not citing it or not saying that it was your own idea." Jamie described it as "...basically cheating and plagiarizing a paper or having someone else write a paper or doing your work for you." Greg noted that when work "is not 100% your own and you don't make that well known through citation or saying my friend said this or etc." Steve's thoughts about plagiarism were similar to Jamie's identifying it as "submit[ed] work that your involvement in was minimal to non existent..."

Copying from others was also frequently included in their definition of academic dishonesty. Phoebe described academic dishonesty as, "in a testing situation, looking at someone else's paper..." Gina provided a glimpse into the emotion involved for students when others copy from them when she described one such situation: "I'm sitting in a classroom, and there is an exam, and I know my stuff and like I know some student who did not study and partied all weekend-long or something and they start[ed] looking at my stuff and I would get mad."

The students' attention to plagiarism and copying from others in tests in their definitions was consistent with the literature in the most frequently cited examples of academic dishonesty (Bowers, 1964 and Kibler, 1993). However,

students' definitions deviated from the literature. Students noted that academic dishonesty was not prevalent in their college environment, which differed from the commonly cited studies indicating a prevalence of academic dishonesty on college campuses (McCabe and Bowers, 1994; McCabe and Trevino, 1996; and Whitley, 1998).

### **College Environments are Different than High School**

It was evident in conversations with students that their definitions and attitudes about the atmosphere for academic dishonesty were formed prior to their first year of college. Students reflected that the atmosphere in high school was different than in college including the frequency by which cheating occurred. Students were asked to reflect how this previous experience with academic dishonesty influenced their current environment.

All of the students identified the frequency of cheating between high school and college as different but not all students agreed which environment was more prevalent for the opportunity for academic dishonesty. Barry identified how the physical differences between a high school and college classroom created a greater opportunity for academic dishonesty by noting that "...in high school the test and the classroom [was] more spread out. Here, a big lecture hall you're just kind of crammed together so it just seem[ed], I mean, while I take the test I'm not exactly looking around cause then I might [have been] considered cheating or there might [have been] people who [were] glancing at other peoples' papers cause it's a lot easier in the atmosphere around here than it [was] in most high



school classrooms.” Barry was one of the few students who noted a difference in the opportunity to cheat between high school and college.

However, most of the students in the study identified that they experienced less cheating in the Lyman Briggs School environment than in their high school. They detailed this finding in a number of ways. Monica explained about cheating, “I don’t really see it as much in college.” Then Monica indicated “I would say more specifically Lyman Briggs because the classes are so much more challenging and there is that it is more competitive being in Lyman Briggs and a lot of people start out in Lyman Briggs but not a lot of people graduate it.” Greg agreed indicating that “I think it’s certainly a lot lessened. Because if nothing more than it’s harder to get information.” Gina described the environment in the Lyman Briggs School as:

The people who did cheat they were not workers, they were like they just wanted everything the easy way out. Like in college, it’s more, it’s like those people are not here you know, like some of them are but most of them are not here and the people that are here they know, like especially those in Lyman Briggs, they know what they’re doing, and like it’s just a whole different community, it’s a whole different environment.

The participants in this study identified that they experienced less cheating in the current Lyman Briggs School environment than they did in high school. While at the same time, without exception, the participants reflected that college was significantly harder than high school. The crux of their discussion centered on the personal motivations of students in college versus the lack of personal motivation of students in high school.

Jamie referred to one of the most prominent themes when she identified that “...high school really wasn’t quite as important. [It] seem[ed] like people would

take [it] so seriously but college [is] definitely more important and should be taken seriously....” Jamie noted that students took it seriously by stating “there may be more at stake in college but I think it’s the same basic principle. They’re trying to get a good grade and trying to do minimal work... like your career or your major, maybe getting into the college of nursing or college of business or something and the punishment is a lot harsher.” Fred supported this point of view identifying that there was more pressure to cheat in college than there was in high school.

As students identified college environments differently than high school environments they cited varied reasons why there appeared to have been such a difference. Donna implied that college students received more severe punishments. She noted that “I know that if you got caught cheating in high school that you would be punished but maybe [it] wasn’t as severe.” Fred discussed how different students respond to high school versus college describing it as, “You know, I’m not doing so well in it, I desperately need to pick up my grade, whereas in high school there [were] a lot of people who don’t feel that pressure.” James supported this noting:

The information that you learn in college is more directly related to what you will do for the rest of your life, a career, in high school you were taking a lot of courses across the curriculum. Where in college you know, you could be science or literature or writing and what you learn in those classes is directly applicable to what you do in a job or career.

### **The Lyman Briggs School Environment Regarding Academic Dishonesty**

Examples of academic dishonesty by the students were often blended between their high school and college experiences making it difficult to distinguish between high school and college experiences. However, students

appeared to have been reflecting more about high school experiences but at the same time referenced their current feelings. Students often blended their experiences with academic dishonesty making it apparent that their definitions, as well as observations, of academic dishonesty in college were based largely on their recent experience in high school.

The students were intentional in noting that cheating occurred in college but were careful and identified that cheating was not prevalent in the Lyman Briggs School environment. Discussion included students' thoughts about the differences between high school and college, the atmosphere for cheating in Lyman Briggs School, and their perceptions regarding why their peers cheated.

### **Academic Dishonesty Creates Unfair Advantages**

The participants in this study, almost without exception, identified that they did not support other students who cheated in college. One of the clearly identifiable themes was students' perceptions that cheating provided an unfair advantage to those that cheated and at the same time disadvantaged those that were unwilling to cheat. This was described with greater frustration by Monica in words and body language when she spoke of cheating in high school when she indicated, "I know people who did cheat and it just seem[ed] like I was working hard...it just really pissed me off when people cheated cause I thought, oh they're going to get a good grade and when my friend did get a better grade than me I was like you didn't even earn it."

Saundra shared a similar thought but expressed frustration rather than anger when she said, "A lot of people want to get a legitimate grade... you know it

would be very, very frustrating...if the score on the test is curved and you know everybody does bad on the test except those who cheated." She also identified a specific example: "If someone got that 4.0 [on] their physics exam and the kid who studies and pulled an all nighter [and] only 3.5ed it I think it hurts them because they worked their butt off while the other person just struggled in the class and kind of just looked at someone's answers." Monica and Sandra felt disadvantaged by their peers' cheating. They were not the only students who expressed this emotion but their comments were noteworthy because they reflected how students felt disadvantaged at the time that cheating occurred.

Steve also expressed frustration regarding how cheating effected the present but addressed concern for the future when he indicated that "I believe in forgiveness, but there are some things that if it is a constant thing, like cheating it will end, up you know, putting some people in a place that they shouldn't be were more deserving people should have that position." In addition to Steve's reflections on short and long term impact he also identified a broader theme in education by suggesting that there was a cost to the academic institution when he said:

I think that if people are going to take the easy way out when it comes to a test or project, you know, it's hurting not only the rest of the class, its just, it could actually reflect upon the university and devalue a lot, it takes away, for something to have such you know, I think for just academic dishonesty it is just something that can shatter legitimacy. I think that when people are cheating around you and it becomes rampant you know, you're no longer become a legitimate institution.

Lucy also identified long range consequences including "You might be able to get through four years of college doing that but in the long run you're going to

have to know this stuff and when you get into the real work force. I wouldn't want a surgeon who just guessed their way through other schooling and doesn't really know everything inside and out so." Lucy's comments, along with Steve's earlier comments, reflected on the ability of the students in this study to identify concerns for the present but also to acknowledge that there is a long-range effect to academic dishonesty.

These comments were a surprising perspective for first-year college students because of how closely they reflected the perspectives of McCabe and Trevino (1996) who noted that the culture for academic dishonesty was an important determinant of the degree of cheating on campus. Their comments were also reflective of Whitney (1998) who identified academic dishonesty as a threat to education because its prevalence led to a devaluing of the institution and a weakening of the public's trust in the institution and higher education.

The students in this study readily admitted that they had relatively few formal conversations with college faculty or high school teachers about academic dishonesty. Although their definitions reflected students who appeared certain of what constituted academic dishonesty, their definitions were rather narrow and expanded only to include plagiarism and copying during tests. The depth of these examples suggested that plagiarism and copying during tests were the most frequently encountered experiences recognized as academic dishonesty among these students.

However, their responses suggested that each of these students had been exposed to academic dishonesty in significant ways for many years. Their

experiences were through informal experiences with peers, comments made by significant role models, or examples of other students who experienced negative consequences of academic dishonesty. Most surprising, however, were their interpretations of the disadvantages associated with academic dishonesty for them, peers that have cheated the academic institution, and their chosen discipline. This particular set of comments suggested that these students had experienced opportunities for their moral development advancing beyond that of the typical first-year college student.

Roffey and Porter (1992) pointed out that this level of moral development was more common among advanced students who had experienced courses in philosophy intended to advance their moral development. These students, at the end of their first year of college had been exposed to the study of “natural sciences and their impact on society” within a residential living learning community. (<http://www.msu.edu/course/lbs>, 2005)

### **Academic Dishonesty Reflects Students' Moral Development**

Although the curriculum and the residential learning environment may have offered some opportunities for students' widened view of the consequences of academic dishonesty they did not always reflect this in their comments. All of the students in this study indicated that cheating was wrong and that they were not comfortable with other students cheating.

However several students, such as Jamie, identified that this perspective came from a moral rationale. She described thoughts about her own academic work “Even if it is a crappy paper and I get a crappy grade like that’s what you’ve

earned so work harder next time.” Donna provided a similar view stating that “There are some people who are like; ‘I’m not going to cheat, I want to do it on my own’ but other people just...don’t have that moral standard.” Some students, such as Monica, identified a clear idea of right and wrong for themselves. Monica stated: “Well it actually made me view it [as] even more wrong. There had been no situation where someone had cheated and I’ve been like, oh yeah man that was cool, show me how to do it so I can do it next time.”

In contrast, Fred was clear about his view that cheating was not right but also identified limited circumstances in that it might have been acceptable. He stated:

I tend to be a very independently thinking person and someone tell me you should or shouldn’t cheat doesn’t influence whether or not I feel I should cheat. I generally, I don’t cheat. Only in most extreme circumstances would I cheat because I feel morally obligated...It feels wrong...I would feel bad if I turned in work that wasn’t mine, unless I had, like spilled a laboratory sample, then, I would feel okay because it happens, and I don’t have that kind of time.

