

What have you got to say for yourself? Academic Dishonesty in Online Courses

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Abstract :

This study explores student academic dishonesty in the context of traditional and distance-learning courses in higher education. Data from 1,365 Students enrolled in academic institutes in the U.S.A and Israel were surveyed to assess their personality and their willingness to commit various acts of academic misconduct. The findings indicate that in both countries dishonest behaviors are greater in face-to-face courses than in online courses. In addition, both American and Israeli students identified with the personality trait of Agreeableness showed a negative correlation with academic dishonesty. In addition, Israeli students identified with the personality traits of Conscientiousness and Emotional Stability demonstrated a negative correlation with academic dishonesty. In contrast, the personality trait of Extraversion among American students was found in a positive correlation with academic misconduct. Implications for further research are discussed.

Keywords: *Academic Dishonesty, Personality Traits, OCEAN, Online Courses.*

I. INTRODUCTION

With the rapid growth of distance learning involving the Internet, there is a greater opportunity for individuals to engage in academic dishonesty and plagiarism, particularly where there is little or no personal contact between students and faculty [1], [2]. Kelley and Bonner [3] suggested that students who feel close to their professors tend to be more honest. However, the ability for faculty to develop a strong rapport with students becomes more difficult in the online learning environment. Students who feel “distant” from others seem to have higher tendency in engaging in deceptive behaviors, such as cheating [4], [5]. Online courses, in contrast to traditional classroom courses, may serve to exacerbate these feelings of separation and, thus, may contribute to higher incidence of academic dishonesty [6], [7]. Another important factor that might influence students' tendency to engage in behaviors of academic misconduct is related to various personality traits.

II. STUDENTS' PERSONALITY AS A PREDICTOR OF ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Research regarding the relationship between unethical behavior and personality traits includes several studies, while each study uses a different measure of dishonesty. Hence, the results are often contradicting [8], [9], [10]. Although the ability of the 'Big Five' personality traits measure was proved effective in explaining unethical behaviors [11], it is not frequently used in the context of academic dishonesty and most researches who did use it addressed only few traits instead of the whole model [10], [12]. Below are explained the personality traits of the "Big Five" model in the context of academic dishonesty.

The Conscientious student may be described as dependable, achievement-oriented, persistent, responsible and honest [13]. He operates as an effective regulator of his own actions, who is able to restrain and regulate behavior through "effortful control", thus, he can resist cheating [14] and hold more negative attitudes toward cheating [15]. As opposed, student with lower conscientiousness is expected to be irresponsible, disorganized and impulsive. As a consequence, these characteristics might lead to poorer study skills, which in turn might increase the tendency to cheat. Another personality trait - Emotional Stability (which is the reverse of neuroticism) - reflects students' enhanced feeling of competence and a sense of security [13], which allow them to be more relaxed, unworried and less likely to become strained in stressful conditions, such as tests or deadlines. Thus, these students are considered to be less inclined toward cheating behaviors [15]. Agreeableness involves cooperating with others and maintaining harmony. Thus, individuals who are low in this trait are expected to show lack in these behaviors. The personality trait of Extraversion is characterized as the tendency to be sociable, talkative, energetic and sensation-seeking. Studies that addressed this trait's effect on dishonesty are scarce and their results are contradicting [12]. Finally, high Openness to Experience includes tendencies toward intellectualism, imagination, and broad-mindedness [13]. Research findings show that this personality trait is related to academic success and to learning orientation, reflecting desire to understand concepts and master material. Furthermore, learning orientation predicted lower inclination to cheat [15].

Empirical research confirmed the relationship between personality traits and individual tendency to cheat for Extraversion, but not for Neuroticism [10]. In addition, low Conscientiousness and low Agreeableness were found as predicting cheating behaviors as well [12]. More recently, [15] examined the effects of Conscientiousness, Emotional stability, and Openness to Experience on students' attitudes towards cheating, combined with two context variables, e.g., classroom culture and pedagogy. The findings showed that while Conscientiousness was the sole personality measure that directly predicted negative attitudes towards cheating, Emotional stability and Openness to Experience also lead to negative attitudes towards academic misconduct, however, only when combined with classroom context variables. Based on the above, we hypothesize that there will be differences in the level of academic dishonesty between the various personality traits especially among e-learners.

