UNDERSTANDING CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCES ON UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS’ DECISIONS ABOUT ACADEMIC CHEATING

A Dissertation in
Higher Education

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

August 2010
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ABSTRACT

Academic cheating is pervasive on college campuses. Researchers have studied prevalence of cheating, factors related to cheating, and characteristics of cheaters. However, little is known about why students cheat. The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how students think about cheating and to build theory about what influences students’ decisions about cheating.

Constructive grounded theory methodology and qualitative methods were used to explore students’ understanding of, experiences with, and influences on cheating. Group and individual interviews were conducted with 42 participants. The group interviews focused on how students defined and understood cheating. The individual interviews focused on students’ personal experiences with cheating.

The research findings indicate that students have unclear definitions of cheating and experience little discussion about or prevention of cheating in courses. However, students look to faculty members to explain and prevent cheating.

A Theory of Contextual Influences on Students’ Decision-Making about Cheating emerged from the data. Most students have an anti-cheating general attitude about cheating. Students also are influenced not to cheat by non-contextual influences: (1) academic self-efficacy, (2) value of education, (3) adherence to societal and group norms, and (4) personal character and responsibility. However, in particular situations, contextual influences either support or override the anti-cheating influences. The contextual influences are (1) classroom context (including class size, prevention measures and fear of consequences, perceptions of faculty demeanor and teaching, relationship with faculty, relevance or understanding of material or subject, type of assignment, and peer behavior and trust), (2) grade pressure, (3) time constraints and personal life circumstances, and (4) personal definition of cheating. If the
contextual influences create an environment in which cheating is deemed acceptable, students adopt a temporary, pro-cheating attitude and act on that attitude.

The findings from this research inform the practice of educators and administrators in their efforts to educate about and prevent cheating. The findings suggest that changes to practices in the classroom might curb cheating. Additionally the findings point to the need for more education about the issue of cheating. Finally, future directions for further research on college student cheating are proposed.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I dedicate my dissertation to the students, educators, and administrators who work to promote academic integrity in their classrooms and on their campuses. The work that you do often goes unnoticed and is unappreciated; however, your efforts do matter, and students are listening. Your work goes beyond addressing cheating to teaching integrity and espousing the importance of learning. I hope that my work gives you new tools and support in your work. Keep up the good fight.

I would not have been able to complete my work without the students who participated in my research. I thank each one of my participants for discussing a difficult topic and for their willingness to share their stories with me. Much has been learned from their insights and honesty.

I thank my committee members for their support. Bob R., thank you for your patience, guidance, and friendship throughout my journey. I do not think I can adequately express all that I have learned from you as a teacher and a mentor. To Lisa, thank you for challenging me to think more deeply about my work. Your insights and questions have helped me immensely, and I am a better person and scholar because of you. To Bob H., thank you for your encouragement throughout my graduate experience. I would not have been at Penn State had I not met you in Chicago. Thank you for selling me on the Penn State experience. You were right; Penn State was the place for me. To Duane, thank you for your support throughout my dissertation process and for lending a critical eye to my work.

I thank my colleagues and friends at the University of Maryland for all of your support and patience as I finished my research. Thank you to John for being flexible with my time and Andrea and Tammy for your support and encouragement. Thank you to José, Lucy, and Nicole for being my adopted doctoral student community and for allowing me to talk through my
findings and process with you. You have helped to make my work and dissertation process better.

I thank my parents, René and Darryl, for always asking me how my “paper” was coming along. Mom and Dad, thank you for your support, encouragement, and prayers. I could not have gotten through this process without you. You are wonderful parents, and I appreciate you immensely. Thank you for all you have done for me throughout my life. It is because of you that I am at this point.

Finally, I dedicate my dissertation to Stephen, my husband, my best friend, my colleague, and my partner. Thank you for supporting me, encouraging me, and challenging me throughout this process, for giving me the space to write, and for gently nudging me forward when necessary. Thank you for talking with me at length about cheating. I’m sure you know more about cheating than you ever wanted to know; thank you for listening and helping me to clarify my ideas. Thank you for reading every word and chapter of this dissertation and providing invaluable feedback. I am blessed to have you in my life. I look forward to the next chapter in our lives together.
CHAPTER ONE
PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Don Campbell, in a 2006 article titled “The Plagiarism Plague,” stated that “according to on-going research, . . . cheating and plagiarism in the country have reached epidemic proportions on college campuses” (p. 15). The word epidemic implies that cheating in college is a nearly unstoppable, widely-spreading, disease-like outbreak, and some research does show that currently as many as 70% of college students admit to some type of academic cheating while in college (Center for Academic Integrity, 2005; Campbell, 2006; Whitely, 1998). College student cheating, however, is not a new outbreak. Researchers have been studying college student cheating since 1928, but a quick search of the Cambridge Scientific Abstracts database reveals over 100 citations since 1990. The rise in concern over the issue of college student cheating is not unwarranted. Although the high level or pervasiveness of cheating may not be new, the literature reflects that acceptance of cheating as a norm or a necessity may be increasing. The attitude that cheating is acceptable and the high rate of cheating in college are problematic.

The Problem

Even with Campbell’s (2006) assertion that college student cheating is rampant and growing across the United States, the ubiquitousness of college student cheating is not well established or understood. While some researchers have found that approximately 70% of college students cheat (McCabe & Treviño, 1996), other research portrays the range of people who admit to cheating as being between nine and 98 percent (Whitely, 1998). The vast disparity in amount of cheating, as exhibited by this large range, indicates a gap in the existing cheating literature. A probable reason for the gap is that researchers use differing definitions of the term
“cheating,” or do not define cheating at all, and assume that students understand the survey questions and items as the researchers do (Ashworth, Bannister, & Thorne, 1997).

Scope and Context of the College Student Cheating Problem

Researchers’ use of differing definitions of cheating provides an unclear understanding of the scope of the problem of college student cheating. From a cursory check of recent literature or The Chronicle of Higher Education, one can readily see that cheating is problem getting much attention in higher education. On college campuses, I have overheard numerous students discussing cheating, and anytime I bring up the subject of my study with fellow graduate students or professors, almost everyone has a story to share about student cheating as well as personal theories as to why the problem exists. But what is the nature of the cheating problem? The more literature I read the less clear the problem becomes. In this section, I will provide a brief historical view of cheating research, discuss the scope of college student cheating, including discrepancies in the literature about the amount of cheating, and outline the means of addressing the problem of cheating by college and university personnel.