Using Kohlberg (1975) as a reference for Fred’s statement, abstract reasoning was a component of his moral rationale for circumstances in where cheating may have been acceptable. His peers, Monica and Donna, were more concrete in their rationale. This theme was carried into other areas of their conversations, which suggested that their moral positions were well formed before college.

At times, the students in this study appeared to have been quite advanced in their moral thinking beyond that of the traditional college freshman. At other times, they presented themselves as very traditional college freshman. The conflict between concrete and abstract moral development have been the result

of several factors. In part, the individual's maturity, previous experiences, opportunities, and world view may have shaped the students' development differently. Their conflict between what was right and wrong regarding their own behavior was expected. Their view of the consequences of academic dishonesty may have developed further than their own development as a result of the concentration of the study of science and the impact that it had on society as identified in the purpose of the Lyman Briggs School.

However, their development may also have been the result of the clearly stipulated honor code, which hung in each classroom. It was available in print and web materials and was referred to by students without suggestion during this study. The honor code and the clearly defined policies and responses to academic dishonesty may have assisted in formalizing the "consequences of academic dishonesty" perspectives that students exhibited. At the same time, they acknowledged an absence of conversation about what constituted academic dishonesty, which may have made it difficult for students to clearly identify what constituted academic dishonesty in the context of their academic program.

### **Shaping the Environment through Everyday Occurrences**

The participants in this study cited several elements that contributed to the environment in the Lyman Briggs School. One of the dominant themes involved the environmental factors that influenced students' perceptions of academic dishonesty. Students were asked to identify how their everyday experiences were shaped by their in and out of class room experiences, commitments, and responsibilities. Students reflected on several themes in their everyday



environment. The participants discussed how competition for grades influenced homework, testing environments, and writing assignments. Additionally, students were also asked to reflect on how relationships with their college peers and instructors influenced their perceptions.

### ***Competition for Grades***

Students had varying positions regarding how much the competition for grades factored into academic dishonesty. Donna reflected that she had not experienced competition for grades and suggested that “people help each other more than they compete against each other.” She continued by identifying that students in her classes were not competing for the same academic goals or career goals.

Bobby supported Donna’s position but identified that he felt greater pressure to compete against himself, rather than other students, and noted that this may have been especially true for those “Who [were] applying to higher education grad schools, med schools.” Greg shared that he came to college expecting there would be a lot of competition with peers but shared that he found “A lot less [competition] than I thought it would be.” Donna, Bobby, and Greg suggested that competition for grades with peers was not a significant factor for them during their first year of college, but some students provided an opposing view.

Lucy, James, and Steve were three of the students who identified that there was competition for grades. Lucy identified that “everyone wants to be the best or smartest, or whatever and, Lyman Briggs is more of like, people are more competitive because they’re more driven.” James identified a similar theme in

noting “it’s a bigger, more elite population that you’re competing against for those grades and to stand out.” Steve noted:

I think that’s a really big influence especially for kids that are planning on going to graduate school or medical school...I think that, that you know it’s the high pressure situation when it comes to grades and huge competition for grades that people will start cheating just so they can... can get a competitive edge.

Lucy, James, and Steves’ comments suggest that not all students felt the same spirit of friendship that Donna, Bobby, and Greg experienced. This was significant because it suggested that not all students view competition similarly within the Lyman Briggs School. As a result, a clear picture of the competition for grades with peers was not known from these results. Based on these interviews, it was known that students’ relationships with their peers were an important element in their academic lives.

The perspectives regarding academic dishonesty were revealed in McCabe’s (1999) findings that competition in the environment was a factor in students’ attitudes about academic dishonesty and the Whitley (1998) study that identified high-achieving students were more likely to cheat. The students participating in this study identified multiple positions regarding the competitive environment in the Lyman Briggs School. Although some students identified that there was a competitive environment, in general, most students did not identify an overly competitive experience.

The nature of the Lyman Briggs School, as described by students, was cooperative and there appeared to have been a recognition that competition was with oneself more than with one’s peers. Although many of these students were

headed for graduate or professional schools, which were perceived to have been competitive environments, students recognized that their peers were headed in different academic directions making competition for grades unnecessary.

### ***Homework***

Unlike competition for grades, homework appeared to influence students' perceptions about academic dishonesty in the Lyman Briggs School environment. When talking about homework students' discussions often became more personal and reflected their own work ethic and thoughts about their responsibilities as a student. Bobby, for example, described his orientation to understanding the workload required of the Lyman Briggs School students by indicating "[w]e were told when we came in [to the Lyman Briggs School] that one hour of class equals two hours of homework." Bobby explained that students will either decide to spend the time and do the homework without cheating or cheat to get it done.

Steve, however, suggested that one thing that influences cheating on homework was students' personal behaviors. He used himself as an example saying, "I do have a lot of homework and I do procrastinate a lot but I will, I mean, cheating never even comes into my head." He later identified that for other students, "I think there are a lot of people that when they do cheat it is because they're just too lazy to actually do the work ahead of time, they will put it off until the very end." Bobby and Steve both reflected the needs for students' understanding of their academic responsibilities and personal discipline to get homework completed without cheating.

Not all students reflected on the measure of personal discipline needed to keep one from cheating. Some of the participants were able to empathize with managing an overwhelming amount of homework. Fred noted "I've yet to have a homework heavy class but it just makes sense along with the pressure to think that if you had a lot of work to do and you want to do well in the class that you would be more likely to cheat to get it done." Monica noted that "if you have all this work from a lot of different classes and a lot of the time you just feel like it's busy work and it's not really going to help you but if you can just get the answers and figure, 'oh, I can just figure everything out later and I'll go back and try to understand everything.'" She later noted that "I'm sure the people who are below average feel the pressure from the kids who are like I'm so smart because they brag about it all the time."

Greg supported Fred and Monica's suggestion that "if they [instructors] lay it [homework] on I think that definitely encourages it." Jamie noted that "I mean if your homework is due I think people tend to be okay I'll just get it done, you do this and I'll do this. I don't know if that's, I guess it's a form of cheating. So I guess that has a lot of play in it." The students in this study identified that personal discipline was not as important as getting the assignment completed. Homework, unlike other forms of cheating, did not always constitute cheating.

Homework became relevant to students interpretations of the environment regarding academic dishonesty for two reasons. First, students' views of an individual's personal discipline closely reflected the literature regarding students' personal characteristics. Second, students' perceptions that homework not

always constituting academic dishonesty may have been a reflection of the absence of formal conversations about academic dishonesty in the lives of students.

Although these students indicated that they did not cheat on their homework, they did identify characteristics in other students who cheated. Lazy, just trying to get it done, and not seeing homework as important have been reflected in several of the studies previously presented. In particular, McCabe (1999) and Whitley (1998) identified students' expectations for reward with minimal work as a significant factor in student cheating.

It was assumed that the students who did not participate in academic dishonesty were most likely to have agreed to be interviewed. As a result, it was not surprising that these students did not cheat when completing homework. Additionally, it was not surprising that these students did not always see cheating on homework as cheating. The collaborative environment within the Lyman Briggs School, the nature of peer relationships and common experiences, and the perceived role of homework may have contributed to the lower priority that homework had in students' lives. In addition, the perception of homework as busywork formed in high school and the absence of formal conversations about the role of homework in academic environments may have been the final element causing students to perceive homework as less important than other academic experiences such as tests or writing assignments.

## **Tests**

Students' perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty may have been related to the degree to that cheating occurred on tests. Yet, unlike cheating on homework students appeared to have greater empathy for students who cheated during tests. Students identified laziness as the rationale for cheating during tests but noted stress, freezing, or not knowing the answer as primary reasons for cheating during a test.

Lucy noted that when students experienced stress and were unable to learn the material then "of course it can lead them to resort to cheating because [they are overwhelmed." Bobby concurred suggesting that "I can see that [cheating on tests] being a factor if students are sitting in the testing room and just oh, I don't know any of these I'll just look over there and take the answers." Saunrda identified that one test question not handled well could cause significant problems for a test taker. She also noted that this was when students got "that urge to want to cheat."

Cheating during a test had been found to have been significant as a means of academic dishonesty in both the Hollinger and Lanza-Kuduce (1996) study and the McCabe and Bowers (1994) study. These students identified the nature of the impulse that occurred when the student had the opportunity to cheat. However, it did not explain the motives for students. Jan and James offered an explanation for why students might choose to copy from others during a test. Jan suggested that the stakes might have been higher for some students in some classes. As an example, Jan used students planning to attend a medical or

veterinary school enrolled in difficult classes such as chemistry, physics, or biology. She indicated that it was “You know the people who want to get their 4.0. They study so much and they still don’t believe in themselves enough to just have faith in themselves.” James shared similar sentiment when he identified the influence that a students’ perception of the test difficulty and the course’s grade had in students’ decisions to cheat. He noted that a test was “A big part of your grade and it has a lot of influence.”

The means to copy from another student and the motive to maintain a strong academic record created opportunities for students to cheat. Although students in this study acknowledged this opportunity, there was not sufficient evidence to indicate that they believed that it was prevalent within the Lyman Briggs School. Although students acknowledged copying from others as significant they more frequently spoke to plagiarism as a means of academic dishonesty.

### ***Writing Assignments***

Students spoke often of the challenges of writing. They indicated that the lack of experience writing, the increased expectations of college level writing, and the spirit of collaboration with peers as factors in plagiarism. Donna indicated that she had experienced “higher standards than high school... there [are] some teachers that if its not 100 percent perfect and you don’t have everything that they want in it then they, you can’t get a 4.0.” She also noted how this “hurts your grade.” Jan reflected how challenging it had been to determine the expectations between instructors and formats. “They change from class to class... they want different things and I get marked off.”

Jan also noted that there was a difference in expectations since coming to college. In high school "...you just put the citation wherever you took the information from." Bobby noted that when students try to live up to the increased expectations without the appropriate experience they "will look to other references and maybe not cite them trying to make it look like they did a little bit more than they did."

Jamie noted that these expectations created an environment in which cheating became more possible. She noted, "a lot of people would plagiarize or make their papers seem more like someone else's... because if there are high expectations for a really good paper than they'll read something on line or something in a book and say hmm, that's really good, I'll use that one, or that sounds better than anything I could write." Greg identified that some students might "go as far as to download entire essays off line, which is asking for it... if you copy off of another student your professor is going to catch that."

