

Does Expected Punishment Act as a Deterrent to Intention to Cheat

Lisa A. Schwartz
Wingate University
lschwart@wingate.edu
contact author

Stuart Michelson
Stetson University
smichels@stetson.edu

Introduction

Many studies have looked at cheating behavior in colleges and universities. Previous research has shown students report high levels of cheating, especially in perceived low risk activities. Students and faculty disagree on the severity of many different activities classified as cheating. Religion and ethics courses do not significantly reduce cheating. Expected punishment may act as a deterrent to cheating. Strong moral approbation may be the reason why some students do not participate in cheating activities. This paper studies the impact of expected punishment and moral approbation on cheating behavior.

Summary of Research

Students tend to view cheating as less serious than faculty

Strong honor codes can reduce cheating. Best way to police cheating is to increase monitoring and reporting by fellow students. Honor codes work best when there are presentations and frequent reminders from faculty. Age and incidence were significant predictors of academic dishonesty. HEXACO finding that fairness, humility, and greed avoidance were the best predictors of academic behavior. Faculty perceive higher levels of cheating for paper-based assignments, non-authorized teamwork, and hiring someone to take an exam. Perceptions of cheating declined from test to homework to report writing. Cheating that required students to exert more effort were perceived as less dishonest. Giving information was perceived less harshly than receiving it and cheating outside the classroom were perceived less harshly than inside the classroom. Likelihood of getting caught and the expected penalty for getting caught is a deterrent from cheating behavior for the most severe types of cheating. Students who have a strong goal of learning or high personal integrity will cheat less in all situations

Methodology

Students are given a survey that measures:

- moral approbation,
- past cheating behavior
- future intention to cheat
- expected punishment for cheating
- actual or observed punishment

The survey includes seven different cheating activities from mild (sharing homework) to severe (plagiarism)

Conclusions

Students are more likely to participate in activities where they expect or have observed lower punishments. Students with higher moral approbation report lower cheating and intent to cheat. Students with higher moral approbation expect higher punishments for cheating. Students with higher moral approbation are more likely to view expected punishment as a deterrent to cheating. Students with higher moral approbation are significantly more likely to say punishment is irrelevant, they would never do the specified cheating activity

Table 1

Comparison of Means for Cheating activities

	I have participated in the following activities in the past		I intend to participate in the following activities	
	N	Mean	N	Mean
Asking someone who has already taken an exam for details	296	2.93	298	3.07
Obtaining a copy of an exam before taking it in class	296	1.47	298	1.69
Looking at another student's paper or computer screen or using unauthorized crib notes during an exam	295	1.57	298	1.48
Lying to a professor about illness, etc., when an exam or assignment is due	296	1.40	299	1.45
Copying or sharing homework from another student when the professor has instructed you to work independently.	295	2.22	298	2.14
Using words from a journal, book, web site, etc., without naming your source	297	1.59	299	1.56
Borrowing another person's speech, report or project and turning it in as your own	297	1.07	299	1.08

Table 2

Means for Expected, Actual Punishment and Punishment as a Deterrent

	Expected severity of punishment for each activity		Observed or informed of severity of punishment for each activity		The expected punishment acts as a deterrent	
	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean
Asking someone who has already taken an exam for details	296	1.56	293	3.28	284	2.34
Obtaining a copy of an exam before taking it in class	294	3.45	293	4.02	283	4.32
Looking at another student's paper or computer screen or using unauthorized crib notes during an exam	295	2.83	293	3.25	284	3.82
Lying to a professor about illness, etc., when an exam or assignment is due	296	2.47	293	3.56	284	3.70
Copying or sharing homework from another student when the professor has instructed you to work independently.	293	2.41	292	3.12	283	3.29
Using words from a journal, book, web site, etc., without naming your source	295	3.01	292	3.66	285	4.29
Borrowing another person's speech, report or project and turning it in as your own	295	4.03	292	4.25	285	4.85