Brief history of cheating. Although researchers, faculty members, and institutional administrators have been paying increased attention to student cheating over the past several decades, the problem of cheating in college is not new. Hugh Hartshorne and Mark May published Studies in Deceit in 1928, a volume that investigated students’ unethical behaviors, H. C. Brownell also published an article in 1928 on the mental traits of cheaters, and William Campbell published works on student academic honesty in 1935. Since those studies were published, researchers conducted periodic studies on student cheating. In their 1977 review of school cheating literature, Bushway and Nash reviewed 42 works published from 1928 to 1973, covering all levels of schooling. The scholarly interest in cheating increased as evidenced by
Whitley’s (1998) review of college cheating literature published from 1970 to 1996, in which he reviewed 107 works. The researcher who sparked academics’ and the public’s interest in cheating was William Bowers (1964) with his 1963 study of over 5000 students on 99 campuses. Bowers found that up to 75% of students admitted to participating in at least one of 13 cheating behaviors. The large percentage of students admitting to cheating prompted more studies into the prevalence and nature of student cheating, which has continued to gain interest to the present.

**Current scope of college student cheating.** Since Bowers’s (1964) study, many researchers have surveyed college students to determine the prevalence of student cheating (e.g., Davis, Grover, Becker, & McGregor, 1992; Dawkins, 2004; Hard, Conway, & Moran, 2006; Kidwell, Wozniak, & Laurel, 2003; McCabe, 1992; McCabe & Treviño, 1993, 1997; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 2001a, 2001b, 2002). However, because researchers use different definitions of cheating, different time periods in which students are asked to indicate cheating rates, and different methods of collecting data and calculating percentages of cheating, interpreting and understanding the prevalence of cheating is challenging (Crown & Spiller, 1998; Whitley, 1998). In his review of college cheating literature, Whitley (1998) indicated that 46 studies estimated cheating prevalence, which he separated into four categories (1) total cheating, (2) exam cheating, (3) homework cheating, and (4) plagiarism. Whitley stated that rates of overall prevalence of cheating ranged from 9% to 95% of students, using 59 estimates of cheating rates. The vast disparity in the cheating rates is likely indicative of significant differences in how cheating is counted or defined, with a few differences stemming from student or institutional type. From the 59 estimates of cheating, Whitley calculated that the mean cheating rate for college students is 70.4%. This rate is not much different than the rate that Bowers found in his 1963 study, indicating that cheating is not more prevalent than in the past.
but perhaps more noticed. But do 70% of college students cheat on a regular basis? And in what type of cheating do students participate?

**Untangling cheating prevalence rates.** In 1993, McCabe and Bowers replicated Bowers’ 1963 study on nine of the 99 campuses (McCabe & Treviño, 1996). In the 1993 study of nearly 1800 students, McCabe and Bowers found the total cheating rate to be 70% compared to 63% in 1963 (on those 9 campuses). Although only a slight increase in the total cheating rate, they found that the percentage of students admitting to cheating on exams rose from 26% to 52% and unpermitted collaboration on assignments rose from 11% to 49% while plagiarism and not citing sources remained relatively unchanged. McCabe and Treviño (1996) suggested that current students are engaging in more types of cheating behaviors as well as cheating multiple times in their college careers (38%). However, in the literature, problems exist in determining prevalence of cheating.

Researchers typically use questionnaires to ascertain prevalence of cheating by asking students to indicate whether they have participated in any of a number of given items from a list of behaviors such as “using crib notes on a test, copying from another student on a test,. . . unpermitted help on an assignment, [or] copying a few sentences of material from a published source without footnoting it” (McCabe & Treviño, 1997, p. 386). The definitions of these cheating behaviors are fairly clear; however, other surveys include such nebulous items as “cheating on classroom tests” (Dawkins, 2004, p. 7). Regardless of the specificity of items, asking students to indicate in which behaviors they have participated assumes that all students understand the behaviors in the same way. Additionally, little research indicates whether students think the behaviors to which they admit are actually cheating. Lack of clarity of definition,
misunderstanding of items, and difference of opinions about what constitutes cheating may all lead to discrepancies in reported levels of college student cheating.

However, according to the Center for Academic Integrity (CAI) (2005), the rate of college cheating did not change from 1993 to 2005. Donald McCabe, on behalf of the Center for Academic Integrity, compiled results from nearly 50,000 undergraduate students on over 60 campuses surveyed since 2002 and found that 70% of students admit to cheating (CAI, 2005). Of that 70%, approximately one-quarter admit to serious cheating on exams, and half of the students admit to cheating of a serious nature on papers or other written work (CAI, 2005), but students do not deem all types of cheating behaviors equally severe. Thus, the prevalence of cheating follows the level of severity students place on behaviors. Kidwell, Wozniak, and Laurel (2003) found that the most common cheating behaviors were copying short passages without citing, unpermitted collaboration, copying from another person’s test, and asking other students about exam questions and content. Rettinger, Jordan, and Peshiera (2004) found the most common cheating behaviors to be using unpermitted notes in a take home test, falsifying references in a bibliography, copying or allowing someone to copy homework or a lab assignment, and unpermitted collaboration. Carpenter et al. (2006), Levy and Rakovski (2006), Newstead, Franklyn-Stokes, and Armstead (1996), McCabe (1992), and Zelna and Bresciani (2004) all found similar commonalities in the most prevalent cheating behaviors to the above findings and added copying from the internet without citing and submitting the same work to more than one class to the list of common cheating behaviors. Many students and faculty members agree that the level of severity of these forms of cheating is lesser than that of stealing or copying an entire exam or substantial plagiarism (Carpenter et al. 2006; Whitley & Keith-Spiegel, 2002), and this ranking of egregiousness of cheating behaviors may result in differential handling or a lack of
handling of cheating cases within institutional judicial settings, even though all forms of cheating are prohibited by institutional policies. Differential treatment of cheaters and often lack of institutional adjudication of cheaters may bolster cheating on campuses if students think that no punishment will come from their behaviors.

Cheating is prevalent across institution types (Dawkins, 2004; Davis, et al., 1992; McCabe, 1992; McCabe & Treviño, 1993, 1997; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 2001a, 2002) and across college majors (Newstead et al., 1996; Passow et al., 2006, Zelna & Bresciani, 2004). However, researchers who ask students to indicate the number of times they have cheated find that most students are not habitual cheaters (Dawkins, 2004; Hard, Conway, & Moran, 2006). The percentage of students who have cheated only one or one to two times is 21% (Dawkins, 2004), 11% to 23% (Robinson et al., 2004), and habitual cheating rates range from 6% (Dawkins, 2004), 19.1% (McCabe, 1992), to 38% (McCabe & Treviño, 1996). Knowing that students are not habitual cheaters raises the questions: Why do students cheat on one occasion but not another? What is it about the situation that leads to students’ decisions to cheat?

Ashworth, Bannister, and Thorne (1997) rightly pointed out that much of the research done on college student cheating ignores the students’ point-of-view about cheating. Researchers typically study one of two issues: (1) prevalence of cheating in general or in a specific area (as determined by the researcher) and (2) factors that relate to cheating in some way. Currently, researchers have found several factors that correlate with cheating, such as perceptions of faculty, perceived peer behavior, pressure to succeed, and fear of punishment (Crown & Spiller, 1998; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 1999), but these studies do not explain why students make the choices they make – what influences their decisions about cheating. The extensive research conducted on college cheating has illuminated the problem of cheating and who might cheat, but
it has not yielded enough information to help educators reduce the cheating behaviors (Jordan, 2001).