These students' definitions of academic dishonesty were consistent with the commonly noted literature defining plagiarism and submitting someone else's work as one's own (Kibler, 1998). However, Lipson and Reindl (2003) provided the most accurate means of identifying how Lyman Briggs School students may have been experiencing plagiarism. They identified the unintentional plagiarist who while attempting to emulate another's work identified it as their own. They also noted that this was compounded when students were confused about the roles of plagiarism and the expectations.



Nearly all of the students in this study identified that they had relatively little experience being instructed on academic dishonesty. However, when they did identify an instructor who had provided some information they noted that plagiarism was one of the topics covered. Additionally, the students in this study also noted an increased concern regarding plagiarism that was not evident in discussion regarding the other forms of plagiarism. This increased concern may have been the result of a better understanding of the role of academic integrity in the scientific study.

The participants in this study had very definite ideas about the role of competition, homework, tests, and writing assignments in the environment regarding academic dishonesty. Not surprisingly, they were not in agreement with each other regarding the weight that each of these had in shaping the academic environment. In recognition of the confluence of factors that assist in evolving students' perceptions, the final area of inquiry was the nature of relationships in the students' lives and their abilities to influence their perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty.

### **Peers, Faculty, and Family Influencing Academic Dishonesty**

The design of the study presumed that experiences were only part of what shaped students' perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty. This study also sought to understand what role students' relationships with peers, faculty, and family had in shaping their perceptions. Specifically, this study considered the nature of their relationships previous to enrolling in college.

## ***Peers***

The first set of relationships examined was students' relationships with college peers. Students expressed differences in the ways they interpreted their peers' influence. Students interpreted differently based on their gender. This topic was not a planned area of analysis but rather a result of the themes identified in analysis of students' perceptions. In general, men expressed that they were not easily influenced by their peers while the women responded that they considered their peers' positions in developing their perceptions.

Fred for example admitted that he was not influenced by his peers when he indicated "I tend to be a very independently thinking person and if someone tells me you should or shouldn't cheat it doesn't influence whether or not I feel I should cheat. I generally, I don't cheat." Greg agreed stating, "I don't think they [peers] would be a negative influence on me." Bobby asserted that peers haven't "really influenced my perception." Then later he added that his peers influenced him "very little" and when referring to students who cheat Bobby said, "I see them doing that and I'm like there really not helping themselves and there's no need for me to do that as well."

The women provided a different perspective and noted that although they were not influenced to cheat by their peers their relationships with peers had significance. This perspective was significantly different from male students' responses. Jan identified how peers had influenced her perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty. While the men saw their peers as potential cheaters she noted that her friends "were brought up with the higher

standards of work." She also indicated that they "work really hard." Jan saw her peer group as students who make their best effort. Monica provided one of the clearest examples when she accounted for her boyfriend's honesty during a recent experience. She explained:

[a]ctually, my boyfriend influences it so much because this is cheating/stealing. They deposited money into his bank account and he didn't know where it c[ame] from because he pays for college 100% himself so he was like Monica, someone just deposited \$600.00 into my bank account. He said, I know my parents didn't do it. So he called the bank and it was a mistake and of course I was like maybe we shouldn't say anything. He said, no I have to and that just made me admire him even more. I was glad that he was so honest about it and didn't cheat the system.

The men in this study were clearer and more definitive in their responses noting that their peers had not been influential in shaping their perceptions of the environment. The men placed little emphasis on the relationships with their peers and were adamant that they were independent.

The differences regarding how the men and women in this study viewed the nature of their peer relationships was consistent with Gilligan (1982) who found that one of the essential differences regarding women and moral issues was the importance in how they viewed relationships. The nature of relationships that the women in this study identified was described more optimistically than the men in the study. In particular Gilligan (1982) noted that men expressed greater independence from relationships while the women appeared to be hopeful about relationships.

## ***Faculty***

The men and women in this study viewed the nature of their peer relationships differently from each other. The characterization of relationships with faculty members and specifically an instructor's ability to influence their perceptions of the environment did not vary. The students always expressed respect for their faculty but did not always identify faculty as influential in shaping their perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty. One of the common threads in students' discussions was that the students viewed their instructors as unsupportive of academic dishonesty. At the same time, they identified their instructors as helpless to stop academic dishonesty in some situations.

Several of the students expressed empathy for the role that faculty members have in trying to identify students who were cheating. Donna offered that "in the big lecture settings you can't catch everyone." She suggested that "if you do it [cheat] once and you don't get caught it's easier the second time to do it again." Bobby agreed that it was difficult to catch cheaters and suggested that when "cheating goes on its really tough for them [faculty] to catch [it]." Donna and Bobby identified one of the means that could produce a culture of academic dishonesty. They concluded, as identified in recent research, that faculty not identifying cheaters could create circumstances where cheating could have been seen as acceptable (Whitley, 1998). Some of the students noted ways where faculty may unintentionally contribute to the problem of not catching cheaters. Greg identified that "none of them [faculty] refer to cheating as a means to get

kicked out, they all just say their flat out disgusted with it, it's embarrassing, it appalls them, you know and so certainly [there is] no encouragement there."

Phoebe noted that "Honesty I don't know that I've ever seen, seen an instructor catch it and address it in class." These students seemed to suggest the faculty could have some influence on students' behaviors in the classroom. However, not all students agreed, Fred's reaction to this question suggested he believed that instructors did not influence academically dishonest behaviors. He suggested that:

it actually becomes kind of irritating because each professor has their own little academic honesty little spiel that they give out. Um my first, my microbiology class, when we first sat down, uh, for our first quiz he said no cheating. If I see you cheating you get a zero. ...you know, I've been told this for a very long time...it just sort of absurd and redundant, if he doesn't think I should cheat, or he doesn't want me to cheat it is kind of arrogant of him to think that he can actually influence the way I think of it. You know I'm not going to change for some random professor what I think either way....it doesn't work like that. It becomes irritating and also kind of insulting, I guess.

Fred's opinion was in the minority. Most participants believed that faculty had at least a minimal influence in shaping the environment regarding academic dishonesty. Steve referred to tone of comments of his instructors when he offered that "[I]ast semester one of my teachers was very influential in that [shaping the environment] because she actually made us take two tests about the rules of plagiarism and how to properly quote. We took two tests; we spent three weeks on that." Steve argued that this faculty member strengthened this lesson by providing a rationale to the class suggesting that it was important that they learn to do their own work. He commended that, "I have had a lot of teachers that have said, you know cheating was frowned upon; but no one has

actually made me feel like, you know, cheating was basically dumbing yourself down because the more that you do it yourself the better you can be at something." Steve was careful to note that this was one instructor in one class. James also identified, "[o]nly one of my classes had it, only one of my classes spent a great deal of time in the syllabuses discussing cheating and what would happen. It was a computer course so it was probably more common I think."

Throughout the interviews students indicated that they were not supportive of academic dishonesty. Recognizing the challenge that faculty members had to address academic dishonesty, most students appeared appreciative of efforts that had been made to address the issue. Students were respectful towards their faculty but it seemed evident that they had not yet formed deep relationships with their instructors.

In most cases, students only referred to interactions with faculty within the structure of the classroom. Limited out-of-classroom interactions may have been a limitation in the establishment of deeper relationships between first-year students and faculty. Although it appeared faculty had begun to set the tone for cultivating an environment of academic integrity, they may not have been positioned to influence individual students' behaviors.

### ***Family***

Although peers and faculty have a greater degree of interpersonal contact with students during their first year of college, students' families appear to have been more influential in shaping their perceptions during this time. The participants in this study identified strongly with the values instilled by family

members and particularly those of parents or older siblings. Students referenced specific examples of family relationships and strong connections between their current behaviors and those learned from family members.

### ***Parents***

All but one student detailed a close relationship with at least one parent. Most of the participants spoke of their relationships with at least one parent(s) with considerable respect and to some degree of admiration. In general, students commented that their parents were influential in shaping their values.

Steve indicated how his parents have shaped his perceptions by noting, "They're probably the ones that had the biggest influence on me. My mom was extremely smart and we all feel the same way about having integrity, that's one of the most important things." Lucy also referenced her mother as an important influence in her life. "She always just made it real clear that cheating is wrong, do you own work. Even like going to school if you just didn't feel good you still go to school you know." Lucy continued describing values instilled by her mother that have remained present in her current decision making. She used an example of her mother encouraging her to finish project.

We would be working on a project at two o'clock in the morning and I'd be like, I'm never going to get this done. I'm just going to be sick tomorrow and she would never let me do that so. I thank her for that. It's just that she had taught me that you can't just take the easy way out all the time. And then in college, it doesn't matter if you are sick you still have to turn your work in.

Steve and Lucy were among the students who had the clearest perceptions of their parents' abilities to influence them. Each accounted for a specific conversation or event that shaped their perceptions and current behaviors about

academic dishonesty. A few of the participants noted that they had less clear examples of their parents influence but had experienced values from their parents have remained lasting influences but with limited means to continue to shape them. Monica shared that that her parents “always raised me not to, just to be honest about things so, I guess I kind of feel like your parents can only sculpt you so far and then it’s just, they can’t do it anymore. Like it’s up to just [you] and like especially when you leave, their not there anymore so it’s mostly the people who you are there with that really influence you.”

Bobby also identified his parents as providing a lasting influence, “I’d always been brought up to do things for my own self so they tried to instill that in me I would assume that’s their values as well”, when referring to academic dishonesty. James supported this noting that “I take the same view as them [parents], they’re against it [academic dishonesty].”

The Brofenbrenner human ecology model (1979) provided a helpful reference to view the nature of parents’ influences on their students. This model provided a lens to view the regularly occurring experiences over an extended period of time it allowed examination of the nature of students’ relationships with family separately from peers and faculty.

The extended time that parents had with students prior to their arrival at college appeared to have been a significant factor in students’ interpretations of appropriate behaviors. Students who had specific examples regarding how a parent had influenced them may have provided the best means to examine how these relationships influenced students’ perceptions.



The students who identified strong relationships with their family presented themselves as somewhat disconnected from the environment. These students indicated that their decisions regarding how to respond to difficult situations were deeply grounded in their value system. By identifying a strong connection to a parent it was reasonable to assume that this relationship may have been of stronger significance than the relatively new relationships with peers and faculty.

