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ABSTRACT

A study was done of student and faculty attitudes to cheating at two New York City metropolitan area universities, one private and one public. The study population consisted of 404 students and 120 professors. All subjects responded to the Attitude Toward Cheating scale. This scale consists of 34 statements relating to various forms of academic cheating. Participants rate each item using a 5 point agree/disagree scale. Students completed two copies, one according to their own opinion, and another copy according to the opinions of "a typical college professor." Likewise, the professors were asked about their own opinions and about the opinions of a "typical college student." Data were subjected to a split plot analysis of variance with position and sex as between-subjects factors, and opinion as the within-subjects factor. All three main effects yielded statistical significance. Students' perception of professors' attitudes were very similar to the actual attitudes held by professors. However, professors believed that students were more tolerant of cheating than students reported themselves to be. Students from business-related majors had the most tolerant attitudes toward cheating. Included are five tables, and three references.
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Attitudes toward cheating

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Attitudes toward cheating by college students
and professors

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Abstract

Four hundred and four students from two major northeastern universities were given two copies of the Attitudes Toward Cheating scale. Students completed one copy according to their own opinions, and another copy according to the opinions of "a typical college professor". Likewise, 120 professors were asked about their own opinions and about the opinions of "a typical college student". Students' perceptions of professors' attitudes were very similar to the actual attitudes held by professors. However, professors believed that students were more tolerant of cheating than students themselves report to be. Students from Business-related majors had the most tolerant attitudes toward cheating.

Attitudes toward cheating by college students and professors.

William and Gardner (1988) administered the Attitude Toward Cheating (ATC) scale to a sample of students and professors. As expected, the authors found that professors were more condemnatory of cheating than were students. In addition, professors were found to have stronger agreement scores for the statement "most college students never cheat", than the actual students themselves. We were curious about this particular finding and therefore for the present study we gave students and professors two copies of the ATC questionnaire. For the students we asked them to complete one copy of the questionnaire based on their own opinion and the other copy based on what they felt were the opinions of college professors. Likewise, for professors, we asked them to complete one copy according to their own opinion and the other copy based on what they felt were the opinions of college students.

Method

Subjects

A total of 404 college students and 120 professors were obtained from one public and one private New York metropolitan area universities. Of

the students who reported their sex, 166 were men and 218 were women. The sample ranged in age between 16 and 55 and averaged 20.48 years. Of the professors who completed the questionnaires, 81 were men and 34 were women. They ranged in age between 26 and 70 and averaged 46 years.

Questionnaire

The ACT, developed by William and Gardner (1988), consists of 34 statements relating to various forms of academic cheating. Participants rate each item using a 5 point agree/disagree scale.

Procedure

Students were administered the questionnaire individually in various settings around each campus or during class sessions of a number of introductory courses of Psychology, Sociology, Economics, and Biology. Each student received two identical copies of the questionnaire with instructions to complete one copy according to their own opinion, and the other copy according to the opinion of "a typical college professor". For the professors, two identical copies of the questionnaire were mailed through the interoffice mail system to an arbitrary sample of professors from each Department or Division within each of the Universities. Of the 297

questionnaires mailed, 120 were returned.

Instructions in one of the questionnaires requested that it be completed according to the individual's own personal opinion whereas the other copy requested what they thought were the opinions of a "typical college student". Approximately half of the participants first completed the questionnaire providing their own personal opinions, and then completed the second questionnaire providing the opinions of others. The other half of the participants completed the questionnaires in the reverse order.

Preliminary Results and Discussion

The data were subjected to a 2 x 2 x 2 split plot analysis of variance with position (student versus professor) and sex as between subjects factors, and opinions (of self and of other) as the within subjects factor. All three main effects yielded statistical significance, $F(1, 471) = 7.32, p < .007$; $F(1, 471) = 6.53, p < .01$; and $F(1, 471) = 42.99, p < .00001$ respectively. In addition, the interaction of position by opinion was also highly significant, $F(1, 471) = 567.66, p < .00001$.

Post Hoc comparisons using the Tukey Honestly Significant Differences (HSD) test revealed that

students' attitudes toward cheating ($M = 4.72$) were significantly lower (more tolerant) than professors' attitudes ($M = 23.57$), $p < .01$. Students' own attitudes were also significantly lower than the attitudes that they thought were typical of a college professor ($M = 21.64$), $p < .01$.

While students' perceptions of professors' attitudes toward cheating were virtually identical to the professors' own reported attitudes, the professors rated students ($M = -5.26$) significantly lower, $p < .01$, than the actual attitudes reported by students ($M = 4.72$). In other words, professors appear to think that students are more tolerant of cheating (would be more inclined to cheat) than students themselves report to be. This effect differs from the finding reported by William and Gardner (1988).