The increase in attention to the problem of cheating has created a national call for college and university faculty and staff to do something to curb student cheating because it is antithetical to the purposes of a college education. However, understanding and enforcement of policies are inconsistent across and within institutions. McCabe (CAI, 2005) found that in a sample of 10,000 faculty members, 44% did not report known student cheating to the appropriate campus personnel. Other researchers and faculty members also reported that faculty members are reluctant to report student cheating or even to confront a student to deal with the matter on a one-on-one basis (Hard, Conway, & Moran, 2006; Kibler, 1998; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 2001a; Thompson, 2006; Whitley & Keith-Spiegel, 2002; Zelna & Bresciani, 2004). Students indicated that they thought that faculty members often ignore or do not deal with cheating (McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 2001a; Passow et al., 2006; Zelna & Bresciani, 2004), and if they knew that faculty would report cheating, students would be less likely to cheat (Kaplan, 1998; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 2001a). Such handling of cheating may send the message to students that cheating is not a serious issue.

Additionally, many institutional administrators deal only with the cheating behavior after it has occurred and do not address the cause of student cheating or work to prevent cheating (Dalton, 1998; Kibler, 1998; McCabe & Pavela, 1998). A potential reason why few institutions, three percent as determined by Kibler in a study of 200 institutions (Kibler, 1998), have educational strategies to address causes of cheating or try to prevent cheating is because the reasons why students cheat are not clear. However, a change in strategies in dealing with cheating and working to prevent cheating could significantly reduce the amount of cheating on
college campuses. Gaining a better understanding of what influences students’ decisions about cheating and how cheating could be prevented is imperative for administrators and educators seeking to address and reduce the problem.

To decrease the level of cheating in college, educators and administrators need to understand why college students cheat or do not cheat. They need to know how students define and think about cheating. They need to know what influences students’ decision-making processes with regard to cheating. Without this understanding of students’ thoughts on cheating, faculty members and institutional personnel cannot fully address the issues underlying cheating behaviors. Additionally, they will not be able to communicate messages about the importance of academic integrity that will counter students’ pro-cheating attitudes. Unfortunately, few researchers have spoken with students directly to find out how they think about cheating, what they consider to be cheating (or not to be cheating), and what influences their decisions to cheat or not cheat.

**Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to understand undergraduate students’ decisions about academic cheating in order to build theory regarding influences on students’ decisions about cheating. I explored how college students define academic cheating and how they make meaning on the subject of cheating and its level of acceptability. Whereas most of the current research about college student cheating is survey-based, I conducted a qualitative study to gain insight into students’ thoughts and decision-making regarding cheating in their own words. Particularly, I generated theory about the influences on undergraduate cheating decisions in the United States. Through this study, readers will gain insight into how students think about cheating and how students are influenced to cheat or not to cheat.
I investigated the influences on individual students’ decisions about cheating or not cheating using sociological deviance theories as lenses through which to interpret and understand the relationships between students’ attitudes and actions. In this study, I explored the primary question: What influences students’ decisions about academic cheating? I also explored three related questions: (1) How do students define academic cheating?, (2) What are students’ beliefs about academic cheating?, and (3) How do students think their classroom contexts affect decisions about academic cheating? Exploration of the questions posed focused on the students’ personal understanding of and decision-making about academic cheating.

**Significance of the Study**

Most college and university faculty would agree that one of the purposes of institutions of higher education is for students to learn the fundamental knowledge of their chosen fields and develop critical thinking and other skills (e.g., communication, decision-making, and interpersonal skills) necessary to be productive members of society. A secondary purpose in some facets of higher education is for students to learn to be ethical members of the college and broader communities. Academic cheating is antithetical to these purposes of a college education. Although researchers do not know the precise magnitude of college student cheating, the ramifications of cheating in college could lead to graduates without the requisite knowledge or critical thinking skills to earn their degrees (without having cheated) or to perform jobs for which they will be hired. Additionally, rampant or even occasional cheating may be deleterious to the culture of integrity that many colleges aim to create within their communities.

Cheating may be detrimental to student learning if students cheat rather than study, which could produce graduates who have not attained an expected or acceptable level of knowledge and ability in their field, yet seem adequately credentialed due to high grade point averages. Furthermore, many of the discipline-based accreditation bodies (such as ABET, APA, AACSB, and NCATE) have
recently added criteria to their standards for undergraduate education documents that require graduates to have learned about professional and general ethical responsibility and how to act ethically. Students who cheat have not met the standards of their fields nor are they learning the larger intended lesson of how to act ethically in their profession.

To curb student cheating and help produce well-educated and ethical college graduates, faculty members, administrators, and student affairs educators need to understand why college students cheat and do not cheat. Current research reveals what factors are related to student cheating, but to decrease the amount of cheating, students’ motivations for cheating need to be addressed. Students make the individual decision to cheat, but what influences those decisions is not fully understood. The decision to cheat is, at its core, a decision to act in a deviant manner in that cheating violates the stated norms of the collegiate institution. Using deviance theory to guide my inquiry of cheating was useful because it provided linkages between factors in a cheating decision and context with the attitude toward cheating. As such, this study adds to the body of research in theory building about student academic cheating and deviance as well as provides useful evidence regarding how students understand the concept of cheating and what can be done to curb cheating behaviors.

This study is important because it elucidates the issue of academic cheating from the students’ perspective. Understanding cheating from the student perspective helps college and university faculty and staff address those behaviors in ways that are relevant to the students. Knowing why students cheat serves to inform faculty and student affairs educators’ practices in working with students to deter cheating, educate about cheating, and address cheating once it has occurred. Additionally, educators and parents can then work to influence students’ behavior by addressing the root influences of cheating and by changing their own behaviors and policies in a
manner that will reduce cheating. This study also provides direction for further research on college student cheating.

