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Academic Integrity: The Experience of Learning Through Cheating

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
Requirements for the degree Doctor of Education
in
Educational Leadership

by

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2010
The Dissertation of Patricia A. Mahaffey is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

California State University, San Marcos

2010
DEDICATION

There were many people who supported my efforts along this journey. To my father, who kept asking how “my paper” was coming along. To my sister, Lynn, thank you for the countless phone calls, your unwavering encouragement and your love. To my husband, Brett, for the nights, weekends you gave up and the many trips we didn’t take. Your continued support of me in this process has meant everything. I cannot adequately find the words to express what you both mean to me in my life.

Finally, to my mother, who left this world much too soon. Thank you for instilling in me the persistence to achieve my goals, a sense of humor to handle difficult moments and the ability to maintain perspective. You were with me each step of the way.
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Thank you.
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 Violations of academic integrity occur frequently throughout the nation’s colleges and universities. How this phenomenon is addressed differs among institutions with some proactively embedding a culture of integrity through curricular and co-curricular approaches and others addressing it superficially through mission statements and campus policies. The research focus on academic integrity has largely analyzed the problem quantitatively, primarily paying attention to student characteristics associated with academic dishonesty, the role of peer perception’s, the classroom environment, and
organizational factors influencing the institution’s culture of integrity. This multiple embedded case study explores the student perspective after an academic integrity violation has occurred by examining in what ways students accept responsibility for an integrity violation and ultimately derive a sense of meaning from their experience. Information derived from individual interviews, document analysis and survey data provide a critical vantage point that can serve to align an institution’s response to academic integrity violations more closely with a student developmental approach. Students varied in their response to assuming responsibility for a cheating incident with some students engaging in neutralizing behaviors but the majority of those students interviewed exhibited strong remorse and contrition. Subsequently, those students who marginalized the experience reported less overall meaning derived from the incident than those students who more readily assumed personal responsibility. The impact of a cheating incident for the majority of students resulted in a profound learning opportunity.
CHAPTER 1

Universities are often perceived as microcosms of our larger society such that trends happening nationally are often seen replicated on a smaller scale on college campuses throughout the nation. Well-known scandals including Enron, the sub-prime mortgage debacle, crooked politicians such as Randy “Duke” Cunningham, and widespread use of steroids in sports combine with a nearly toxic level of a “win at all costs” mentality that has long permeated our greater society (Callahan, 2004). It is paradoxical then, that while students themselves often perceive universities as places of a reprieve from the “real world”, occurring simultaneously within universities are the same crises of ethics and misplaced values that plague our larger society. Our colleges and universities are rightly focused on the intellectual development of our students and developing the leaders of tomorrow in a variety of disciplines. However, the development of intellectual capacity alone is insufficient for the complexity of the world in which we live. Students also need to co-develop appropriate character building skills and appropriate ethical and moral reasoning abilities that enable them to become positive, contributing community citizens (Callahan, 2005; Swaner, 2004).

Academic integrity is a university value that directly connects to the university’s core mission, though institutions vary to the extent in which they communicate and embed this value in their culture. An increasing deviance from this value of integrity has developed over the last twenty years that has strengthened with the escalating use of the Internet (Szabo & Underwood, 2004). Recent statistics identify cheating on college campuses to be as high as two-thirds of the student population with some identifying it as
an epidemic (Angell, 2006; Hughes & McCabe 2006; McCabe, 2007; McCabe &
Trevino, 1997; Nathanson, Paulhus & Williams, 2006; Whitley, 1998;). Influencing this
trend is the fact that nearly 40% of faculty fail to report incidences of academic
dishonesty (McCabe, 2007). Some research has asserted that the problem of cheating is
surfacing as early as middle school with roughly 1/3 of middle school and high school
students indicating they would be willing to cheat if it increased their chance of attending
college (Finn & Frone, 2006; Levy & Rakovski, 2006).

When the value of academic integrity is compromised, it deceives not just the
college or university but those outside the institution who rely on the knowledge and
integrity of its graduates as well as the research produced by the institution. Institutions
of higher learning have long been held in society’s eye as having “…an essential role to
play in the creation of a learning society, including the development of citizenship
behaviours.” (Hughes & McCabe, 2006, p 51). The failure of the institution to stem
academically dishonest behaviors plays an influential role in fostering a culture where
cheating occurs which potentially may lead to more serious forms of dishonesty in the

Study Rationale

The perception within many colleges and universities that cheating is inextricably
tied to an inherent character flaw necessitating primarily punitive action frames the issue
most predominately as a student problem. In contrast to this punitive approach is a re-
positioning of academic integrity violations into the larger context of a student’s
developmental process. The work of Kibler (1993) and more recently, Money (2008) have confirmed that a student developmental approach is largely under-utilized on college campuses in addressing violations of academic integrity. Approaching integrity violations through a student developmental lens can initiate and enhance personal growth. This study adds to the limited, existing research which supports a student developmental approach towards the issue of academic dishonesty.

Institutions have an inherent responsibility to proactively assist in a student’s positive developmental growth as a holistic individual (Callahan, 2004). While many institutions proclaim that the development of moral and civic responsibility is a core part of its mission, too often it is mere rhetoric (Hersh & Schneider, 2005). The bell for institutions to more intentionally address the moral development of students is being rung by several national organizations such as the Templeton Foundation and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (Swaner, 2004). Students enter college during a period of profound personal transition, and as important as it is to prepare students intellectually, equally important is to prepare students to become personally and socially responsible leaders. Learning moments may occur when students engage in immoral actions and make immoral decisions. If we are unable to help students make sense of these experiences, we have in many regards failed them as educators. Confronting a violation of academic integrity can be one of the most profound learning experiences in a young person’s life. Indeed, it may also be an experience that scaffolds moral growth and development. The idea that moral growth may be tied to immoral choices supports
the assertion that providing opportunities for reflection and self analysis is a necessary component of any disciplinary program (Austin, Simpson & Reynen, 2005).

Students today are under a high degree of perceived pressure which often correlates with cheating behaviors (Anderman, 2007). While efforts at reducing the frequency of cheating behaviors is critical, equally important is helping students, once a transgression has occurred, make sense of that experience. Further, since it is unlikely that a student’s perceived pressure is limited to their undergraduate experience, helping students make meaning out of their behavioral choices through reflection and open dialogue can build moral capacity and the presence of mind to avoid potential immoral pitfalls in future graduate school and career experiences. Reducing the instances of academic dishonesty has to be an institutional imperative, supported by all members of the academic community and reflected through conduct policies and procedures. As illustrated in Figure 1., colleges and universities can proactively approach academic integrity by embedding a culture of integrity through mission statements, core values, and the organization of the institution. An example of this would be creating disciplinary processes and procedures that are aligned with an integrity culture and focusing on the development of the student when a transgression has occurred.
Currently, the research literature in academic dishonesty is saturated by survey designs yielding quantitative data regarding the frequency, types of cheating, and motivations for engaging in cheating behaviors primarily among college-aged students. These studies have been informative and confirm that the trend toward academically dishonest behaviors has increased; nevertheless, this focus in the literature obviates other significant perspectives on this pervasive problem. For instance, we know that students
cheat for a wide variety of reasons and cases are disparate in their level of severity (McCabe, 2007). Some cases involve students who engage in sloppy scholarship or opportunistic cheating such as copying during an exam. Some cases involve students who engage in more premeditated instances of cheating such as changing answers on an exam and returning to their professor requesting a re-grade or the student who takes another student’s paper from a previous class and substitutes their name turning the assignment in as their own work. The continuum of types of cheating is vast, with the reasons behind the behavior just as diverse.

However, something that is not covered explicitly in the literature is an understanding of what learning takes place when a student accepts responsibility for engaging in academically dishonest behaviors. If the statistics regarding cheating behavior are accurate, then we know that solving the problem of academic misconduct will likely require a multi-faceted approach that is focused both on the individual and the broader academic community. As an example, one preventative approach has examined how academic institutions embed the value of integrity, overlaying an organizational perspective onto the problem (Bertram Gallant & Drinan, 2006). This macro approach asserts that as institutions raise awareness regarding academic integrity a corresponding decline in the number of misconduct cases will also likely occur. With the focus on broad survey studies, missing in the literature is a more detailed analysis of student’s qualitative perceptions. This study will be a step toward filling this gap by assuming a micro view through the exploration of how students learn from an experience of academic cheating.
My Experience in Relation to the Study

My interest in academic dishonesty stems from my role and responsibility as Dean of Student Affairs at Stewart College at the university. In this capacity, I interface directly with faculty and work to resolve allegations of academic dishonesty with students. The perplexing nature of this problem has no simple solution and the root causes are complex. The situations I have encountered, and am involved with, are fascinating. As an example, I met with two students from the same class regarding two papers they each turned in that are nearly identical, with the exception of a few sentences, and with both at an utter loss for an explanation. Other situations involved high achieving students who due to pressure chose to take an exam for a friend who suffers from a serious eating disorder. Yet other situations might include students who panic during an exam and copy from their neighbors, or students who cut and paste large amounts of text from Internet sources and claim it as their own work. Each of these cases differs substantially from one another in such a way that understanding one doesn’t necessarily inform the other. This inherent complexity in understanding academic misconduct is a challenge for researchers and educational institutions that must employ a variety of strategies to reduce the prevalence of cheating on our college and university campuses.

My experience meeting with students for a wide range of academic dishonest behaviors shapes this study. The shame, guilt, self-disappointment, and fear are powerful emotions that exert influence over a student’s reflection upon their experience. It is a
powerful and critical developmental point for students, and understanding how students derive meaning from this experience is essential.

_Theoretical Foundation_

The theories connected to moral development, social cognition, decision theory, experiential learning, and resilience illuminate upon this study. At issue is the gap between a student’s perception of what is wrong and their corresponding behavior. While it seems that students understand right from wrong, their failure to self-regulate their moral behavior is of considerable concern and garners much attention in the literature of the field.

Most students say it is wrong to cheat. For example, the percentage of students answering yes to the question ‘is it wrong to cheat?’ has never been below 90%. This opinion contrasts sharply with the mean percentage of students who report having cheated in either high school or college or both (76%). (Davis, Grover, Becker & McGregor, 1992)

Lawrence Kohlberg, a giant in the field of moral research, centered much of his research around moral cognition and advanced three main levels (Pre-conventional, conventional, & post-conventional) of moral understanding (Blasi, 1980; Kohlberg, 1984). His work was extended by Rest who attended to the integration of moral thought, moral motivation, and moral action (Bergman, 2002, Derryberry & Thoma, Rest, Narvaez, Thoma & Bebeau, 2000). The theories around decision-making and Bandura’s social cognition combine to illuminate the decision to engage in academic integrity as a socially-constructed phenomenon. As complex as the research field is regarding the connection between moral development, thought, and action there are new arguments that
academic cheating is tied less to a moral issue but is rather more closely aligned with a social issue (Murdock & Stephens, 2007).

The college years are marked by one of the most active and complex developmental periods in a young person’s life. The early theory of Chickering (Evans, Forney & Guido-Dibrito, 1998) identifies the development of values and the congruence of behavior as key benchmarks of Vector Seven in his theory of the psychosocial development of students (Evans, et al., 1998). This level in his theory connects to Kohlberg’s moral development theory and Rest’s integration of moral thought. Building upon Kohlberg and Rest includes Kolb’s experiential learning model (Kolb, 1984), which provides a framework to study the role of self reflection in student development and growth. The role of shame and resilience are factors that also may directly influence in what ways a student reflects upon his or her academic integrity violation. These theories build upon each other in ways that deepen our understanding of this perplexing phenomenon.

Purpose of the Study

This study advances the idea that by approaching academic integrity from an intrinsic, qualitative student learning perspective, we can better understand this phenomenon and likely leverage change in a student’s future ethical behavior, a concern expressed throughout much of the literature. A theoretical foundation integrating moral development, social cognition, decision-making, experiential learning, responsibility
judgment and resilience illuminate this phenomenon and connects to the student developmental process.

*Study Design Overview*

Examining the remediation of students presents itself as an excellent opportunity for a multiple-case study design. Students who accept responsibility for engaging in academically dishonest behaviors face several consequences both academically and personally. This study explores the reflection and learning that occurs in the wake of these incidents or in other words, make meaning from the experience.

*Research questions:*

1) How do students perceive academic dishonesty individually and among their peers?

2) In the wake of accepting responsibility for academic cheating, in what ways does a student make meaning out of this experience?

Sub-Questions:

a) In what ways do students connect this experience of academic cheating with their broader life experience?

b) In what ways do students disclose to others?

c) How do students reflect on their own “ethical failure”?
Overview of Methodology

Students who accept responsibility for violating the University of California, San Diego Integrity of Scholarship are both administratively and academically sanctioned by the institution. Included in the sanctions is the requirement that students attend an Educational Integrity Seminar (Seminar) coordinated through the Academic Integrity Office. Students who have attended the Seminar are required to complete a pre-assessment questionnaire which includes a broad range of questions regarding the participant’s attitudes towards cheating and their own experiences. Students also must complete a reflective essay. Both the survey and essay were collected and analyzed. Survey data along with individual survey responses was analyzed. Students who have successfully completed the seminar were asked to participate in an individual interview. The interviews were conducted and the reflective essays were collected on a rolling basis and up until data saturation had been established. This occurred when no new themes were emerging in the data collection and ongoing analysis. Individual survey data was collected after the individual interviews had been conducted and subsequently compared to the aggregate survey data.

In accomplishing this study the counseling intervention method of motivational interviewing provided an orientation for conducting the interviews. Motivational interviewing has been used successfully in the past towards changing college students’ behavior in such areas as binge drinking (Berkowitz, 2004). The approach aims to increase the student’s own awareness regarding the risks and problems associated with continuing the behavior (Miller & Rollnick, 2002). Central to this interviewing method
is the ability to reframe and reflect back to the participant their understanding for further
clarification and to build personal awareness. Violations of ethical principles may at
times appear to a student as very easy or the only alternative. Motivational interviewing
is a non-judgmental approach that attempts to dissect the rationale and thinking behind
the behavior in order to lead towards permanent change.

*Study Significance*

This study is significant because it is among the first to study the phenomenon of
an academic integrity violation from an intrinsic, qualitative student centered approach.
The information derived from this study may be useful in developing policies and
programs alternatively aimed at prevention as well as developmentally appropriate
disciplinary responses. Past studies have focused on either clarifying the extent of
academic cheating through quantitative studies or approaching the problem from an
extrinsic perspective. This approach frames the issue of academic cheating as a student
developmental issue requiring a comparable reflective and educational approach as a
possible disciplinary sanction associated with an integrity violation.
CHAPTER 2

The research on academic cheating primarily originates from two disciplines, Education and Psychology. The literature utilizes the terms academic misconduct, academic integrity violations, academic cheating, academic dishonesty, and cheating to address this phenomenon, and thus these terms are used interchangeably in this paper. A large portion of the research literature frames the issue of academic integrity as either a student problem or a faculty problem and to a smaller extent, as an institutional problem. In fact, the majority of research in the field analyzes the behaviors associated with cheating, attitudes towards cheating, and perceptions of undergraduate students about various forms of academic cheating. Research in the field of Psychology has principally centered on dissecting what motivates students to cheat couched largely in moral developmental theories such as Lawrence Kohlberg’s Theory of Moral Development (1984), James Rest’s Neo Kohlbergian Theory (2000) and the use of instruments such as the Ethical Position Questionnaire and the Defining Issues Test (Etter, Cramer & Finn, 2006).

What factors contribute to the decision to engage in academic dishonesty is of interest not only to academia but corporate America as well. Consideration is also given to the role of a student’s academic self-efficacy on academic integrity, perceived peer norms, and other individual characteristics including religion, course major, age, and gender (Allmon, Page & Roberts, 2000; Buckley, Weise & Harvey, 1998; Crown & Spiller, 1998; Jordan, 2001; Lambert, Hogan & Barton, 2003; McCabe & Trevino, 1997;
McCabe, Trevino & Butterfield, 2001; McCabe, Trevino & Butterfield, 2002; Murdock & Anderman, 2006). Situational characteristics have also been widely studied and include the perception of the severity of sanctions and the classroom environment (Bennet, 2005; Crown & Spiller, 1998; Vandehey, Diekhoff & LaBeff, 2007). Another thread of contextual studies analyzes the influence of honor codes in institutions and cases of academic dishonesty (McCabe & Trevino, 1993; McCabe et al., 2002). Schools with strict honor codes require students to report other students observed to be cheating. Schools with modified honor codes eliminate this peer reporting requirement. Understanding the effects of both to these approaches is of interest to many researchers in the field.

Another section of the literature focuses on evaluating and comparing incidents of academic misconduct between specific disciplines, such as business and engineering. This focus in the literature has reported a slight increase in cheating among students majoring in business (Crown & Spiller, 1998, Iver & Eastman, 2006 & McCabe, Trevino & Butterfield, 2002).

Cultural influences among students have been lightly covered within the body of literature. Predominately, the literature has examined in what ways cheating is a Western cultural phenomenon or a consistent value across cultures. The results in several studies reflected an elevated incidence of cheating among U.S. students and a stronger competitive academic environment in the U.S. (Burns & Davis, 1998; Kuehn & Others, 1990). One of the more provocative studies in this area of the literature includes a focus on the discourse surrounding the concept of plagiarism. Leask (2006) asserts that
plagiarism discourse and different cultures originate from a predominately Western worldview. This view stresses that plagiarists are framed as either culturally-inferior learners or desperate learners whose only chance of survival in the university is to steal another’s concepts or ideas. Asian educational systems are often equated to rote learning, and within the Western educational community the view exists that Asian learners are not deep thinkers, as that can only be cultivated through critical thinking skills. It follows, then, the assumption that Asian students plagiarize because they can’t think or write critically. Leask maintains that plagiarism is a culturally constructed concept and it is incumbent upon Western educational institutions to view international students not as deficient learners but rather as competent learners in a new environment. Finally, burgeoning recently in the literature is a focus on students who choose not to cheat and their associated personal characteristics (Stearns, 2007).

This drift in the literature towards individual student characteristics and situational factors obviates some important organizational perspectives focusing on the institutions’ responsibility to promote academic integrity as well as monitoring and confronting broad issues of academic integrity, inclusive of graduate and faculty-produced research. Further, little attention has been paid in the research literature to either the educational remediation of students found responsible for cheating or an examination of the reasons and trends associated with recidivism. The former is explored in the present study. To capture the diverse ways in which the issue of academic integrity has been studied, this chapter establishes a solid understanding of student trends and behaviors associated with academic cheating. The latter part of this chapter will broaden
the scope of the problem to include organizational theory, faculty perspectives, and the influence of peer norming. Concluding this chapter will be an exploration of moral cognition through theories by Kohlberg (1984) and Rest (1986), moral action as explained in Bandura’s (2002) Social Cognitive Theory, and Blasi’s (1980) Theory of the Self, Rettinger’s (2007) Decision Theory as applied to academic cheating, Kolb’s (1984) Experiential Learning Theory, the interplay of shame and resilience on a student’s self development, and the role of responsibility judgment in Weiner’s (1995) Attribution Theory. All these theories combine to scaffold this study and explicate the findings.

Literature Search Strategy

Many authors have identified the problem of academic dishonesty as primarily a Western cultural phenomenon (Hughes & McCabe, 2006 & Leask, 2006). Because there appears to be significant differences between those cultures with a socially constructed educational environment versus a more individualistic educational approach, studies were restricted to predominately English-speaking Western countries. Since academic integrity pivots on an ever-changing student culture and population, studies older than 20 years were not included in this review. Included in this review of the literature are those studies that focused on the association of particular student characteristics with academic dishonesty for example, contextual influences on cheating behavior, organizational perspectives, faculty perceptions, and the theories of social cognition, moral decision-making, and student development.
Prevalence of the Problem

The research has demonstrated that there is an established problem of academic dishonesty that begins during elementary and secondary schools and extends into the tenure of a student in higher education (Levy & Rakovski, 2006 & McCabe, 2007). The problem has been persistent, and while many authors have argued that academic dishonesty has increased, some caution must be exercised, as how cheating has been defined and how the problem has been examined vary widely throughout the literature. These challenges in the research field are further addressed under methodological considerations. Nonetheless, the Center for Academic Integrity, housed at Clemson University, in conjunction with Donald McCabe, has produced the broadest and most consistent analysis of academic dishonesty statistics involving over 118 schools within the U.S. and Canada. In recent years, this broad survey research has reported a consistent level of academic dishonesty with slight decreases in some dishonest behaviors and slight increases in other areas, most notably among Internet use and plagiarism. In total, the percentage of students who have admitted to engaging in cheating behaviors both in writing and exams is as high as 70% of the total participants. Obviously of great concern to institutions of higher education is understanding why this is occurring and what are successful strategies and approaches to curbing and deterring this behavior on campus. This chapter explores the research to the extent it has engaged the topic from a student and situational perspective. Specifically, this paper examines student attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions towards cheating and the contextual factors influencing the behavior.
Ambiguity in Defining Academic Misconduct

One of the problems that has emerged in the literature is the inconsistent definition of what constitutes academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty can range from minor, sloppy scholarship such as failing to correctly cite a source to more egregious forms of academic misconduct, including the use of unauthorized aides during an exam, or purchasing a paper. There seems to be little ambiguity among faculty and students regarding the more egregious forms of academic misconduct (Burrus et al., 2002). With respect to minor forms of academic misconduct, there is a great deal of uncertainty (Higbee & Thomas, 2002). For instance, on homework assignments a professor may instruct students that they can work together but must write their assignments individually without any help. Students often do not define this collaboration as cheating. Burrus et al. summed up the issue of ambiguity best: “societal laws are usually explicit whereas there is often a degree of ambiguity concerning the behaviors that are considered student cheating.” (p. 4). This uncertainty can pose challenges in self-reported surveys that do not explicitly state in the beginning the definition of academic dishonesty (Burrus et al.). Deficient throughout the literature seems to be a widely accepted definition of what constitutes academic dishonesty.

In addition to an unclear and inconsistently applied definition of cheating is the absence of many studies that distinguish between major and minor forms of academic dishonesty. Bennett (2005) and Passow, Mayhew, Finelli, Harding & Carpenter (2006) looked at minor and major plagiarism and cheating on homework versus cheating on
exams, respectively. Their results differed depending on the type of cheating presented in the survey, reaffirming that how academic dishonesty is defined matters.

**Methodological Considerations**

Prior to examining the intrinsic variables, personal characteristics, and contextual influences associated with academic dishonesty, it may be helpful to understand some of the challenges in methodology connected with this area of research. One of the most ironic aspects of studying academic dishonesty includes the approach of asking students to be honest in reporting their own dishonest behaviors. Depending on how and when this question is asked influences to what degree this consideration affects the research. For example, if the study is an in-class survey, then asking students to report out dishonest behaviors inclusive of that class may discourage students from reporting honestly (Crown & Spiller, 1998).