### ***Siblings***

Parents were not the only family members identified as influential in the lives of these students. An unexpected outcome in students' reflections included the significance that siblings, particularly older siblings, had in shaping students values and perceptions. Reflections regarding parents were primarily positive. Siblings were perceived as both positive as well as negative role models regarding academic dishonesty. One of the elements that transcended both relationships with parents and older siblings was the role that experiences over extended periods of time had in shaping students perceptions. In particular, siblings appeared to have the most impact in shaping students perceptions about the value of honesty. Monica, for example saw her older sister as an important role model indicating "I live with her and she is like extremely religious that she has shown me religion. She is 100% like against cheating and she just sticks to her morals."

Monica identified that her sister was a positive example while Lucy noted that she learned the consequences of cheating from her older brother. This example seemed to have stuck with Lucy creating a lasting perception. Lucy noted that

her brother had been caught plagiarizing a paper the previous year. She identified that it was “sort of scary in a way because...I don’t want to get caught, or I don’t want to find myself in that position.”

Donna had a different position when she viewed herself as a positive role model for her younger sister. Donna indicated that “if she knew I was cheating she would feel it was okay so I kind of try to be a role model.” Monica stated that she tried to be a positive influence in her sister’s life implying that she tells her that “it’s fine; you would rather get a “B” on a test and do it yourself than get “A” and be cheating.”

### **Major Findings from the Presentation and Analysis of the Data**

Several major findings were identified in this study. These findings suggested the importance of high school and college academic experiences, and role that relationships with family, peers, and instructors had on influencing students’ perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty.

Students indicated that they already had a definition for academic dishonesty prior to attending college. Although most students noted that they had very few “formal” discussions about academic dishonesty in high school or college they understood that it was not an acceptable behavior. This finding was evidenced by their definitions that primarily included “examples” of other students’ behaviors, notably plagiarism, cheating during tests, and copying homework.

Participants in this study appeared to understand that cheating was not an acceptable behavior, their understanding of how cheating undermined the academic community centered on how it impacted the student who cheated.

Most often, students identified how cheating could impact a person's career. Several students noted that cheating created an inequitable balance in grading identifying the costs to ones self when someone else cheated. One student identified the impact of cheating on the reputation of the institution.

The students' perceptions of the environment in this study were not influenced by their experiences or relationships. Rather, these students revealed that their experiences, particularly in high school, and their relationships, especially those with their families, were most influential in determining their attitudes about academic dishonesty. Students consistently identified that their peers who cheated in high school were students with less motivation to attend college and a more intense focus on just "getting through."

These students identified themselves as significantly different from their high school peers. However, they were less clear regarding how different, or similar, they were from their Lyman Briggs School peers. It was because this relationship was unknown that results from this study need to be considered carefully. The small sample of fifteen students may not reflect the greater Lyman Briggs School first-year student population for several reasons.

First, the students who agreed to participate in this study could represent the larger Lyman Briggs School student population or they could represent a small subculture of first-year students. In particular, because students were encouraged to participate in the study by Phillip Strong, Assistant Director of Student Life, they may represent a culture of students who have an active relationship with administrators within the school.

These students may best represent students who reflect positively on their experience in the Lyman Briggs School, are doing well academically, view cheating as incompatible with academic environments, have close relationships with family, and are willing to discuss academic dishonesty because they have not been impacted by it nor participated in it.

## **CHAPTER FIVE ANALYSIS**

This study provided a means of understanding new dimensions of the problem of academic dishonesty. Specifically, the analysis of the data brought to light new information regarding the influence that relationships and experiences of first-year students' had in shaping their perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty. Prior to the study, there was considerable information regarding students behaviors related to academic dishonesty. However, very little was known about how their perceptions of the environment were shaped. In particular, previous research did not provide a means to examine students' experiences and relationships and their influence. This study provided an opportunity to consider students academic experiences prior to college and role that relationships with family had in shaping their perceptions. Even less was known about what factors shaped high achieving students perceptions of academic dishonesty in an academically competitive environment such as the Lyman Briggs School

### **Major Findings**

An analysis of the interviews with students revealed that students participating in this study had their behaviors and perceptions shaped by two forces. Students' reflections about relationships, particularly those with their parents and siblings, were most influential in shaping their behaviors when making decisions about academic dishonesty. The second force shaping students perceptions was academic experiences prior to college. These experiences had become an important foundation in determining students'

definitions of academic dishonesty as well as their means of evaluating college environments.

Students' reflections regarding the influence that relationships with family members had on their behaviors were not surprising. It was expected that parents would have a significant influence in students moral development and as a result their parents influenced their decision making regarding academic dishonesty. However, the influence of siblings on students' behaviors was not expected. This finding suggested that siblings are a powerful social network for students and to some extent more influential than their college peers.

A separate set of relationships was also worth examining. The nature of students' relationships with siblings brought to light the near absence of the influence of college peers regarding academic dishonesty. Although college peers were thought to have been important influences regarding academically dishonest behaviors this finding was not replicated with Lyman Briggs students who expressed considerable independence from their on-campus social networks (Whitley, 1998).

Examination of the Bronfenbrenner human ecology model (1979) was best in aiding understanding of the implications of the importance of parent and sibling relationships. The study acknowledged that "the social development of individuals cannot be divorced from the social networks in which they are embedded" (Cairns and Cairns, 1995, p. 398). Specifically the lens of the person-process-context-time model (p. 263) provided a means of understanding how students were influenced over time by the enduring relationships regarding their

behaviors. In particular, students understanding of their parents' values and their siblings' moral decisions and their lasting influence were examined.

Finally, students' high school and college academic experiences revealed that student definitions of academic dishonesty were shaped largely by their high school experiences. As a result of these findings an expanded model that provided a framework to view the microsystem and mesosystem within the context of the problem of academic dishonesty was presented.

### **A New Model for Understanding Academic Dishonesty**

This study presented an opportunity to view the Brofenbrenner human ecology model (1979) through a new lens (Figure 5). By applying the results of this study, new relationships became apparent within the micro and mesosystems. Specifically within the microsystem, there were limitations to the degree of influence that peers had prior to and during the first year for these Lyman Briggs School students. Conversely, the influence that family members had in shaping students' development and decision making regarding academic dishonesty provided new insights especially when examining the role that siblings had in students' lives.

Although elements of the microsystem had limited ability to influence students' perceptions, the macrosystem appeared to have considerably more influence in shaping students' perceptions. The forces of the combined pre and current college experiences appeared to have been most influential in shaping students' perceptions. Additionally, these experiences also appeared to lend considerable

weight to students' definitions of academic dishonesty and their feelings about role of integrity in their lives and in the academic process.

	<b>Influences shaping students' perceptions since arriving at college</b>	<b>Influences shaping students' perceptions prior to arriving at college</b>
<b>Microsystem</b>	<p>Included: roommate, floor mates, faculty and instructors, fraternity/sorority peers, and classroom, residence hall, campus employment, and student organization experiences.</p> <p>Limited ability to influence first-year students' perceptions and behaviors. Some influence occurred depending how strongly students perceived the relationships with peers or faculty and how frequently students perceived cheating to occur. In general, the limited time for sustained contact gave way to other stronger influences.</p>	<p>Included: parents, teachers, peers, siblings, and classroom, co-curricular, after school employment, church, etc.</p> <p>There was considerable ability to influence students' behaviors but limited ability to influence perceptions. The long term influence of parents and siblings provided a foundation for students' moral decision making. This influence may result in how they choose their friends but did not appear to result in how they perceived their environment.</p>
<b>Mesosystem</b>	<p>Included: The combination of formal education experiences prior to college and the blending of classroom, peer, student organization, campus employment, and faculty interaction experiences, since arriving on campus.</p>	<p>Included: The combination of classroom, peer, and parent interactions throughout their formal education, prior to college.</p>
	<p>Considerable ability to influence students' perceptions of the environment but limited ability to influence their behaviors. Factors such as perceived importance by a faculty member, perception of the value of an honor code, and degree to which students believed that cheating occurred influence their perceptions of the environment.</p>	<p>There was considerable ability to influence students' perceptions and behaviors, particularly when there had been a consistent set of experiences before and since arriving at college. A student who received strong positive messages that cheating was unacceptable from family over a period of time and was enrolled in an academic program for which they perceive cheating to have been unacceptable and viewed cheating as an unacceptable behavior and perceived the environment as non-supportive of cheating.</p>

Figure 5: Revised model for human ecology and academic dishonesty



## **Family Influence on Students' Moral Development**

The ability for family members to influence students' behaviors was one of the dominate themes identified in the study. Although behaviors were certainly influenced by family, the same certainty could not be applied to family members' ability to influence students' perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty. Influence was significant in two different relationships. First, students' moral development was shaped in large part by their parents particularly when the student identified a significant relationship with a parent. Second, students identified that an older sibling could be very influential in shaping their moral decision making regarding academic dishonesty. In particular, students' behaviors seemed to have been more deeply entrenched when they were imitating a specific incident or behavior exhibited by their older sibling.

### ***Parental Influences***

Parents provided much of the developmental stimulation needed for individuals. Long term consistent influence provided the opportunity for deeply embedded values to take shape prior to college. These values were tested during the students' first year on campus. Newly established independence, introduction to other students with different values, new experiences balancing risks and rewards in ethical decisions created opportunities for students to reexamine their parents influence on their moral development. All students admitted that their parents influenced their moral development but the nature of this influence was viewed differently by the students. Jamie, Saundra, and Lucy were examples of students who identified that their parents had an ability to

influence their beliefs about academic dishonesty. Jamie indicated “I care a lot about what my parents think so if they ever found out that I got in trouble especially at the University for cheating, I would be devastated.”

Mothers were identified by several students as particularly influential. Sandra identified her mother as a significant influence in her decision-making. Sandra described her mother as “a big factor” in her life. Similarly, Lucy gave credit to her mother’s influence. She spoke about her mother’s who set high expectations and at the same time helped her have a healthy perspective regarding how she made decisions in an academic environment. Lucy gave credit to her mother for helping her evaluate right versus wrong when faced with unpleasant circumstances such as a looming deadline for a paper or assignment.

Students’ relationships with their parents were identified as important in shaping students’ moral development and thus their decisions about academic dishonesty. The ability of the relationship to endure over a long, sustained period of time and the reciprocal nature of the relationship made it understandable that a student would select their parents as influential in shaping their attitudes about academic dishonesty. The strength of this relationship seemed especially important when the student identified a strong, positive relationship with at least one parent.

As powerful as these relationships were, they were not found to shape students’ perceptions of the Lyman Briggs School environment regarding academic dishonesty directly. It was most likely the parent’s absence from participation in daily life on campus that caused the lack of influence in this

aspect of first-year students' perceptions. The shift that students made during their first year of college, living away from home and establishing independent peer relationships, resulted in a shift of parents' ability to regularly influence how students interpreted their environment.