**Discussion of Terminology**

Since I invited students to use their own definitions of cheating, I did not proffer my personal definition of the term; however, a discussion below examines others’ definitions of cheating. I did however, use the term cheating very intentionally, rather than use such terms as academic integrity or academic dishonesty, which some consider to be synonymous with not cheating and cheating, respectively. I chose to use the term cheating for two reasons. First, cheating is the term most often used in the literature, and I wanted to be consistent with the existing literature in the area. Second, the terms academic integrity or academic dishonesty may not be terms with which students are familiar or use in regular conversation. The term cheating, although ill-defined, is a known term, and does not carry with it the possible connotations that other terms may carry. In my conversations with students, I wanted to use the terminology they use so as to make them comfortable, build rapport, and hopefully mitigate the possibility that they would not speak openly and honestly because the language used seemed institutional rather than familiar. In instances where researchers or documents use the terms academic integrity or academic dishonesty, as distinct from cheating, I use the terms used in the original source.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

In the following chapter, I provide a synthesis and analysis of literature pertaining to college student academic cheating that is pertinent to the focus of my study. Also in Chapter 2, I review three sociological deviance theories and provide a framework for how they informed my study. In Chapter 3, I discuss the methodology and methods used in my study and data collection and analysis procedures. In Chapters 4 and 5, I present the findings from my study and
interpretation of those findings. Chapter 6 is the summary of the study, discussion of the findings, conclusions, and implications for research and practice.
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF THE RELEVANT LITERATURE AND THEORY

This chapter is a review of relevant literature on college student cheating and of three sociological deviance theories. I begin with a discussion of the inconsistencies in defining cheating. I then synthesize the research findings related to factors related to reasons for cheating. Finally, I explicate three theories, (1) strain theory, (2) social control theory, and (3) differential association theory, from the field of the sociology of deviance that I used to inform my study about cheating.

The vast majority of the articles chosen for this review were published after 1990, are empirical in nature, and address undergraduate college student academic cheating. Where appropriate, anecdotal works by faculty members or academics with knowledge of academic cheating are used. This review will serve as a basis for developing the purpose of this dissertation study to examine student definitions of, beliefs about, and influences on academic cheating in college.

Defining Cheating: Differences Abound

Whitley and Keith-Spiegel (2002) stated that “academic dishonesty appears to be one of those phenomena that few people can define exactly, but that everyone can recognize when they see it” (p. 16). I agree with the sentiment of Whitley and Keith-Spiegel’s statement that cheating is ill-defined by many; however, many people do, or at least try to, define cheating precisely. In reviewing the literature, I found that the definitions used by researchers are different and at times quite vague, which may have resulted in over-reporting or under-reporting of cheating. Within institutions of higher education, the latter half of Whitley and Keith-Spiegel’s remark is true for some people, but false for others. The disparity in definitions of cheating used in the literature also exist at colleges and universities, even though most institutions have policies regarding
cheating. Students and faculty members have differing definitions of cheating (Schmelkin, Gilbert, Spencer, Pincus, & Silva, 2008), which results in the inability for some to know what cheating is, even if they participate in the behavior or it occurs right in front of them. The problem of college student cheating partially stems from the lack of a coherent definition understood by both faculty and students. Additionally, the use of varying definitions of cheating by researchers makes understanding the extent of the problem difficult.

**Researcher Definitions of Cheating**

Researchers who study academic cheating have differing definitions of the term cheating (Kibler, 1998). Most of the literature on cheating uses researcher-derived definitions of cheating or cheating behaviors, but in recent studies, some researchers have begun to ask students and faculty members if they agree that listed behaviors are cheating, to comment on the level of seriousness of the behavior, or to provide their own definitions of cheating (e.g., Ashworth et al., 1997; Blum, 2009; Carpenter, Harding, Finelli, Montegomery, & Passow, 2006; Higbee & Thomas, 2002; Kidwell, Wozniak, & Laurel, 2003; Levy & Rakovski, 2006; Passow, Mayhew, Finelli, Harding, & Carpenter, 2006, Zelna & Bresciani, 2004).

Pavela (1978) defined academic dishonesty as being comprised of four types of dishonesty, (1) “cheating,” (2) “fabrication of information,” (3) “facilitating academic dishonesty,” and (4) “plagiarism” (pp. 72-73). Whitley and Keith-Spiegel (2002) added three categories of academic dishonesty to Pavela’s list (for a total of seven categories), (5) “misrepresentation,” (6) “failure to contribute to a collaborative project,” and (7) “sabotage” (p. 17). Cheating consists of using “unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in any academic exercise” (Pavela, 1978, p. 72), which includes test and homework activities. Fabrication of information includes falsifying such information as references for a written work
or a laboratory report. Facilitating academic dishonesty entails helping another person commit an act within one of the other categories. Plagiarism is representing another’s work or ideas as one’s own without properly referencing the source material or includes using one’s own past work for credit in more than one course without informing the instructor (Pavela, 1978). Misrepresentation includes providing false excuses or information to an instructor about an academic exercise (Hollinger & Lanza-Kaduce as cited in Whitely & Keith-Spiegel, 2002). Failure to contribute to a collaborative project is “not doing one’s fair share” of a group project (Whitely & Keith-Spiegel, 2002, p. 17). Finally, sabotage consists of disrupting another person’s ability to complete academic work (Stern & Havlicek as cited in Whitley & Keith-Spiegel, 2002).

The seven categories above include most academic dishonesty behaviors. The use of these categories, however, provides a definition of cheating that is separate from other acts of academic dishonesty, and this limited definition of cheating may carry over into institutional definitions and student definitions, thereby limiting the behaviors students consider to be cheating in a broad sense. Conversely, the categories themselves may be too broad or ill-explained producing confusion as to the exact meaning or behaviors of each category.

In an effort to clear up students’ confusion about what vague or broad definitions of cheating or dishonesty categories mean in survey research, most current researchers list a series of behaviors as a means to define cheating (e.g., Carpenter et al., 2006; Higbee & Thomas, 2002; Kidwell, Wozniak, & Laurel, 2003; Levy & Rakovski, 2006; McCabe & Treviño, 1997; Passow et al., 2006; Schmelkin et al., 2008; Robinson, Amburgey, Swank, & Faulkner, 2004; Vowell & Chen, 2004). However, the number of behaviors included in the list varies from as few as one (Kerkvliet, 1994), two (Passow et al., 2006), or four (Vowell & Chen, 2004) to as many as 25...
Common behaviors include copying from another person’s test or homework or allowing another person to copy one’s own work, using crib sheets during an exam, falsifying references in a bibliography, using uncited information or direct quotations in a written assignment, and unpermitted collaboration on assignments. However, a number of other behaviors are also included such as giving or getting information about a test, making up an excuse so as not to take a test or turn in an assignment, studying from previously administered tests or test files, witnessing and not reporting cheating by another person, taking a test for or completing another person’s assignment, fixing mistakes in a friend’s work, using the same work for more than one class, and buying notes or assignments (Carpenter et al., 2006; Higbee & Thomas, 2002; Whitley & Keith-Spiegel, 2002).

The long and varied list of behaviors researchers deem as cheating or possible cheating may or may not be in line with institutional definitions of cheating. Also, as discussed below, many faculty and students disagree with some of the behaviors categorized as cheating or assign varying levels of severity to them (Ashworth, Bannister, & Thorne, 1997; Carpenter et al., 2006; Dalton, 1998; Higbee & Thomas, 2002; Kaplan & Mable, 1998; Kidwell et al., 2003; Levy & Rakovski, 2006; Passow et al., 2006).

