



## Review

## Integrity in nursing students: A concept analysis

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The purpose of this review was to clarify the concept of nursing student integrity. Unlike published reviews that highlight the absence of integrity, the author sought to identify the positive defining characteristics of integrity.

**Design:** Concept analysis.

**Data Sources:** A literature review was conducted using the Cumulative Index for Nursing and Allied Health, Social Science Index, Psyc Info and Medline. Inclusion criteria included peer reviewed articles, written in English, with no limitation on publication date. The search also revealed that a concept analysis of integrity had not been performed.

**Review Methods:** Walker and Avant's (2005) eight step modification of Wilson's (1963) classic concept analysis procedure was used as the organizing framework to explore how the concept of integrity is defined in the current literature.

**Results:** Nursing student integrity was analyzed using Walker and Avant's method of concept analysis: concept definition, defining attribute, model, borderline, related and contrary cases, antecedents, consequences and empirical referents (Walker and Avant 2005). Defining attributes to nursing student integrity were honesty, ethical behavior and professionalism. Antecedents to integrity included an academic culture of respect, characterized by student-faculty relationships derived from mutual respect, trust and a shared learning goal.

**Conclusions:** This review identified honesty, ethical behavior and professionalism as the defining attributes of integrity. The importance of faculty as role models of integrity was paramount in building a culture of honesty. Future research should explore faculty perceptions of their professional role as models of integrity, and faculty perceptions of behaviors that promote a culture of respect.

## 1. Introduction

The honesty and ethical standards of nurses are consistently ranked among the highest of professions in nationwide public gallop polls (Jones, 2011). The American Nurses Association Code of Ethics and Interpretive Statements (2015) challenge nurses to value the profession of nursing and to demonstrate qualities which preserve wholeness of character and integrity (ANA, 2015). The International Council of Nurses (ICN) Code of Ethics for Nurses (2012) defines nursing professional values which include respectfulness, responsiveness, compassion, trustworthiness and integrity. The value of integrity among nurses is evident in public polls, community expectations, and in professional codes of ethics. Nurses value honesty, integrity and professionalism, and therefore, nursing students preparing for this profession should equally value these qualities (Wilk and Bowllan, 2011).

Although the public perceives nurses as honest and ethical, these qualities may be lacking in nursing students. Cheating on exams,

plagiarizing writing assignments, lying, inadequately preparing for clinical assignments and falsifying documentation in a patient's chart are described in the nursing literature, and depict behaviors that demonstrate a lack of integrity in nursing students (Baxter and Boblin, 2007). Cheating behaviors among college and university students are a global problem, and occur so frequently that students often do not perceive these actions as immoral or dishonest (Arhin and Jones, 2009). Academic dishonesty is influenced by the student's desire to succeed, a lack of organizational skills, competition for grade dependent scholarships and awards, acceptance and assistance of cheating in the program of study, and the thrill of risk-taking (Faucher and Caves, 2009). Nursing students are often held to higher academic standards for academic progression, and in this high stakes environment feel tremendous pressure to succeed (Tippitt et al., 2009).

Cheating is viewed by some nursing students in the millennial generation as acceptable and the judgement of what is and is not ethical has "a more fluid notion" than in previous generations of students

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(Faucher and Caves, 2009, p. 37). Healthcare educators are concerned with academic cheating behaviors because of the causal link to future unethical behaviors in professional practice (Park et al., 2013). Students who cheat in a nursing classroom are more likely to falsify clinical data in their future employment than students who do not cheat (Park et al., 2013).

The professional nurse of today is required to demonstrate the knowledge, attitudes and skills associated with moral, ethical and legal behaviors as they provide care for patient populations (MDHE, 2010). Advancements in technology, diminished moral codes and cultures of cheating promote deceptive academic and professional practices among nursing students (Faucher and Caves, 2009; Harper, 2006; Woith et al., 2012). As nursing students prepare to enter a fast-paced and demanding healthcare climate of professional nursing characterized by high acuity patients and understaffed nursing units, an understanding and commitment to integrity is paramount. Preparation for role transition during the senior year of education can heighten the nursing student's awareness to the value of integrity in practice, and the many situational challenges (Duchscher, 2009).

Academic and professional integrity are both valued and necessary qualities of nursing students. When integrity is discussed in the nursing literature, it is associated with honest, ethical and moral behaviors. However, in demonstrating the attributes and characteristics of integrity in the nursing student, the literature provides examples of behavior devoid of integrity, such as cheating, plagiarism, lying and deception (Tippitt et al., 2009; Faucher and Caves, 2009; Woith et al., 2012). As such, integrity is more often defined by behaviors that represent a lack of integrity resulting in blurred meaning and understanding of the concept of integrity as it relates to the nursing student. In order to provide a clear and consistent meaning of the concept of integrity in nursing students a concept analysis was undertaken.