Fred was an example of a student who was identified aspects of his own moral development and at the same time indicated the quality of his parents influence. Fred suggested that his parents influenced him at a young age but did not have much influence currently. He described himself as a "very independently thinking person" and added that even his peers did not "influence whether or not [he] feel[t] [he] should cheat." Fred identified one of the aspects of students' relationships with their parents when he indicated "[t]hey wouldn't influence me now, but I'm sure when I was little they did...I have to admit that I'm sure I have some bias from their opinions that they instilled in me when I was young." Fred was one of the few students that identified this particular position in the study. Most students identified that they felt strongly connected to at least one parent who shaped their moral development.

This independence seemed to allow Fred to feel free of family influence and acknowledge to himself that "only in most extreme circumstances would I cheat because I feel morally obligated through my own morals not to cheat. I don't like the idea, you know. It just, it feels wrong, I don't like to lie, I'm usually overly honest..." but he then qualified "...I would feel bad if I turned in work that wasn't mine, unless I had, like spilled a laboratory sample, then I would feel okay because it happens, and I don't have that kind of time."

There are two important elements that seemed to occur in this study. The first element was Fred's acknowledgement that his moral obligations were integrated deeply and yet were not always consistent. His identification that there were some circumstances that he would consider cheating suggested that he understood that these choices were not always absolute. His example was indicative of Kohlberg's (1975) post-conventional stage that described a self-chosen ethical principle. However, the acknowledgement that he would cheat to serve his own needs was more indicative of the pre-conventional stage. Although we did not know enough about Fred's life to assume that he was not at either stage, it did suggest that there were some inconsistencies in his "moral obligations."

Similar to Fred, Monica also identified that her parents had been influential yet maintained that there was not an especially close relationship with them. "Well, I'm not like super close with my parents but they always raised me not to, just to be honest about things...." Monica also indicated "I guess I kind of feel like your parents can only sculpt you so far and then it's just, they can't do it anymore." Monica was describing an increasing independence from her parents.

Fred and Monica both described their parents as influential, Brofenbrenner (1979) explained "[f]or a young child, the necessity of such coordination not only fosters the acquisition of interactive skills, but also stimulates the evolution of a concept of interdependence... (p. 57)." As they were growing up, Fred and Monica were dependent on their parents for basic needs but they also were dependent on their parents to shape their concept of how the world worked. In a

reciprocal relationship, Fred and Monica also likely shaped their parents views. Although, they both identified that the present relationship was less close, this concept of human development “tend [ed] to carry over to the other person’s ‘side’ or joint activity in other settings in the future, either with others or alone” (Brofenbrenner, 1979, p. 57). Students’ responses demonstrated that the values influenced by their parents earlier in their lives remained with them while attending college.

### ***Siblings as a Social Network***

The interview questions did not ask students to identify siblings as an influential relationship, yet most students named their siblings over other family members as influential in shaping their perceptions. A few students identified a neutral or negative relationship with their siblings but most saw their older siblings as positive role models. Female participants were most forthcoming about their relationships with older siblings such as Monica who indicated “I try to be a lot like her” when referring to her older sister. Monica clarified that she lives with her “extremely religious” sister who was openly opposed to cheating. Monica described her as “...100% like against cheating and she just sticks to her morals....” This relationship may have been influenced by Monica’s description of a more distant relationship with her parents.

Donna also identified her older sister’s influence, noting “We’re not that close but, just, I’ve always looked up to her so I pretty much would do stuff to get her approval....” She described this as “...I definitely try to measure up to those standards.” Although the relationships with their sisters appeared different

Monica and Donna were clear that their sisters had been influential in shaping their views of cheating because of their moral position. Additionally, Donna also found herself in a position to have been providing moral leadership for a younger sister, seeing herself as a role model noting "...if she knew I was cheating she'd feel it was okay."

Donna and Monica expressed very different perspectives. Monica described a close relationship with her sister while Donna noted a more distant one. Yet, they both identified a similar tone of how their older sisters have influenced them in this area. To understand this relationship operationally Brofenbrenner (1979) explained "[l]earning and development are facilitated by the participation of the developing person in progressively more complex patterns of reciprocal activity with someone with whom that person has developed a strong and enduring emotional attachment...(p. 60)."

Although they described the quality of their relationship differently, both women identified their sisters as influential in shaping their perceptions about academic dishonesty. As traditional age college freshman, both Donna and Monica described the beginning of the transition of relationships with their siblings from childhood playmates to that of the increasingly complex relationships of adolescent and adult siblings. As they progressed in the development of these relationships, "closeness" became more of an issue if their older sisters remained influential role models.

Lucy seemed to have experienced the complexity of older siblings as role models earlier than Monica and Donna. When her brother had been accused of

cheating, Lucy responded with empathy by sharing “I don’t even know if he like knew if he was just copying work or not” and indicating that “he just doesn’t do well in school.” Lucy did not identify her bother as someone who dissuaded her from cheating in the obvious manner. However, she seemed to have been identifying this experience as one that had been influential for her regarding her own choices. Through her tone and mannerisms she communicated that this event had been a significant early experience.

The relationship with parents may have been more limited in influencing students if it were not for another strong family relationship. Students identified their siblings, particularly older siblings with equal importance in their moral development. However, it was students’ identification of specific examples of their siblings’ behaviors that appeared to have shaped their development most notably. In both their relationships with their parents and with their siblings, students identified that what their parents or siblings thought of them was important in shaping their moral development.

### **Leading Independent Lives – Peers Influencing Students’ Perceptions**

Brofenbrenner (1979) identified “...that what matters for behavior and development (in individuals) is the environment as it is perceived rather than as it may exist in ‘objective’ reality” (p. 4). This claim became apparent during interviews with students. Their discussions about their relationships with peers suggested that they might not influence their behavior but they did influence, to some degree, students perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty.

An equal number of students identified that their peers did not participate in academic dishonesty as did students who identified that their peers are neutral or accepting of some aspects of cheating. Conversely, nearly all of the students in this study reflected that they were adamantly opposed to cheating behaviors themselves with a few limited exceptions for specific circumstances.

Saundra, Greg, Jamie, Barry, and Jan each identified that their friends were not supportive of cheating. Saundra noted, "My friends think it's wrong. I mean it's better to work hard, open a book, study and get that 3.0 than like rely on that smart kid to get that 4.0, cause in the end your work shows." Barry identified a similar perspective stating "None of my friends really try to cheat [be]cause they kind of agree with me that cheating is kind of a stupid idea. So, all of my friends try and study, and if they don't study they accept the fact that they are going to fail." Later Barry shared that, "so far in college I haven't known of anyone who cheated. I'm sure that it has happened, but I don't really know that someone cheated...."

Saundra and Barry identified an important element to their experience in the Lyman Briggs School. They both noted that they experienced an academic community, among their peers, who did not see cheating as an acceptable behavior. There may have been a number of explanations for this phenomenon. One of them might have been explained by Greg:

A lot of my friends are like Lyman Briggs of the typical, this same stature that I am. So I don't think they would be a negative influence on me. Um, that might be an advantage from Lyman Briggs just because if it's the small close knit people aren't going to, are less likely to cheat then having friends in the same situation would probably encourage honesty.



Jamie used a similar tone stating:

I typically hang out with people who are studious and honest about their grades so I really don't have a lot of close friends that would cheat or do cheat and that's been that way since high school. So they don't really influence me and I don't think I influence them all that much because we were all basically on the same page.

This element of influence was prevalent in students' conversations about their peers. Even students who noted that their friends were accepting of cheating identified that they could accept this difference among their friends.

There was a contradiction between students' views of their peers' attitudes towards cheating and the description of these as important relationships. The crux of the tension may have been found in how students view themselves and prioritize the relationships in their lives. Unlike their family, these students did not appear to have been identifying their peers as influential in their own academic dishonesty decision-making. Yet, friends were influential in shaping their perception of the environment regarding academic dishonesty. Phoebe and Donna shared insight into how students made meaning of their environment.

Phoebe noted that her peers had:

...certainly opened my eyes to the different kinds of cheating available. ... cheating [is] equivalent of the little white lie. Which is the going to the all MSU site or whatever...people doing that, its my friends [going to the website], so um its possible that it might have lowered my standards or made it more acceptable but its not like the bad kids doing it. It's the nice friendly people.

Although Phoebe seemed to have been guessing at what her peers were doing Donna identified that she had not personally witnessed cheating but was aware of peers that were "trying to come up with a way that they could help each

other out on the exam.” Donna identified that this was a rare situation, perhaps because of her placement on the honor’s floor. She noted also that cheating did not seem generally prevalent in the Lyman Briggs School environment and it seemed more common that:

people help each other more than they compete against each other so. Cause everyone is going separate ways so it’s not like you’re going to be the one class that is going to be a competition between someone getting into this various school, like the business college and someone not. No, you are not making a sacrifice by helping someone else so you might as well help your friends out whenever you can.

Each of the students that referenced an element of the environment being accepting of cheating did so with some caution. Most identified a rationale for why cheating may have been acceptable among their peers. Monica and Frank identified that society, in general, was accepting of cheating and that the Lyman Briggs School environment was not excluded. Several students also identified that there were some justifiable reasons for why students might cheat including an overwhelming amount of homework, fear of the consequences of doing poorly on a test or paper, or (most common) laziness.

One could expect that first-year students living in a residence hall and sharing a similar course schedule would spend a great deal of time with each other. As expected, the students in this study identified their peers as an important element of their academic and personal lives. However, their ideas of their own independence suggested that Brofenbrenner’s (1979) concept of reciprocity might not apply for all students in this study. Independence was not part of the question sets in the pilot or dissertation study, yet several students identified it as a theme in their lives.

Fred noted, "...I tend to be a very independently thinking person and [if] someone tell[s] me you should or shouldn't cheat [that] doesn't influence whether or not I feel I should cheat." He also suggested "I like to consider myself a non-conformist." Jamie identified similarly "I think my friends think there is a lot of cheating on campus but that doesn't affect me at all." She later clarified, "I mean I'm sure there's probably people who do [cheat] but none of my friends I really know of and I don't really pay attention to it as much anymore. I mean it's not as obvious if they are cheating around me."

