

Study examines the psychology behind students who don't cheat

August 17 2008

While many studies have examined cheating among college students, new research looks at the issue from a different perspective – identifying students who are least likely to cheat.

The study of students at one Ohio university found that students who scored high on measures of courage, empathy and honesty were less likely than others to report their cheating in the past – or intending to cheat in the future.

Moreover, those students who reported less cheating were also less likely to believe that their fellow students regularly committed academic dishonesty.

People who don't cheat "have a more positive view of others," said Sara Staats, co-author of the research and professor of psychology at Ohio State University's Newark campus.

"They don't see as much difference between themselves and others."

In contrast, those who scored lower on courage, empathy and honesty – and who are more likely to report that they have cheated -- see other students as cheating much more often than they do, rationalizing their own behavior, Staats said.

The issue is important because most recent studies suggest cheating is common on college campuses. Typically, more than half – and

sometimes up to 80 percent – of college students report that they have cheated.

Staats conducted the research with Julie Hupp, assistant professor of psychology and Heidi Wallace, an undergraduate psychology student, both at Ohio State-Newark.

They presented their results Aug. 16 and 17 in Boston at two poster sessions at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association.

Staats said this continuing research project aimed to find out more about the students who don't cheat – a group that Staats and her colleagues called "academic heroes."

"Students who don't cheat seem to be in the minority, and have plenty of opportunities to see their peers cheat and receive the rewards with little risk of punishment," Staats said. "We see avoiding cheating as a form of everyday heroism in an academic setting."

The research presented at APA involved two separate but related studies done among undergraduates at Ohio State's Newark campus. One study included 383 students and another 73 students.

The students completed measures that examined their bravery, honesty and empathy. The researchers separated those who scored in the top half of those measures and contrasted them with those in the bottom half.

Those who scored in the top half – whom the researchers called "academic heroes" – were less likely to have reported cheating in the past 30 days and the last year compared to the non-heroes. They also indicated they would be less likely to cheat in the next 30 days in one of their classes.

The academic heroes also reported they would feel more guilt if they cheated compared to non-heroes.

"The heroes didn't rationalize cheating the way others did, they didn't come up with excuses and say it was OK because lots of other students were doing it," Staats said.

Staats said one reason to study cheating at colleges and universities is to try to figure out ways to reduce academic dishonesty. The results from this research suggest a good target audience for anti-cheating messages.

When the researchers asked students if they intended to cheat in the future, nearly half -- 47 percent -- said they did not intend to cheat but nearly one in four -- 24 percent -- agreed or strongly agreed that they would cheat.

The remaining 29 percent indicated that they were uncertain whether or not they would cheat.

"These 29 percent are like undecided voters – they would be an especially good focus for intervention," Staats said. "Our results suggest that interventions may have a real opportunity to influence at least a quarter of the student population."

Staats said more work needs to be done to identify the best ways to prevent cheating. But this research, with its focus on positive psychology, suggests one avenue, she said.

"We need to do more to recognize integrity among our students, and find ways to tap into the bravery, honest and empathy that was found in the academic heroes in our study," she said.

Source: Ohio State University

Citation: Study examines the psychology behind students who don't cheat (2008, August 17)
retrieved 3 May 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2008-08-psychology-students-dont.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.