**Faculty Definitions of Cheating**

Most faculty will agree that almost all of the behaviors common to the studies discussed above are cheating, and from the research that has been conducted to examine faculty definitions of cheating, the findings show that faculty define more behaviors as cheating (Whitley & Keith-Spiegel, 2002) and as more severe cheating (Higbee & Thomas, 2002) than students. However, not all faculty members agree on exactly what constitutes cheating or what constitutes severe cheating. Higbee and Thomas (2002) included in their survey 25 behaviors that may not clearly
be definable as cheating. Higbee and Thomas received responses from 251 faculty members at a large research university. The survey consisted of 25 behaviors that faculty members could respond “yes, no, or depends” to whether the behavior was cheating, with space to write comments (Higbee & Thomas, 2002, p. 44). The faculty responses revealed much disagreement on what constitutes cheating or that labeling an act as cheating “depends” on situational factors. Additionally, Pincus and Schmelkin (2003), in a study of 212 faculty about perceptions of academic dishonesty, found that faculty viewed “academic dishonesty on a continuum of severity” (p. 206), and that faculty members had varying opinions about the how serious some behaviors were, such as using materials from test files.

The disparity in the faculty responses indicates that either institutional guidelines are not clear or that faculty members have their own ideas about what constitutes cheating. Many faculty in Higbee and Thomas’s (2002) study answered that labeling a behavior as cheating depends on what an instructor tells students. The allowance of some behaviors by one faculty member and not another may send mixed messages to students about what constitutes cheating. Additionally, if a faculty member does not tell students, explicitly, what behaviors constitute cheating, students may make assumptions that are incorrect, adding to the already lenient definition of cheating held by many students.

**Student Definitions of Cheating**

Students define cheating differently than researchers and faculty members. Students considered fewer acts to be cheating, saw degrees of severity among acts of cheating, or saw situational factors as relevant to determining if an act is cheating (Carpenter et al., 2006; Higbee & Thomas, 2002; Levy & Rakovski, 2006; Schmelkin et al., 2008; Whitley & Keith-Spiegel, 2002). Students readily agreed that copying from another person or using crib sheets on an exam,
allowing someone else to copy from one’s exam, plagiarizing large sections of a paper, or turning in another’s work as one’s own was cheating, but other behaviors outlined in polices or defined by researchers were not necessarily defined as cheating by students (Carpenter et al., 2006; Kidwell et al., 2003; Levy & Rakovski, 2006). However, behaviors that students saw as trivial cheating or not cheating included copying a few sentences from a source or the internet without citing, turning in the same work for different classes, asking other students about the contents of a test, collaborating with students on homework, discussing papers with peers, studying from previously administered tests, using fake references in a bibliography, giving false excuses to professors, receiving full credit for a group project when little work was contributed, and not turning in another student for cheating (Carpenter et al., 2006; Higbee & Thomas, 2002; Kaplan & Mable, 1998; Kidwell, Wozniak, & Laurel, 2003; Levy & Rakovski, 2006; Schmelkin et al., 2008; Stiles & Gair, 2010; Whitley & Keith-Spiegel, 2002; Zelna & Bresciani, 2004). Most of these behaviors are defined as cheating in institutional policies, but students differ in their definitions. Carpenter et al. (2006) in their study of 643 engineering and pre-engineering students at 11 institutions asked students to indicate whether the listed behaviors were “cheating, unethical but not cheating, or neither” (p. 185). They found that students indicated that many of the behaviors listed above were not cheating but were unethical. However, the definitions of academic integrity typically stress ethical behavior.

The disconnect for students between ethics and not cheating could be a manifestation of how institutions frame cheating and integrity or focus on one but not the other; however, there likely are other reasons why students see certain behaviors as not cheating. Zelna and Bresciani’s (2004) in a study of 780 students at a large research institution found that 69% of students indicated that they “would never cheat under any circumstance” (p. 83). Of that 69%, 59% of
the students had participated in at least one of the cheating behaviors listed in the survey. However, 41% of the 59% of students who cheated did not consider the behaviors in which they participated to be cheating. Zelna and Bresciani’s findings indicate that students do participate in behaviors considered to be cheating as defined by institutional policy, but do not consider the behaviors cheating and likely truly believe that they are not cheaters. Burrus, McGoldrick, and Schuhmann (2007), in their survey of 300 economics students at two institutions, found that from a list of given behaviors, students reported an average of 1.8 incidents of cheating in the previous 12 months. After being given a formal definition of cheating, the average reported incidents of cheating increased to 3.32. Additionally, prior to being given a definition of cheating, 39% of students indicated that they had cheated at least once; after being given the definition 53% of students indicated cheating. Burrus et al. stated that their findings indicated that “student definitions of cheating are, at best, incomplete” (p. 14).

The work of Zelna and Bresciani (2004) and Burrus et al. (2007) points toward the need for a better understanding of how students define cheating as a large portion of the cheating problem may be due to a fundamental lack of understanding of what constitutes cheating. McCabe, Treviño, and Butterfield (1999) found that students justified cheating behavior because of unclear rules and “grey areas” in definitions of cheating (p. 224). The differences in how each group defines and understands cheating is an issue that needs to be addressed. Most of the research on cheating assumes that students define cheating as the researchers and institutions do; however, recent studies reveal that this is not the case. The work of Burrus et al. (2007), Carpenter et al. (2006), Higbee and Thomas (2002), Kaplan and Mable (1998), Kidwell et al. (2003), Levy and Rakovski (2006) Whitley and Keith-Spiegel (2002), and Zelna and Bresciani (2004) is a useful beginning to understanding how college students define cheating, but the
nature of the research did not allow for a full exploration of why students define some behaviors but not others as cheating.

Two researchers who began to address the issue of how students define and understand one aspect of cheating are Blum (2009) and Power (2009). Each researcher conducted a qualitative study exploring how students defined and understood plagiarism. Both researchers found that students do not understand what plagiarism is or how to appropriately cite sources. The students in both studies did not fully agree with all of the rules about citation or copying and did not consider some acts to be plagiarism even though they knew their professors did. The findings from these two studies shed light on how and why students defined plagiarism as they did, but further exploration into how students define cheating and why they define it as they do is necessary. Until researchers and educators have a more complete understanding of students’ reasons for defining some behaviors as cheating and others as not cheating, they will be unable to address the problem fully. The current lack of consensus about cheating not only pays little attention to student thoughts on the issue but also creates confusion in trying to understand the scope and nature of the problem itself. Thus, the lack of understanding of students’ thoughts about academic cheating demonstrates the need for an inductive process to cull meaning from students’ thoughts about cheating.

**Factors Related to Reasons for College Student Cheating**

To address the problem of academic cheating and create strategies to curb cheating behaviors or help students think of all types of cheating as unacceptable behaviors, faculty and student affairs educators need to know why students cheat. A vast body of literature exists on the topic of college student cheating and the factors associated with it. Researchers have explored student characteristics and personality traits, attitudes, and the campus environment to provide
explanations for why students might cheat. Several researchers have sought to provide a comprehensive account of why students cheat. A minority of researchers have sought to understand cheating as students themselves define and understand it.