## 2. Method

Walker and Avant's (2005) eight step modification of Wilson's (1963) classic concept analysis procedure was used as the organizing framework. This framework is outlined as a sequential process, but is meant to be an iterative process of idea and information review, revision and analysis (Walker and Avant, 2005). The eight steps consist of selecting a concept, determining the purposes of the analysis, identifying all uses of the concept, determining the defining attributes, identifying a model cases, identifying antecedents and consequences and defining empirical referents (Walker and Avant, 2005).

A literature search was conducted using the Cumulative Index for Nursing and Allied Health (CINAHL), Social Science Index (SocINDEX), Psyc Info and Medline. Inclusion criteria included peer reviewed articles, written in English, with no limitation on publication date. Cheating, lying and plagiarism are reported in the literature as occurring among college students, and are measured by self-reported academic dishonesty and cheating instruments (Arhin and Jones, 2009; Jensen et al., 2002). To better understand if integrity differs from a lack of cheating, lying and plagiarism, further investigation of the concept of integrity in the literature was undertaken. The search of the term integrity revealed an abundance of literature on this concept from the following databases: CINAHL 8491 sources; SocINDEX 5357 sources; Psyc Info 16,399 sources and Medline 99,420 sources. These results were derived from the following disciplines: radiologic science, physical therapy, physician assistants, pharmacy, criminal justice, engineering, business and law. Thirteen articles were randomly selected for abstract review, and 9 were selected to illustrate use of the concept in the non-nursing literature. The search also revealed that a concept analysis of integrity had not been performed.

The following search terms were then applied to the literature search: professional integrity with nursing students, professional integrity with nursing practice, nursing students with honesty and integrity, and integrity in nursing resulting in 648 titles. Each abstract

was reviewed and those without relevance to the study of integrity in nursing were removed along with the duplicate articles, resulting in a final sample of 18 articles.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Integrity

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines integrity as “firm adherence to a code of especially moralistic or artistic values” (MWD, 2016). The Oxford Dictionary defines integrity as “the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles” (2016). Synonyms for integrity include honesty, morality, ethics, honor and trustworthiness. Integrity “implies trustworthiness and incorruptibility to a degree that one is incapable of being false to a trust, responsibility, or pledge” (MWD, 2016).

### 3.2. Academic Integrity

A second prominent definition is that of academic integrity. The International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI), which “works to identify, promote, and affirm the values of academic integrity among students, faculty, teachers, and administrators” defines academic integrity as “a commitment, even in the face of adversity, to five fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility” (ICAI, 2016). Donald McCabe, the first president of The Center for Academic Integrity, investigated cheating, academic dishonesty, values and moral dilemmas among students enrolled in natural science, engineering, business, law and nursing programs (McCabe, 1997; McCabe, 2009; McCabe et al., 1991; McCabe and Trevino, 1993; McCabe et al., 2001). He also examined academic integrity among nursing students in traditional BSN, RN to BS, accelerated, graduate and online learning environments. His Academic Integrity Survey has been utilized by numerous researchers in varied academic settings to evaluate student perceptions of cheating, awareness of honor codes and academic policies, and student participation in cheating behaviors. The students surveyed self-reported engaging in academic dishonesty such as cheating on exams and plagiarism (Hart and Morgan, 2010; McCabe and Trevino, 1993).

### 3.3. Academic Integrity and Professional Conduct

Academic integrity is conceptualized in the healthcare literature as professional conduct that demonstrates ethical behavior in the education and practice settings. In a study of radiologic science students and faculty, professional conduct and academic integrity are explored as they relate to self-monitoring and autonomous performance. Faculty and student perceptions of cheating and unprofessional behaviors were investigated, and the professional ethics and integrity of faculty were identified as factors that influence student integrity (Aaron et al., 2011).

Moral values, honesty and high ethical standards were associated with integrity in the literature concerning professional practice of physician assistants. The physician assistant-physician relationship is dependent upon “mutual trust”, as the physician assistant functions as a “direct agent” of the physician (Derezyk et al., 2010, p. 27). An assessment of physician assistant students' attitudes and behaviors toward cheating and academic integrity revealed varied student perceptions of the seriousness of cheating behaviors. In order to reinforce the high level of integrity required of this profession, honor codes and integrity policies containing clear explanations and reinforcements throughout the program of study were recommended (Derezyk et al., 2010).

A similar exploration of attitudes and perceptions of the seriousness of academic dishonesty and the lack of ethical and professional behaviors was explored among physical therapy students and educators (Montuno et al., 2012; Mohr et al., 2011). Unprofessional conduct

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