The predominant methodological approach to studying academic misconduct has been through survey design research. This application of survey research to academic misconduct is appropriate when studying trends over time, attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of a specific population (Cresswell, 2005). Academic dishonesty surveys have been administered frequently in class and through the Internet. On-line surveys have recently come under scrutiny as their response rate has been reportedly lower than those surveys administered in class. This phenomenon is mostly attributed to the suspicion students hold over the anonymity of the survey if their email address is connected in some way or their computer IP address can be associated with their survey (McCabe,
Interestingly, there exists only a small number of experimental studies and few studies that include control groups that have been found in the literature. As a result of not including more control groups in studies, internal validity has been questioned (Crown & Spiller, 1998). The approach of including more control groups could assist in identifying any causal relationships between attitudes and cheating behaviors. Largely this void in the literature may be due to the inherent difficulty in setting up this particular design, controlling for external variables, and gaining institutional review board approval. Consequently, much of the literature can only identify relationships that exist between attitudes, perceptions, and self reported behavior (Crown & Spiller, 1998).

Tolerated in the research has been the lumping together of several distinct cheating behaviors ranging in severity and identifying them all together as academic misconduct. This has been problematic because students may not perceive a particular behavior as cheating - for example, working together with other students on an assignment when the instructor asks for individual work. We see often in the literature that these behaviors are combined to measure frequency of misconduct (Burrus et al., 2002; Whitley, 1998 & Passow et al., 2006). Studies that clearly define academic dishonesty, separating the constructs and their frequency provide a more accurate portrayal of cheating trends.

Another complication in studies that have examined cheating has been the inconsistent use of timeframes applied to past cheating behaviors. Some studies ask students to report past behaviors for the current term, some ask students to self-report for the past year; and some studies ask students to simply self-report for the entirety of the
student’s academic life (McCabe, 2007). Additionally, a few studies ask about a student’s attitude towards cheating and neglect actual behavior. These data blend and hold implications for the wide variance in the rates and persistence of cheating reported in the literature.

Still another limitation in the validity of existing survey research has been that students appear to be more reluctant to self-report egregious acts of academic dishonesty as opposed to less serious or minor integrity infractions (Bertram Gallant, 2008).

Finally, the literature is rife with scholars who have contributed one study to the field of research and moved on to other areas of study. Perhaps the motivation stems from a personal experience with academic misconduct. These studies complicate the research as they often use an inconsistent definition of academic dishonesty, an inconsistent method of measuring the behavior (e.g. dishonesty in a term vs. over the student’s tenure) and, further, study only one institution. While the results from these studies are difficult to generalize to the larger population they do contribute because they serve to push the research field in different directions (McCabe, et al., 2001).

Intrinsic Variables and Personal Characteristics

A large body of the research literature has been dedicated to correlating individual variables and personal characteristics to academic dishonesty. These studies are intended to identify the critical variables that may serve as predictors of academic dishonest behaviors. There has been a consistent effort throughout the field of research toward examining these variables, though there remain some discrepancies in the conclusions.
that can be drawn largely due to methodological concerns. Of significance is whether the study examines the variables in the context of attitudes towards cheating or the self-reporting of actual cheating behavior. Both approaches in self-reporting have been used in the research.

**Gender.** The role that gender plays is a personal characteristic that has been examined in several studies (Allmon et al., 2000; Buckley et al., 1998; Lambert et al., 2003; McCabe & Trevino, 1997; McCabe et al., 2002; Pino & Smith, 2003; Whitley, 1998; Whitley, Nelson, & Jones, 1999). Pino and Smith, McCabe and Trevino, Szabo and Underwood (2004) and Whitley all found males more likely to report having engaged previously in academic misconduct. Allmon, et al and Buckley et al., found that women were more likely to hold higher ethical standards than their male counterparts. However, Jordan (2001), Lambert, et al., McCabe et al., (2001), and Whitley, et al. found little significant difference between the student’s gender and actual cheating behaviors. Throughout these latter four studies the two genders were similar in actual cheating behaviors. Reinforcing this trend is McCabe (2007) who reported that women appear to be engaging in academic misconduct at similar rates to men. An explanation that has been advanced to explain this difference is that many women may hold higher-valued attitudes towards cheating but in actuality their behavior is similar. This trend of women catching up with men in the arena of cheating also mirrors the increase of women enrolling in higher education and into traditionally male-dominated majors (Whitley).

**Age.** Throughout the literature, attention has been paid to the variable of age and how it may discriminate between cheaters and non-cheaters. Most studies hypothesize
that older students tend to engage less in cheating behaviors compared to younger students (Allmon, et al., 2000; Lambert et al., 2003; McCabe & Trevino, 1997; Pino & Smith, 2003; Vandehey et al., 2007 and Whitley, 1998). This factor has received some mixed responses, though generally, it is supported in the literature. One reason for the discordance may depend on the institution where the study is conducted. Some colleges and universities include a large non-traditional and older population of students which would result in a wider range of ages among students. Alternatively, many institutions yield a more traditionally-aged student population resulting in a limited range in student ages. Overall, according to research by McCabe & Trevino and Whitley, both studies being multi-campus investigations, age does play a role in determining who cheats, with older students cheating less than younger students. Because students mature and develop at differing rates, this trend within the literature makes sense and is confirmed through student development theory.

**Academic Achievement.** Another consistent variable studied throughout the literature has been the prevalence of cheating among low-achieving students. The hypothesis has been that students who perform poorly academically will engage in cheating behaviors more than students who show strong academic performance. With the exception of a few studies such as Buckley et al. (1998) and Burrus et al. (2007), students who are higher-achieving tend to engage less in academic dishonest behaviors (Finn & Frone, 2004; McCabe et al., 2001; McCabe & Trevino, 1997; Nathanson et al., 2006; Pino & Smith, 2003 and Whitley, 1998). A complicating factor in analyzing this particular variable is how the authors defined a “low” G.P.A., which seemed to be
inconsistent throughout the literature. Further complicating matters is the difficulty in discriminating throughout the research regarding an individual’s academic self-efficacy vs. lack of appropriate study skills. McCabe (2007) recently reported that while the lower-and-higher achieving students seem to comprise a majority of the cheaters, students in the middle are starting to catch up with their lower-achieving counterparts. This is an emergent phenomenon that might best be explained by the increase in intensity and pressure students at all levels experience with regards to academic achievement. As more students proceed to graduate school after college, competition into graduate programs has become more intense, which may explain why students at any achievement level may be motivated to engage in academic misconduct.

**Athletes and Engagement in Co-Curricular Life including Greek Organizations.**

It appears that much of the research conducted found that students who participate in athletics and are involved in fraternities and sororities tend to cheat at a higher rate than students not involved in these activities (Burrus, et al., 2007; Lambert, et al., 2003; McCabe & Trevino, 1997; Pino & Smith, 2003; Vandehey, et al., 2007 and Whitley, 1998). Mere involvement in co-curricular activities has been widely studied; however, discerning whether a student’s involvement in a co-curricular pursuit is affecting their ability to manage their time appropriately has not been clearly examined. Thus, it is unclear whether campus involvement is a correlating factor with cheating, with or without the development of adequate time-management skills. Over involvement on campus may lead to poor time management skills and consequently a lack of preparedness academically. Moreover, Burrus et al., hypothesized that a reason for
cheating may be associated with a peer group such as a fraternity or baseball team where cheating is internally viewed as normative behavior and/or loyalty to a peer group is high.

**Course Major.** Some studies in the literature have focused on academic dishonesty by academic major. Not only has there been an effort to discern academic dishonesty by major but some studies have attempted to predict unethical workplace behaviors based on attitudes towards cheating or self-reported cheating behaviors (Allmon et al., 2000 & Nonis & Swift, 2001). The theory holds that if students engage in unethical behaviors in college that this will continue into their professional careers. Business schools have been interested in evaluating this trend as society holds business executives in the lowest regard when it comes to ethical behavior (Nonis & Swift). The results of these studies have generally been mixed, with one study that found non-business students are just as likely to engage in cheating behaviors as business students (Iyer & Eastman, 2006). However, the majority of studies in this thread of the literature have found a higher incidence of cheating behaviors among business, engineering, and communication majors compared to students in the social and hard sciences (Crown & Spiller, 1998; McCabe, 2007 & Passow et al., 2006).

**Culture and Religion.** Evaluating academic integrity through a cultural lens holds significance for educators. The research literature reveals little difference between cheating behaviors or perceptions of cheating based only on ethnicity within U.S. institutions (Sutton & Huba, 1995). However, the research does support that the cultural and educational system within which a student is oriented is a significant factor in forming a perspective regarding what constitutes academic dishonesty (Leask, 2006).
Understanding the designation of many behaviors, such as plagiarism or unauthorized collaboration, as academic dishonesty is a definition that may be largely exclusive to a Western worldview. This holds serious implications for American universities whose student enrollment is increasingly being diversified through visiting scholars from other countries and first-generation students pursuing higher education.

Another personal characteristic which has been under-investigated by researchers has been the association of students with strong religious beliefs, and/or religious participation and incidents of academic dishonesty. Sutton & Huba (1995) found that students who reported a high level of religious participation were more likely to believe that cheating is never justified as compared to students who reported low levels of religious participation. However, Whitley (1998) and Hughes and McCabe (2006) both found insignificant correlations between cheating and religious participation. Here, again, personal variables are inconsistently correlated.

Cost/Benefit Analysis. Some studies, such as Murdock and Anderman (2006), analyze cheating as a decision made by the student who carefully weighs the benefits and the costs associated with the cheating behavior. Their theory asserts that, “When the costs outweigh the perceived gain, the behavior is less likely to occur.” (p. 136). Murdock and Anderman’s study was unique in that it investigated the relationship between several personality variables and various motivational theories including achievement goal theory. They concluded that a student’s propensity to engage in academic dishonesty is highest when the student has a low perception of their ability and a low perceived chance of getting caught. Buckley, et al. (1998) found that if students
perceived a zero chance of getting caught that a little over 75% of their respondents would engage in unethical classroom behavior. When this perception was evaluated in the research field the findings seemed to be consistent; the perceived likelihood of getting caught is correlated with lower levels of academic dishonesty (McCabe, et al., 2001; McCabe & Trevino, 1993; Szabo & Underwood, 2004).

Previous Engagement in Academically-Dishonest Behaviors. Emerging as a strong predictor of future cheating behaviors in this literature includes incidents of past engagement in academic misconduct. The research indicates that students in high school are engaging in cheating behaviors at alarmingly high rates (McCabe, et al., 2001; McCabe, 2007 & Murdock & Anderman, 2006). Many of the survey studies looked at the correlation between students who admitted to cheating in high school and cheating behaviors in college. Lambert, et al. (2003) and Whitley (1998) both found a positive relationship between students who cheated in high school and those students who continued that behavior while in college.

Locus of Control, Motivation, and Self-Efficacy. Pushing the literature field towards an internal direction includes those studies that focus on self-efficacy theory, locus of control theories and intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivating factors. Some studies have evaluated a student’s perceived academic self-efficacy and its relationship to cheating. Self-efficacy is defined as a student’s perception of their own future academic ability. Murdock and Anderman’s (2006) research was framed by goal achievement theory in an effort to evaluate a student’s level of motivation as either intrinsic (i.e., genuine desire to learn) or extrinsic (i.e., parental approval). In a study by Pino and Smith (2003) a
student’s “academic ethic” was evaluated in relation to cheating behaviors (p. 491). A student with a high academic ethic would correspond to a high academic locus of control, strong study skills, and class attendance. In this particular survey the authors found that students with a high academic ethic were less likely to engage in cheating behaviors. Jordan’s (2001) study examined a student’s level of extrinsic motivation and found that those students who were extrinsically motivated had a higher engagement in cheating behavior. In yet another study by Bennett (2005), intrinsic motivation was examined from the angle of a student’s fear of failure which was positively associated with major forms of plagiarism. Finn and Frone (2004) studied a student’s sense of self-efficacy and found that variable in addition to a higher emphasis on grades also correlated strongly with cheating. All of these studies that focused on intrinsically related variables have predominately found that a fear of failure and lack of confidence are a potent combination when examining what can influence cheating behaviors. Likewise, those students who are motivated by extrinsic forces seem also to have a propensity to take short cuts academically.

Neutralizing Attitudes. Many students who do engage in academically-dishonest behaviors tend to justify their decisions much more frequently than students who do not engage in academic dishonesty (Jordan, 2001; Murdock & Anderman, 2006; Pulvers & Diekhoff, 1999). These attitudes towards rationalizing away cheating behaviors often are directed towards faculty and their peers, as well as the institution. These neutralizing attitudes range from perceptions that faculty are not concerned with the learning of the individual student; that their teaching is considered irrelevant to the class content; that the
content is too hard and thus unfair; the perception that their peers are cheating and so must they; and that if cheating did occur the faculty would fail to enforce institutional policy (Jordan; McCabe et al, 2001; Murdock & Anderman, and Pulvers & Diekhoff). Neutralizing attitudes remain a key difference between those students who cheat and those who choose not to cheat. In addition, a strong sense of self-worth and personal identity has been correlated strongly with students who choose not to cheat (Stearns, 2007). Thus, students who believe that cheating undermines their own perception of self tend to choose not to cheat.

Many of the individual characteristics and demographics discussed in the previous section are so interrelated that it is difficult to parse the data. Many of the individual variables are themselves not strong indicators of cheating behaviors. For example, involvement in co-curricular activities, such as leadership or involvement in athletics, does not represent a strong independent correlate to cheating. Combining these individual characteristics, however, with gender, age, an external locus of control and a neutralizing attitude may correlate more intensely with engaging in dishonest behaviors. In other words, it is important to not only know the correlation of the variable, but also the effect size. Researchers studying personal characteristics must therefore be cautious when correlating academic dishonesty due to the inherent complexity of the problem. Further, this thread in the literature does little to help administrators deal effectively with the problem of cheating on campus as these factors are largely out of administrators’ sphere of control, a topic of special concern for my proposed study.
**Contextual Factors**

While correlating individual characteristics with cheating behaviors has been helpful in understanding the relationship between students who engage in academic misconduct, this approach lacks the capacity to exert influence over student’s behavior. The research that has centered on contextual factors, such as the employment of an honor code, peer perceptions of the likelihood of getting caught, the severity of sanctions, and classroom environments combine to build an environment that can discourage cheating behaviors.

*Honor Code v. Non-Honor Code Environments.* Generally speaking, honor codes are pledges that students sign in which they agree to abide by appropriate standards of academic behavior. Some institutions utilize a pledge that all students must sign while others have students sign a specific pledge related to a specific program, test, or major writing assignment. Institutions also vary in the way honor codes are administered, with faculty being responsible for the administration of the code versus student honor councils or the administration. Many institutions with honor code systems require students to report other students who are observed cheating. Relatively new approaches include a modified honor code used at some schools where this “rat clause” is eliminated (McCabe, 2007). Still some honor codes systems like the one in use at the University of Virginia are connected with severe administrative penalties such as dismissal if a student is found responsible for any violation of the honor code.

Honor code environments have long been held as one solution to the problem of academic dishonesty although the literature has been mixed in reaching agreement with
this determination. McCabe and Trevino (1993) and McCabe et al. (2002) found that schools with honor codes have slightly lower reported incidents of academic dishonesty. Thus, it appears there are aspects of academic honor codes that contribute to a culture of integrity including creating awareness among students regarding academic integrity policies and the associated high likelihood of getting caught. In some studies, such as Vandehey et al. (2007) where the researchers studied the same institution over time, and before and after an honor code was introduced, they found the differences among incidences of academic dishonesty were largely unaffected under the honor code environment. According to McCabe and Trevino, because honor codes are implemented differently at institutions, there are challenges associated when comparing different honor systems. For instance, the institution studied in Vandehey et al. had only recently established an honor code, hence it may have been too early to have sufficiently saturated the campus environment.

One of the most powerful tenets of honor code systems may be that the sole responsibility for monitoring academic integrity shifts from the administration and faculty onto the students. Some of the strongest honor code systems are those developed from the ground up in which students are involved at all levels of the honor system. McCabe, et al. (1999) found: “Most code students see themselves as part of a moral community that offers significant trust and freedom and has corresponding rules and expectations that must be honored to preserve that trust and freedom” (p. 222). In this type of an environment, academic integrity is an embedded value in the institution in such a way that every member has a role to play.
*Peer Perceptions.* Intertwined with honor code environments are the perceptions of peers regarding cheating behavior. Students arrive at college having already observed others cheating or having been involved in cheating during high school (McCabe et al., 2001 & McCabe, 2007). Thus a student’s experience when they arrive at college can have a large effect on their decision to engage in cheating behavior and in their decision to report students observed cheating. For example, if they observe upper-class students engaging in cheating behaviors or perceive there is little enforcement of the rules pertaining to academic integrity, there is a greater likelihood that they will not report and, in addition, may also choose to engage in academically dishonest behaviors (McCabe et al., 2002; Simon, Carr, McCullough, Morgan, Oleson & Ressel, 2004). Student perceptions of peer cheating behavior has been increasingly studied, with Jordan (2001) and Hard, Conway and Moran’s (2006) studies being two that find clear associations between students’ perceptions of peer behavior and the likelihood to self-report having engaged in academic dishonesty. In Jordan’s (2001) study, cheaters tended to overestimate peer cheating behavior at higher rates than non-cheaters.

Repeatedly emerging in later literature is the assertion that the most significant factors related to a student’s decision to engage in academic misconduct include their perceptions of peer behavior (Crown & Spiller, 1998; Hard, et al., 2006; Hughes & McCabe, 2006; McCabe et al., 2002). In other words, students who perceive that their peers are engaging in dishonest behaviors in an effort to achieve may themselves feel that in order to keep up academically they must also be willing to engage in academically
dishonest behavior. This finding, mixed with an overestimation of cheating behaviors among students, is a potent combination in a competitive academic environment.

McCabe and Trevino (1993) suggest:

The perception of peers’ behavior was the most influential contextual variable, suggesting that social learning theory may be particularly useful for understanding academic dishonesty behavior among college students. The strong influence of peers’ behavior may suggest that academic dishonesty not only is learned from observing the behavior of peers, but that the peers’ behavior provides a kind of normative support for cheating. ….Thus, cheating may come to be viewed as an acceptable way of getting and staying ahead. (p. 533)

Likelihood of Getting Caught and Severity of Penalties. Associated with peer perceptions of cheating as a deterrent against future cheating behavior is the perception connected with the likelihood of getting caught and the severity of the penalties. Interestingly, this positive association occurred more frequently in honor code environments (McCabe, et al., 2002; Crown & Spiller 1998). A reason for this may be the level of awareness towards academic integrity that is associated with honor code environments, as well as the risk that a peer may report observed cheating behavior. Schools that clearly communicate the penalties and environments in which students perceive a likelihood of getting caught is usually connected to lower incidents of academic dishonesty.

Classroom Interventions. The perception of getting caught has a lot to do with the classroom environment and how faculty frames the issue of academic integrity in their classes. Pulvers and Diekhoff (1999) found a clear association between small class size and greater personalization with lower incidents of academic misconduct. Cheaters
in large classes have a greater tendency to engage in neutralizing attitudes claiming
distance and neglect on the part of the instructor (Pulvers & Diekhoff). In competitive
academic environments, the pressure to succeed may be so great that one of the most
effective approaches to managing cheating is through the classroom environment

Some of the ways faculty address dishonesty is verbally in their class and written
in their syllabi. Professors may also take environmental precautions such as spacing
students during tests, walking around the classroom, providing different versions of
exams, using plagiarism detection software as an educational tool, and clearly articulating
assignment expectations. These proactive actions on the part of faculty are some of the
ways professors can deter cheating behaviors and send a message that academic integrity
is an institutional value.

Faculty Perceptions. Compared to research conducted on students, faculty beliefs
and attitudes towards academic cheating have been studied minimally. Primarily, the
focus has been on faculty perceptions regarding the extent of cheating, how faculty define
cheating and reasons for failing to report cases of academic dishonesty.

Students are often criticized for failing to report other students observed to be
cheating. However, it turns out this failure in reporting is not the exclusive province of
students. In fact, about 40% of faculty fail to report cases of academic misconduct
(McCabe, 2007). The reasons faculty fail to report ranges widely and most notably
include a lack of confidence in the administrative process, uncertainty regarding the
elements of evidence or even ambiguity about the behavior constituting dishonesty (Schmelkin, Kaufman, & Liebling, 2001). Some faculty fail to report because of a disagreement with the process, the perception that sanctions are too severe and lack an educational focus, fear of litigation and/or retaliation, and the fear that the charge, if brought forward, could be overturned by a hearing panel (Schmelkin et al., 2001).

Higbee and Thomas (2002) examined how both faculty and students define which behaviors constitute cheating. Central to their findings was a disparity between the behaviors faculty defined as dishonest and those behaviors that students defined as dishonest. There exists consistency and clarity regarding the obviously dishonest behaviors such as copying from another student during an exam, changing lab results, or turning in a paper written by someone else. But other more ambiguous behaviors are less agreed upon. Both faculty and student differed on their labeling behaviors as cheating in such areas as turning in the same paper twice and collaborating with students on an out-of-class assignment (Higbee & Thomas, 2002). The research in this area indicates a need for greater understanding of what constitutes cheating as well as clear communication on the part of faculty regarding class expectations and policies.

Although there is ambiguity regarding what types of behaviors constitute cheating, interestingly, both faculty and students overestimate the frequency of cheating (Hard, Conway & Moran, 2006). Supporting this phenomenon for students is Social Norms Theory (Berkowitz, 2004) which posits the tendency of people to follow perceived normative behaviors. Subsequently there is a connection and a potential that perceiving a higher frequency of behaviors will lead to an increase in that behavior (Hard
et al., 2006). The relevance to faculty is how their beliefs about the frequency of academic dishonesty relate to their reporting cases of cheating and employing methods to deter cheating. The research conducted by Hard et al. (2006) found that regardless of over-estimating or under-estimating, faculty typically do not challenge student dishonesty. While their perceptions may have little to do with reporting cases of student dishonesty, their knowledge of institutional policies and trust in the administration does seem to bear some influence on reporting behaviors. Simon et al. (2003) found that faculty who are “more trusting” in the university have a greater likelihood of reporting cases of academic dishonesty. Conversely, faculty who distrust the administration will be more likely to handle cases of academic dishonesty on their own.

Organizational Perspectives

Essential to a solid understanding of academic dishonesty is an understanding of the organizational influences exerted over the phenomenon of academic dishonesty. Thus far the approach to academic dishonesty in the research literature has largely been focused on an individual level, either students or faculty. Building upon this micro approach is extending the perspective on academic dishonesty to include organizational, institutional, and societal influences (Bertram Gallant, 2008). This macro approach is infrequently discussed but recent research is applying organizational theory to address issues of academic integrity.
Kibler (1993) followed by Whitley and Keith-Speigel (2001) were among earlier efforts to reposition academic dishonesty as an institutional issue requiring a student development framework and an embedded culture of integrity. As Kibler (1993) notes,

Prevention must begin at the institutional level. Colleges and universities must establish an environment that promotes a sense of responsibility and a general sense of morality, values, and ethics in order to actually educate students about the moral and ethical issues involved in cheating. (p.10).