Jamie noted that "for some people it would really influence them and if there really, really worried about their grades" but qualified "...not that I can really tell, like I said, not that I really look for it so I don't know." In addition, Lucy identified that "Um, I just always do my own thing, like I have a set of morals and everything I just, I don't know they weren't even in the same classes with me so it didn't really effect me I just, I don't know, I just kind of overlooked it and didn't really think about it to much...." Steve identified a clear independence from some of his peers, noting "A lot of, like, my friends don't have the exact same view but they feel the same, they feel basically the same way about any kind of academic dishonesty. I mean, I guess I'm a bit more of the extreme of all of them [be]cause I'm so dead set on it."

Conviction of beliefs and independent thinking among students was one of the clear findings in this study. The students participating in the study noted that they came to understand better what academic dishonesty was during their high school and college experiences. They identified that they really had very little

experience with it personally. Most students identified that cheating was prevalent in high school, but even for those that identified cheating in college, there was caution to note that they did not participate in it. Students did not see cheating as acceptable, and for peers that cheated were identified as either 'lazy' or "having good reason to cheat."

Of greater interest were the participants' convictions that academic dishonesty was wrong. Out of this was a clear voice of independence that arose unprompted from a number of the participants in the study. This result might be a consequence of the type of student who would participate in a study about academic dishonesty. These students reflected a population of students who were engaged as learners. The students reflections of what they had learned from their college experiences, concerned about their futures, reflective of their previous experiences, and that transition into viewing the world as a complex entity showed why it was not easy to explain cheating as just "right" or "wrong."

### **Educational Experiences as Influencers**

Students, in their reflections about the formal classroom experience limited their comments to faculty members' behaviors in the classroom. However, they did not limit their reflections to college instructors. It was evident from conversation with these students that their high school teachers have had as much influence as their college faculty in shaping their perceptions. However, the manner in that these two groups influenced students was quite different.

Students were more critical of their high school teachers when reflecting on their secondary education environments regarding academic dishonesty.

Collectively, they shared many examples of the prevalence of cheating in high school. Although students identified their high school peers as responsible they seemed to suggest that their teachers were willing enablers to students' cheating. Furthermore, these students did not appear to have much concern for about their high school teachers whom they identified as unable to resolve cheating in their classrooms.

High school was described as not very challenging while college offered a productive learning environment. High school teachers were viewed as stifled by some unknown entity forcing them to offer the same curriculum to each student. College faculty, on the other hand, was described as independent enough that two instructors who were teaching the same course were able to teach different subject matter making it impossible to cheat.

Fred shared an example of his high school French class "...as soon as the test came out, everyone's book was open and on the floor and the lady wasn't very good at catching it. So, it happened a lot." Donna noted that "...it was easy to get away with a lot of students, or a lot of teachers didn't catch it even if they were, even if they were kind of aware of it they never really knew what was going on and a lot of students did it regularly for every test." Jamie noted that in high school "the teacher didn't really seem to notice or anything."

However, not all students were critical of their high school teachers. Several students viewed them more positively. Jan qualified some of her comments but described her high school experience as "...pretty strict on the plagiarism at least and cheating...." Phoebe contradicting her earlier comments by noting that "...I

guess I was sympathetic because the teacher didn't really, it was more to kind of show what we knew and what we didn't know for our own sakes so. I mean, like sometimes you saw it and didn't even care, but yeah, I guess that would have been an example. Not much else."

Students identified cheating as common place in high school but barely visible in the Lyman Briggs School. Two themes were evident. First, students reflected on the experiences in the environment. Although there was an acknowledgement that cheating could occur in the Lyman Briggs School, students were not very aware of it. Using their experiences from high school they translated their perceptions about others' work attitudes and moral decision-making to their college experience and explored the influence of homework and testing and identified reasons why college students might cheat. Second, students explained their relationships with their college instructors and their ability influence them concerning academic dishonesty.

Most interesting was students' attitude toward their high school teachers' view that their teachers were indifferent of academic dishonesty by their high school teachers. Students viewed their high school teachers as willing accomplices, helpless and unable to resolve cheating in their classrooms. Furthermore, these students were not concerned about the level of apathy from their high school teachers. One reason appeared to have been students' beliefs that high school was not very important in their academic careers. This reflection might have been presented differently had any of the students in this study been affected

negatively by others cheating in high school. Their perceptions about the importance of the college classroom were described differently.

Similar to their high school experiences, students placed the bulk of responsibility for cheating on their peers. Laziness was identified as a rationale for why students cheated. Work load was also noted. Workload was a new theme as a rationale for cheating. The amount of homework, reading, or writing assignments was not identified as an underlying cause for cheating in high school but was clearly identified as an underlying cause for cheating in the college environment.

Students identified a significant difference in the importance of their college and high school environments. College was identified as an environment where students identified greater motivation and importance in their experience. A few students such as Fred noted that some courses were not relevant to his future but most students identified the importance of their course work for their future plans. However, unlike high school most students identified that learning took precedence over grade achievement in college. This theme was strikingly different from their high school experience in which several students suggested that the purpose was simply to get through high school to get to college.

This perspective from students may account for students' reflections that their college instructors were not supportive of cheating although it may be occurring students did not see it as prevalent in their classes. Donna explained, when referencing her organic chemistry instructor, "well, they disapprove of it...if they caught anyone there would be harsh consequences and I can't really think that

much or recall any times when they have really addressed it but maybe just in the syllabus in the beginning of the year but I'm sure that if it ever happened they would take the actions necessary to meet whatever was going on."

Several students also identified their college instructors as influential in their perception of the environment. Steve noted that "...last semester one of my teachers was very influential in that [perception of environment] because she actually made us take two tests about the rules of plagiarism and how to properly quote." Steve later gave an additional example of an instructor who held a student accountable for cheating.

In general, college instructors were identified as considerably more effective than high school teachers in responding to academic dishonesty. There may be several reasons for this feeling among these students. First, it was important to remember that these students were high achieving, highly motivated academically orientated students. Application to Lyman Briggs School was seen as the beginning of a long academic journey in which their credibility as students would have been forged. This motivation towards their academic career might have been responsible for helping these students to see their college instructors as willing partners in their learning.

The second reason was that for high achieving students, public high school was not the type of academic challenges for which they were hoping. Their transition to an environment with other high achieving academically oriented students presented new opportunities for shared goals that high school peers might not provide. They also identified that the broader circle of their peers were



just trying to graduate. Individuals outside their small circle of friends were identified as unmotivated students who viewed cheating as a means to achieve graduation. As a result, the Lyman Briggs School offered these students a new arena to experience learning and a shared commitment to their academic goals.

### **Concluding Analysis**

High school academic experiences prior to and since enrolling in college were influential in establishing their definition for academic dishonesty. These previous and current experiences were also influential in shaping their perception of the current environment in Lyman Briggs School. The study found that students did not perceive their environment exhibiting or encouraging academic dishonesty. Relationships with family were most influential in shaping their moral decision-making but were not influential in shaping their perceptions of the environment. Relationships with peers and instructors were less influential in determining their moral development but were only slightly influential in shaping their perceptions of the Lyman Briggs School environment.

This study found that experiences and relationships influenced students' perception of academic dishonesty but did not necessarily influence their perception of the environment regarding academic dishonesty. Overwhelmingly, students indicated that they did not perceive the Lyman Briggs School environment to have been prevalent academic dishonesty. However, when students reflected on their academic experiences in high school nearly all of the students who attended public high schools indicated that they experienced an environment that was conducive to academic dishonesty. In general, these

students described high school environments that were less academically challenging and populated by students who did not view their education as important to their future. Additionally, most of the students in this study reflected that their families were more influential in shaping their perceptions of academic dishonesty than their peers and their instructors in shaping their perceptions.

Parents and siblings appeared to have the greatest impact on shaping students' perceptions of the acceptability of academic dishonesty. However, they did not appear to shape students' perceptions of academic dishonesty in the environment as much as they influenced their moral position on academic dishonesty. This influence appeared to have the greatest impact on the students' moral position rather than their perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty.

These students reflected that peers appeared to have little influence on their decisions but had some influence on their perceptions of the environment. Although the Lyman Briggs School had an established honor code, students in this study were surprisingly disengaged from it. Nearly all students failed to mention the Lyman Briggs School honor code in their discussions and those that did mentioned it said they had seen it on a classroom wall. None of the students communicated that they had been engaged in a conversation about the honor code or students' responsibilities for academic integrity. This finding does not suggest that these conversations have not occurred, but for unknown reasons students have not identified it as their honor code.

The first-year students in this study reflected a supportive environment for academic integrity. In general, they identified an academic experience where they believed that their peers, faculty, and parents would not support academic dishonesty. Yet, in several instances students placed their own qualifiers on these statements. Several students remarked that they did not believe that they would need additional experience in the Lyman Briggs School to evaluate the environment. Others believed that academic dishonesty may occur but they had not personally witnessed it. In addition there always remained the probability that some students were aware of academic dishonesty in the Lyman Briggs School environment but were not comfortable disclosing its occurrence. Also, the pressure that first-year students experienced to achieve their career goals and the opportunity it presented to make critical decisions regarding academic dishonesty.

Students' perceptions of the Lyman Briggs School environment may have been a reflection of the culture by which they are influenced and the ways in which they influence the culture. Previous studies regarding students' experiences in residential living learning communities indicate that students are more likely to have positive attitudes about the nature of their academic work with peers and value their contributions to the academic process (Franklin, 2000, p. 41).

The students in this study identified that they felt positively about their academic experiences in the Lyman Briggs School but they might have reflected instead on the positive experience they were having with their peers. Unlike high

school students, these students reflected that they believed that they were experiencing their academic environment similarly. They described this as an “in the same boat” experience. By extension, their few experiences with peers cheating in college might have lent to their perception that cheating was not prevalent in the Lyman Briggs School.

### **Research Limitations**

It is noted that several limitations exist in this study. These limitations include primarily the size, scope, and nature of the study and to some degree the methodology used. The sample size of fifteen students (three in the pilot study and twelve in the dissertation study) provide a limited scope to understanding the Lyman Briggs School student population. Although they represented a variety of majors within the Lyman Briggs School and had nearly equal gender distribution, they may only reflect a sub population within the Lyman Briggs School.

The study population did not adequately represent all first-year students. In particular, the participants in the study were not representative of the racial or ethnic diversity within the Lyman Briggs School. Additionally, none of the participants in this study indicated that they had been born outside the United States, although this population was also reflected in the general Lyman Briggs School population.