In this section, I will discuss researchers’ findings about factors related to reasons for college student cheating. I will begin with factors specific to the individual including personal characteristics and student values, beliefs, and behaviors. I will then discuss findings related to the students’ environment including campus and classroom environment, perceptions of faculty, and peer culture. I will end the section with a discussion on the probability of risk or punishment as related to students’ decisions about cheating. To aid my discussion, I include findings from Crown and Spiller’s (1998) and Whitley’s (1998) comprehensive reviews of cheating literature.

**Personal Characteristics**

In efforts to predict who might cheat, several researchers have focused their attention on the relationship of individual student characteristics, abilities, and personality traits to cheating. In this section, I will discuss the relationship of cheating with academic ability, motivation, and fear of failure and need to please others.

**Academic ability.** Many researchers surmise that students with lower grade point averages (GPAs) or lower academic ability will cheat more to increase their grades, and research partially supports this notion. Crown and Spiller (1998) found that in 12 of 14 studies that included a measure of GPA or academic ability students with lower GPAs or ability reported higher levels of cheating than those with higher GPAs, and Whitley (1998) found a very small negative relationship between GPA and cheating. Three studies I reviewed supported the claim that students with lower GPAs or academic ability reported higher levels of cheating than those with higher GPAs or ability (McCabe & Treviño, 1997; Newstead, Franklyn-Stokes, &
Armstead, 1996; Smith, Davy, & Easterling, 2004). However, four study’s researchers reported no relationship between GPA and rates of cheating (Bernardi et al., 2004; Kerkvliet, 1994; Passow et al., 2006; Robinson et al., 2004). The weak and mixed results may indicate that GPA as a measure of academic ability is not a good predictor of cheating but may be confounded with cheating. If students cheat to earn higher grades, the GPA may be artificially inflated skewing the results of the research.

**Motivation.** Students may be motivated to earn high grades in one of two ways. Students who are intrinsically motivated are “learning-oriented” and motivated by learning for knowledge acquisition (Rettinger & Kramer, 2009). Students who are extrinsically motivated are “performance-oriented” and motivated by grades, accolades, or the desire to “appear competent” (Rettinger & Kramer, 2009, p. 294). Students who are extrinsically-oriented were more likely to think cheating was acceptable or to participate in cheating behaviors than students who were intrinsically motivated (Jordan, 2001; Murdock, Miller, & Goetzinger, 2007; Rettinger, Jordan, & Peschiera, 2004; Rettinger & Kramer, 2009; Robinson et al., 2004). Jordan (2001) studied students cheating in particular courses within one semester. He surveyed 175 students and found that students were more extrinsically motivated in courses in which they cheated than in courses in which they did not cheat. Jordan suggested that motivation may not be a static or dichotomous quality; rather, students’ motivation may be affected by the courses they are taking. Researchers who studied motivation in relation to cheating provide an understanding of how focus on grades versus learning might affect student cheating behaviors, and with Jordan’s work, that students might have differing motivation orientations in different classes.

**Fear of failure and need to please others.** Several researchers included items that measured students’ fear of failure or level of stress and outside pressure in relation to cheating.
Whitley (1998) found a moderate relationship between feeling pressure to get good grades and cheating, and many studies added to the strength of this relationship. Passow et al. (2006) found that students who feared losing a scholarship or receiving failing grades and who wanted to alleviate stress or not let down their families reported higher levels of cheating than students not reporting such issues. McCabe (1992) reported similar findings as Passow et al. with “52.4 percent [of 6,096 students in the sample] rat[ing] the pressure to get good grades as an important influence on their decision to cheat with parental pressures and competition to gain admission to professional schools singled out as the primary grade pressures” (p. 367). In their studies using open-ended questions, Clifford (1998) and McCabe, Treviño, and Butterfield (1999) found that pressure from parents and pressures to achieve high grades to meet post-college goals and fear of failing were factors many students cited as contributing to their decisions to cheat in college. Kaplan and Mable (1998) in a study using focus groups at ten institutions also found that students most often reported pressure to get good grades as a primary reason for cheating.

Pressure from others or perceived pressure to achieve high grades may be one of the most prevalent factors affecting students’ decisions to cheat, however, it is notable that few researchers include these factors in their quantitative studies and that the most support for this relationship is found in studies that give students the opportunity to cite their own reasons for cheating. The importance that students give to pressure as an antecedent to cheating calls for further research to be conducted in this area.

Although some personal and personality characteristics are related to cheating, most have only small effects. Feeling pressure to succeed or please others is the most prominent factor that related to cheating within this group, but it is notable that this issue may be related more to factors outside the individual than within the individual and is likely situational, not a student
characteristic. Additionally, coupling pressure to succeed with extrinsic motivation perhaps provides a fuller understanding of how extrinsic motivation acts on students’ decisions to cheat. And Jordan also suggested in his work that situational factors might play a role in determining students’ motivation.

**Student Attitudes, Beliefs, and Behaviors**

In addition to personality traits, student attitudes and beliefs about cheating itself have been found to contribute largely to whether students will decide to cheat. Additionally, cheating behaviors are linked to other forms of illegal or unethical behavior such as shoplifting and lying as well as past cheating behavior. Interestingly, though, students’ level of moral development has little relation to students’ decisions to cheat.

**Attitudes toward cheating and personal values.** Attitudes are defined as context-based, evaluative, latent pre-dispositions to act; however, individuals do not always act based on their attitudes (Alwin, 2001; Rokeach, 1968). Even though attitudes do not consistently result in actions, students who held positive attitudes toward cheating, were more likely to cheat, and conversely as students’ scores on a scale measuring attitudes toward honesty and integrity increased, cheating was less likely to occur (Bernardi et al. 2004; Bolin, 2004; Nonis & Swift, 2001; Passow et al., 2006; Whitley, 1998). Whitley (1998) found attitudes toward cheating to have one of the largest effect sizes in his review of the literature (d=.811 from 16 studies). Bolin (2004), in his national study of 799 students, found that “nearly 40% of the variance in academic dishonesty is explained by its relationship with attitude toward academic dishonesty” (p. 109). Although, Bolin did not appear to control for many variables, the strong R² suggested that students’ attitudes about the wrongness of cheating were a key factor in decisions to cheat.
Few researchers discussed values, attitudes, or beliefs in general as they related to cheating other than attitudes toward cheating or honesty and integrity (moral obligation not to cheat). McCabe, Treviño, and Butterfield (1999) found that many students reported that holding values of integrity and pride kept them from cheating. McCabe (1992) theorized that neutralization attitudes – attitudes that serve as justifications for cheating (discussed in detail below) – could explain student cheating. Smith, Davy, and Easterling (2004) included a measure of neutralization attitudes in their study of 742 marketing and management students and found that having neutralization attitudes significantly related to prior cheating and the reported likelihood to cheat in the future.