Institutions of higher education, however, possess an inherent organizational challenge. Per Simon et al. (2003), the structure within colleges and universities reflects a “loosely coupled organization” with the realms of administration and faculty often working alternatively separately and interdependently (p. 194). This type of decentralized structure can undermine a university’s ability to coordinate and provide a unified response to important institutional issues. Academic dishonesty is a complex, serious institutional issue affecting many parts of the organization and indeed the reputation of the academy. There exists a disconnection between many universities stated commitment to eliminating academic dishonesty and the institutions actual practice. In an effort towards developing an institutional theory to address issues of academic integrity, Bertram Gallant and Drinan (2006) conducted a study surveying 352 universities across the country yielding a response rate of 43%. The results indicated that the majority of the respondent institutions are committed to the enforcement of academic integrity standards and have in place policies to address breaches of academic honesty. However, those same institutions lacked attention to the education of the campus community and towards the development of academic integrity as an institutional value.
Bertram Gallant (2008) provides a practical dual view of post-secondary institutions’ approaches to dealing with issue of academic integrity. The two main organizational approaches that dominate the literature include a “rule compliance strategy” and an “integrity strategy” (p. 34). In the former, an institution’s attention is judicially based, centered on the behavior of students, enforcement of rules, and classroom interventions that prevent dishonest behavior. The other strategy includes an approach couched in an understanding that student behavior is developmentally represented and the institution has an inherent responsibility to promote a culture of integrity through education and awareness that permeates the entire campus community. Part of an integrity culture includes the realization that students can learn from mistakes and ultimately benefit from understanding poor choices.

Theoretical Connections

Several theories are presented in order to help frame this complex, multi-faceted phenomenon. Moral theories inform a background understanding of the phenomenon of academic cheating through a largely moral cognitive lens. Emergent in the literature regarding academic dishonesty and theories of morality is the consideration that moral theory is less involved with the decision to cheat than those theories that include social cognitive influences and variables, such as Bandura’s (2002) Social Cognitive theory (Derrybery & Thoma, 2005; Murdock & Stephens, 2007). A theory addressing the deliberative nature of academic dishonesty includes decision theory and more specifically prospect theory which applies a value to a perceived loss or gain. The theories connected to resilience include Frederickson’s (1998) Broaden and Build Theory and Van Vliet’s
(2008) theory surrounding shame and resilience. Both of these theories may deepen our understanding of how students perceive their experience with academic dishonesty. Kolb’s (1984) theory pertaining to the experience of learning as a process and tied to personal transformation illuminates the importance of reflection in the facilitation of growth and development. Finally, Bernard Weiner’s (1995) Attribution Theory provides a context for understanding the circumstances and influences upon a person accepting responsibility for a negative event.

Kohlberg’s Theory of Moral Development and Rest’s Four Component Model. Lawrence Kohlberg’s Moral Development Theory (Kohlberg, 1984) and James Rest’s Four Component Decision Making Model (Rest, 1986), fall largely within the cognitive context. Kohlberg’s theory is inclusive of three levels and focuses predominately on moral obligations, rules, and rights. His theory is also process-oriented and sequential, requiring one stage to be completed before a person can enter the next stage (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004). Kohlberg’s theory is conceptualized as three levels and six separate stages. The first level is pre-conventional morality, and the first stage is *obedience and punishment* characterized by an avoidance of punishment. The second stage is *relative hedonism* characterized by right action being the choice to satisfy one’s own needs and, when it serves a purpose, the needs of others. The second level is the conventional level where the orientation to moral decisions shifts to include relationships with others. Stage three is *interpersonal concordance* or as it is commonly referred to, the good girl/good boy orientation, characterized by an interest in pleasing others. The fourth stage is *maintenance of social order* and is oriented towards authority and rules for their own
sake. The final level is post-conventional in which moral reasoning intersects with an individual’s deliberation and abstract thought. The fifth stage is identified as the social contract characterized by action consistent with socially agreed upon rights and standards. The final stage is universal principles characterized by an adherence to self-chosen ethical principles that are universally ethical and just (Lapsley, 2006; Baldizan, 2008).

James Rest’s theory on moral development builds from Kohlberg’s theory and includes four components or “schemas” for moral development, which are not sequential. Rather, people move through these schemas in either direction dependent upon a variety of variables and situations (Rest, Narvaez, Thoma & Bebeau, 2000). The four components to his theory include: moral sensitivity which is the identification of a moral dilemma; moral reasoning which is reviewing all available options; moral choosing which is deciding on a direction; and moral action which is the behavior.

Blasi’s Theory of the Self. Rest’s theory helps us clarify the actual decision to act. Augusto Blasi’s Theory of the Self moves us away from conceptual thinking to a more practically grounded theory. Blasi argued that the highest degree of moral integration occurs when a person’s sense of identity is connected to or unified with their own moral self understanding. The self model includes three components: Moral self which is one’s moral values articulated in one’s self identity; the second component is a person’s level of self responsibility for acting morally, or in other words, the sense of obligation to act morally. The third component is self-consistency which encompasses the congruence between judgment and action (Walker, 2004).
The terms “moral agency” and “moral engagement” in the literature both refer to behavior. Engagement, however, is tied more closely to a person’s identity – how individuals make meaning out of the world. This aspect of morality encompasses values, thoughts, emotions, and reactions, and it’s relevance to this study is an important one. Engagement casts a broader net around moral decision-making and includes the process of self-reflection as an aspect of reform. A sense of agency includes a person’s intent to act. Thus, agency is multifaceted, and in the realm of academic dishonesty it may be best understood as the intention to either work hard or to take short cuts. Both phenomenon combine and influence a student’s moral behavior (Thorkildsen, Golant, & Richesin, 2007).

The incongruity between moral judgment and moral action, as in many cases of academic dishonesty, is understood as the “judgment-action gap” (Walker, 2004, p. 1). What has been difficult to connect in the literature on moral development theory is a clear understanding of the decision to act. Derryberry and Thoma (2005) assert that academic integrity and moral action together comprise a unique phenomenon and thus cannot be generalized to other forms of immoral action. It may be that moral development theory has taken us as far as we can go with understanding moral reasoning as it applies to academic dishonesty, and that social cognitive theory will do more to lead us to an understanding of what constitutes the moral judgment gap especially as it pertains to this phenomenon. For instance, we know that students are under a high degree of perceived pressure (a situational influence), and that this often correlates with cheating behaviors. It is during these pockets of time that students set aside their moral judgment and act in
favor of action incongruent with stated beliefs. Additionally, some students do not believe that their behavior represents an integrity violation such as working with someone on a homework assignment despite the professor instructing individual work. Through guided reflection students can be engaged to understand their transgression and make meaning out of this experience.

**Social Cognitive Theory.** Social cognitive theory articulated by Bandura (2002) recognizes that moral reasoning is built into and interacts within a broader context that involves social influences. Bandura’s theory focuses on the situations in which moral reasoning and control become disengaged, allowing for immoral action to occur. As Bandura (2002) aptly observes, “Almost everyone is virtuous at the abstract level. It is in the ease of moral disengagement under the conditionals of life where the differences lie.” (p. 115). These affective influences include diffusing responsibility, minimizing effects and consequences, neutralizing attitudes, blame and justification. In academic dishonesty all of these have been applied or been used to justify cheating behaviors and deny responsibility. According to Bandura’s social cognitive theory (Tisak, Tisak & Goldstein, 2006) moral agency is comprised of two components: (1) inhibitive agency, which is the ability to avoid negative behaviors and (2) proactive agency, which is the ability to act in pro-social moral ways. In academic dishonesty, inhibitive agency may be reflected in the student who in an exam is tempted to look at another student’s exam but resists. In an example of proactive agency a student due to interpersonal issues cannot complete an assigned paper. Rather than cutting and pasting Internet text without attribution, the student chooses instead to contact the professor and request an extension.
**Decision Theory.** Yet another theory that commands attention and is relevant to this study includes behavioral decision theory as it is applied to academic dishonesty. Derived from the field of economics and psychology, this approach includes both emotional and deliberative factors that contribute to the act of cheating. Prospect theory is a deliberative decision-making theory that is especially useful in understanding cheating decisions. In prospect theory the value associated with cheating may vary and can include a combination of psychological as well as contextual factors to represent either a perceived gain or loss to the student. Rettinger (2008) states that people are more likely to take risks to avoid a loss than to achieve a gain. This phenomenon is connected to the perception that experiencing a loss is more negative than not experiencing a gain. Within that frame, the value gained or the perceived loss from cheating could vary and include reasons such as avoiding disappointment from others, raising their cumulative G.P.A., or simply passing a class. Whatever is perceived of as a “loss” is to be avoided. The other aspect of this theory includes “temporal discounting” which is essentially the farther away a perceived outcome may be, the less significance it holds on the pending decision as the penalties seem inconsequential (p. 150).

**Experiential Learning Theory.** Connected to Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory is Kolb’s (1984) Cycle of Learning theory which frames the education of students as cyclical, constantly contributing to their growth and development (Johns, 2001). A constructivist model, built upon John Dewey’s Experiential Learning Model and Kurt Lewin’s Action Research model, Kolb’s Cycle of Learning Theory includes four components: Concrete experiences; reflection; generalization; and application. His
theory asserts that learners continually cycle through the four phases, non-sequentially, with each phase building off the last and contributing to the learning process (Johns, 2001). In the first phase, direct experience is interpreted both concretely and abstractly by the learner. The second phase is reflection which is facilitated through discussion, journaling and debriefing sessions. The third phase includes generalization, which entails connecting their experience to theory, rules, and conceptual models. The fourth phase includes application which involves behavior, problem-solving actions, and individual projects (Johns, 2001). Kolb asserts that the education of students is subjective and socially constructed where past and present experiences converge to influence learning (Miettinen, 2000). Knowledge is drawn through present experiences and not solely through an abstract education. Learning from real-life situations is essential for personal growth and development, and educators play a key role and are in fact, obligated in facilitating this growth. Central to this approach is the presence of opportunities for reflection. Reflecting upon experiences allows the learner to build knowledge and connect the actual experience to a conceptual framework and to new situations. It is the power of the act of self-reflection that undergirds the present study.

Resilience Theory. The ability to emotionally rebound and maintain emotional equilibrium following a significant distressing or negative event characterizes the concept of resilience. Sometimes confused with the concepts of recovery and coping, resilience differs from these concepts in significant ways. Recovery attends to an individual’s ability to work towards emotional wholeness following a significantly distressing event. Coping refers to how an individual manages life stressors which can be reflected in either
positive or negative behaviors. Resilience is the multi-faceted ability to maintain an even, positive disposition and emotional stability in the face of serious stress and emotional trauma (Fredrickson, 2001 & Van Vliet, 2008). When people experience negative emotions, it handicaps their ability to think broadly and creatively. In the resilience literature the “Broaden and Build Theory” developed by Fredrickson (1998) has captured the most salient concepts of resilience. In this theory, she asserts that by building individual capacity to experience positive emotions such as joy, love, and contentment, individuals can more successfully endure distressing or emotionally threatening events. Further, the focus on positive emotions can also trigger what she identified as an “upward spiral” in positive wellness and future capacity to positively manage adversity (Frederickson, 2001 p. 223).

**Shame and Resilience.** Narrowing the understanding of resilience and focusing on the emotion of shame, Van Vliet (2008) developed a theory that addresses how a person successfully rebuilds interpersonally and recovers following a shame event. Several emotional phases are identified as a part of the process. Shame is recognized as an emotion triggered by a broad range of events and characterized by a profound and painful emotional experience. Van Vliet (2008) identifies the core experience of shame as an assault on the self which throws an individual into a state of emotional disequilibrium. This state of disequilibrium is characterized by a negative effect on relationships and connections with others, the likelihood a person will withdraw and isolate themselves and take actions that avoid recurring painful emotions connected to the shame event. Shame events were categorized in four principle areas: Moral; social or
personal transgression; personal failure; social rejection; and trauma (Van Vliet, 2008).

The conceptual framework Van Vliet advances to address the process of rebuilding following a shame event includes five main non-linear facets: connecting, refocusing, accepting, understanding, and resisting. Through connecting, an individual resists the temptation to isolate and instead reaches out to or builds relationships with those people in their lives that will provide support and unconditional acceptance. The individual engages socially, may participate in religious activities or seeks counseling. The next facet is refocusing and is characterized by an individual focusing on positive behaviors or opportunities, avoiding negativity, attending to self-improvement and taking positive action. The third facet is accepting, which is represented by taking responsibility for feelings or actions. The fourth facet is understanding, which is characterized by an individual making sense out of the experience, identifying the factors that lead to the shame event, and developing personal insight. The last facet of rebuilding is resisting which is described as the ability to prohibit negative judgments from others and standing up for oneself. Certainly an academic integrity violation fits in the definition of a shame event, and students often experience profound negative emotions following a cheating experience.

*Attribution Theory.* This theory, advanced by Bernard Weiner (1995) connects most significantly to this study’s findings. Central to Weiner’s theory includes the assertion that a negative event is followed by a judgment of either a personal or impersonal causality, a controllable or uncontrollable cause, and mitigating circumstance or no mitigating circumstance. Depending on the determination of each of these either
responsibility is assigned or not assigned. The theory also affords degrees of responsibility based upon determinants such as intentionality, controllability, and the concept of managing a positive personal self-impression. At its core, the theory holds that responsibility should be assigned in cases where a negative event occurs through a controllable cause.

In fact, each of the theories explained above assists in building an understanding of how academic integrity violations occur and, most germane to this study, how students frame their experience in the aftermath of an academic integrity violation. Figure 2 illustrates the influence of each of the theories previously described upon the phenomenon of academic dishonesty and student development.
Figure 2. Student Development and the Experience of Cheating.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEORIST</th>
<th>THEORY</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>RELEVANCE TO STUDY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lawrence Kohlberg (1988)</td>
<td>Moral Development</td>
<td>Three sequential stages, cognitively focused on obligations, rules and rights.</td>
<td>Assists in understanding the process of moral development in college students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augusto Blasi (1980)</td>
<td>Moral Development</td>
<td>Combines both Rest and Kohlberg. Three components that identify the importance of congruence between thought and action.</td>
<td>Introduces the concept of moral engagement including moral cognition, action and self-reflective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albert Bandura (2002)</td>
<td>Social Cognition</td>
<td>Broad theory that accounts for the role of social influences on individual decisions. Includes two components: Inhibitive agency and Proactive agency.</td>
<td>Acknowledges the influence of context on moral reasoning and action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Rettinger (2007)</td>
<td>Decision Theory (as applied to Acad. Integrity)</td>
<td>Deliberative decision making theory that accounts for the weighing of options based upon a perceived loss or gain.</td>
<td>Recognizes the deliberative nature of decisions to engage specifically in academic dishonesty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kolb (1988)</td>
<td>Experiential Learning</td>
<td>Learning is socially constructed and practical. Key to this theory is the power of self-reflection.</td>
<td>Learning occurs through experience and intentional self-reflection, which is significantly related to academic dishonesty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara Fredrickson (1998)</td>
<td>Broaden and Build Theory</td>
<td>Resilience theory that posits the building of capacity for positive emotions enables individuals to positively persist in the face of adversity and distress.</td>
<td>Ability to positively reflect on negative experiences is linked to one’s capacity for resilience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica Van Vliet (2008)</td>
<td>Shame and Resilience</td>
<td>Focuses on the rebuilding of the self following a shame event. Includes the facets of concentrating, refocusing, accepting, understanding and resisting.</td>
<td>Academic dishonesty is a significant shame event which this theory illuminates upon as a process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What We Know and Areas of Future Research

While academic dishonesty has been a persistent problem throughout colleges and universities it may be seen as an undesirable research field because it has the potential to reflect poorly on the reputation of any given academic institution. Perhaps this is why so much of the field of research has framed the issue as a student issue and to a much lesser extent as an institutional or faculty issue. What we gain from the strand in the literature focused on students is the understanding that students cheat for a wide variety of reasons, under a variety of circumstances, and that students hold a myriad of perceptions and attitudes about academic dishonesty. What we have less understanding about from the student perspective is what meaning they make from an experience of cheating. The proposed study hopes to fill this gap. The theoretical connections are equally divergent depending on whether the problem is approached from an institutional/cultural perspective or from a student moral and developmental perspective. Armed with this knowledge, the field of research is poised to embark on discovering new perspectives on this problem.

Recently, there have been a few studies, such as Stearns (2007), that have looked at the perceptions of cheating from those who engage in cheating and those self-identified as non-cheaters. This area of research could be expanded to better understand the role of peer perceptions on students’ attitudes, behavior, and their perceptions of academic dishonesty.
Absent from the sea of predominately survey-centered studies are qualitative studies examining academic dishonesty. Specifically, this includes examining the development of students through self-reflection. Guided by resilience theory and Van Vliet’s (2008) rebuilding theory following a shame event, this approach may serve to provide a greater understanding for the role of remediation for students who have been found responsible or admit to cheating and who are subsequently sanctioned by the university. How an incident of academic misconduct in a student’s life may have impacted him/her and their understanding of their own values and sense of ethics could prove informative to research.

New research should focus on directing the research field away from simply correlating personal characteristics and contextual influences and advance towards a more holistic understanding of integrity as an institutional value. Further research into the personal development of students and the role remediation can play in the student developmental process is an exciting area for future study and serve as a foundation for the present study.

Summary

This chapter explored several of the largest segments of research on the issue of academic integrity: personal characteristics of students who self report cheating behavior; contextual influences on cheating trends; faculty perceptions; and theoretical connections. We know that age, gender, student involvement, academic achievement, locus of control, academic self-efficacy, and course major are related in varying degrees to academic
misconduct. We know faculty are predominantly not reporting cases of academic dishonesty. How a classroom is managed, if an institution has an honor code, how students perceive the costs and benefits of cheating, student’s own personal development, and how they perceive the behavior of their peers are all influences upon the degree to which academic dishonesty persists on a campus.

We know that through recent research on moral development, social cognition, experiential learning, resilience and personal rebuilding after a shame event that gaining insights into students’ understanding of their experience following an act of academic dishonesty is a rich area of exploration.

Clearly, academic integrity is an issue in higher education and deserves our attention if for nothing else but the central role honest scholarship plays in the academy and the responsibility colleges and universities have to educate towards positive citizenship. The research is unambiguous in establishing that there exists a problem regarding academic integrity and, while this topic has been explored for half a century, we haven’t moved much past a superficial understanding and approach to solving this problem. In fact, the solution to academic integrity is complex and requires not a single approach, but a comprehensive approach that involves the commitment of most, if not all, segments of an academic institution.
CHAPTER 3

The phenomenon of cheating has generally been examined in higher education, through primarily quantitative research approaches. Prior research has answered the questions about who cheats, how students cheat, attitudes towards cheating, contextual influences upon cheating, and to some extent why students cheat. This study is unique from previous research in the application of a qualitative approach to better understand how students who have accepted responsibility for cheating frame their experience. Few studies in the area of academic integrity have focused on the student’s experience subsequent to a violation of academic integrity. The college years are fraught with developmental moments. The action of making a poor immoral choice is in practicality an opportunity to positively develop an individual’s moral reasoning. Perhaps one way of learning to be moral is through the act of engaging in an immoral act and appropriately reflecting (Austin, Simpson & Reynen, 2005). This study’s significance is that it focuses on the obligation of institutions of higher education to assist positively in the holistic development of students. The methodological approach in the current study is deliberately constructed to gain an understanding of how students who have accepted responsibility for academic cheating understand what often proves to be an intense and complex experience.

Multiple Embedded Case Study Design

Defining case study designs, Yin (2003) states this approach is best utilized as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life
context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). The phenomenon the current study explores is examining the potentially transformative thoughts and attitudes among students who have accepted responsibility for engaging in academic dishonesty. Because each case of academic cheating includes divergent elements a comparative study including 13 students representing various ages, egregiousness of misconduct, and diverse backgrounds provides for more robust evidence than a single case study design could provide (Yin, 2003). The orientation of this case study is primarily psychological which according to Merriam (1998), is a methodological approach focused on the individual and their behavior, rooted in psychological theory. This study’s intent is also predominately descriptive which Merriam (1998) states is appropriate when, “presenting basic information about areas of education where little research has been conducted.” (p.38). Data collected was analyzed using constant comparative analysis consistent with a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory is a useful analytical approach when attempting to explain thoughts and behavior through data systematically gathered in social research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This analytic method illuminates the students post-cheating experience and allows for consideration of multiple meanings emergent in the data (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008).

**Context of Study**

This study was conducted at a large, public research oriented campus on the west coast. The university is a large, urban campus of approximately 28,000 undergraduate and graduate students. The campus is considered a research level 1 institution.
Resembling Oxford University, the university is decentralized with six undergraduate colleges. Undergraduate students at the institution can major in any field of study and belong to one of the six undergraduate colleges. The university recruits a high-achieving freshmen class of approximately 4,000 students and a transfer class of approximately 2,500 students a year. The average G.P.A. of the incoming freshmen class for the 2008-09 academic year was a 4.3 with equally impressive test scores.

Purpose of Study

The startling number of students who have admitted to engaging in academic dishonesty at some point in their academic careers is large and has been established in the literature. It has also been argued (Callahan, 2004) that institutions of higher learning have an inherent responsibility to assist in the moral education of the nation’s youth, thus it is imperative to understand how colleges and universities can effectively approach academic integrity. This study endeavors to frame the dilemma of student cheating from a developmental perspective by analyzing how students understand the experience of engaging in academic dishonesty and, perhaps most importantly, experience growth as an outcome of this incident.

Research Questions

1) How do students perceive academic dishonesty individually and among their peers?

2) In the wake of accepting responsibility for academic cheating, in what ways does a student make meaning out of this experience?
Sub Questions:

d) In what ways do students connect this experience of academic cheating with their broader life experience?

e) In what ways do students disclose to others?

f) How do students reflect on their own “ethical failure”?

Data Sources

The methodological approach used to answer the research questions this study’s research questions was a multiple embedded case study approach utilizing a pre-existing survey, reflective writing essays, and individual interviews. Yin (2003) proposes that a key principle in effective case study designs is the inclusion of multiple sources in order to triangulate and strengthen data collected. The inclusion of this extant data allows for the triangulation of data which is essentially providing the researcher multiple angles at which to access and analyze the information collected.

Academic Integrity Survey. A quantitative source that was used to inform this study included a pre-existing survey (Appendix B) administered to all students who accepted responsibility and were mandated to attend the Educational Integrity Seminar coordinated by the UC San Diego Academic Integrity Office. Among the reasons Miles and Huberman (1994) provide for linking quantitative data with qualitative data is that each can corroborate the other and assist in the triangulation of data providing for more in
depth analysis of a particular study. By assessing several data sources the researcher was able to gain greater insight into the complexity of this social phenomenon.

This survey developed in part by Donald McCabe (1993) and Bertram Gallant is administered prior to students attending the seminar. The survey asks students to answer questions regarding their self-reported prior academic cheating behaviors, their values, perceptions of peer cheating, and attitudes about contextual influences surrounding academic cheating. The part of the survey that was developed by McCabe (1993) relates to self-reported behaviors and perceptions of other student’s behavior. Questions are designed in a nominal scale and participants self-report frequency of specific cheating behaviors and their perceptions of peer cheating behavior. McCabe’s comprehensive survey addresses a broad range of academically dishonest behaviors which indicates strong content validity. The reliability of this survey is represented through a Cronbach Alpha scale of 0.794. Finally, this survey has been administered at hundreds of universities and colleges around the country, contributing to both the survey reliability and validity (Cresswell, 2005). The remaining sections of the survey were designed by Bertram Gallant and include primarily open-ended questions assessing student’s values and attitudes about the integrity culture at UC San Diego.