METHOD

A. Participants

The sample consisted of 1,574 participants with 803 from two American academic institutes and 771 from four Israeli academic institutes. 65% of the participants were women and 35% were men. The age ranged from 17 to 59 (the mean was 26.4 years). 26% of the participants were freshmen, 32% - sophomores, 20% - juniors, 19% - seniors, and 3% were graduate students. 46% were Christians, 38% were Jews, and 16% were Muslims. 13% of the participants were excluded from the analysis because their surveys were incomplete or carelessly completed. Therefore, the final data set consisted of 1,365 participants.

B. Survey Instrument

A three part survey instrument was used in the current study. Part 1 included the TIPI scale developed by [16], which was consisted of 10 items assessing the participants' personality traits. The reliability of this questionnaire, measured by Cronbach's alpha, was 0.72. Part 2 was consisted of the questions that examined academic integrity using the Academic Integrity Inventory [17]. These questions investigated the students' likelihood to engage in various forms of academic misconduct. The instrument was validated by [17] and reliability of this questionnaire, measured by Cronbach's alpha, was 0.75. Part 3 presented a series of socio-demographic questions.

C. Procedure

In order to encourage the participants to think in the frame of a specific type of course, we administered a printed version of the survey instrument in the traditional face-to-face courses and an on-line version of the survey instrument in the e-learning courses. The survey instruments were coded and grouped according to the location of the participants' college or university (USA or Israel).

D. Results

Table I summarizes the results of Independent Sample T-test analyses, which indicate that there were statistically significant differences in students' likelihood to engage in academic dishonesty based on the type of course in which they were enrolled. Specifically, it was found that students in face-to-face courses were more likely to engage in acts of academic dishonesty than their counterparts in e-learning courses.

Table I Differences in academic dishonesty by course type and country

Country	Course type	N	Mean	S.D.	T-Test	F
USA	E-learning	287	1.61	0.52	12.70 ^{***}	57.16 ^{***}
	Face-to-Face	470	2.16	0.66		
Israel	E-learning	293	1.78	0.60	5.33 ^{***}	
	Face-to-Face	315	2.52	0.65		

^{***}P<0.001, ^{**}P<0.01, ^{*}P<0.05

Based on MANOVA analysis we found significant interaction between country and course type (F(1,1361)=57.16, p<0.001).

Table II Correlation between personality and academic dishonesty by course type and country

Course type	Country	Openness Experiences	Emotional Stability	Conscientiousness	Agreeableness	Extraversion
Israel N= 608	On-line	-0.038	-0.149*	-0.125*	-0.246**	-0.068
	Face to face	-0.090	-0.131*	-0.237**	-0.151**	-0.063
USA N= 757	On-line	-0.100	-0.090	-0.057	-0.121*	-0.038
	Face to face	-0.016	-0.040	-0.031	-0.114*	0.105*

***P<0.001, **P<0.01, *P<0.05

Table II shows a significant negative correlation between the personality trait of Agreeableness and academic dishonesty indicating that the more the students are cooperative with others they are less likely to be academically dishonest in both countries: Israel and USA. In addition, Israeli students identified with higher Conscientiousness and Emotional Stability demonstrated a significant negative correlation with academic dishonesty. Interestingly, the personality trait of Extraversion among American students was found in a positive correlation with academic dishonesty, indicating that the tendency to be sociable is correlated with higher inclination to cheat.

DISCUSSION

Our research found that there is less overall cheating in the virtual than in the traditional classroom settings. These findings are similar to [18], who explained this phenomenon by the notion that these students may have a higher motivation to learn or able to learn without being dependant on the typical structure of traditional classroom settings. Our research also indicates that the personality traits of Emotional Stability and Conscientiousness are negatively related to academic dishonesty. These findings are similar to [15]. Furthermore, the results of this research showed that these effects were not observed among American students. This might be explained by cultural differences, as several studies that compared US students with students in Lebanon [19], China [20] and non-Western countries [21], showed that Americans tend to show less acceptance for cheating and to possess higher standards with regard to honesty.

Classroom contextual effects, such as those presented in [15]'s study, may be worth investigating in further research, since they seem to contribute to the knowledge regarding the effects of personality traits on attitudes toward cheating [15]. The main practical implication and contribution of this research is to the process of students' profiling, since we found that students who use cheating practices are less emotionally stable, less conscious and less agreeable. Further research should focus on how to amplify cooperative tasks in online courses in order to reduce Academic Dishonesty.

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