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The Relationship Between Ethical Regard and Academic Misconduct Among College Students

Abstract

A correlational quantitative research project was conducted at a large public research institution in the Southeast to investigate the relationship between ethical regard and academic dishonesty among undergraduate college students. An online survey was completed by 273 undergraduates. Participant engagement in cheating behaviors established a Propensity To Cheat (PTC) score, which was then analyzed in conjunction with student characteristics, ethical self-perception, ethical ideology, and perception of cheating behaviors. Data were analyzed using ANOVAs, independent t tests, correlations, and descriptive statistics.

Findings indicate that students aged 22-23 were significantly more likely to cheat than students in other age ranges; Millennials were significantly more likely to cheat than non-Millennials. No significant difference existed between PTC compared by gender or academic classification. When given a response set of 11 behaviors commonly defined as academic misconduct, the majority of students indicated agreement that the identified behavior is a cheating behavior.

The behavior most commonly perceived as cheating was copying from a classmate's exam or permitting copying by a classmate (99.3% agreement). The behavior least likely to be perceived as cheating was seeking exam content from a peer who had taken the exam (55.7% agreement); students cited this cheating behavior as the most commonly

committed (46.5%). A correlational analysis was conducted for each of the 11 cheating behaviors; results indicate that in 8 of the 11 behaviors, students were less likely to engage in the specific behavior if they perceived the behavior as cheating. Overall, 77.3% of respondents reported cheating, and 30.8% reported 4 or more cheating behaviors.

The study is significant because few researchers have evaluated academic misconduct through the lens of ethical ideology. Therefore, this study contributes to the existing literature related to academic integrity among college students by employing ethical ideology as a conceptual framework to examine cheating behaviors and prevalence. In the analyses students who exhibit absolutist ideologies are significantly less likely to cheat than students with subjectivist ideologies. Furthermore, higher ethical self-perception scores significantly correlate to a lower PTC.