The nature of the students who indicated an interest in participating in this study may also have been a limitation. In general, the students in this study reflected that they were high achieving, academically motivated, and generally satisfied with their college experiences. It was likely that this population does not

reflect the entire Lyman Briggs School first-year student population. Although the admission process for the Lyman Briggs School is competitive, not all students reflect the personal motivation or satisfaction with their experience that the students in this study expressed. The methodology of this study only reflected the voices of the fifteen students participating.

The limitation of a qualitative study is that it cannot denote a perspective beyond that of the participants of the study. Although the result of these students' voices expands the understanding of the problem of academic dishonesty, it does not reflect other student populations at Michigan State University or student populations at other colleges or universities.

As a result, caution is required when articulating the results of this study beyond the scope of the intended purpose. Although students in this study identified some differences with the current body of research on academic dishonesty, not enough information is available to indicate that trends have changed significantly.

## **CHAPTER SIX SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

Academic dishonesty presents critical challenges for higher education. A considerable body of literature during the past fifteen years has assisted in developing a deeper, broader understanding of the problem resulting in a better understanding of how academic dishonesty impacts the individual and the institution. Additionally, there is a significant body of knowledge that identifies the institutional and individual characteristics that establish conditions for academic dishonesty.

These individual and institutional characteristics have provided considerable insight into how students perceive the environment regarding academic dishonesty. However, this body of knowledge has not been sufficient in the understanding the factors that shape students' perceptions of the environment. In particular, the research to date has only considered students' current relationships with peers and the environment. The research did not provide a means to examine pre-college factors that shape students' perceptions.

In an effort to broaden the understanding of these factors two dimensions were selected for investigation in this study. First, the nature of students' relationships with peers, faculty, and family before and since arriving at college were examined. Second, academic experiences during high school and college were considered to determine their influence on students' perceptions. In the course of this investigation, information regarding how students' defined academic dishonesty was investigated.

A new lens was applied to the problem of academic dishonesty to investigate how these factors shaped the environment. The Brofenbrenner's human ecology model (1979) and Kohlberg (1984) and Gillian's (1982) framework for moral development were selected because they provided a broad view of students moral development. These theoretical frameworks provided the means of exploring how students' perceptions were influenced by academic experiences and significant relationships.

The current research on honor codes and living-learning communities was excluded from this study intentionally. This approach allowed a means for the researcher to limit the scope of the study to examine the role that significant relationships and previous experiences had in shaping students perceptions of their environment regarding academic dishonesty. Narrowing the focus provided the means of carefully examining the role that relationships and experiences had in shaping students perspectives. This allowed for a cleaner investigation of the factors influencing the micro and meso systems as identified by Brofenbrenner's human ecology model (1979).

The study included fifteen first-year students enrolled in the Lyman Briggs School (LBS) at Michigan State. Lyman Briggs School students were first admitted to Michigan State University and then applied to the Lyman Briggs School. All students in the Lyman Briggs School were enrolled as Natural Science majors and most were preparing for careers in science. Students in this study had a range of career plans including medical and dental school, graduate science master's programs, and teaching.

The entire study occurred during the spring semester 2004 at Michigan State University. Students were invited to participate in a pilot study in February. During the interview, students were asked for their definition of academic dishonesty and then asked about their perceptions of the environment. Students were asked to describe their experiences with academic dishonesty in high school and then during their first year of college. Finally, students provided information regarding the significance that their relationships with peers, instructors, and family had in influencing their perceptions of the Lyman Briggs School environment regarding academic dishonesty.

Students were interviewed about several aspects of their academic experiences and relationships. First students provided definitions of academic dishonesty. This was considered an important aspect of this study because of the wide degree of disagreement in the literature regarding a definition for academic dishonesty between students and faculty. Second, students identified their experiences with academic dishonesty. Initially, students were asked about their academic experiences prior to college, primarily in high school, and about their experiences during their first year of college. Third, students were asked to describe the environment for cheating, competition for grades, and to what degree the volume of homework contributed to academic dishonesty during their first year of college. Finally, students were asked to reflect on the influence that their peers, parents, siblings, instructors, and future employers or graduate school faculty had on their perceptions of their environment.



The study found that the Lyman Briggs School students participating in this study perceived that their current environment was not conducive to academic dishonesty. Although some students acknowledged that cheating might occur, most identified that they had not witnessed academic dishonesty. None of the students identified that they believed that it was prevalent in the Lyman Briggs School Environment.

Interviews revealed that these students' experiences prior to college and since the beginning of their first year were influential in establishing a definition of academic dishonesty and the perception of the Lyman Briggs School environment. Primarily, students utilized their recent experiences from high school to shape their understanding of the Lyman Briggs School. All but one of the students reported attending a public high school where academic dishonesty was prevalent.

From this study, a revised framework of the Brofenbrenner (1979) human ecology model was revealed. The revised model as identified in the previous chapter revealed a specific framework outlining the factors that influenced students' perceptions of the environment prior to and since enrolling in college. The study found that these students' relationships with family members were influential in shaping their moral decision-making while relationships with peers and instructors were not as influential in moral decision making. The study did not find that any of these relationships were influential in shaping their perception of the environment. This finding was significant because it contradicts the previously held assumptions that academic experiences and relationships,

especially those with peers and faculty, greatly influenced students perceptions of their environment.

These results might deviate from previous studies for several reasons. First, most previous published studies found that students to some degree perceived a prevalence of academic dishonesty in their environment. This study did not find this perception among these students. In part, this may be due to the nature of the student who volunteered to participate as well as the low number of participants in the study. Additionally, the students in this study described themselves as high achieving and academically orientated. These characteristics may have influenced to what degree they identified themselves as academically independent.

The results of this study must not be overstated. While expanding on the current understanding of the problem of academic dishonesty and highlighting student voices, this study does not reflect all student voices within the Lyman Briggs School nor does it necessarily expand to other student populations. However, the findings do reflect that additional information regarding students' attitudes towards academic dishonesty is necessary. In particular, additional research is needed to explore the voices of high achieving, academically motivated students understanding of academic dishonesty and their perceptions of the environment. This perception may be the crux of the reason why their attitudes about academic dishonesty of the students in this study do not reflect most of the major research to date.

This study presents both challenges and opportunities for higher education. The costs in dollars and human resources to replicate a program such as the Lyman Briggs School may not be practical for many institutions or programs. Although living-learning communities have been in existence for nearly forty years at Michigan State University, the knowledge base of staff and faculty to manage these environments, at times, appears to be slow to grow. The complex set of skills, experiences, and perspectives along with the financial and human resources may result in missed opportunities for creating environments in which academic dishonesty is not prevalent.

It should also be noted that Lyman Briggs School students recognized a “long range” concern to academic dishonesty that the average first-year student may not fully appreciate. The combination of respect for their instructors, their peers, and their field of study appears to have helped these students communicate an ethical responsibility that is beyond a set of rules and instead reflects the beginning of an appreciation for value of scientific study.

The problem of academic dishonesty in higher education must begin to be seen as a broader problem than just an academic issue. Academic dishonesty is often seen solely as a faculty concern. To be truly effective in resolving the concern, a shared leadership for discouraging academic dishonesty is needed from faculty, administrators, and students.

Connected campus learning that involves broadening students understanding of academic dishonesty as it impacts their classroom experience should continue to be a priority. However, stronger inclusion of academic dishonesty in the core

of student affairs or student life is needed. In particular, when students can begin to view academic dishonesty as a “community concern” versus a “victimless crime” their behaviors are more likely to reflect the behaviors of learning community members during their collegiate years as well as after graduation.

### **Future Study and Considerations for Replication**

Three considerations are recommended for replication of this study. First, the benefits of this study are best suited for a small, reasonably contained population. A specific program, class, or grouping of students with a similar set of experiences during college may provide the best results for the methodology. Additionally, the research would have been advanced by including a comparison group or a primary study population of older students. For example, the results would likely have been different if seniors in the Lyman Briggs School were the study population.

Second, the timing of the study is an important consideration. The primary interviews in this study were conducted during three weeks in late April. As a result, the study population may have been limited in size because of the academic priorities of Lyman Briggs School students during the final weeks of the semester. A researcher might have been advantaged by conducting the interviews earlier in the spring semester.

Finally, as a result of the unanticipated deviations in perceptions of academic dishonesty expressed by these students, a quantitative survey examining students' perceptions of the problem of academic dishonesty might have been advantageous. A survey of the entire Lyman Briggs School first-year population

would have provided greater clarity regarding the attitudes and behaviors of Lyman Briggs School students on this issue.

The most prominent forms of academic dishonesty was taking credit for the work of others and copying from other students on tests or homework. Although students seemed clear about the inclusion of plagiarism and copying from others as academic dishonesty their disagreement or non inclusion of other behaviors as academic dishonesty was interesting. This narrow definition of academic dishonesty suggests that they share a limited scope of the problem. Additionally, most students reflected that they experienced few opportunities to discuss academic dishonesty with their instructors prior to and since arriving at college.

Additional research is needed to examine the relationship between faculty and students and their ability to influence their understanding of academic dishonesty. Participants in this study, in general, regarded the faculty with respect and appreciation. Students reflected that they did not expect their college instructors to spend considerable time talking about academic dishonesty but were appreciative when this occurred. In particular, additional research regarding faculty understanding and comfort discussing academic dishonesty is needed.

Specifically for the Lyman Briggs School, additional research is needed to examine students' perceptions of the Honor Code. Students reflected that they were aware of the honor code and saw it as helpful but did not identify it as an element that influenced either their perception of the environment or their definition of academic dishonesty. Additional information from a larger body of Lyman Briggs School students would have been helpful.

Perhaps the greatest opportunity for research is to explore in more detail the effect of students' relationships with their family members had on their moral decision-making regarding academic dishonesty. Although this was not an intended area for research in this study it became a prevalent theme. In particular, the results of this study suggested that a student's relationships with family members may have had more influence than their peers who were more present in their everyday lives.

Future studies that explore academic dishonesty in the context of other moral decisions, especially for high achieving students, might shed light on this conclusion. Research of this nature could help determine if this was true of other high academic achieving students in other situations, true of other students integrated into living learning communities or true of the Lyman Briggs School specifically. Additionally, future research might assist in identifying additional means for higher education to capitalize on the relationship that parents have with their respective institutions.