Reflective Writing Assignments. Another central data source collected included the reflective writing pieces students submit as an assignment for the Educational Integrity Seminar. Students attending the seminar are given a homework assignment after the first session and prior to attending the second. Students are also given a final
selenium assignment. The homework assignment asks students to respond in writing to
the following prompt:

Take the position of an interested stakeholder whom you respect or admire
(e.g., an Instructor, your favorite high school teacher, a friend, your boss, a
parent). Write an email to that person explaining your integrity violation,
including the factors that contributed to your decision to commit the
violation and who was affected by your violation. Then, write that
person’s response to you including whether they thought what you did was
right or wrong, what they thought you could have done differently, and
what alternative courses of action they suggest you take in the future if
facing this type of situation again. (Educational Integrity Seminar Outline,
2008)

This writing prompt fits perfectly into this research study as it asks students to
reflect on their experience allowing for the collection of data produced in the student’s
own words. This data point is a primary source defined by Merriam (1998) as, “those in
which the originator of the document is recounting firsthand experience with the
phenomenon of interest.” (p. 122). The final assignment asks students to create a
presentation with the following prompt:

Academic Integrity Presentation

For this assignment you are expected to create an educational presentation
about academic integrity at the university. The format of the presentation
is up to you—-it could be a powerpoint presentation, a video, a poster, a
library walk display, or anything you can dream of. Your audience can be
any group you wish, for example, university undergraduates, graduate
students, faculty, high school students, community college students,
parents, teachers.

Think about including some/all of the following: why academic integrity
is important, factors that lead to student cheating, key perspectives on the
issue (i.e., of faculty, the university, parents, and so on), and/or what
students should do instead of cheating.
Documents can provide rich information and a description of events through the voice of the participants, offering another investigative angle on social phenomenon, in this case academic cheating (Cresswell, 2005).

**Individual Interviews.** Participants in the Educational Integrity Seminar were invited to participate in individual interviews. These interviews were conducted with a semi-structured approach. This design is most effective when there is only one opportunity to interview an individual and where time may be an issue. According to Bernard (2002) a semi-structured approach conveys the formality of an interview but also allows for new leads that develop in the interview to be followed. The interview protocol is found in appendix D.

The application of motivational interviewing adds a delicate layer to traditional interviewing. Motivational interviewing has three essential components: Collaboration, intrinsic, focus and autonomy. Behavioral change is understood to happen only if argued on behalf of the student (Miller & Rollnick, 2002). While this application of motivational interviewing is a slight variance on its more traditional uses, which is primarily in counseling sessions, the focus on the behavioral gap that this approach emphasizes is an important aspect of the current study. In defining motivational interviewing, Miller and Rollnick (2002) state “…it is fundamentally a way of being with and for people - a facilitative approach to communication…” (p.25). Application of this interviewing framework is useful in highlighting any discrepancy between behavior and stated values, identified in the literature as the “moral action gap”.
Utilizing several data points including the academic integrity survey, document analysis and individual interviews, this particular design provides rich insights into the experiences of students in the aftermath of a violation of the University of California’s Integrity of Scholarship.

Participants

Students who participated in this study represented five of the six colleges at UC San Diego (Muir College students excluded). Participants in this study had previously accepted responsibility, for violating UC San Diego’s Integrity of Scholarship (Appendix A). In accepting responsibility students agreed with the professor that they were responsible for the specific act of academic dishonesty whether it was working too closely on a homework assignment or plagiarizing material in a paper. Alternatively, students who do not accept responsibility for academic dishonesty generally take their case to an Academic Integrity Review Board (review board) where they may either be found responsible or not responsible by the Board (see figure 3. below). Participants in this study were limited only to those students who accepted responsibility for their violation and did not elect to take their case to a review board. Among the administrative sanctions for students who have accepted responsibility or are found responsible for violating UC San Diego’s Integrity of Scholarship is mandatory attendance at an Educational Integrity Seminar (seminar). Students who elected to take their case to a Review Board were not included in this study. Approximately 96 total students participate in eight (8) seminars held each quarter.
Invitations to participate and individual consent (Appendix C) were sought from those students who accepted responsibility and who attended the seminar during the Fall, 2008 and winter 2009 quarters. Approximately 190 students received invitations to participate in this research project. Retroactive consent was requested because it was believed that students would have a stronger willingness to participate after having completed the seminar. Students who had already completed the seminar may be more open and willing to participate in this research than those students first entering the seminar. Participants represented the most common cheating incidents forwarded on this
campus, which included unauthorized collaboration and plagiarism. Together, these two forms of cheating accounted for 67% of academic dishonesty cases in the 2007-2008 academic year (University Office of Academic Integrity, 2008). Students who engaged in more egregious forms of academic dishonesty did not choose to participate in this study. Those students who did participate in this study were willing to reflect upon their experience, represented different years in school, and came from a variety of disciplines. Data saturation was established when recurrent themes surfaced, concluding the thirteen interviews. Emergent themes were repetitive and no new significant information was added to the study (Cresswell, 2005).

The extant survey data and reflective essays were collected and individual interviews were conducted during the spring quarter, 2009. Retroactive to their Seminar attendance, students were invited to interview and participate in this research study and a small incentive was provided ($20.00 gift card). Participant’s permission was subsequently sought in order to utilize the results from their reflective writing (Appendix D).

Data Collection

Academic Integrity Survey (Appendix B). The survey was administered to all students assigned to attend the Educational Integrity Seminar. Students are sent the survey via email and are expected to complete the survey prior to their first session in the seminar and again at the conclusion of the seminar. The survey results are managed by the Academic Integrity Office, thus the aggregate data from this survey was anonymous.
The results of the pre-and post-survey from fall 2008 and winter, 2009 was provided in aggregate form displaying trends in the data set. Only the post-seminar survey data were used in this study as they related to a student’s overall post-cheating experience, and analyzing the effects of the seminar was not a research focus of this study. Additionally, retroactive consent was sought and obtained from twelve of the thirteen interview participants to view their individual survey results. This strategy was useful to strengthen emergent themes and confirm the narrative data derived from the interviews and reflection essays.

In an effort to establish reliability of this survey’s application to students who have accepted responsibility for violating the university’s Integrity of Scholarship, the aggregate survey results were comparatively analyzed with national data derived from McCabe’s survey conducted at North American universities between the years of 2002 – 2005 (McCabe, 2005).

**Reflective Writing Essays and Final Assignments.** Permission to review the reflective writing essays and final assignments of students was sought retroactive to their successful completion of the seminar and at the time of their interview. This approach ensured full disclosure of the study with all seminar participants. All students who participated in the interview agreed to share their reflective writing essay and final assignments (Appendix C).

**Interview Protocol (Appendix D).** Invitations to students to participate in an individual interview were given retroactive to their successful completion of the Seminar
via an email from the Academic Integrity Office. Thirteen students participated in the interviews which were conducted on campus in a private conference room during the spring quarter 2009. The interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed by the researcher. The narrative data was then analyzed using constant comparative analysis consistent with grounded theory research. The transcription of the interview will be maintained in a locked cabinet for a period of three years, then subsequently destroyed. Students were informed prior to the start of the interview that they could disengage from the interview at any time or have any part of their transcript removed from the data set for any reason. The interview protocol is found in Appendix D.

Data Analysis

Through the process of constant comparative analysis consistent with grounded theory, the data set was reduced and categorized based on this iterative, analytical approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The method included categorizing data by recurrent and emergent themes in the interviews, essays written by participants, and short answers given on the surveys. As applicable, data were also connected to the theoretical frameworks and contextual variables proposed in chapter two. Matching relevant data to theory and context helped to focus the data analysis, naturally excluding any irrelevant data collected (Yin, 2003). Specific techniques used included identifying and coding common themes, themes that represented the student development process, and finally coding for any influential variables upon student development.
According to Miles and Huberman (2005) the strength of qualitative research rests on the ability to fully and accurately analyze the data collected. Miles and Huberman assert there are three key elements of qualitative data analysis: Data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (p. 11). The practice of sorting data collected by separating stories, matching patterns and words into distinct chunks, is a form of data reduction that proved critical to analysis. Displaying the data in a graphic, accessible form was also a method of analyzing the data and helped to make sense of the large amounts of information collected. Miles and Huberman identify the value of constructing matrices in data analysis. In the current study an antecedent matrix was developed primarily using outcome variables in order to identify the most influential and meaningful variables derived from the data set (Appendix E).

Another method aligned with grounded theory is the analytical approach of memo-writing. Memo-writing is a process that facilitates active engagement with the data set. Writing memos helps to identify thoughts, capture connections within the data, and recognize emergent themes (Charmaz, 2006). Memo writing was used throughout the analysis of the interview data. As the data was examined, interpretations, meanings, and conclusions begin to emerge which helped form the foundation for developing theory grounded in the data. The process of qualitative data analysis according to both Yin (2003) and Cresswell (2005) is an iterative process that begins with a detailed analysis of the data and concludes by interpreting the data into broad themes. Once data was analyzed, they were then visually displayed representing themes identified through their relationships, other variables, and then connected to theory (Miles & Huberman, 2005).
Strengths of the current study included the use of three key data points (survey, document analysis, and interviews) all of which enhanced the accuracy of the study and validity of the findings. Triangulation in qualitative studies, according to Cresswell (2005), strengthens a study through the process of connecting data from different sources (see table 2.). Following each individual interview, the student’s reflective writing piece and interview were combined and a synopsis of the individual case created. Each case was then subsequently comparatively analyzed both with other participants and with the responses to several short-answer survey questions. Open coding revealed 18 themes which were eventually reduced to eight themes (accepting/resisting responsibility, disclosure, emotional response, likelihood of future cheating, external pressures, perceptions of cheating, meaningfulness, and lessons learned) and three major outcome responses: A marginalized response, a moderately profound response, and a profound response. Pivotal to determining the major outcome responses were individual responses to the question of rating how meaningful this incident had been in the participant’s life on a scale of 1 through 10. The lowest rating this question received included a “6”. Thus students who rated the experience a “6” or “7” tended to also marginalize the experience, resist responsibility, distort the incident and distanced themselves from the experience. These students were subsequently categorized under the marginalized response outcome. Alternatively, those students who rated the experience a “10” or sometimes even an “11” further expressed strong emotions such as sincere regret, unequivocally accepted responsibility and talked about the lessons learned from the experience. In this way, participant responses were categorized under one of the three major outcome responses.
Table 2. Research Questions and Corresponding Data Sources and Method of Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Method Of Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) How do students perceive academic dishonesty individually and among their peers?</td>
<td>Academic Integrity Survey</td>
<td>Descriptive Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual Interviews</td>
<td>Constant comparative analysis, memo writing, and theory matching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) In the wake of accepting responsibility for academic cheating, in what ways does a student make meaning out of this experience?</td>
<td>Reflective Writing</td>
<td>Constant comparative analysis, memo writing, and theory matching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Questions:</td>
<td>Individual Interviews</td>
<td>Descriptive Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) In what ways do students connect this experience of academic cheating with their broader life experience?</td>
<td>Reflective Writing</td>
<td>Constant comparative analysis, memo writing, and theory matching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Individual Interviews</td>
<td>Constant comparative analysis, memo writing, and theory matching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflective Writing</td>
<td>Constant comparative analysis, memo writing, and theory matching</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual Interviews</td>
<td>Constant comparative analysis, memo writing, and theory matching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflective Writing</td>
<td>Constant comparative analysis, memo writing, and theory matching</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Academic Integrity Survey.* The results of the academic integrity survey were used to identify broad themes in student attitudes and self-reported behavior. Specific questions were identified for the applicability to this study and were subsequently analyzed for statistical significance. Themes that emerged through the open-ended questions included the influence of context, values, integrity culture, and peer
perceptions. These data were comparatively analyzed to the data derived from the interviews and written documents as well as to the theories advanced in chapter two of this document.

Reflective Writing Assignments. Through an analysis of the reflective writing essays and final assignments, the data set was reduced through the process of coding for various themes. Surprisingly, the reflections shared in the writing assignments provided little depth as compared to the individual interviews, which were a rich source of information. Nonetheless, contextual variables which have been shown to influence students’ behavior connected the data collected to a variety of variables such as perceived pressure to succeed, emotional responses, and opportunity to cheat. Connections between student reflections and the conceptual frameworks presented in chapter two assisted in reducing the data and identifying common themes that emerged in the individual interviews.

Individual Interviews. The individual interviews were a rich source of information that led to the development of several data themes identified, which were then affirmed in data derived from the survey and the reflective writing essays. Coding themes included (but were not limited to) the following: external pressures, assuming responsibility, emotional responses, perceptions of cheating, support in processing the experience, and learned lessons.

Finally, it is important to understand in what ways the Educational Integrity Seminar may have influenced a student’s post perception of the incident. The seminar
could have been an influential factor throughout data analysis as a contributing aspect of students’ self reflection.

**Positionality**

My position in this study is unique in that I currently serve as Dean of Student Affairs at one of the six undergraduate colleges at this university. In this position part of my responsibilities include the adjudication of students accused of both academic and non-academic conduct violations. With regard to academic dishonesty at the institution the professor has the sole authority to advance or withdraw an allegation of academic dishonesty. My role in this process is to facilitate either an informal resolution with the student or direct the student through the formal adjudication process which includes an Academic Integrity Review Board. I am also responsible for the application and oversight of administrative consequences resulting from a violation of academic integrity. My role has served to provide a strong incentive to understand the phenomenon of cheating as well, as it places me in a potentially biased perspective. To account for my role I took several precautions. First, I did not interview students registered in my college (Stewart College). Second, I fully disclosed my role on campus to all students participating in this study. Third, the purpose of this study is not to pass judgment or impose any disciplinary outcomes. Instead, this study aims at understanding a student’s attending perspective and experience as it relates to previously engaging in an act of academic dishonesty and accepting responsibility. It was clearly communicated to students that the decision to participate or not in this study would in no way have any
deleterious effects on the student’s disciplinary record or in completion of their assigned sanction.

**Study Limitations and Ethical Considerations**

This study sought to better understand the experience of students subsequent to an academic integrity violation. While pushing our thinking surrounding immoral choices and responses, this study is limited in its applicability to other colleges and universities.

First, this study was conducted at one large, Western university. The university is a tier-one research-based institution and as such generalizability to schools that are not so heavily research-oriented may be limited. Further limiting is that this particular campus enrolls a traditional-aged college population where the average age is twenty-three years old. The reputation of this campus is highly competitive. Schools that enroll a more mixed-age student population (e.g., older, re-entry students) and those that have a less competitive academic culture may observe different results.

Second, this study also experienced some response bias as those students who came forward and agreed to be interviewed represented less serious forms of dishonesty. While this study does capture the major types of academic misconduct, it does not include those students who engaged in more egregious forms of academic dishonesty such as using unauthorized notes on an exam or changing answers on an exam after it has been graded and requesting a regrade from their professor. Among the possibilities for this limitation may be that students were either not currently enrolled at the university due to their transgression or were too ashamed to come forward.
Third, a unique feature of this university’s disciplinary process includes that following a report of an incident of academic misconduct, the student will meet with their College Dean of Student Affairs and at that juncture, the student has two choices. Students must either accept responsibility or deny the allegation and request their case be forwarded to an Academic Integrity Review Board. If a student accepts responsibility, administrative sanctions are determined such as probation through graduation, the creation of a disciplinary record, and an educational sanction which is commonly the assignment of mandatory attendance at an Educational Integrity Seminar. Additionally and separately, faculty determine the academic penalty imposed.

The process of accepting responsibility is important because it limits students’ ability to outwardly preserve their innocence. They must stipulate to either accept responsibility or deny responsibility. Students are largely unable to assert negligence claiming their behavior was unintentional, possibly perpetuating their resistance to fully accepting responsibility.

Fourth, my position on campus as a Dean of Student Affairs at one of the six undergraduate colleges may have influenced the responses of participants. Inherent limitations accompany administrator research and affected this study directly. Prejudice and unexamined impressions developed through privileged access to extant data (e.g. prior written essays and private student meetings) may have influenced the objective interpretation of data (Anderson & Jones, 2008). Adherence to the connection of collected data to established themes assisted in reducing this potential effect. The disclosure of my role on campus occurred prior to each interview conducted and students
from my college (Stewart College) were excluded from this study. Nonetheless, my role as a campus administrator may still have inhibited honest answers in the student interviews. The power dynamic at play in this study is significant and is addressed through the exclusion of students registered to the researcher’s home college. Students may have been inhibited to answer honestly during the interview and participants may have been biased as a result of my role on campus.

Finally, a possible influence on student responses includes the Educational Integrity Seminar and its attending effects on participants’ reflection and understanding of the incident. For many students, during the resolution of their case, they needed to have their transgression explained as to more fully recognize why their behavior was a problem before they could understand their experience. The seminar provided that structure and a space to safely explore the incident, which included listening to other students sharing their stories.

The sensitive nature of this study means that precautions needed to be taken to ensure that anonymity was strictly maintained. The survey results were aggregate and did not include personal information, individual survey results were only viewed with permission; students were informed prior to their participation in each interview that they may at any time stop the interview, choose not to participate, or exclude any part of the interview at any time (see Appendix C). Finally, students who participated in this study were informed that in no way did their involvement affect any part of their status as a university student.
CHAPTER 4

Analyzing the experience of cheating from a primarily qualitative, student perspective marks a deviation from most of the literature on academic dishonesty, which approaches the issue from primarily a quantitative view. The approach used in this study is significant to understanding how a student who engages in academic cheating reflects upon the incident and experiences growth as a possible outcome. The results of this study may prove useful to educational practitioners who adjudicate, educate, and study the issue of academic integrity.

The methodological approach used in this study included a multiple embedded case study design, and data was captured through individual interviews, document analysis, and a pre-existing survey. Quantitative data was derived from the Academic Integrity Survey administered to all students who were mandated to participate in the Educational Integrity Seminar in the fall, 2008 and winter 2009 quarters subsequent to a policy violation. The data was analyzed and provides a broad representation of this student population’s perceptions and attitudes towards cheating. Included in the survey are questions about students’ own cheating perceptions of others cheating, degree of seriousness with respect to different cheating behaviors, and reasons for why students cheat. From the approximately 155 survey respondents, a total of thirteen students responded to an email and volunteered to be interviewed. All thirteen students permitted their personal, reflective writing essays produced during the seminar to be analyzed. Twelve of the respondents also granted retroactive permission to view their individual survey results. Student participation in interviews and retroactive consent was requested.
after the seminar in order to maximize participation. It was expected that students who had already completed the seminar would be more willing to participate in this research study than those students first entering the Seminar. The demographic profile of the participants is found in Table 3.

Table 3. Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Entered as a First Yr./Trans</th>
<th>Year in School</th>
<th>Violation</th>
<th>Major</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Troy</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>First Year</td>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>Plagiarism</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sean</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>First Year</td>
<td>Fifth</td>
<td>Plagiarism</td>
<td>Chemical Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nora</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>First Year</td>
<td>Third</td>
<td>Plagiarism</td>
<td>Human Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lupe</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>First Year</td>
<td>Third</td>
<td>Plagiarism</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanya</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>Third</td>
<td>Assignment Cheating</td>
<td>Human Bio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>First Year</td>
<td>Third</td>
<td>Assignment Cheating</td>
<td>Biochem/Cell Bio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>First Year</td>
<td>Second</td>
<td>Assignment Cheating</td>
<td>Evol.,Behavior &amp; Ecology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>First Year</td>
<td>Fifth</td>
<td>Assignment Cheating</td>
<td>Environmental Systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddie</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>Fifth</td>
<td>Assignment Cheating</td>
<td>Biology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>First Year</td>
<td>Grad</td>
<td>Plagiarism-Extensive</td>
<td>International Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antonio</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>First Year</td>
<td>Third</td>
<td>Plagiarism</td>
<td>Mech. Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ted</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>First Yr.-Winter</td>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>Plagiarism</td>
<td>Mech. Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Trans. (Intrntl).</td>
<td>Third</td>
<td>Plagiarism</td>
<td>Poli Sci</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The research questions that framed this study included:

1. How do students perceive academic dishonesty individually and among their peers?

2. In the wake of accepting responsibility for academic cheating, in what ways does a student make meaning out of this experience?
Sub-Questions:

a) In what ways do students connect this experience of academic cheating with their broader life experience?

b) In what ways do students reflect upon this experience through writing and in disclosure to others?

c) How do students reflect on their own “ethical failure”?

This chapter is organized into two sections beginning with a presentation of the qualitative findings collected from both the individual interviews and the reflective writing essays. Students’ individual surveys were analyzed to explicate the qualitative data collected. The second section of the chapter includes the findings derived from the Academic Integrity Survey that was administered to all students attending the Educational Integrity Seminar in the Fall 2008 and Winter 2009 quarters. Several questions on the survey connected to the themes that emerged in the qualitative data and serve to contextualize these findings (Table 4.).
Table 4. Research Questions and Corresponding Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Connecting Data Themes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quantitative</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.) How do students perceive academic dishonesty individually and among their peers?</td>
<td>Perceptions of cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Future Motivation to cheat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External Pressures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disclosure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Qualitative</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2.) In the wake of accepting responsibility for academic cheating, in what ways does a student make meaning out of this experience?</td>
<td>Perceptions of cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meaningfulness of incident</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Accepting/Resisting</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learned Lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External Pressures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disclosure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub Questions:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) In what ways do students connect this experience of academic cheating with their broader life experience?</td>
<td>Future motivation to cheat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learned Lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External Pressures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meaningfulness of incident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) In what ways do students disclose to others?</td>
<td>Disclosure</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learned Lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional Responses</td>
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<td></td>
<td>External Pressures</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Future Motivation to cheat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meaningfulness of incident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) How do students reflect on their own “ethical failure”?</td>
<td>Learned Lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External Pressures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perceptions of cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accepting/Resisting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Qualitative Findings

The specific research question answered through the individual interviews and document analysis includes:

2) In the wake of accepting responsibility for academic cheating in what ways does a student make meaning out of this experience?

Sub Questions:

a) In what ways do students connect this experience of academic cheating with their broader life experience?

b) In what ways do students disclose to others?

c) How do students reflect on their own “ethical failure”?

The experience of cheating irrespective of age, major and background had a considerable effect on most of the participants in this study. Of importance is that the types of cheating cases included in this study were either cases of plagiarism or assignment cheating such as copying on a homework assignment. Plagiarism is defined as using another person’s words, computer code, or ideas as one’s own without proper attribution. Common examples include copying and pasting text directly from the Internet and representing it as one’s own work. Assignment cheating includes unauthorized collaboration which is characterized by working with another student on an assignment when the instructor has requested individual work. Another form of assignment cheating includes copying homework from another student. Together, the
two cheating behaviors of plagiarism and assignment cheating accounted for over 70% of reported cases at the university as well as representing a less egregious form of academic dishonesty (Bertram Gallant, 2009). Students who elected to take their case to an academic integrity review board were not included in this study. Additionally, those students who engaged in more egregious acts of academic dishonesty did not choose to participate in the interviews which may hold implications for future research.

Participant demographics, displayed in Table 3, include the student’s year in school, major, whether they entered the university as a first year student or a transfer student, their UC San Diego college affiliation (students can major in any discipline and belong to any college at UC San Diego), and type of integrity violation. Participants were given a pseudonym to further protect their identity. As is evident, the sample is fairly distributed among all these variables. It is important to note that the interviews were conducted as much as nine months after the incident occurred and subsequent to when the student had completed all associated sanctions, providing ample time to reflect and think about the incident.