**Past behaviors.** As one might assume, students’ past cheating behaviors are strong predictors of current and future cheating behaviors. Whitley (1998) found that cheating in high school or in previous college courses was a very strong predictor of cheating in college or graduate school (d= - 1.117, 4 studies). Since Whitley’s review of the literature, researchers have continued to find a significant positive relationship between past cheating and current and future cheating decisions (Passow et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2004). McCabe (CAI, 2005) found that over 70% of high school students admitted to cheating. Given this high rate of cheating in high school, a high number of students are likely to cheat in college, and this pattern of cheating behavior is troublesome for faculty and student affairs professionals focused on student learning and development.

Another troubling behavioral pattern is that cheating is correlated with other problem behaviors. Sims (1993) and Nonis and Swift (2001) found that cheating in college correlated with committing unethical practices in the workplace. Whitley (1998) found that the relationship between cheating and forms of mild deviance such as “petty theft, and other minor crimes,
alcohol abuse, and lying to friends” (p. 250), had a moderate effect size (d = .715, 10 studies). Beck and Ajzen (1991) found that cheating correlated with lying and shoplifting, and Mustaine and Tewksbury (2005) found that for men, cheating was related to a pattern of deviant behavior and correlated with skipping class, days per week of alcohol consumption, and selling, using, or being near drugs. The possible connection between cheating and other deviant behaviors is an area that needs further exploration. Students who make poor or unethical decisions on multiple behaviors may likely need differing interventions than those who partake in cheating alone.

**Moral development.** Although the decision to participate in an unethical behavior, such as those listed above, would seem to be linked to a person’s level of moral development, a disconnect exists between moral development and the ability to predict actual behavior (Treviño, 1986), particularly pertaining to cheating. Dalton (1998) suggested that in “high-stress” situations in which fear of punishment is low, “even students with high levels of moral development will cheat’” (p. 6). Although many students feel a moral obligation not to cheat, which keeps them from cheating, researchers have found weak or no connections between level of moral development, as measured using Kolhberg’s theory and the Defining Issues Test (DIT), and cheating (Bernardi et al., 2004; Crown & Spiller, 1998; Whitley, 1998). Tittle and Rowe (1973), studying students’ actual behavior in a classroom, found that levels of cheating did not change after a moral appeal was made to students about honesty in self-graded quizzes. Ames and Eskridge (1992) found that students who completed an ethics course categorized fewer behaviors as cheating than a control group, and no differences in behavior were found. The evidence suggests that when students cheat, they know that the behavior is wrong, but knowing this does little to curb behavior depending on the situation (Carpenter et al., 2006).
The evidence supporting the notion that students’ attitudes toward cheating have much influence on the cheating decision is quite robust. However, researchers have not studied what values or beliefs underlie the students’ attitudes or how the attitudes are informed by the students’ environments. The weak evidence linking level of moral development to cheating may suggest that general values have little to do with cheating, but moral development measures do not measure values and behavior. Attitude and subsequently behavior may be affected by a student’s personal values or environment.

**Campus and Classroom Environment and Perceptions of Faculty**

Several researchers focused their studies on how the environment and contextual variables might influence cheating decisions. McCabe and Treviño (1993, 1997), McCabe, Treviño, and Butterfield (1999, 2002); Whitley and Kite (1998), Whitley and Keith-Spiegel (2002), and others argued that the campus and classroom environments have much to do with keeping students from cheating (or not keeping them from cheating). In this section, I discuss the findings in the cheating literature with regard to institutional and classroom factors. Specifically, I discuss the successful nature of honor codes in deterring cheating, the need for academic dishonesty policies to be understood in order to be effective as cheating deterrents, how academic major and classroom environment affect students’ cheating, and the role that faculty members play in students’ reasons to cheat.

**Honor codes.** Melendez (as cited in McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 2002) defines an honor code as having two or three of the following four characteristics, “unproctored exams, the use of a pledge, a judiciary with a high level of student involvement, and a nontoleration policy” (p. 365). McCabe and Treviño (1993) and McCabe, Treviño, and Butterfield (1999, 2002) conducted three major studies in the 1990s to ascertain the differences in student cheating rates
and attitudes at schools with and without honor codes. Studies in 1990-1991 and 1995-1996 were conducted on the same 31 campuses with over 6000 participants in each study. A study in 1999 was conducted on 21 campuses, all of which were different than in the previous studies, with over 2000 participants and had the purpose of replicating the earlier studies and adding the dimension of examining schools with modified honor codes (McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 2002). A modified honor code is not as structured as a traditional code, but it does include student involvement in academic integrity judicial processes and includes intentional programming or communication to the entire campus community emphasizing the importance of academic integrity, also with high student involvement (McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 2002).

McCabe and Treviño (1993) and McCabe, Treviño, and Butterfield (2002) found that rates of cheating are highest at schools with no honor code and lowest at schools with an honor code. Rates at schools with modified honor codes fall between the code and non-code schools. In the aggregate across all the studies and schools, understanding and acceptance of policies is significantly and negatively correlated with cheating; however, the effect was stronger at schools with codes than at schools with no codes. To illustrate the difference in accepting and knowing one’s policy and its relation to cheating, McCabe, Treviño, and Butterfield (1999) reported that, in responses to open-ended questions, students at campuses with honor codes discussed the importance of the code and the role it played in students choosing not to cheat. Whereas at campuses with no codes, students mentioned academic honesty policies in reference to not understanding them and the fact that students do cheat.

**Efficacy of policies.** McCabe and Treviño (1993) and McCabe, Treviño, and Butterfield (2002), found that an understanding of institutional academic integrity or cheating policies was related to levels of student cheating across institution types but was not related to cheating at
some non-code schools. Passow et al., (2006) also reported that understanding of institutional policy did not correlate with cheating. This finding may be attributable to students thinking that policies were not enforced because Passow et al. also found that for cheating on homework, students who reported that academic dishonesty policies would deter cheating reported higher rates of cheating. This finding may mean that students understand academic integrity policies but will only follow them if they are enforced by faculty and other institutional personnel. If policies are not uniformly enforced, students may get the message that cheating is not a serious issue and as such be likely to cheat because there is little fear of repercussion. More understanding is needed about why students who fully understand academic integrity policies still cheat.

