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Academic cheating in college students: relations among personal values, self-esteem and mastery

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Abstract

Academic cheating is one of the most blamed and still frequent and somehow accepted practice presents in the life of college students. In the current study we are interested to look at the relation among this trend and personal values, self-esteem and mastery. Also, the frequency and type of cheating is studied. Self-esteem and mastery feeling is negative associated with cheating. Small, negative correlations were obtained between cheating and values placed on honesty and academic achievement. Students with a more optimistic view on human nature cheat less, but there was no relation between the cynic ones and cheating.

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Keywords: academic cheating, self-esteem, values, mastery

1. Introduction

Plagiarism and academic cheating are hot subjects in the field of education, and the echoes attract interest not only from psychologists or teachers but also from media, politicians and general public. Recent data showed that the phenomenon is expanding but not directly by open recognition but indirectly through less willingness to recognize cheating or to report it and greater tolerance of it and greater engagement in it doubled by lesser readiness to acknowledge the harm (Nabi, 2012; Herbst-Bayliss, 2013). Two of the most recent papers on academic cheating (Anderman, & Murdock, 2006; Brent, & Atkinson, 2011) review many of the themes surrounding the subject, from motivation and causes, to individual characteristics and social factors that associate with this behavior. This topic is not a new one, Brownell (1928, cited in Whitley, Jr., 1998) being among the first interested in studying it. Along the years there was more or less awareness in this matter, but the complexity of the phenomena is an agreed fact.

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2. Objectives and Hypotheses

2.1. Objectives

There are three objectives for the present study: to identify the frequency of academic cheating among students, to check the relation between self-declared academic cheating and the presence of this behavior in classmates and to verify for any relations among academic cheating, moral values, self-concept and his own philosophy on humane nature.

2.2. Hypotheses

Keeping in mind the objectives of the research, it is expected that:

- There are significant differences between cheating behavior depending on sex, with males cheating more frequent than females.
- Self-reported cheating is positive associated with cheating in colleagues
- Students with high self-esteem and high mastery feeling will cheat less.
- Students with a cynic vision on human nature will cheat more often in contrast with those who trust people.
- Students who value academic achievement and honesty will cheat less.
- Students perceive that others are cheating more than themselves.

3. Method

3.1. Instruments

All instruments were filled together with the first one asking about cheating behavior, followed by the ones about self concept and ending with personal values and philosophy on human nature.

Cheating behavior questionnaire is asking about the frequency of nine types of cheating behavior on a four points scale. Each question requires an estimation of the frequency of the specific behavior for the subject himself and also an estimation of the frequency in subject's colleagues. The alpha Cronbach coefficient for self-reported cheating behavior is .86 and in others is .74.

Rosenberg self-esteem scale is well known in measuring overall self-esteem, presenting a strong alpha Cronbach coefficient of .92.

Mastery scale (Pearlin et al., 1981, apud Robinson, Shaver, & Wrightsman, 1991) measures how a person considers his/hers life' chances to be under his/her own control in contrast to being fatalistically ruled. It is a seven items, four point answering scale questionnaire, with an internal consistency of .79.

Revised philosophies on humane nature questionnaire (Wrightsman, 1974, apud Robinson, Shaver, & Wrightsman, 1991) is a two dimension scale: one positive (10 items) referring to the belief that people are conventionally good, and one negative, named "cinism scale" (also 10 items) that measures the degree a person consider that people don't deserve to be trusted and that mostly everyone acts selfish. Alpha Cronbach = .82 for the positive dimension and alpha Cronbach = .71 for cinism scale.

Personal value scale (Scott, 1965, apud Robinson, Shaver, & Wrightsman, 1991) was divided and only two dimension were selected: academic achievement (sixteen items, internal consistency = 0.81) and honesty (seventeen items, internal consistency = .78). High scores describe persons who value academic achievement and honesty.

3.2. Participants

Sixty three second year participants from two fields of study – one in engineering and one in economy were enrolled. Mean age for the participants was 21.1 years of age, with a minimum of 20 years and a maximum of 24, balanced by sex (thirty males and thirty three females).

The participants filled in five questionnaires, keeping anonymity except for their age and sex.

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