As the data was originally coded a total of eighteen themes were identified. As coding continued this data field was reduced into three broad categories (marginalized experience, moderately profound experience and profound experience) and eight sub categories (Accepting/resisting responsibility, external pressures, perceptions towards cheating, emotional responses, meaningfulness of incident, disclosure to others, importance of not cheating in the future, and learned lessons).
The three broad categories that emerged in the data reflect the students overall response to the incident which was categorized as either a marginalized response, a moderately profound response, or a profound response. The categories of profound and marginalized, while representative of how the student is currently interpreting the incident, are not mutually exclusive and may in fact be progressive.

Several students fell in between a clearly profound response and a marginalized response which is identified as a moderately profound response. A profound response was distinguished by the students’ willingness to accept responsibility for their actions, and express a sense of resilience. Their attending emotional responses were primarily directed inward or in other words were not directed at external forces or entities such as the student’s Teaching Assistant (TA) or Professor. Further, students who were characterized as having a profound response commented often on how the incident changed their thinking and their future behavior.

Conversely, students whose interpretation was characterized as being a marginalized response resisted accepting responsibility for the incident and directed their emotional reactions externally, tending to rationalize the incident and perceiving little change in their behavior or thinking.

Those participants who were categorized as moderately profound, while expressing many elements of a profound response, also expressed attitudes and thoughts consistent with a more marginalized response. Three students fell into the category of marginalizing the experience (Sean, Tanya & Beth); three students fell into the category
of moderately profound (Troy, Mark & Martin); and seven students fell into the category
of profound response (Antonio, Lisa, Eddie, Nora, Lupe, Ted & Tracy).

Marginalized Response

A respondent’s inclination to marginalize the experience was characterized by the
student resisting responsibility, engaging in rationalization, minimizing the degree to
which they believed they were cheating, possessing an increased perception of their
peers’ behavior, expressed emotional responses that were directed externally, and
disclosed the incident to a few people. At times students distorted the incident and
framed lessons learned in relation to specific academic behaviors as opposed to broader
life implications. Three students that were interviewed (Sean, Tanya and Beth)
marginalized the experience in ways previously described which ultimately seemed to
influence the level of meaningfulness they derived from the incident and whether or not
they would engage in cheating in the future.

Sean. Sean is a fifth-year Chemical Engineering student. Outwardly, he
accepted responsibility for plagiarizing a paper in an Environmental Studies class. He
described the incident this way,

I wasn’t meaning to plagiarize, obviously, I mean I knew I was copying
and pasting but I made sure to try and put it as much as I can into my own
words because I know that plagiarism is definitely cheating and everybody
knows that from high school so there isn’t any gray areas for that. But in
my case it was unintentional I wasn’t trying to, I tried to put most of the
content in my own words but I guess I forgot some certain paragraphs I
guess because I was rushed and so I did it kind of last minute obviously
but I put in the effort to making sure I didn’t plagiarize there wasn’t any
strong intentions of plagiarizing I thought I was OK but obviously not and
that is how I got caught.
The themes that emerged as most salient in Sean’s story included external pressures, resisting responsibility, perceptions of cheating, emotional responses, and future motivation to cheat. Sean continued in his explanation of the incident to say that he thought information that was “common knowledge” need not be cited, and he thought he had a lot of that type of information in his paper. Sean admits, which his individual survey results confirm, that he has engaged in other types of “minor” cheating including working on assignments with others when the instructor asks for independent work and copying homework from friends, all of which he justifies because of the that workload engineering students experience.

For us engineers we have four courses and we have all the work due for each course and sometimes it is just easier to break the load amongst us. As long as we understand the material we should be fine, I guess. I guess that is how I justify it in a sense.

Contributing to his ability to marginalize the experience is his perception of cheating and that the rules are not entirely clear about what does and does not constitute academic dishonesty. He writes in his final assignment, “However, some students consider ‘working together’ on homework or getting previous test exams not cheating. This issue can become a slightly gray area.”

Emotionally, Sean expressed anger. He is still frustrated about the experience and felt he suffered an injustice. He engages in blaming and is convinced that if he could have talked to the TA, the misunderstanding could have been avoided. “Why would he just rat me out without getting my side of the story?” Sean reluctantly accepts responsibility for the incident, saying his dean “…advised me to take the responsibility
and don’t go to a hearing because you will most likely lose and so I was okay – I feel like I am not going to win anyways so I might as well take the responsibility.” When pressed about how meaningful the experience was for him, Sean indicates on a scale of 1 through 10 that he would rate the experience a “six”.

I didn’t really think it made me a person like – oh I really shouldn’t cheat now, I came out feeling like I should do some stuff differently – when I went in I learned a little bit about student perspectives and teacher perspectives but I didn’t come out thinking I am going to be a new student and I am not going to cheat anymore.

In summary, Sean’s persistence in identifying external pressures and his perception of cheating undergird his reasoning for his transgression. It also allows Sean to distance himself from the incident and resist responsibility.

Tanya. Tanya is a third-year student majoring in Human Development. She entered the university as a transfer student. Her integrity violation included assignment cheating on a lab assignment. She described the incident as follows:

My roommate and I worked on a lab together that was not supposed to be worked on together. We were supposed to only work on lab together and then when we were out of lab, any assignment was supposed to be done separately. And we worked on it together and we came up with the wrong answer and so we were caught for cheating and the violation of integrity.

The themes that connected most strongly to her story included resisting responsibility, external pressures, emotional responses, disclosure, and meaningfulness of the incident. She admits to engaging in cheating previously which involved sharing answers on homework assignments but denies engaging in any “blatant” cheating such as copying on a test or plagiarizing. Her survey results are consistent with the interview
data, in her survey she admits to limited, less egregious cheating and reports never engaging in more serious cheating. She also felt betrayed by her TA for not talking with her and her roommate before forwarding the charge. She says, “I am actually kind of disappointed in my TA because he didn’t actually pull me and my roommate aside and talk to us about the situation.” She expresses anger at having to accept responsibility for the incident stating:

I had no idea we couldn’t work on homework together and it was worth so little it was like they wanted you to put that much effort into it. I was very mad that I had to pay for the class, I had to go to this class and take responsibility for this.

Tanya identifies a pressure to succeed as the driving force behind her admittedly past cheating. She explains that when attending community college the work was easier and she cheated less.

…at the community college – the work was not as rigorous to the point that I was worried I was going to get the wrong answer, but in high school when I had honors classes I really wanted to do well and like, now, I really want to do well – those two stages when the competition is a lot harder. There is a lot at stake.

Her mother discovered the incident when the notice was mailed home and much of Tanya’s emotional reactions centered around disappointing her mother. She explains, “I just don’t want to ever put my mother through that.” Tanya rated the meaningfulness of the experience a “7” highlighting that the scope of cheating involved a homework assignment and that she was unaware that she had been cheating. She also writes in her final assignment, “I worry that the actions I take will lead me to a future I did not plan,
even if I had every good intention at the core of my actions.” Overall however, she derives a marginal amount of meaning from the incident, as she explains in the interview,

> It hasn’t impacted me so much that I am going to be a better person and I think I am bad and I am going to change my ways. No, I am just more cautious about what I do and make sure that I am never going to do this again.

In summary, blaming the TA and minimizing the severity of her cheating act contributed to Tanya’s ability to resist responsibility. Through justification and anger Tanya was able to distance herself from her integrity violation, ultimately marginalizing her experience and inhibiting her own growth and development.

Beth. Beth completed her degree requirements in December of 2008. However, her integrity violation resulted in her degree being postponed by one quarter. Beth’s integrity violation included extensive plagiarism. She is an International Studies major and explained her transgression this way:

> It was the class I thought would be the easiest of the quarter but was actually the one I got in the most trouble for. It was the last quarter I was enrolled in. The paper was due the next day and I didn’t start it until the night before and I had no idea what to write and I was really, really tired. But it was not my intention at all to copy – I guess I copied from the website and I didn’t cite it.

The themes that emerged in Beth’s story included external pressures, resisting responsibility, meaningfulness of the incident, and perceptions of cheating. Beth refers to the external pressures she was experiencing as the reason she engaged in cheating explaining that looking for a job and trying to finish her degree kept her from sleeping the week the assignment was due. Beth’s greatest fear in the wake of the incident was
whether or not her parents would find out about it. She explains, “I didn’t know what was going to happen to me. I really wanted to graduate and I really had hoped that this is not going to not let me graduate because I already had an extra quarter. My parents were going to be really angry.” She chooses not to tell her parents which results in many anxious moments and continued lies to cover up why she does not have a physical diploma to show her parents. She expresses disappointment in herself for not exercising better time management skills and working on an assignment the night before it is due. But Beth is also quick to talk about the behaviors she sees in other students, saying

I know a lot of people cheat in this school. My freshmen roommate cheated a lot. I never saw so many people cheating so much and she got away with a lot of them [cheating] actually, so I feel like a lot of people cheat and got away with it.

Beth’s individual survey results indicate she has observed students “frequently” engaging in cheating behaviors such as assignment cheating, helping another student cheat on a test, and falsifying excuses. Beth blames the professor’s lack of class management as a contributing reason for her transgression. She writes in her Case Study assignment, “Due to the lack of structure and direction in the class, I was confused about where and what to research.”

When asked how meaningful this experience has been for her Beth rated it as follows,

Like a seven. It is a pretty big deal academically because I have never had anything like this happen in my academic life but in terms of having an affect about the way that I live I don’t think it affects it too much. But obviously nobody should cheat but it just happens because people want to get a good grade, get through college with a good G.P.A.
In summary, Beth’s persistent perception of other students’ cheating behavior and continued blame towards her professor seemed to enable her to distance herself from her cheating incident, resist personal responsibility, and externalize the experience. In marginalizing the incident, Beth contains her transgression as pertinent only to her academic life and fails to connect the experience to her broader life experience and personal development.

*Moderately Profound Response*

Students who fell into the moderately profound category tended to externalize the experience, engaged in blaming others, and simultaneously accepted at least partial responsibility. Students engaged in rationalization and resisting responsibility. Prevalent in this group were strong emotions. Students were affected emotionally by the incident, expressing substantial feelings of guilt, shame and fear coinciding with reflecting on the incident and learning more about themselves through the experience.

*Troy.* Troy is a fourth-year student majoring in Psychology. His integrity violation included plagiarizing a paper in a required general education course. He describes his violation in this way, “When I wrote the paper I paraphrased a couple of things and I didn’t cite. Looking back it was a dumb mistake and just my thought was to finish the paper and I didn’t really think, it just slipped my mind to cite it.” His sense of responsibility for the incident is characterized more as a resignation. He explains this upon receiving the notice in the mail:
I thought oh wow – I didn’t cite it – I made a huge mistake and so because of that I got an “F” in the course and I had to take an academic integrity course and I was really bummed out that because of this mistake and that this slipped my mind I have to pay all of this and yeah it was wrong for me to not cite it and I admit that but I just – I took the responsibility and I just took the course and everything.

The emergent themes in Troy’s story include resisting responsibility, perceptions of cheating, external pressures, and emotional response. At the time of the incident Troy was experiencing a break-up with a girlfriend which he partially blames for his failure to cite.

I was going through a breakup and it was really just messing with me and it was like the day before the paper was due and it was pretty hard. I don’t mean to make it sound like an excuse but I just couldn’t concentrate and the paper was due the next day and I wasn’t even thinking straight.

Troy’s emotions toward the experience include regret, feeling stressed by the incident, and fear of the consequences. He admits that his actions were “careless” and “not something that I do.” His individual survey results indicated he “never” cheated on all but minimal paraphrasing and copying a few sentences from outside sources and not citing. To that extent the incident seemed to initiate some turmoil about his own moral choices in life which he hasn’t fully worked through yet. “I think of myself as an honest person and just because this happened I don’t know if that affects, I don’t know, I am an honest person. I don’t lie and I tell the truth.” Troy only discloses to some close friends to “let it out at bit” but he attributes his ability to cope with the situation to his own sense of resilience. “I believe that whatever happens in life it is for a reason and so I try to take a lesson out of it and that’s what I like to think of this that it is just another experience I go through in life.” He identifies the experience as very meaningful to him.
rating it a “9” and one that has made him “learn a lot” and “...just be stronger, I mean I feel this whole experience has definitely made me strong and definitely has made me learn more about myself and my limits and my weaknesses.”

In summary, while Troy acknowledges that the experience made him learn more about himself he persists in marginalizing his experience as one that was merely a “slip”, not representative of his true academic work. He struggles with the obvious severity of the incident and how it intersects with his own personal identity. He blames a break-up with a girlfriend for his failure to cite and focuses on the attending consequences so much so that it hinders his personal growth and sense of responsibility.

Mark. A graduating Environmental Systems major, Mark was cited for an integrity violation which included assignment cheating. He describes the incident:

It was a Physics lab class, me and my girlfriend were in the class together and we worked together on the pre-labs, and labs together and we somehow on a pre-lab, I copied off of her or wrote it the same way or whatever you want to call it. We got busted for it.

The themes that emerged most intensely in Mark’s story included emotional responses, disclosure to others, resisting responsibility, future motivation to cheat, perceptions of cheating, and learned lessons. Mark’s first reaction is anger towards his TA for not talking to him about the situation, “He didn’t contact us until the last day, he told us and I was kind of angry about that. I would have rather have known earlier and I don’t know if it would have done anything but I could have talked to him.” Despite his frustration towards his TA, Mark accepts responsibility for the incident and realizes, “I knew I did a wrong thing – Physics is a tough class and there is a lot of work involved. I
got careless, I have to say, and didn’t want to do the work one day.” His ability to accept responsibility and put the incident into perspective had in part to do with his father, a high school Vice Principal who encouraged him to view it as a life lesson.

I was pretty bummed when I found out because I didn’t know how it was going to affect me after school and after I get out – how it will affect grad school and that really kind of bummed me out because you put six years into getting my BS and maybe not being able to go on because of that – because of one little incident it kinda really bummed me out and I talked to my dad and he kind of calmed me down.

The incident also caused Mark to reconcile his own perceptions of morality himself as he identified as a student who was “against cheating”,

I am a person of morals and I think you should do something right or it’s not worth doing it and I don’t know why I did it – I guess it was just one of those slips. I guess I didn’t feel it was a big deal like taking a midterm or a final.

Aside from anger, Mark was also disappointed in himself and scared of the consequences. He writes in his Stakeholder Letter assignment, “I will become a better person from this and I guarantee that I will never cheat on anything again in life.” In an effort to understand the event he disclosed to “anybody who asked”. He found reflecting on the incident with his father and with other students in the Educational Integrity Seminar helpful to coming to terms with the incident. When asked how meaningful the incident was for him, Mark assigned it an “8”, explaining,

It was an enlightening experience. It definitely has strengthened me and since I went through this and I know the consequences now and even though in a job, I will just know that. It is confidential here and I think that I have just grown as a person – it sucks because a lot of people get away with it and they won’t ever learn if they don’t get caught.
In summary, Mark outwardly accepts responsibility and seems also to grasp the severity of the incident as it relates to his own moral choices in life. However, his persistent blaming of the teaching assistant allows him to focus on the act of getting caught as opposed to focusing on his own choice to copy his girlfriend’s assignment. In this way he evades full responsibility but still links the incident to his broader life experience.

Martin. Martin is a third-year, international student from Indonesia. He transferred into the university after attending a community college. His integrity violation included plagiarizing in a Political Science class. The themes that connect most strongly to Martin’s story include resisting responsibility, emotional responses, perceptions of cheating, meaningfulness of the incident, and learned lessons. Martin resists responsibility for the violation through blaming his violation on his education which he feels has ill prepared him to be knowledgeable about plagiarism. He explains his incident,

My intention was not to plagiarize I was trying to paraphrase and I didn’t have the proper citation. Plagiarism is very difficult to prevent for me because of the language difficulties and it was a factor and when you look at words in my sentence it is so close that it could be said as plagiarizing.

Martin really feels that he did not understand the concept of plagiarism and believes that his education has lacked an important piece: “I am not being ignorant but the education I have gone through has not provided me with good information and I think that is how it hits me a lot. The education from high school and before up until now hasn’t been enough.” Martin also partially blames the instructor for not talking to him
after the violation, which in Martin’s opinion could have helped him had he the opportunity to explain his situation to the professor.

Professors have to have flexibility for students who have special circumstances and you don’t know what students have gone through. My third party is the professor and the TA for charging me with the violation. They should have talked to me prior to making the charge. You just don’t know what a student has gone through that accounts for the difficulty, maybe more than language.

Although Martin blames a lack of understanding as a reason for his transgression, he admits to having engaged in several cheating behaviors on his individual survey. The incident has caused Martin to question his moral standards as he understands, “If you don’t have a good morality you are not going to be very successful you have to have strong fundamentals and strong morals.” He chooses to disclose to his parents who live outside of the country. They explain to him that now he must achieve an even higher G.P.A. to overcome this mistake. “So for me I have to be better than the average student in order to say that this is just my mistake and a simple mistake that I have now proven my worth by obtaining a higher GPA. My parents told me this.”

He rates the meaningfulness he has derived from the incident as a “9”. Martin is very concerned with how this incident will affect his future and is having great difficulty moving beyond the incident.

I try not to think about it every day because it discourages me. Every time I think about it there is only regret. It is not a temporary problem. It goes through your life. You can’t do anything. I am trying to use it to trigger me to do better. But I haven’t been able to yet.
Overall, Martin seems stuck on getting caught and the consequences for his behavior which prevents him from accepting responsibility and engaging in honest reflection.

Profound Response

Students who had a profound reaction to the incident accepted responsibility with contrition, engaged in little or no equivocation, expressed significant shame and regret. They reported that they still think about the incident, sometimes daily. Students talked about the importance of reflecting upon the incident as important to their understanding of what happened. Overall, the event made them think differently about themselves, and they were able to talk concretely about how the incident changed their behavior.

Antonio. Antonio is a third-year student studying Mechanical Engineering. The themes that emerge in Antonio’s story include emotional responses, accepting responsibility, meaningfulness of the incident, disclosure, and learned lessons. His integrity violation included plagiarism, and he admits to having paid a website to check his paper for plagiarism prior to submitting it for a grade. Yet the Turnitin.com report used for the class reflected a 40% match. Antonio shares that his friend offered to let him look at her paper, which he at first declines but later changes his mind.

Once I got close to the deadline I was almost on the same page that I started from so I just decided to take a chance with her paper. I thought I was short on time and at the last minute I just decided to do it and it was the biggest mistake.

Antonio knows immediately that he was wrong to have copied the paper, “I knew it was wrong and I have known that this whole time and I don’t know why I decided to
do it, I knew the consequences I would face.” He states that he has not ever thought about cheating before, “I was scared, it was my first time doing it and I knew it was not a good thing to do.” In his individual survey Antonio was only one of three interviewees who identified that students cheat “because they think they won’t get caught.” Given the extent that Antonio went to avoid getting caught his survey results makes sense, he thought he was being careful. Antonio identifies several pressures in his life at the time that he thinks facilitated his cheating.

I still had a lot of things to do for my other three classes I was taking and I am not very much of a writer either so I just thought I’d BS my way through it but it didn’t work out at all – I couldn’t even BS anything at all, I just didn’t have time to read all the readings thoroughly and so I had enough time to do it but just decided not to – I decided to plagiarize instead.

Although Antonio points to several stressors that were impacting his behavior he is also quick to assume responsibility for the incident and understands that he could have made different decisions.

In the beginning of the week I had plenty of time. And when I could make different decisions, but at that one point the day before the class and the day before it was due I didn’t have many options so that is when I decided to plagiarize in this class and study for my engineering class. It was a risk I was apparently willing to take.

Upon receiving the notice, he experienced several different emotions, anger at himself and the website that he hired, deep shame and regret, disappointment, and fear for what may happen to him.

I mean that what if they tell me you can’t come to [this university] anymore now what do I tell my parents – they have invested two and half years in me – time and money - and I am just going to go back and say I
am not going to go anymore because I cheated this one time and so I was really scared.

He deeply regrets the situation writing in his Stakeholder Letter, “I realized that there were many others affected, such as the person I copied from, my colleagues, the school and most especially you, my family.” He shares in the interview,

I just think there is no way I could have done that and why did I do it and I just regret it so much. I just wish I could go back and if I could go back to that one point I have that option – to prioritize that one class over the other – I would still prioritize but I would not cheat. I would just get a ‘d’ or not pass the class.

Antonio chooses to not disclose the incident to anyone, which he is finding more and more difficult, and it seems to be preventing him from moving beyond the incident.

None of my friends know about this and nobody knows about this – I don’t talk to anybody at all. Maybe it is because I have a lot of pride and doing that is just such a low dignity act, it was really hard for me to talk to the dean.

Antonio cannot bring himself to share with his friends which he admits is increasingly difficult. “It has been really hard. It’s been tough because I have really close friends and just not telling this stuff I am not lying to them but I am not being completely transparent with them either and it is tough.” He hasn’t been able to tell the friend whose paper he copied though he is sure she knows. “Even though she acts the same way, I don’t say anything to her and I can’t act the same with her. It’s affected my friendship with her.” But his biggest fear is disclosing to his parents. He is certain that should they find out, they will cut off his funding for school and not allow him to attend even if he paid for school himself.
My brother and sister they have always been real rebellious and I have been the nice kid and now that is why it was so difficult to face the facts – knowing that they expected the best of me and they got the worst. I don’t think I have ever disappointed them in any way that I know. They have high expectations of me. I am the first to come to a highly competitive school and both my brother and sister went to CSUN. And [this university] is a more competitive school than Cal State – the tuition tells a lot. My brother only pays 1/3 of what I pay so they expect a lot of me – they are investing a lot and they expect a lot.

Antonio has taken away many lessons from this experience including how he would react when confronted with the violation. He thinks that he would have lied to cover for his mistake, but when he meets with the dean he tells the truth, “When I got to the point of actually talking to him I felt like a coward if I lied and so I just decided to be responsible and not be a coward. It felt good but it was tough.” The incident has resulted in some deliberate decision-making on Antonio’s part with respect to how he completes his academic work.

Now, I can’t afford that to ever happen again. So when I get an assignment I get on it right away and I try to finish it. I don’t have time for anything – I just don’t have time for anything but my school anymore. I used to hang out with my friends and just kill time but now I don’t kill time unless I have finished all my work and what I have to do and if not I am really sorry. It is the first time I have done this with my friends because every time before I would just go and then come back and I find myself in trouble and I wouldn’t have time to finish this. Now it is the other way, I would finish it and if I don’t have time to hang out with my friends well there will be some time in the future. But I have to finish it. My study skills have changed – my time management skills have changed.

Not surprisingly, Antonio ranks the meaningfulness of this experience as a ten. He explains, “Well to tell you I think about it every day – it is a ten. I wake up every morning and like there is all these things in my head and it is one of them – it is always there.” Antonio writes in his Stakeholder Letter, “It will teach me the value and the
importance of being honest for the rest of my life.” Connected to this is his inability to disclose to anyone else about the incident which has held him back from bringing closure to the incident.

But coping with this is really tough without really telling anybody. Knowing that I learned from it and I am doing things right now and though I made a mistake I am not doing them again and I learned from them. I don’t know who to say sorry to and say that I won’t. But it is really tough to deal with this and it has been awhile but it feels like it happened just yesterday.

In summary, Antonio immediately accepts responsibility for his violation, recognizing the poor judgment he had exercised. He experiences strong emotions of deep regret, fear, and shame. He identifies the experience as very meaningful and one in which he learned significant lessons.