Although we asked students to report their academic major, comparisons between majors could not be made because for some majors, e.g., mathematics, there were too few respondents for meaningful statistical analyses to be carried out. As the questionnaires were scored, however, we noted that some related majors, e.g., business, economics, accounting, appeared to score lower than other

clusters of majors, e.g., education and psychology. We therefore grouped the majors according to the following broad categories: 1) Business and economics, 2) social sciences, 3) science and mathematics, 4) humanities, and 5) professional studies (see table 2 for the various majors included in these groupings).

Tables 3 and 4 present the newly categorized data for both students and professors. Four separate one way ANOVAs were conducted using the five academic major categories as a between subjects factor on students' own opinions, on students' perceived opinions of professors, on professors' own opinions, and on professors' perceived opinions of students. Only the analyses from students' data resulted in significant main effects, $F(4, 332) = 3.05, p < .02$, for students' own opinions, and $F(4, 244) = 6.11, p < .0001$, for students' perceived opinions of college professors (the discrepancies in degrees of freedom stem from the fact that not all participants completed both questionnaires). Although the Business and Economics grouping had the lowest attitudes toward cheating (more tolerant), post hoc analyses indicated that these scores were only significantly lower ($p < .05$) than the scores for

social sciences students.

The analyses of attitudes attributed to professors revealed that students from the science and mathematics grouping projected the lowest attitudes to professors (more tolerant). The next lowest scores were obtained from students from the business and economics grouping. The scores from both of these groups were significantly lower, $p < .05$, (more tolerant of cheating) than the scores of the Social Science, Humanities, and Professional Studies groups.

For one of the samples of students, we decided to collect ethnicity data because we suspected that perhaps students from certain ethnic groups (e.g., asian) might hold less tolerant attitudes toward cheating than white north american students. Therefore two separate one way ANOVAs were conducted on these data (see table 5). One analysis was conducted on data from students' own attitudes and the other analysis was conducted on students' perceived attitudes of college professors. Neither analysis resulted in a significant main effect.

Professors' overestimation of students' attitudes toward cheating may reflect the recent wave of media attention to this topic (e.g., Collison,

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1990; Janya, 1991). However, the differences in attitudes between the various groupings of majors remains a source of concern.

References

- Collison, M. N-K. (1990). Apparent rise in student cheating has college officials worried. The Chronicle of Higher Education, 36 (January 17), A33-34.
- Gardner, W. M. & Melvin, K. B. (1988). A scale for measuring attitude toward cheating. Bulletin of the Psychonomic Society, 26, 429-432.
- Janya, M. R. (1991). Undergraduate update. Monitor, September, pg. 28.

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Table 1

Mean score and number of professors and students as a function of self-other opinions and sex.

Opinions of	Self	n	Other	n
Students				
Men	2.65	160	18.11	162
Women	6.26	215	24.28	217
M	4.72		21.64	
Professors				
Men	22.46	78	-5.47	75
Women	26.11	34	-4.79	33
M	21.64		-5.26	

Please note that for all tables of data the discrepancies in the number of subjects per cell stem from the fact that not all participants reported their sex, age, etc., and some failed to complete both questionnaires.

Table 2

List of majors under the five groupings.

BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS

Accounting	Economics	Management Business
Finance	Marketing	

SOCIAL SCIENCE

Criminal Justice	History	Psychology
Education	Political Science	Sociology

HUMANITIES

Art	Dance	Foreign Language	Philosophy
Communication	English	Philosophy	Theology

MATHEMATICS & SCIENCE

Biology	Computers	Pharmacy	Engineering
Chemistry	Mathematics	Premed.	Geology

PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

Athletic Admin.	Paralegal Studies	Transportation
Medical technician	Physicians Asst.	Nursing

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Table 3

Mean scores and number of participants per group (in parenthesis) for students' own attitudes, and for attitudes attributed to professors, as a function of major grouping.

Grouping	Own Attitudes	Attitudes attributed to professors
Business	0.55 (75)	18.61 (74)
Social Science	7.49 (139)	24.88 (138)
Humanities	4.79 (24)	23.88 (25)
Math & Science	4.37 (76)	15.55 (78)
Prof. Studies	3.83 (23)	23.39 (23)

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Table 3

Mean scores and number of participants per group (in parenthesis) for professors' own attitudes, and for attitudes attributed to students, as a function of major grouping.

Grouping	Own Attitudes	Attitudes attributed to students
Business	20.66 (38)	-6.31 (35)
Social Science	24.50 (18)	-6.00 (18)
Humanities	25.22 (27)	-4.52 (27)
Math & Science	25.20 (20)	-8.63 (19)
Prof. Studies	23.50 (4)	-8.67 (3)

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Table 5

Mean scores for students' own attitudes, and for attitudes attributed to professors, as a function of ethnicity.

Ethnicity	Own Attitudes	Attitudes attributed to professors
White	4.03	22.20
African-American	9.55	21.36
Hispanic	0.15	19.80
Asian	4.59	15.46