There is a considerable body of research regarding first-year students' experiences and success. However, very little of this research examined students' orientation to academic dishonesty in college. Additional research in this area could yield better information for faculty regarding how to reset students' expectations and understandings of their role as students. In particular, there is a considerable opportunity to examine the differences and opportunities for students enrolled in residential living learning environments versus the average student.

Finally, additional qualitative research is needed to explore students' understandings and perceptions of academic dishonesty. To date, few significant studies exist that examine students' interpretations of their environment regarding academic dishonesty. Continued reliance on only quantitative data may have limited the degree to which we understand this critical campus issue. Efforts to better understand how students experience and perceive their environment could have been helpful to determining solutions that meet the individual college, program, or school's need.

## **APPENDICES**

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# First Year Lyman Briggs Students Wanted

**GIVE ME 90 MINUTES & I'LL GIVE YOU A \$10.00  
MSU BOOKSTORE GIFT CERTIFICATE**

Participants are needed for a doctoral dissertation study asking freshman students about their perception of the environment for academic dishonesty. Participants will **NOT** be asked if they or others students have cheated. To qualify for participation students must:

- Be enrolled in the Lyman Briggs School
- Be a first time, first-year MSU freshman.
- Be between the ages of 18-20.
- Have completed highschool, home school, or other preparatory education 2002 or later.
- Have not attended any other colleges
- Be willing to participate in a 90 minute confidential interview during the Fall 2003 or early Spring 2004 semester. *Confidential means that you will be asked to sign an informed consent form that indicates that your name will not be revealed as a participant in the study.*

**Participants completing the 90 minute interview will receive  
a \$10.00 gift certificate for the MSU Bookstore.**

## **STILL INTERESTED, CONTACT:**

***Participants will be included in the study on a first to call basis.***

**Academic Dishonesty Study  
E-mail: [todaro@msu.edu](mailto:todaro@msu.edu)**

February, 2004

Dear Lyman Briggs School Student:

I am a current MSU Doctoral student seeking first-year Lyman Briggs School students to participate in a study regarding perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty. The study will examine the factors that influence first-year students' perceptions of student cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of academic dishonesty. The study will not ask students to identify themselves, others, or class experiences where academic dishonesty had occurred.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me at [todaro@msu.edu](mailto:todaro@msu.edu). After you indicate an interest, I will select four to five participants by random sample to participate in a pilot study. If selected, I will contact you to determine if you meet the criteria for the study. The criteria includes:

- A first-year MSU student enrolled in the Lyman Briggs School
- Between the ages of 18 – 20
- Have graduate college not more than two years ago
- Have not attended any other colleges

If you meet the criteria, and are interested in participating in the study, I will request a 90 minute individual interview time. Prior to the interview, you will receive from me a copy of an informed consent form for your review. At the scheduled interview I will review the informed consent with you and conduct the interview.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Angela L. Todaro  
Ph.D. Candidate in Higher, Adult and Lifelong Education  
Michigan State University  
[todaro@msu.edu](mailto:todaro@msu.edu)

## Participant Inquiry – pre-interview

<b>Name:</b>	
<b>Campus Address:</b>	
<b>Campus Phone:</b>	
<b>E-mail Address:</b>	
<b>Have you attended any other college besides MSU?</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Are you a first-year freshman?</b>	<b>YES</b>
<b>Are you enrolled in the Lyman Brigg School?</b>	<b>YES</b>
<b>Are you between 18-20 years old?</b>	<b>YES</b>
<b>Did you attend:</b> Public high school Private high school Home school Military academy Other	<b>YEAR COMPLETED:</b>  _____
<b>Are you willing to participate in a 90 minute individual interview?</b>	<b>Between Jan 15 – Feb 15</b>
<b>INTERVIEW DATE:</b> _____ <b>TIME:</b> _____ <b>LOCATION:</b> _____	
<b>Reminder e-mail sent:</b>	
<b>Participant pseudonym:</b>	

**Factors influencing students' perceptions  
of the environment regarding academic dishonesty  
INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

This study will investigate how first time, first year, traditional age college students enrolled in a residential academic program at a large public institution perceive the campus environment regarding academic dishonesty. Specifically, the study will examine what factors are most influential in shaping your perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty.

**PARTICIPANT CONFIDENTIALITY**

Participant information is confidential. Identifying information will be kept separate from interview notes and transcriptions. At the completion of the study, all identifying information will be destroyed. Audio taped interviews will be destroyed immediately after the interview, and notes and transcriptions, which disclose identifying information, which had been removed, will be kept for a minimum of three years. You will **NOT** be asked if you or others have participated in academic dishonesty. In the event that you provide this information, the researcher(s) are not permitted to reveal your name or identifying characteristics unless compelled to by law.

Participant's privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. The participant is at minimal risk of exposure for participating in the study and being identified in the final study analysis although only pseudonyms are used to identify individuals.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time. If you have concerns or questions about any aspect of the study you are free to request additional information at any time. There will be no cost to you as a participant. In appreciation for your time, at the completion of the individual interview you will be given a \$10.00 MSU Bookstore gift certificate.

**STUDY PARTICIPANTS**

You are included in this study because you indicated an interest in participating and indicated that you were a first time, first year, traditional age at least 18 years but not more than 20 years of age, and are currently enrolled in the Lyman Briggs School at Michigan State University.

The secondary researcher/interviewer is a Ph.D. Candidate within the Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education program in the College of Education and is conducting this study as a student. Additionally, the researcher/interviewer is a former employee of Michigan State University within the Department of Residence Life. For this reason, participants who have had been or are or have been employed within the Department of Residence Life should not participate in

this study. Additionally, any participants having a prior relationship to either of the investigators will be excluded from the study.

**ESTIMATED TIME COMMITMENT FOR PARTICIPANTS**

The estimated time commitment for participation is a 90-minute individual interview, which will be audio-taped. Participants may participate in the interview but decline consent to be audio-taped. Participants will be given the opportunity to read their comments and provide corrections, additions, or comments prior to completion of the study. Participation in reading one's comments in the study is voluntary and participants may indicate at any time that they are not interested in being contacted for participation in this aspect of the study.

**CONTACT PERSON:**

As a participant in this study you have the right to be fully informed about the research purpose and procedures. If you have any concerns about this study, please contact the investigator.

Angela L. Todaro  
200 Longbow Trail # 203  
Slippery Rock, PA 16057  
724-794-9222  
Todaro@msu.edu

The primary researcher and faculty advisor for this project is:  
Marylee Davis, Ph.D.

If you have questions or concerns regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact – anonymously, if you wish:

Peter Vasilenko, Ph.D., Chair  
University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS)

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have read this consent form and am familiar with the purpose and parameters of this study.

---

PARTICIPANT'S SIGNATURE

---

DATE

## INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### Part 1 - Welcome

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I expect that we will talk for about 90 minutes. During our time, I will ask you a series of questions regarding your perceptions of the campus environment regarding academic dishonesty. Prior to getting started, I'd like you to review the informed consent form and I'll answer any questions that you may have. **REVIEW INFORMED CONSENT FORM.**

### Part 2 – Interview protocol

***Lets get started with having you tell me a little about why you chose MSU? If the participant doesn't identify specific factors that influenced their decision ask: What (individuals, experiences, expectations) most influenced your decision?***

- What do you see yourself being five years from now?

***As you know, this study is designed to examine the factors that have influenced your perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty. The next few questions will ask specifically about your views of cheating.***

- How would you define academic dishonesty?
- How has your definition changed, if at all, since coming to college?
- Do you believe that students cheated while in high school/preparatory education?
- In college, do students cheat more, less, or about the same as they did in high school?
- Why do you believe that students cheat/don't cheat in college? How is this different from high school/prep education?

***Since coming to college, what relationships have influenced your perception of how many students cheat on campus?***

- Who was influential in your perceptions of the environment before college?
- How have the following influenced your perception of cheating:
- What your friends think about cheating?
- What your instructors think about cheating?
- What your parents think about cheating?
- What other family members think about cheating?
- Are there others that have been influential in your perception of cheating?

***Since coming to college, which experiences have influenced your perception of how many students cheat on campus?***

- How is this similar or different from your perception of your (highschool, home school, etc.) experience?
- How have the following influenced your perception of cheating:
- Other students cheating?
- Faculty or instructors not catching cheaters?
- What you have heard about the universities policies on cheating?
- What you have heard about how students are punished for cheating?
- The competition for grades?
- The amount of homework?
- The difficulty of tests?
- The expectations for writing assignments?
- Are there other things that have influenced your perception of cheating?

## **INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – Revised 3-23-04**

### **Part 1 - Welcome**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I expect that we will talk for about 90 minutes. During our time, I will ask you a series of questions regarding your perceptions of the campus environment regarding academic dishonesty. Prior to getting started, I'd like you to review the informed consent form and I'll answer any questions that you may have. **REVIEW INFORMED CONSENT FORM.**

### **Part 2 – Interview protocol**

***Let's get started with having you tell me a little about yourself and why you chose MSU? If the participant doesn't identify specific factors that influenced their decision ask:***

- *What (individuals, experiences, expectations) most influenced your decision?*
- *What field of study are you pursuing or considering? How did you get interested in this field?*
- *What do you hope to do after graduation?*

***As you know, this study is designed to examine the factors that have influenced your perceptions of the environment regarding academic dishonesty. The next few questions will ask specifically about your views of cheating.***

- *How would you define academic dishonesty?*
- *Were you aware of students cheating while you were in high school? In your opinion, what type of cheating was most common?*
- *Have you been aware of students cheating since coming to college? In your opinion, what type of cheating is most common?*
- *Why do you believe that students cheat/don't cheat in college? How is this different from high school/prep education?*

***Since coming to college, how have the following experiences influenced your perception of how acceptable cheating is:***

- *Other students cheating?*
- *Faculty or instructors not catching cheaters?*
- *The competition for grades?*
- *The amount of homework?*
- *The difficulty of tests?*
- *The expectations for writing assignments?*
- *What you have heard about the university's policies on cheating?*
- *What you have heard about how students are punished for cheating?*
- *Are there other things that have influenced your perception of cheating?*

***What relationships have influenced your perception of how many students cheat on campus?***

- *Who was influential in your perceptions of the environment before college?*
- *How have the following influenced your perception of cheating:*
- *What your friends think about cheating?*
- *What your instructors think about cheating?*
- *What your parents think about cheating?*
- *What other family members think about cheating?*
- *What a prospective graduate school or employer might think about cheating?*
- *Are there others that have been influential in your perception of cheating?*

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