Lisa. A second-year, Environmental Systems major, Lisa’s experience with academic integrity was clearly life-altering. The themes that surfaced in her story include accepting responsibility, emotional reactions, disclosure, meaningfulness, and learned lessons. Her violation included assignment cheating where she had copied homework from a friend. She explains the situation:

It was fall quarter this year and I was taking a Physics lab, Chemistry, Calculus and an MMW class and that was the most classes I had ever taken I had just started my internship and I was returning fall quarter and things just got very hard. In this one instance I was just over my head and she [friend] was trying to explain it and I was just like, ‘yeah right’ and I just ended up copying at that point and because honestly I just didn’t care I was just overwhelmed with everything else, and I have basically regretted it ever since.
Lisa accepted responsibility with sincere contrition when she received the notice in the mail, “It was basically devastation because I knew that it was my fault and I had done that to my really good friend. I had a lot of self hate for doing that to her.” She spends time being very honest with friends about what happened.

Like you know when you do something wrong and you don’t need anyone to tell you that is wrong like you really are grasping it and that was kind of how it was. I apologized a lot to her and whenever it comes up in a social situation – because sometimes it will get mentioned between our close friends and someone will say some comment like that was so stupid and I can’t believe you guys did that and I am always like no, no it was me it wasn’t her, she had nothing to do with it.

She writes in her Stakeholder Letter, “It is my fault entirely, and I am ok to admit that. But I have also realized that if I didn’t have so much self-pressure to do well, I wouldn’t have put myself in that position.”

The emotions she connected with the experience included being “really ashamed”, angry with herself and very regretful. She shared early in the interview that, “I definitely feel like I have learned a lot about it and that is why I wanted to interview with you and talk about it because I feel like it has actually changed me – legitimately changed me.” Before the incident Lisa thought that she had little understanding of what cheating was and that had this incident not occurred she would have still been “blurry” on what cheating meant. She perceives other students “cheating just to stay afloat.” Her transgression helped her understand not only the importance of academic integrity but the importance of staying true to one’s convictions. She ranks the experience a “Ten – eleven” for meaningfulness and explains:
Huge impact in my personal life – I feel like after this seminar I decided okay, cheating is wrong and I will never do it again. This wasn’t all at once, this was over months. I would just think about more and more. But I decided that the fact that I slipped and I cheated and I didn’t think it was a big deal before I got caught – I was okay with it. So, I thought okay you need to set values and decide these are what you need to hold by and just guidelines in life like this is what I believe is right and righteous and I should stay within these. And so more scenarios would come up where I would have to decide do I think it is wrong and if I think it is wrong then I have to not do it and not only not do it but stand strong in my decision to not do it and not allow anybody else to sway me because I have already made the decision in myself that it is wrong.

Lisa shares with her father what had happened through her Stakeholder Assignment in the Educational Integrity Seminar. His reaction helps her process the experience:

I think he is a man who just understands that sometimes when you do something wrong and you don’t have to reprimand someone because they already get it and he reassured me and said – you know this is not going to change anything you want to do in life this isn’t changing who you are and yes, it is a hit but you know we can move on.

Lisa felt that “accepting it and then deciding that I am going to move on and this isn’t going to be the end was really what helped me get to the next step.” Her interview was impassioned, and she was clear the incident changed her behavior as she has since been approached by other students to collaborate too closely on another assignment.

Whatever grade I will get I just want it to be mine because I just want my coursework to reflect my work and sometimes I think oh, why am I not getting a better grade? However I graduate [from this university] I just want it to be my own honest work, when I reflect back I don’t want think, oh, I got through it and, oh, my roommate really got me through it. Each time I feel proud when I’ve turned the people down, that has been a whole other reassurance and boost that this is the right thing.
Lisa accepts the fact that this incident is not a reflection of who she is as a person, “It is an embarrassing thing and it is not representative of who I am but it is a part of me now.” Her survey results corroborate her interview, as she indicated that she has not engaged in any cheating behaviors outside of assignment cheating. Moreover, she has expressed gratitude for the incident and the impact it has had in her life.

Yes, I think I think better about myself in the end because I did something wrong and I was punished from it but I grew from it. And I feel like what better result could you have in your life but to grow from it and not just to never do it again or not get caught, but to really change your ways.

In summary, Lisa readily accepts responsibility for her violation, maintains that the incident was very meaningful for her and that she has learned several lessons which she supports with examples. Lisa shares her experience with others in the hopes of helping those around her learn from her experience.

Eddie. Eddie is a fifth-year student majoring in Biology. He entered the university as a transfer student. Themes that were evident in Eddie’s story included accepting responsibility, emotional responses, perceptions of cheating, disclosure, learned lessons and meaningfulness. Eddie engaged in assignment cheating. His mother received the notice and called Eddie at school to ask him about it. He explains that at first he was “shocked” and didn’t exactly understand what he was accused of, “Confusion and anger in the beginning, how did this happen type of anguish. But after thinking about it and meeting with everyone I just came to terms with what happened.” The anxiety about the situation gave way to a little anger, followed by fear. “I was actually scared, a lot of scary thoughts were going through my head like suspension and expulsion and
major, major things like that.” Eddie accepts responsibility for the incident, saying, “I was responsible for it and I had to take the consequences and learn from my mistake.” He describes himself as an honest student who hasn’t engaged in cheating before, “I am pretty straightforward as a student, no plagiarism and I don’t cheat on tests.” His individual survey results support this claim. Nevertheless, the incident affected Eddie, and that made him think differently as a student.

It definitely affected me personally – it was quite a shock – I am definitely more careful about who I work with now and if someone needs help, when I used to show them my paper I try to teach them now instead of showing them. It made me realize that I should always be putting more than 100% work into my schooling and work in general you know. And that I shouldn’t be lazy and I should do my work.

In explaining how meaningful the incident was to Eddie, he assigns it a “10” and explains,

I don’t want to over exaggerate but it really opened my eyes and really changed how I work and how I help others and basically impacted my life now. I always tell others about my experience when they are faced with this or are potentially thinking about it - so it helps me and it helps others I think.

Reflecting upon the incident was important for Eddie. He spoke with his parents and friends about what happened and credits the Educational Integrity Seminar for helping him better understand academic integrity issues. Eddie also found himself lecturing his younger brother once when he disclosed a cheating incident to Eddie.

My little brother once mentioned cheating to me and I totally lectured him, it wasn’t my style but we were driving and I stopped the car and I said ‘what are you stupid?’ This was a little after what happened and he knew what happened and I told him – ‘don’t do stupid stuff like that’ …It was a serious issue.
In describing why he thinks other students engage in cheating, Eddie had this perspective:

There is that word de-sensitized – you know it will start with looking at a little homework problem then it will go to writing a paragraph and it will go to peeking over your shoulder to look at someone’s test and as you do it more and more people get comfortable with the idea or they think they are getting better at cheating and especially if you are stressed with a lot of work everyone looks for the easy way out and I think that definitely affects why people resort to cheating and copying other people’s work.

When asked if he had anything to add, Eddie closed his interview with this final remark, “This experience opened my eyes and taught me to be a better student and help others. I can help others through my experience now.”

In summarizing Eddie’s experience, his ability, upon reflection, to accept responsibility seemed to be a pivotal point for him. Once he recognized his own mistake, he was able to look at what he learned from the experience, including his own misperceptions of cheating.

Nora. Nora is a third-year student majoring in Human Development. The salient themes in her story include accepting responsibility, disclosure, emotional responses, external pressures, perceptions of cheating, meaningfulness, and learned lessons. Her integrity violation included plagiarism in one of her major courses. She described her incident in this way;

We were supposed to write about the lecture materials that she [professor] covered in the week and what we thought about it and engage in discussions. It was only 5% of the final grade and I copied and pasted things among the information from a website without citing the source.
She is quick to accept responsibility for the incident explaining that when the professor showed Nora her paper she said, “I knew I had made a mistake.” Nora had visited the professor often during her office hours, and when the professor told her about the incident, Nora was very embarrassed.

Now, I am thinking back and I don’t know why I actually did that because I knew I was supposed to cite it and I knew I was supposed to do that. It wasn’t like I didn’t have any idea. I knew exactly what I should do but I still did it, you know. So I feel like I really did make a bad choice.

Part of the reason Nora believes she cheated was because of the pressure she perceived she was under from her parents. She shares “they just have a really big amount of expectation of me.” While she discloses to her friends, she still has not been able to bring herself to tell her parents. She thinks that after she graduates she may tell them what happened.

Reflecting upon the incident helped her to understand why she did it, which actually caused her to be more distressed because it didn’t reflect her self perception.

The class itself was harder than my other classes and I thought that I was putting in a lot of effort on the papers and it didn’t seem like I was getting the full points and I was, like, I really want to get an “A” for this class and to get a higher grade I was willing to take a risk in this class. Before this experience I didn’t know that I was like – I didn’t think that I was like a person who thinks that all I need to get is a perfect score for all I that do, I didn’t see myself as a perfectionist but, after this experience I feel like oh, maybe I really cared about my grade and maybe I really did care about that 5%. Now thinking back, without that 5% I could of still got an ‘A’ for that class but I still cared about that 5% so much that I made a really stupid mistake, and now I see myself as I really cared about my grade. Maybe I was just same as the other students and maybe I was willing to take a risk for a higher grade.
Nora also shares that she had contemplated cheating before but had never done it. She sees other students cheating and not getting caught which shaped her perception of academic integrity. Her survey results are consistent with her interview. She reported she thought other students either sometimes or frequently engage in the full range of cheating behaviors, which she believes is because of the high pressure to succeed. She writes in her Final Assignment,

Since you want to get a higher grade so much you start making bad choices. We all know that cheating is wrong. However, the pressure to succeed allows them to cheat and this shows that students are willing to take the risk to get a higher grade.

Disclosure helped Nora process her experience and gain some perspective. She tells her friends who in turn help her think about the experience a little differently.

Pretty much all of my friends who I told were tried to cheer me up kind of thing, (sniffling), but they still think that I made a bad choice so they were, like, there is nothing you can do about it now, so, accept the situation as a mistake and you can still move on. They gave me a lot of different perspectives about how I should understand the situation. By that time I was more like – self-blaming kind of stage – oh, maybe I should haven’t done this, why did I do this? They tried to look at the same situation with a different perspective – a positive side that maybe you can learn from this.

Nora has also decided to apply to be a peer educator with the Academic Integrity Office. She thinks that “being a peer educator will help me to move on and help by helping other students who are in the same situation as myself before.”

Nora regrets the incident, writing in her Stakeholder Letter assignment, “I made a big mistake and as I am recalling the past, I feel very regretful about what I did.” She admits to thinking about the incident often,
Once a week I guess, like whenever I have to write a paper I keep thinking about it, it kind of comes all of a sudden it comes and I have to think about it and take a deep breath and I write my paper and stuff.

As a result Nora shares that she has learned a lot from the incident. She writes in her Stakeholder Letter, “Now, I know what a serious mistake I made and I can promise you that I will not make the same mistake again. I am really sorry again and thank you for teaching me this great lesson.” She says during the interview,

This situation reminds me of doing the work that I am supposed to do and get a grade that I deserve is better. Getting an honest ‘C’ or ‘B’ is better than getting a fake ‘A’. I feel like I need to be more honest with myself.

In summary, Nora’s ability to disclose the incident and reflect upon her mistake facilitates her ability to accept responsibility and identify important lessons. The situation helped clarify for her the values that are important to her.

\emph{Lupe.} A third year student majoring in Psychology, Lupe’s integrity violation included plagiarism in her college’s core writing program. The themes that connect to her story include disclosure, emotional responses, accepting responsibility, meaningfulness of the incident, and learned lessons. She explains, without equivocation, that she knew what she was doing was wrong:

I pretty much knew it. What I did was not copying and pasting it but, um, I copied the different quotes from the books and then I just changed the order of it and then later I couldn’t find time to find the sources again from the books because it was all mixed up and I thought ‘whatever,’ I just did it and turned it in.

The notice about her violation was sent home to her parents whom upon reading the letter were very upset at Lupe. She described that phone call as “horrible”. She explains, “I really hated the feeling, I didn’t want to tell them and I didn’t want to
disappoint them as a daughter. I guess that was the most horrible thing is to not disappoint them.” Lupe was very worried she would be expelled from school, kicked off campus or, would fail the course. While she shares that she has never engaged in cheating before her survey results indicate she has “more than once” engaged in several cheating behaviors including “submitting a paper you purchased or obtained from someone else and claim it as your own work.” As a result of this incident she has absolutely no intentions of ever again engaging in academic dishonesty. She has expressed gratitude for the experience, she thanked her dean, and shares, “accepting the decision and now really rethinking about it I am thankful for that because I learned something and as long as I learn something.”

What seemed to help Lupe process the experience was talking about it with a few people she trusted, which for Lupe turned out to be her church youth group.

Well, that happened in spring and until fall quarter I didn’t tell anyone because I was too ashamed of it and as a final project for AI Seminar I decided to make a power point of the contents and present to my youth group at church. They were in junior high school to high school. So I did and they didn’t know I did it, but I told some people of my church because I had to explain why I had to do this, because out of nowhere would be too random. So a few members knew, the people I trusted knew. It was pretty supportive I guess. They didn’t accuse me of anything and they said that anybody can make mistakes.

Lupe also found the Educational Integrity Seminar helpful for her processing the experience:

Otherwise if I hadn’t taken the seminars then I wouldn’t have time to look at the problem again and have had time to face the problem. I wanted to avoid it all the time before the seminars. And I was sat down there and I
had to listen to what they were saying and I had to review what I did and it was pretty hard in the beginning.

Though it was difficult for Lupe she has learned a lot and rated the experience a “10” for how meaningful it was to her. “It was the biggest issue in my college life – more than anything.” She writes in her stakeholder letter assignment,

I assume that you know what I went through during that time. Perhaps making it one of the most important decisions in my lifetime. I was mentally and emotionally stressed and burnt out. However, I should’ve done my duty as a student more than anything.

Lupe has decided to help others by becoming a peer educator. She explains, “Taking the seminar helped me decide to be a peer educator for the seminars, so I am taking the opportunity. It is a way for me to overcome the issues and really step up from that. It has been really important in my life.” In the wake of the incident Lupe has learned to be less judgmental of others and has a new perspective regarding expectations she has for herself.

Well, for one thing I learned, that for sure, I would never do it again, no matter how long it takes I will do it on my own work or I would tell the professor I need more time. I won’t repeat the same mistake again. I learned also that I have to take responsibility for what I did whether it is good or bad I have to be responsible for my actions and what I choose to do. I learned what it [academic integrity] was and how important it is for later in life even in jobs and not just in college. I guess I am a perfectionist and I realized that I can make mistakes and it is totally fine to make mistakes as long as you learn from them and take lessons from them. I guess towards other people I have been more open minded because I never thought that I would be a cheater and before when I looked at people who were called cheaters I would have a biased view towards them and their personal characteristics. But now I hear the word ‘cheater’ and I don’t judge them I guess I have a more open view.
In summary, while Lupe experienced strong emotions, she immediately accepted responsibility which allowed her to review the experience and glean several important lessons. She found the experience deeply meaningful and altered her perceptions of cheating.

Ted. Ted is a fourth-year, Mechanical Engineering student who has taken very few writing courses at the university. The themes that emerge in Ted’s story include perceptions of cheating, emotional responses, external pressures, accepting/resisting responsibility, disclosure and learned lessons. His violation involved plagiarism which he explains, with equivocation, this way,

It was the first time I experienced Turnitin.com and for the case it was an upper division course and the instructor assumes that everyone knows the rules of writing and he didn’t state it clearly on the prompt. He didn’t mention that we needed to put the citations and the quotes in the paper and apparently I didn’t and I didn’t pass Turnitin.com. It was like a 30-50% match on Internet resources and that was a violation right there.

As Ted describes the incident and events that unfolded it is clear to him how little he understood about the rules of writing and the writing process. The class for Ted was one he took pass/no pass with the intention of just getting through the class and satisfying a general education requirement. His plan was to do as little as possible so he could concentrate on his mechanical engineering courses. He admits to using Google and Wikipedia which he viewed as appropriate sources from which to copy and paste. The emotions he identified with the incident included:

Frustration, disbelief, the dean and I met 2-3 times and the first time I was a little bit angry and trying to blame it all on the instructor and then I just thought it is unbelievable and it is like how could you just accuse me of
cheating for that? I didn’t think like without citation it is a big deal, but it turns out it is.

While at first Ted resists responsibility he soon accepts that it was his fault. “I accepted responsibility because I felt like it was my responsibility for not knowing the rules because I almost graduated and don’t even know the rule of writing!” Because Ted is nearing graduation he is also thinking about how this situation may impact him in his work.

In engineering, doing research and writing reports I think these types of experiences that sometimes it is necessary. If you go onto work and you get those types of accusations then it is not just a warning or anything it will be something more serious like it might just go to court or all of a sudden you are in a lot of trouble and people are against you.

Ted accurately shares the incident with his friends and his parents. He explains that while he “thought this was not what I do in life,” he relies on a sense of resilience to work through the incident explaining, “Emotionally I don’t think it is good for me to be sad, it is going to affect all the people around you, so it is better to just learn from the mistake and just stand up and keep going.” He rates the meaningfulness of the incident a “10” and explains it has changed the way he completes his work:

For now, I think that if I hadn’t been caught I wouldn’t be reading this book right here I would just be googling some summaries. So I am writing a different paper and I am approaching it differently and it is not just that I can get the stuff done with my own ideas – but I feel more confident about the subject if I do the reading myself and write the paper myself and also avoiding the same incident again.

In summary, what was important for Ted was his ability to accept responsibility for the incident and recognize his own failure. The incident grows in meaningfulness
from the point of his accepting responsibility, and he is able to grow personally as a result.

*Tracy.* Tracy is a third-year student majoring in Biochemistry and Cell Biology. Emergent themes in her story include external pressures, accepting responsibility, meaningfulness of the incident, disclosure, and learned lessons. She describes her integrity violation as:

It was one of the classes where you had to write three lab reports for that quarter and so I had this other copy of a lab report that I kind of copied off of and used the same techniques and words to turn in as my own.

Tracy identified strongly with the pressure to succeed in school as an explanation for her engaging in cheating. This response is corroborated on her individual survey where she indicates the reason other students cheat is due to external pressures. She eventually realizes, though, that the decision was hers and writes in her Stakeholder Letter, “I know now even under certain stressful or seemingly helpless situations to never take the easy way out by relying on someone else. What I did was unfair to other students and to myself.” Upon reflection she is able to identify the external influences she allowed to penetrate her thinking.

I felt really guilty and I knew that it was a little more referring to my friends report than just looking at it and I was pre-pharm and the stress from school and doing well in every class you kind of get into this zone that I have to get an “A” in everything and I don’t know if it is an Asian culture thing or a pre-med thing. It is just that everyone is so competitive in this school and you kind of get lost in that and I think that is what happened to me. It was like I felt like it was more advantageous to do that and get an “A” than really do the work and try.
It is not uncommon for many students entering this university to feel the pressure from many other students who are just as bright as they are, and for Tracy, this was evident and in the end, an important lesson for her.

In high school I was just straight “A” every semester so it is really – it is kind of like you go through middle school and high school it is easy and you try a little bit and you are still doing the best and I was top ranked and when you first come here a lot of people are more at your level and it kind of comes as a shock and what you have to put into your whole effort into it and even when you do you don’t get an “A”. Like that was really hard at first. Now, I have really kind of like just had an epiphany. It is okay.

The incident preceded another major life event for Tracy which included being diagnosed with Type I Diabetes. She identified the meaningfulness of her cheating incident as an “8”. However, the two events combined greatly influenced Tracy, resulting in her taking a quarter off from school, changing her major, and generally slowing down, she says about her integrity violation,

It has definitely helped me slow down. I know I won’t do it again and I won’t beat myself about it now because it is over and I won’t make that decision in the future and just from this experience and taking that class. It is not as big of a deal as compared to being diagnosed with diabetes.

She discloses her incident to her mother who after getting angry at Tracy, helps her understand her experience, and both women seem to take a more reasonable approach towards life. “My mom persuaded me that I had to figure everything out first before going back to school. This quarter of just relaxing and thinking about everything has helped me understand why I needed to slow down a little and not push myself so hard.” She says she learned to not be so critical towards herself, and that “if you are not that great in lab you can practice and I think that is what I gained out of it.”
In summarizing Tracy’s experience, what was important for her included her recognition of external pressures and how she was able or not able to effectively manage them. She accepts responsibility and discloses to her mother, which allows her room to reflect on the incident, recognize her mistakes and identify important lessons.

Summary

Overall, students who persist in marginalizing the experience through resisting responsibility by either justification or rationalization seem to connect less meaning from the incident, and as a result are less likely to change their behavior. In disclosing the incident these students who distanced themselves from the experience reported distorting the incident, focusing more on the intentionality of their actions (e.g. I didn’t mean to cheat), and blaming and minimizing the experience. Alternatively, those students who accepted responsibility identified stronger intrinsic emotions, recognized intervening behaviors such as poor time management skills and their own inability to distinguish the severity of their integrity violation. These students derived deeper learning from the experience and were more likely to report altering their behavior and thinking. All students interviewed identified external pressures that affected their decision to engage in an integrity violation, with the difference resting in the students’ perception of their own role and responsibility in handling these stressors. In general, there seemed to be a connection between the degree of responsibility a student accepted for the cheating incident and the level of profundity derived from the experience (Table 5. Broad Overview of Responses).
### Table 5. Broad Overview of Responses

#### OVERALL RESPONSE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Marginalized Response; Student Rationalization and blaming, resists responsibility. Distance themselves from the cheating event.</th>
<th>Moderately Profound; Student Rationalization, equivocation, outwardly accepts responsibility, perception of unfairness.</th>
<th>Profound Response; Student Genuinely accepts responsibility without resistance, exhibits sincere contrition, self-blame.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accepting/Resisting Responsibility</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional Response</strong></td>
<td>Externalizing emotions; expressing anger, betrayal by Professor or TA.</td>
<td>Externalizing emotions, anger towards others; fears consequences, regret and shame.</td>
<td>Expresses significant shame and regret, fear, reports thinking about it daily or weekly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disclosure to others/Coping</strong></td>
<td>Discloses minimally, distorts incident, may not tell parents.</td>
<td>Discloses to friends, parents, truthful about incident, may engage in equivocating responsibility.</td>
<td>Honestly shares with trusted friends, and/or family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perception of cheating?</strong></td>
<td>Perceives as minor incident, believes others frequently cheat, justifies behavior.</td>
<td>Recognizes others engage in cheating, self perception: not a cheater.</td>
<td>Expresses astonishment at decision/behavior. Self perception: not a cheater.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Future motivation towards cheating</strong></td>
<td>May engage in cheating again if right opportunity presents itself.</td>
<td>Not interested in future cheating, fearful of getting caught again.</td>
<td>Motivated to avoid any future incidences, affirm their commitment to integrity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meaningfulness from incident</strong></td>
<td>Derives minimal meaning from the incident, mostly restricted to academic life.</td>
<td>Meaningful, personally learned from the experience, changed thinking.</td>
<td>Incident changed their thinking and behavior, identified as &quot;life-altering&quot;; interest in helping others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Pressures</strong></td>
<td>Cites external pressures as reasons for their cheating. Lacks personal responsibility.</td>
<td>Recognizes existing external pressures as a contributing reason, partially replacing personal responsibility.</td>
<td>Recognizes external pressures, fully accepts personal responsibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learned Lessons</strong></td>
<td>Avoid getting caught, cognizant of own academic behaviors.</td>
<td>Importance of integrity academically and otherwise.</td>
<td>Importance of doing their own work with integrity, establishing moral beliefs, and behaving congruently.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Quantitative Findings

The Academic Integrity Survey (Appendix B) was administered to students both before they entered the Educational Integrity Seminar and after they had completed the seminar. The post results of the survey for both fall 2008 and winter 2009 quarters proved most salient to the research questions posed in this study. Approximately 155 surveys were collected and analyzed as a part of this study. Because this survey was mandatory for students attending the seminar, the survey enjoyed a 100% response rate. Questions on this survey helped to better understand students’ perceptions of their own cheating behavior and those of their peers. The survey short-answer questions also helped explain why students believe others cheat and how disclosure may influence their understanding of the incident.

RQ #1: How do students perceive academic dishonesty individually and among their peers?

The quantitative data collected in this study serves to answer the research question, how do students perceive academic dishonesty individually and among their peers? There were seven questions on the survey that were identified because they either elicited data which linked to this research question and/or served to explicate the qualitative findings. Survey responses connected to four themes that emerged in the qualitative findings: perceptions of cheating, external pressures, disclosure to others, and learned lessons. The survey results replicate and are consistent with results represented in McCabe’s (2005) North American Survey. The results from the university’s Academic Integrity Survey serve to provide context and explicate the qualitative findings in this
study. Questions which are relevant to understanding respondent perceptions of cheating included:

1. It is my perception that university students in general, do/do not consider academic integrity as an important value to uphold.

2. On average, how often have you engaged in the following behaviors on this campus? If a question does not apply to any of the courses you took in the last year, please check 'Not Relevant'

3. On average, how often do you think other university students engage in the following behaviors?

4. Rank the seriousness of the following behaviors on a scale from "not at all cheating" to "serious cheating"

5. I think for the most part, that other students cheat in their classes because: On a scale of "not at all" to "very", rate your confidence in your future ability to do the following:
   a. Complete my academic assignments without INTENTIONALLY violating the Integrity of scholarship policy.
   b. Complete my academic assignments without UNINTENTIONALLY violating the integrity of scholarship policy.

6. Do you think it is important to talk about your academic integrity violation with others? Why or why not?
Peer perceptions may contribute to a student’s ability to engage in neutralizing attitudes and marginalizing their experience. For instance, it students believe that “everyone cheats,” they may feel justified in their actions, blame others for getting “caught,” or otherwise resist responsibility for the cheating behavior.

When asked whether or not their peers believe academic integrity is an important value to uphold, nearly 79% of respondents for fall quarter and 77% for winter quarter agreed that their peers felt it was an important value to uphold. However, students’ opinion differed on whether or not participants felt that in practice, their peers upheld this value.

Perceptions of Cheating. Many of the participants surveyed identified differences in perceptions about the severity of different forms of cheating. Most students found some cheating behaviors much more egregious than other cheating behaviors, and this was reflected in the following survey question: “Rank the seriousness of the following behaviors on a scale from “not at all cheating” to “serious cheating” (Academic Integrity Survey, 2008) (Figure 4.). An average of 25% of all respondents felt that collaborating on an individual assignment was either “not cheating” or “trivial” cheating. Approximately 42% of winter respondents and 31% of fall respondents felt that receiving unauthorized help on an assignment was also either “not cheating” or “trivial” cheating and (Figure 4.).
Figure 4. "Rank the Seriousness of the following behaviors on a scale from "not at all cheating" to "serious cheating"

Alternatively, other behaviors which students strongly identified as “Moderate” or “Serious” cheating included “helping someone else cheat on a test,” in which approximately 80.5% of students identified this behavior as serious cheating. “Copying from another student on a test” was identified as “Moderate” or “Serious” cheating, with 91.2% and 82.7% of fall and winter students responding. The behavior, “Using unauthorized aids (e.g., cheat sheets, programmable calculator, electronic communication with another person) to get help during a test or exam” was identified as “Moderate” or “Serious” cheating by approximately 96% of respondents. Finally, the act of purchasing a paper or obtaining a paper from someone else and submitting as your own work yielded a ranking of “serious cheating” for 87.5% and 89.3% of fall and winter respondents respectively (Figure 5).
Students’ perception of other students’ cheating was higher than their own self-reported behaviors. Approximately 83% of all respondents indicated that overall they had either never cheated or only cheated once while attending UC San Diego. In contrast, the cumulative summary indicated that approximately 80.5% of all survey respondents believe that other other students “sometimes” or “frequently” engage in cheating behaviors. These findings are consistent with the comments some students made in the individual interviews regarding their observations and opinions of other students’ propensity to engage in cheating behaviors.
The specific behaviors that respondents thought their peers engaged in most frequently and seemed to earn the highest ratings were mixed between behaviors that were considered trivial or moderate cheating to serious cheating as identified earlier in question #7 (see figure 5). The less-serious behaviors that on average over 90% of respondents indicated their peers either “sometimes” or “frequently” engaged in included, “receiving unpermitted help on an assignment”, “copying another student’s homework”, and “working on an assignment with others when the instructor asks for individual work”. The behavior of “using unauthorized aids (e.g., cheat sheets, programmable calculator, electronic communication with another person) to get help during a test or exam” was identified as more serious and approximately 78% of respondents felt their peers either “sometimes” or “frequently” engaged in this behavior. Highlights from this question appear in figure 6.

Figure 6. "On average, how often do you think other university students engage in the following behaviors?"
**Learned Lessons.** There was high confidence in survey respondents regarding whether or not they could intentionally avoid another cheating incident. Question #11, “On a scale of “not at all” to “very”, rate your confidence in your future ability to do the following: “Complete my academic assignments without INTENTIONALLY violating the integrity of scholarship policy” reflected that 92.5% and 98.7% for fall and winter respondents, respectively, felt “very confident” they could intentionally avoid a future cheating incident.

However, students were less confident in their ability to avert an academic integrity violation that was UNINTENTIONAL. Only 72.5% and 74.7% of those surveyed were “very confident” in their ability to avoid unintentionally violating the policy while 23.8% and 21.3% were “somewhat confident” (Figure 7). One way of interpreting this result could parallel the opinion expressed by several interview participants that they were not even aware that they were violating the Policy on Integrity of Scholarship. It also represents a certain degree of fear that students hold about violating the policy when their intention was not to cheat.
Figure 7. "On a scale of 'not at all cheating' to 'very', rate your confidence in your future ability to do the following: Complete my academic assignments without intentionally/unintentionally violating the integrity of scholarship policy?"

Further, students also felt “very confident” that they would choose a lower grade on an assignment rather than cheat to obtain a higher grade with 93.8% and 90.7% fall and winter quarters respectively, choosing the option “very confident” (Figure 7).

Confidence was high with the survey respondents regarding their future ability to choose not to cheat even when there was minimal risk of getting caught with 93.8% and 85.3% of survey respondents for fall and winter respectively choosing, “Very confident” in their ability to not cheat in the future (Figure 8).
Figure 8. On a scale of 'not at all' to 'very', rate your confidence in your future ability to do the following: Accept a lower grade on an assignment rather than cheat for a higher grade and Not cheat even when faced with the opportunity and little likelihood of being caught.

*External Pressures.* A survey question that connected directly to a theme found in the interviews included a sentence completion question, “I think for the most part, that other students cheat in their classes because…” and the answer options included:

- Students don’t know what they are doing will be considered cheating
- Students think they won’t get caught
- Pressure to succeed
- Students are willing to take the risk to get a higher grade
• Professors don’t care about/emphasize the importance of academic integrity.”

The results overwhelmingly recognized the pressure to succeed and willingness to take a risk as a reason why students cheat (Figure 9.). Additionally, survey results of the twelve students reflected 75% of this subgroup identified the pressure to succeed as a reason why students cheat.

Figure 9. "I think for the most part, that other students cheat in their classes because..."
Disclosure. One of the short answer/open-ended questions on the survey asks respondents, “Have you talked with another person about your violation or cheating in general since completing the AI Seminar? If so, whom have you talked with and what did you tell them?” The answers predominately reflected that respondents shared their cheating incident with either friends or family. Of both fall and winter respondents, approximately 75% of students surveyed shared that they had disclosed the incident to others. Many reflected that sharing with others provided support, as well as helped to educate their peers. Students felt that sharing their experience was important in order to help other students. One survey respondent shared, “I think it is important to talk about my violation because you can share with other people and can encourage others not to make the same mistake.” Another said, “People should learn from your mistakes.” Overall, students understood that disclosure may help in processing the experience. One student wrote, “It gives me a chance to reflect on what I did.” Another said, “Yes, because this is a learning experience.” One student reflected, “Yes, because it relieves some of the pressure.” And another student wrote, “Yes, I think it is important because it helps to understand what I did.” For those students who chose not to share, shame seemed to play a role in deciding whether or not to share their experience. One survey respondent said as to why he/she chose not to share, “It is very embarrassing, as I feel very stupidly for having violated this policy unintentionally.” Another student wrote, “I do not want to talk about my academic integrity violation to others because I am ashamed of it.”
Other students felt that sharing their experience with others would somehow strengthen their level of accountability for their actions. One student wrote, “I personally feel that I need to confront this issue and to do so, I need to show others my shame so that I will never contemplate violating [the university] policies ever again.” Another student said, “Yes, so I can maintain accountability and take responsibility for what I did.”

Summary

Overall, the trends seen in the full survey data used in this study remain consistent with the data derived from McCabe’s North American survey data (McCabe, 2005). In general, students’ perception of their peers cheating is higher than their own self-reported behaviors, and there exists a perception among students that some cheating behaviors are more serious than other cheating behaviors which may be viewed as more acceptable. Students clearly identified external pressures as a contributing reason why students engage in cheating. Finally, students were less confident and indeed wary of their ability to avoid a future, unintentional integrity violation.
CHAPTER 5

Discussion and Recommendations

Academic integrity, while a core value of educational institutions, is often obscured behind an institution’s reputation through advances in research, athletics, funding, and alumni accomplishments. It has become increasingly important for universities to embed this value in the culture of the institution, especially since we know that students enter our colleges and universities during a period of often intense personal transition and development. While universities possess a responsibility to prepare students for effective careers, it is necessary that they simultaneously assist students in their ability to function effectively in an increasingly complex, global world. To be sure, institutions have a responsibility to assist in the development of students’ sense of personal and social responsibility by actively engaging in the promotion of individual and organizational values, accountability, and education (Callahan, 2004; Swaner, 2004).

Cheating is ubiquitous throughout the nation’s educational institutions (McCabe, 2007). Colleges and universities can assist students in processing and learning important lessons from these missteps through reflection, education, accountability, and even punitive measures. Integrity violations are in fact teachable moments and ripe opportunities for universities to positively contribute to a student’s moral growth. This study is unique in that it approaches the problem of student cheating after a student has outwardly accepted responsibility for the cheating incident and with the specific purpose of understanding how a student subsequently derives meaning from the experience. This multiple embedded case study reveals that understanding how students perceive their
transgression, accept or deny responsibility, and derive meaning from the incident is often just as fragmented as deconstructing the profile of student cheaters. The student’s initial response to the incident may be to deny the violation. Evidence from this study suggests a progression towards acceptance of responsibility and further meaning derived from the incident upon reflection which holds implications for administrators. This study may provide a context for understanding the post-cheating experience and offers suggestions for new research directions.

The research questions this study sought answers to include the following:

1. How do students perceive academic dishonesty individually and among their peers?

2. In the wake of accepting responsibility for academic cheating, in what ways does a student make meaning out of this experience?

Sub-Questions:

   g) In what ways do students connect this experience of academic cheating with their broader life experience?

   h) In what ways do students disclose to others?

   i) How do students reflect upon their own “ethical failure”?

Review of the Methodology

Data collected in this study included a survey of students found in violation of the University Policy on Integrity of Scholarship and subsequently mandated to attend an
Educational Integrity Seminar in both fall of 2008 and winter of 2009. The survey was among the requirements for the successful completion of the seminar. Through email solicitation, thirteen students agreed to be interviewed regarding their experience, and retroactive consent was sought in order to obtain their reflective essays produced for the seminar. The individual interviews were conducted in the spring of 2009, approximately 4-9 months after their incident occurred. Additionally, twelve respondents provided retroactive permission for the researcher to view their individual survey results.

This multiple embedded case study provided for the triangulation of data between what students reported in the interviews, their individual survey data, aggregate survey data, and document analysis. The aggregate quantitative data was analyzed using mainly descriptive statistics in order to observe emergent trends in the data set. Individual survey results were reviewed in order to confirm or counter what students reported in the individual interviews. The interviews yielded robust data which was further strengthened through the students’ reflective writing pieces as well as their individual surveys.

Qualitative data was reduced and analyzed using an iterative process of categorizing data, identifying emergent themes, and constructing the individual stories from each participant. According to Miles and Huberman (2005) the ability to reduce the data, display the data, and draw conclusions are the three most important elements of successful qualitative analysis. In this study, utilizing primarily outcome variables, an antecedent matrix was developed that facilitated the emergence of the most influential and meaningful themes derived from the data set.
Summary of the Findings

The qualitative results of this study indicated a progression of responsibility that was associated with the level of meaning students experienced from the incident. Those students who persisted in deflecting responsibility through blaming others or circumstances were less likely to report much meaning derived from the experience. Alternatively, those students who accepted personal responsibility for their cheating incident seemed to experience deeper learning and personal growth as a result. The quantitative findings in this study confirmed the previous findings in many of the studies introduced in chapter two. These findings included an elevated perception of cheating among peers, self-reported cheating that is lower than peer perceptions and the role of external influences on a student’s decision to cheat.

Discussion of the Research Questions, Findings, and Theoretical Connections

Numerous studies have examined student perceptions of cheating, why students’ cheat, how students’ cheat, and how often students cheat. To some extent this study confirms many of these findings regarding perceptions of cheating, why and how students cheat and extends the research in regards to understanding how students derive meaning from the experience.

This section is organized by first discussing research question number one and comparing that to existing literature. Question two is then presented along with the interconnected sub-questions collapsed for the purposes of discussion. The role of safe disclosure, guided reflection, resilience, personal rebuilding following a shame event,
and the judgment of responsibility were elements of several theories presented in chapter two that intersect with the findings associated with question #2 and are included as part of the discussion.

Research Question #1: How do students perceive academic dishonesty individually and among their peers?

**Finding 1: Students reported a perception that their peers engage more frequently in less-serious cheating behaviors.**

Reflected in the survey data and again in the individual interviews, students perceived their peers engaged in cheating behaviors at a higher rate than self-reported cheating. Students perception of their peers engaging in low-level academically dishonest behaviors either “frequently” or “sometimes” was reported at over 90% on the surveys. This finding is not new as it has previously been reported in several studies (Crown & Spiller, 1998; Hard, Conway & Moran, 2006; Jordan, 2001 and McCabe, 2007). However, this aspect associated with cheating is important in a competitive academic environment where students may perceive the need to use every resource possible to either stay afloat or advance academically.

**Finding 2: Students reported an increased sensitization to perceived low-level cheating.**

McCabe’s (2007) survey data results reflect that students perceive the act of cheating on a scale from the least to most serious. This study confirms these previous findings regarding student perceptions and illuminates to the extent that students
reported an increased sensitization to perceived low-level cheating (e.g., receiving unpermitted help on an assignment or working together on an individual assignment). In other words, students seem increasingly to be perceiving other students’ cheating and in turn may be less personally inhibited. This perception of others’ cheating at higher levels is present at a persistent level. Approximately 80% of survey respondents reported they felt that other students either cheated “sometimes” or “frequently”. Further, approximately 30% of students reported that these behaviors represented either “not cheating at all” or “trivial cheating”. Cheating at these low levels, at least among their peers, seemed acceptable to participants as a result of their perceptions. Absent a clearly communicated value from the institution the default appears to be relying on perceived peer norms.

**Finding 3: External pressures are perceived as the reason students engage in cheating.**

Reflected throughout the literature (McCabe, 2001; Murdock & Anderman, 2006, and Pulvers & Diekhoff, 1999) is the assertion that students’ opinion of external pressures influenced their decision to engage in cheating behaviors. Within the aggregate survey data 63.7% of respondents felt that the pressure to succeed contributed to the reason students’ cheat. Corresponding to that result included 75% of the sub-group of interview participants who felt that the pressure to succeed contributed to the reason students cheat. Clearly, the perceived competition from other students and the pressure to succeed academically contribute to a students’ decision to engage in cheating as a way of getting ahead academically. Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory (2002) facilitates
an understanding of this finding’s connection to cheating. The perception of external pressures disengages proactive and/or inhibitive agency or in other words, the ability to choose not to cheat.

Research Question #2: In the wake of accepting responsibility for academic cheating in what ways does a student make meaning out of this experience?

Sub-Questions:

a. In what ways do students connect this experience of academic cheating with their broader life experience?

b. In what ways do students disclose to others?

c. How do students reflect upon their own “ethical failure”?

Finding #4: Overall, students who resist responsibility and engage in marginalizing the experience through neutralizing attitudes derive less meaning from the cheating experience.

The point at which a student accepts responsibility for an act of cheating appears to be pivotal in their process of growth and development inclusive of connecting their cheating behavior with their broader life experience. A person’s judgment of responsibility is in fact a complex process. In an attempt to capture the nature of responsibility judgment, Weiner (1995) advanced his Attribution Theory which illuminates the process of assigning responsibility. Applied to academic cheating cases and this study, Weiner’s theory helps to unpack the process of a student’s experience
subsequent to a cheating incident. Perhaps it is human nature that most people, when confronted with being responsible for a negative event, would defer blame in an attempt to manage what Weiner terms “positive impression management” (Weiner, 1995 p 49). The need to manage social or parental approval in the wake of being accused of cheating appeared highly applicable in this study. With respect to whom students disclosed, many participants were fearful of sharing their integrity violation with their parents, choosing instead to either keep it to themselves or share with peers whom they perceived as more understanding. Since peers tend to be more accepting of low-level cheating this finding was not surprising.

Another method students used to defer responsibility and manage a positive impression was through projecting neutralizing attitudes. Persisting in blaming others and focusing on external influences was a strategy some students used to reject their own ethical failure. As an example, some students who resisted responsibility for the incident talked about why their teaching assistant was in some way culpable for their troubles. Sean a fifth-year Engineering student, expressed anger towards his teaching assistant for reporting his cheating. Sean states, “Why would he just rat me out without getting my side of the story?” Anger was an emotion participants tended to use to obscure responsibility alongside identifying external pressures and the perception that their peers are engaging in cheating as a means of validating their own choice.

Tanya, a third-year student majoring in Human Development, focused on the external academic pressure as a reason for her transgression, she says, “…at the community college – the work was not as rigorous to the point that I was worried I was
going to get the wrong answer, but in high school when I had honors classes I really wanted to do well and like, now, I really want to do well – those two stages when the competition is a lot harder. There is a lot at stake.”

Regardless of what neutralizing tool the students used, their objective was to keep their personal responsibility at an arms distance preserving their personal self-impression, and inhibiting personal growth by avoiding hard questions about why they personally succumbed to academic cheating as a way of getting ahead.

Guided self reflection, as it was facilitated in the Educational Integrity Seminar, seemed important to helping students who were stuck in this cycle of denying responsibility through neutralizing attitudes or emotions. Aligned with Van Vliet’s theory on rebuilding following a shameful event, reflecting on the incident helped several students move forward and engage in accepting responsibility, understand the factors that contributed to the decision, and build capacity for resilience.

Finding #5: Overall, students who genuinely accept responsibility and engage in honest reflection seem to experience more profound learning. As a result, these participants derived more meaning from the cheating incident.

Introduced earlier in chapter two, James Rest’s Four Component Model (2000) provides a theoretical structure to understanding how students make meaning from an experience of academic cheating. Rest asserts that those who develop in moral judgment are those who are reflective and assume responsibility for their actions. He recognizes that while moral education programs contribute to moral development, it is life
experiences that are rich sources of self understanding (Rest, 1986). The analogy Rest uses to explain moral development is to think of one’s morality as a muscle that needs to be exercised. While there are different means in which to exercise this muscle, one way may be engaging in an immoral act which upon reflection can contribute to and facilitate positive moral development. Tracy, a third-year student majoring in Biochemistry and Cell Biology, wrote in her stakeholder letter, “I know now even under certain stressful or seemingly helpless situations to never take the easy way out by relying on someone else. What I did was unfair to other students and to myself.” Tracy accepts responsibility, understands the context of her decision and recognizes the affect on others.

The Experiential Learning theory by David Kolb (1984), also introduced in chapter two, linked to the findings in this study through his theory’s emphasis on honest reflection and learning. The idea that sometimes engaging in an immoral act is necessary for moral growth and development surfaced in the stories of several students who characterized their experience as profound. Facilitating this growth is the ability to honestly reflect upon the incident. Kolb (1984) posited that moral growth needs to be inclusive of self-reflection as a means of learning. Kolb argues that learning and development are interconnected processes fed by external circumstances. Accordingly, moral growth can be achieved through immoral experiences. The opportunity and willingness to process an experience of cheating, by accepting responsibility and engaging in honest reflection, was reported by many participants as enhancing their understanding of their own morality and how the incident connected to their broader life experience. Lisa, a second-year Environmental Systems major, shared this, “I definitely
feel like I have learned a lot about it [integrity] and that is why I wanted to interview with you and talk about it because I feel like it has actually changed me – legitimately changed me.” Her willingness to talk openly about her incident with her friends and parents facilitated her learning from the experience. Likewise, Eddie, a fifth-year student majoring in Biology reflected, “I don’t want to over exaggerate but it really opened my eyes and really changed how I work and how I help others and basically impacted my life now. I always tell others about my experience when they are faced with this or are potentially thinking about it - so it helps me and it helps others I think.”

Capturing the importance of reflecting upon the incident, Lupe, a third-year student majoring in Psychology, said, “Otherwise if I hadn’t taken the [Academic Integrity] seminars then I wouldn’t have time to look at the problem again and have had time to face the problem. I wanted to avoid it all the time before the seminars. And I was sat down there and I had to listen to what they were saying and I had to review what I did and it was pretty hard in the beginning.”

This finding that learning occurs through accepting responsibility and engaging in sincere reflection also connects to Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory (2002) introduced in chapter two. Bandura asserts that moral agency is dualistic and includes inhibitive agency, which is the ability to avoid engaging in immoral behavior, and proactive agency, which is the ability to engage in pro-social moral behaviors. Applied to academic cheating, avoiding immoral behavior may be explained as keeping one’s eyes on their own paper during an exam. Whereas engaging in pro-social moral behavior may be altering one’s time management skills, enabling themselves ample time to complete an
assignment. For those students who were characterized as having a profound response, they reported a shift in their thinking and behavior as applied to their academic work; they were choosing to exercise what Bandura terms “moral courage”. Antonio, a third-year Mechanical Engineering student, shared that as a result of accepting responsibility for and reflecting upon his cheating incident, “My study skills have changed – my time management skills have changed.” Another participant, Ted, who is a fourth-year mechanical Engineering student, explained how his study skills have changed as a result of accepting responsibility for a cheating incident. “For now, I think that if I hadn’t been caught I wouldn’t be reading this book right here I would just be googling some summaries. So I am writing a different paper and I am approaching it differently and it is not just that I can get the stuff done with my own ideas – but I feel more confident about the subject if I do the reading myself and write the paper myself and also avoiding the same incident again.”

In addition to the deeper learning that occurs when a student accepts responsibility, Weiner’s Attribution Theory also provides an alternate explanation as to why students may choose to accept responsibility for an incident. Weiner contends that this strategy can also be a form of positive impression management. By confessing and accepting responsibility, a person is able to maintain a positive self impression, the overall result being less perceived damage to their self esteem.
Finding #6: Resisting and accepting responsibility are not mutually exclusive and in fact may be progressive.

Deferring responsibility through neutralizing behaviors and attitudes and managing a positive impression was the initial reaction of several participants. What seemed to influence a student’s movement towards a more profound level of meaning derived included less persistence in external blaming and an increase in accepting personal responsibility. A clear line did not exist between those students who tended to marginalize the incident and those students who had a more profound response experiencing significant learning from their transgression. Rather, the distinction is best represented on a continuum with marginalization on one end and a profound learning experience on the opposite end (See Figure 10).

Figure 10. Continuum of Meaningfulness
Students who were interviewed fell in different places along this continuum depending on their responses, and the disparity was greatest when students were asked about what they learned, if and why the experience was meaningful to them, and how they may have changed as a result of the incident. The experience of accepting or denying responsibility connects with Weiner’s Attribution Theory and how students in this study made judgments regarding responsibility. The present study extends our understanding of responsibility by suggesting a progression exists that is directly influenced by disclosure and honest reflection.

Students who marginalized the experience talked about how they would be more careful in the future, while students who reacted more profoundly talked about how they learned more about themselves, gained confidence, and reflected on their own moral growth. Students who marginalized the experience rated their meaningfulness either a “6” or “7” on a scale of one to ten, with ten being most meaningful. Students who experienced a more moderately profound response rated the meaningfulness of the incident an “8” or “9”. Finally those students who experienced a profound response rated the meaningfulness of the experience at a “10” and in some cases, an “11”. When asked about what they learned, students who marginalized the experience limited the scope of learning to their academic behaviors, failing to see the connection between this incident and their own personal growth or broader life experience. Students who fell into the category of a moderately profound experience tended to limit their learning cognitively, describing their thoughts and attitudes around cheating. Students who had a more profound response talked about how both their behaviors and attitudes had changed as a
direct result of the incident. It is worthy to emphasize that only three students fell into the category of marginalizing their cheating experience. In fact, ten students expressed varying degrees of sincere contrition and remorse for the incident that leveraged either cognitive or behavioral change, or both.

Understanding that a student’s post-cheating experience may be progressive may hold important considerations for future research and administrators whose responsibility it is to resolve cases of academic dishonesty. The perception around cheating may be different from other kinds of misconduct, such as a violation of alcohol policies, in that it reflects on the student’s moral character and often holds more serious long-term ramifications. Simply put, there is often more at stake for students following an academic integrity violation. Hence the desire for a student to maintain a positive self impression in the wake of a cheating incident is higher than it might otherwise be for other types of misconduct which is often explained away as “adolescent misbehavior”. Some students who have cheated may understand their mistake immediately and experience sincere and profound learning unguided, while others may find themselves stuck, denying responsibility as a possible means of managing a positive self impression. Students may also be denying responsibility out of a genuine belief that their actions were not morally wrong but instead merely a violation of university policy. In either case, the result is that their response inhibits personal growth and development. Helping students progress through disclosure and reflection towards acceptance and recognition of their responsibility in the incident should be the focus of effective academic integrity practices.
Suggestions for Practice

**Suggestion one: Opportunities for Reflection and Education.** Built into the resolution of academic integrity cases should be opportunities for students to reflect upon their incident while becoming educated regarding integrity policies. The opportunity to engage in safe disclosure and reflection seemed important to the personal growth of many students in this study. It is important that administrators are aware that the point at which they may meet with a student may not reflect the students full understanding of the incident. Instead, administrators need to appreciate that engaging in an immoral act may be a teachable moment that can be used to help leverage growth and learning. Sanctions when possible should not be overly punitive but rather include education and opportunities for safe disclosure and reflection aimed at facilitating a student’s progression towards accepting responsibility and deriving a more profound meaning from the incident. Students in this study reported at times a concern about being judged by others. For some participants, accepting responsibility equated to a stigma which they resisted in an effort to manage a positive self-impression. Alternatively the experience could serve as an opportunity to embrace the experience as one from which to grow and learn.

**Suggestion Two: Conduct a Social Norms Campaign.** It was apparent through both the quantitative and qualitative data collected that strong peer perceptions surround academic integrity policies and violations. Largely, these peer perceptions are not an accurate reflection of student behaviors and attitudes towards cheating. Instead they tend to be inflated and distorted. Social norms campaigns have been used largely surrounding
students’ beliefs about alcohol attitudes and behaviors helping to bring the disparity between what students think about the frequency and consumption of alcohol among their peers into alignment with what is actually reported (Berkowitz, 2004). A social norms campaign applied to academic integrity would essentially include the results from a survey of the student population regarding attitudes and cheating behaviors and subsequently reflect those results back to the student community. Social norms campaigns have the powerful ability to initiate essential campus-wide dialogues about academic integrity policies, procedures, attitudes, and behaviors.

**Suggestion three: Embed Academic Integrity as a Clear Institutional Value.**

Positioning the value of integrity throughout all layers of an institution, starting at the top of the organization and including graduate and faculty research, clearly communicates its importance to the university community. Upholding that value through education and accountability further strengthens the resolve of the academic community. Embedding academic integrity as a clear institutional value communicates to students the institution’s commitment to honest, scholarly work. Peer perceptions were an influencing factor in this study. Thus as a campus can more clearly communicate the value of academic integrity, there exists a higher likelihood of breaking down peer perceptions. Some ways in which this can and has been accomplished on other campuses include the designation of an academic integrity office on campus, the inclusion of integrity policies in assessment strategies, marketing integrity policies to faculty and students, and regularly publishing the frequency and types of violations to the university community (Bertram Gallant, 2008; Kibler, 1993; Whitley & Keith-Spiegel, 2002)
Suggestion Four: Encourage a Student-Centered Approach to Integrity Issues.

Too often in many universities and colleges the province of academic integrity is limited to those administrators and faculty who deal directly with violations of integrity policies. In reality, it is a persistent problem that all members of an academic community can play a role in reducing. As an issue that seems plagued by peer misperceptions, student involvement in helping to educate other students should be a key element of any integrity program. Included in this approach may be hiring students to serve as peer educators or advocates who can coordinate outreach efforts and create awareness and educational programs suited for the student community.

Suggestion Five: Assist in the Development of Positive Time-Management Skills for Students. Evident in the survey data, and expressed by interview participants, is the strong sense of external pressure students felt to achieve academically. Well over half of the students in the survey and interviews believed this contributed to their decision and the decision of their peers to engage in cheating. Part of the pressure students described in the interviews connected to a perceived lack of time to complete assignments, difficult choices over which subject or test to study for, or deciding to work with others on an assignment in order to save time. Consequently, focusing on the development of positive time-management skills and study efforts may help students negotiate this perception and reduce cheating behaviors.

Suggestion Six: Adjudication of integrity cases. This study holds significance for administrators whose responsibility includes adjudicating cases of academic dishonesty.
Understanding the barriers and influences upon a student’s willingness and ability to accept responsibility for an integrity violation is an important consideration when engaging with an accused student. Of importance includes leveraging the opportunity for learning through reflective questions as well as appropriate sanctioning that includes an educational component. Implications from this study may include special training sessions for student conduct administrators, and faculty.

Recommendations from the Study for Future Research

Recommendation One. Conduct a longitudinal study. Helpful to understanding the true long-term effects of an incident of academic misconduct may be evaluating that experience with students after one, three, and five years have passed. This type of study may answer in what ways the experience has impacted students after a considerable amount of time has passed and individuals have experienced other major life events and transitions.

Recommendation Two. Comparatively analyze different educational institutions. Replicating this study at other institutions representing a different academic culture and varied student and institutional demographics may provide insights into the applicability and generalizability of this study’s findings.

Recommendation Three. Conduct an appreciative inquiry study. This study suggests that neutralizing behaviors and attitudes serve as intervening mechanisms to interpersonal growth and development. Alternatively, it may be important to identify what factors facilitate a neutralizing attitude and conversely, what factors positively
contribute to growth and development. Connecting variables such as an individual’s capacity for resilience, moral development, and previous life events may help explain what contributes to a student’s ability to accept or deny responsibility for a cheating incident.

Recommendation Four. Comparatively analyze students who have engaged in egregious forms of misconduct. Since this study was limited in evaluating only students who engaged in more minor forms of academic misconduct, analyzing students who have engaged in more serious forms of academic dishonesty may illuminate further this study’s findings and provide more comprehensive results.

Recommendation Five. Analyze repeat offenders of violations of integrity of scholarship. The students included in this study proclaimed to be first-time offenders of the university’s policy on integrity of scholarship. The uncommon occurrence of students repeating an integrity violation may prove insightful to further understanding what factors contribute to and continue to impede moral development and moral choices.

Recommendation Six. Analyze Pre- and Post-Effects of the Educational Integrity Seminar. The intervening effects of the Educational Integrity Seminar may in fact be very significant to a student’s interpersonal growth and development. Interviewing participants prior to and post participation in the seminar may confirm some of the findings of this study regarding safe disclosure and guided reflection. This may in turn further strengthen the suggestion for practice that colleges and universities regularly coordinate similar seminars for students who are responsible for academic dishonesty.
Summary

The cheating phenomenon present in our educational institutions is a complex problem. Presented in this study is the understanding that the numbers and percentages associated with student cheating across institutions and cultures is essential information administrators and educators need to understand the larger picture of student cheating trends. This quantitative information is critical to ultimately help in determining where institutions need to be exerting effort to educate and deter cheating behaviors. This study’s strength lies not in the broader picture but instead with the experience of the student. The qualitative results in this study help us understand how students experience a cheating incident and the impact that experience may have had in their lives. For some, the experience held less meaning and for others the experience was a moment of personal development that resulted in either changed behavior or changed attitudes or both. A learning opportunity often occurs in the wake of an integrity violation and educators have an opportunity to help students understand and leverage that experience towards positive personal growth.

END
References


Higbee, J. L., & Thomas, P. V. (2002). Student and faculty perceptions of behaviors that constitute cheating. *NASPA Journal, 40*(1)


Appendix A

UC San Diego Policy on Integrity of Scholarship

*Integrity of scholarship is essential for an academic community. The University expects that both faculty and students will honor this principle and in so doing protect the validity of University intellectual work. For students, this means that all academic work will be done by the individual to whom it is assigned, without unauthorized aid of any kind. Instructors, for their part, will exercise care in planning and supervising academic work, so that honest effort will be upheld.*

Integrity of scholarship is essential for an academic community. The University expects that both faculty and students will honor this principle and in so doing protect the validity of University intellectual work. For students, this means that all academic work will be done by the individual to whom it is assigned, without unauthorized aid of any kind. Instructors, for their part, will exercise care in planning and supervising academic work, so that honest effort will be upheld.

The following policies apply to academic coursework for both undergraduate and graduate students. A separate policy exists governing integrity of research. Medical students are governed by policies specified in the Handbook for School of Medicine Advisors and Students, as formulated by the School of Medicine Committee on Educational Policy.

**Instructors' Responsibility**
At the beginning of the term the instructor shall state in writing (e.g., in the syllabus, information sheets, or website) what graded assignments and exams will be required of students. If there are any course-specific rules required by the instructor for maintaining academic integrity, the instructor shall also inform students in writing what kinds of aid and collaboration, if any, are permitted on graded assignments and exams. The University Policy on Integrity of Scholarship states the general rules for student integrity.

**Students' Responsibility**
Students are expected to complete the course in compliance with the instructor's standards. No student shall engage in any activity that involves attempting to receive a grade by means other than honest effort; for example:
No student shall knowingly procure, provide, or accept any unauthorized material that contains questions or answers to any examination or assignment to be given at a subsequent time.

No student shall complete, in part or in total, any examination or assignment for another person.

No student shall knowingly allow any examination or assignment to be completed, in part or in total, for himself or herself by another person.

No student shall plagiarize or copy the work of another person and submit it as his or her own work.

No student shall employ aids excluded by the instructor in undertaking course work or in completing any exam or assignment.

No student shall alter graded class assignments or examinations and then resubmit them for regrading.

No student shall submit substantially the same material in more than one course without prior authorization.

A student acting in the capacity of an instructional assistant (IA), a category including but not limited to teaching assistants, readers, and tutors, has a special responsibility to safeguard integrity of scholarship. In this role the student functions as an apprentice instructor, under the tutelage of the responsible instructor. An IA shall equitably grade student work in the manner agreed upon with the course instructor. An IA shall not make any unauthorized material related to tests, exams, homework, etc., available to any student.
Appendix B

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY SURVEY

Please note: your individual answers will not be shared and you will not experience any hardship as a result of your complete honesty on this survey.

1. Rank order the following values from 1 (most important) to 10 (least important) according to how important they are to you personally:
   ___ Compassion (helping others who are in difficulty)
   ___ Responsibility (being a responsible person)
   ___ Wealth (being financially well-off)
   ___ Independence (being able to do what I want)
   ___ Honesty (being truthful in my dealings with others)
   ___ Respect (being able to respect myself and others)
   ___ Influence (being able to have an impact on the world)
   ___ Community (being an active member of a community)
   ___ Fairness (working to promote justice for all)
   ___ Trust (being someone whom others can trust)

2. Finish each of the sentences below. Please use your own words to answer the questions; there is no right or wrong answer, we would like to get an honest assessment of your current thinking and knowledge about academic integrity.

   a. I define academic integrity as:

   b. I think my peers:
      ___ DO
      ___ DO NOT consider academic integrity important because:
c. I think my professors

☐ DO
☐ DO NOT

consider academic integrity important because:

d. Ultimately, it

☐ DOES
☐ DOES NOT

matter how students complete their academic assignments because:

3. On average, how often have you engaged in these behaviors at the university and how common it is for other students to engage in these behaviors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>You</th>
<th>Other Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fabricating or falsifying a bibliography.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working on an assignment with others when the instructor asked for individual work.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Getting questions or answers from someone who has already taken a test.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Helping someone else cheat on a test.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fabricating or falsifying lab data.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Copying from another student during a test</td>
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<tr>
<td>Receiving unpermitted help on an assignment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Copying another student's homework.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paraphrasing or copying a few sentences from a book, magazine, journal or webpage without citing the sources.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Submitting a paper purchased or obtained from someone else.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Using unauthorized aid (e.g., cheat sheets, programmable calculator, electronic communication with another person) to get help during a test or exam.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Copying material, almost word for word, from any source and using it in an assignment turned in for academic credit.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Turning in a paper copied, at least in part, from another student's paper, lab report, computer program, or homework assignment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Using a false or forged excuse to obtain an extension on a due date or delay taking an exam.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Turning in work done by someone else.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cheating on a test in any other way.</td>
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</table>
4. Rank the seriousness of these same behaviors on a scale from “not at all cheating” to “serious cheating”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Not at all cheating</th>
<th>Trivial cheating</th>
<th>Moderate Cheating</th>
<th>Serious Cheating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fabricating or falsifying a bibliography.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Working on an assignment with others when the instructor asked for individual work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Submitting a paper you purchased or obtained from someone else (such as <a href="http://www.schoolsucks.com">www.schoolsucks.com</a>) and claimed it as your own work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Using unauthorized aid (e.g., cheat sheets, programmable calculator, electronic communication with another person) to get help during a test or exam.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copying material, almost word for word, from any source and turning it in as your own work.</td>
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</table>
Turning in a paper copied, at least in part, from another student's paper, lab report, computer program, or homework assignment

Using a false or forged excuse to obtain an extension on a due date or delay taking an exam.

Turning in work done by someone else.

Cheating on a test in any other way.

5. In my opinion, students should not cheat because:
   a. It is not fair to other students
   b. It causes more harm than good for the university
   c. It is the instructor’s right to expect students to complete the assignments in expected ways
   d. It is not good for society (e.g., if doctors cheated their way through school)
   e. It is dishonest and therefore, morally wrong
   f. None of the above; students should be able to cheat if they want---it’s their life and their decision.

6. Before I did something I think might be cheating, I would:
   a. Weigh the personal benefits (e.g., higher grade) against the costs (e.g., getting caught)
   b. Think about whether I would want my action published on the front page of the Guardian
   c. Consult the Policy on Integrity of Scholarship and/or the course syllabus to see if the exact behavior is listed as cheating
   d. Check what my conscience or “gut” says about the behavior
   e. Ask someone I respect if I should do it
   f. None of the above, instead I would: ______________________________
   g. All of the above

7. I think that academic cheating mostly happens at the university because:
   students don’t know that what they’re doing will be considered cheating
   students think they won’t get caught
   pressure to success; students are willing to take the risk to get a higher grade
   professors give lame assignments or repeat the same exams and assignments all the time
   the classes are large and impersonal; students have no relationships with their professors
none of the above, students cheat because: ________________________________

8. On a scale of “not at all” to “very,” rate your confidence in your future ability to do the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Very</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complete my academic assignments without <strong>intentionally</strong> violating the integrity of scholarship policy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete my academic assignments without <strong>unintentionally</strong> violating the integrity of scholarship policy</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Accept a lower grade on an assignment rather than cheat for a higher grade</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not cheat even when faced with the opportunity and little likelihood of being caught</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graduate from the university without another Policy violation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tell my peers that they shouldn’t cheat and stop them from cheating</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tell my professors when I know that classmates are cheating</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Recover from this Policy violation to achieve my long-term education and career goals</td>
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</table>

9. If you answered “not at all” or “somewhat” on any of the items in #8, what do you need from this seminar or from the faculty and staff to help you increase your confidence and/or abilities in that area?

10. a. Do you think it is important to talk about your academic integrity violation with others? Why or why not?
    
    b. Have you talked with another about your violation, if so, who have you told?
Appendix C

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Joint Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership UCSD AND CSUSM

Academic Integrity: The Experience of Learning through Cheating

You have been identified because of your participation in the university Educational Integrity Seminar. This form is to seek your permission to participate in a case study on academic integrity, and its relationship to your understanding of this experience. There may be up to 20 participants in this study. The study is being conducted as part of the Joint Educational Leadership Doctoral Program at the University of California, San Diego and California State University San Marcos. Specifically, I am interested in understanding how this incident has impacting you personally, What you have gained from this experience, your subsequent academic-related decisions and your understanding of what influenced your decision to engage in a violation of the university’s Integrity of Scholarship.

This study has four objectives:

1. To understand in what ways do students who accept responsibility for academic cheating make meaning out of this experience.

2. To understand in what ways do students connect this experience of academic cheating with their broader career goals?

3. To determine if the severity of academically dishonest behaviors (e.g. pre-mediated vs. opportunistic), influences how a student understands their experience?

4. To understand how students describe their own “moral action gap”?

You may be interviewed on up to two occasions, the first lasting approximately 45 minutes and the second interview will occur about 3 months later and will be approximately 45 minutes in length. The open style interviews will be audio taped and transcribed for your review of the accuracy of the transcription. Additionally, you will be asked permission to read the reflective essay you submitted as part of your completion of the Educational Integrity Seminar.

Participation in the research study is voluntary. Your participation or non-participation will have absolutely no bearing on your disciplinary status at the university. It is your right to
decline to answer any question that is asked, and you are free to end the conversation at any
time. You do not have to participate in this study if you do not want to. If you agree to be in
this study, but later change your mind, you may drop out at any time. If you choose to drop
out of the study all information obtained to the date of your decision will be expunged/
deleted from the study. There are no penalties or consequences of any kind if you decide you
do not want to participate.

While every effort is made to reduce risk there exist the possibility of a loss of confidentiality
in this study and feelings of discomfort. Too minimize this risk your interview will be kept
confidential, available only to me for analysis purposes. Your name will not appear on any
tapes or transcripts resulting from the interview and your name and identity will remain
confidential in any publications or discussions. Only the transcriber and I will listen and
transcribe the recorded interviews. Only I will review the reflective essay. The recordings
and reflective essay will be kept in a locked cabinet for four years and then destroyed.

The benefits to your participating in this interview include an increased understanding of
your experience engaging in an academic integrity violation and continued personal growth
and development.

By signing below you indicate that the researcher has explained this study, answered your
questions, and that you voluntarily grant your consent, which can be withdrawn at any time,
for participation in this study. If you have any questions about this study, I will be happy to
answer them now. If you have any questions in the future, please contact me at 858 688.2386
or pmahaffey@ucsd.edu . Also questions about the study can be addressed to my advisor
Dr. Mark Baldwin at (760) or at mbaldwin@csusm.edu. If you have any questions
about your rights as a research participant, you may also contact the California State
University San Marcos Institutional Review Board at 760-750-4029.

☐ I agree to participate in the interview and allow the review of my survey, case study,
stakeholder letter and final project for the purposes of this research study only.

__________________________________________________________________________
Participant’s Name                                                  Date

__________________________________________________________________________
Participant’s Signature

__________________________________________________________________________
Researcher’s Signature
Appendix D

Interview Protocol

Introductions (3-5 minutes)

Introduce self, student and ensure all consent forms are signed.

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research study. The focus of this study is to acquire a better understanding of the experience students go through when confronted with an accusation of academic dishonesty, accepting responsibility for cheating and reflecting upon their experience. Your thoughtful, honest answers to my questions will in no way affect you negatively and all answers will be kept confidential and anonymous. In addition, you may decline to answer any question, and may withdraw from the interview at any time or even erase any portion of the taped recording. To begin I’d like to ask you just a few questions to get to know you a little better.

Guiding Interview Questions:

Personal History/Warm-up questions (5-10 minutes):

1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself, your year in school, major, begin as transfer or first year student, what you are involved in on campus, etc.?

2. What have you enjoyed about your experience at this university?

The following questions are regarding your academic integrity violation (20-30 minutes):

1. Specifically, please talk about how you engaged in academic dishonesty?

2. Could you talk a little about what happened in this incident? What circumstances led up to your decision.

   Follow-up Question: Had you considered the possibility of cheating before you engaged in cheating?

3. What emotions would you identify with this experience?

4. What surprised you about this incident?
5. Whom did you talk to about this incident? Why did you confide in this particular person(s)? What were their reactions? Did their reactions differ from what you expected?

6. What would you identify as the positive aspects associated with Not Cheating? Conversely, what are the negative aspects about cheating?

7. In what ways do you see this experience impacting you in your personal or professional life?

8. Did this experience make you think differently about yourself? In what way?

9. If you hadn’t been caught how do you think things would be different for you?

10. How important is it for you to not cheat in the future (on a scale of 1-10)?

11. How meaningful to you has this experience been (on a scale of -10)?

12. Often, students know it is wrong to engage in cheating but they do it anyway. How do you explain that?

General

1. What are your perceptions of “cheating” at this university? Is it different than your previous institution?

2. Do you think cheating is tolerated on this campus, why or why not?

3. What or whom has been most helpful to you in processing this experience?