Researchers who studied students’ thoughts on and understanding of policies found that students regularly reported that they did not fully understand policies, which led to unintentional cheating, or they felt that policies were both vague and not enforced which led students to think that cheating was not a serious problem or offense (Ashworth et al., 1997; Kaplan & Mable, 1998; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 1999; Zelna & Bresciani, 2004). Students also reported that they wanted academic integrity and dishonesty policies to be more clear, specific, and enforced and that this would deter students from cheating (Kaplan & Mable, 1998; Zelna & Bresciani, 2004). Students’ lack of understanding about what constituted cheating and the severity of the problem relates to the unclear nature of definitions of cheating. For policies to be effective, students need to understand them and accept them, which seem unlikely to happen at many institutions. To ascertain the efficacy of policies, a greater understanding of the extent of students’ knowledge of policies, how this knowledge is gained, and students’ thoughts about policies are needed.
**Academic major.** Many researchers have studied students within particular majors, particularly business and engineering, but those who studied students within multiple majors found that students in more competitive or career-oriented majors tended to cheat more than students in less competitive majors (Bowers, 1964). Baird (1980) and McCabe and Treviño (1995) reported that students majoring in business reported higher levels of cheating than non-business students. Newstead et al. (1996) in their study of 928 students at a British university found that students in the sciences reported the highest levels of cheating followed by social science, technology, education/humanities, and health. Although the research on relationship of major to cheating is scant, the probability that students who are in fields that promote competition with each other for class-standing, grades, or future jobs would cheat more than those in non-competitive majors makes intuitive sense and warrants further study.

**Classroom environment and strategies.** Whitley and Keith-Spiegel (2002) asserted that the classroom environment had an effect on deterring or not deterring cheating. Pulvers and Diekhoff (1999) undertook a study to explore the relationship between cheating and the classroom environment. The study included 280 students from small classes (30 or fewer students) at two liberal arts colleges. Of the seven factors measured by the College and University Classroom Environment Instrument, three were significantly related to cheating. Students who admitted to cheating “described their classes as less personalized, less task oriented, and less satisfying” (p. 493). If students felt a lack of personal attention or much anonymity in a class, felt that the class activities were not organized or clearly defined, and were unsatisfied with the class environment, they were more likely to cheat. Pulvers and Diekhoff’s study was conducted in small classrooms and calls for additional research on classroom environment. If lack of personalization and task orientation affect cheating in small classes, those
factors might have a greater affect on students in large classes, which are the norm on many campuses. Genereux and McLeod (1995) studied other course-related variables and found that the use of essay exams rather than multiple choice exams, students thinking that exams were fair, and students valuing the course material decreased the likelihood of cheating.

Students often cited that they would be less inclined to cheat if their classroom and exam experiences or assignments were changed (Genereux & McLeod, 1995; Murdock et al., 2007; Kaplan & Mable, 1998; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 1999; Newstead et al., 1996). Students stated that feeling anonymous in a large university or large lecture class was a factor in cheating (Kaplan & Mable, 1998). Another factor students attributed to cheating was the focus on grades and competition rather than learning for learning’s sake, and students added that having more group collaborative assignments would reduce cheating (Kaplan & Mable, 1998; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 1999; Murdock et al., 2007). Students also mentioned that ensuring that seats were left between students during exams might deter students from cheating (Genereux & McLeod, 1995; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 1999; Newstead et al., 1996).

The reasons for cheating that relate to classroom environment should be some of the most easy to modify in ways that could deter cheating. From a synthesis of the above literature, getting to know students, providing clear direction in assignments, changing seating arrangements, and stressing learning for its own sake may relate to students’ decisions about cheating. Also these practices may be tasks that many faculty members excel in and should be relatively easy for other professors to adopt. A few simple changes in classroom strategies and environment might deter much cheating. Carpenter et al. (2006) included a section in their survey asking students who admitted to cheating if they still would have cheated under a number of classroom circumstances that would seem to deter cheating, such as instructors knowing students’ names,
allowing group work on graded assignments, and assigning seats during exams as well as several others. They found that a plurality of students said they still would have cheated, but more than half of the students in each case answered that they would not have cheated or did not know if they would have cheated. Such data seem to suggest that changes in classroom environments might cut cheating levels in half; however, more research needs to be conducted in this area to discover how students think the classroom environment affects decisions about cheating.

**Perceptions of faculty.** Even though some students still would cheat if faculty changed the classroom environment, Carpenter et al.’s (2006) results show that the changes likely would curb some cheating. Classroom environments, however, do not exist without faculty members, and students place much of the onus of their cheating on faculty members (Broeckelman-Post, 2008; Carpenter et al., 2006; Genereux & McLeod, 1995; McCabe, 1992; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 1999; Murdock et al., 2007; Newstead et al., 1996; Zelna & Bresciani, 2004). Carpenter et al. (2006) reported that 79.3% of the students in their survey agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “It is the instructor’s responsibility to prevent cheating” (p. 186). Additionally, Genereux and McLeod (1995) found that students were likely to cheat when they perceived that an instructor “does not seem to care about cheating” (p. 699). Likewise, Zelna and Bresciani (2004) found that one in four of the students in their study indicated that “how the instructor viewed cheating was a very important factor when deciding whether to cheat” (p. 85). Students who think that instructors are lenient with cheating, ignore cheating, or do not fully support or enforce institutional policy are more likely to cheat than students in classes with faculty members who strongly and clearly explain to students that cheating is wrong, what cheating is, and that policies about cheating will be enforced (Broeckelman-Post, 2008; McCabe, 1992; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 1999; Newstead et al., 1996; Zelna & Bresciani, 2004).
Broeckelman-Post (2008) found that students’ reported cheating decreased as reports of faculty members’ discussions about the seriousness of committing specific dishonest behaviors increased. Broeckelman-Post found that “discussing specific expectations for behavior, especially in relation to specific assignments” was an effective means for reducing cheating (p. 210). In fact, students said they wanted faculty members to clearly explain and enforce policies as well as explain what constituted cheating (Kaplan & Mable, 1998; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 1999; Newstead et al., 1996; Zelna & Bresciani, 2004), and they said this would deter cheating. However, for this to be successful, faculty need to have a good understanding of and support for policies and have congruent definitions of cheating, which is not always the case.

Supporting, explaining, and enforcing policies is only one part of the role that instructors play in whether students decide to cheat. Students’ respect for and perceptions of faculty members’ teaching, fairness, and caring also affect cheating decisions (Bertram Gallant, 2008; McCabe, 1992; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 1999; Murdock et al., 2007; Stearns, 2001; Whitley & Kite, 1998). McCabe (1992) reported that students used the neutralizing attitude of “condemnation of condemners” when cheating. Basically, students justified or blamed cheating on faculty for grading too harshly, not grading fairly, not making class work seem important or connected to their lives, being poor instructors, being too lenient regarding cheating, leaving during exams, or seeming not to care about or get to know students (McCabe, 1992; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 1999; Murdock et al., 2007; Whitley & Kite, 1998). McCabe (1992) further reported that many students developed a “‘we’ versus ‘they’” attitude and cheated as a means to subvert the institutional system or to punish a teacher (p. 370). Murdock et al. (2007) found that students thought cheating was “more justified” when the instructor’s pedagogy was deemed to be poor (p. 151). Also Stearns (2001), using the Student Evaluative Perceptions of
Instructor Behavior Instrument, found that students who cheated had lower instructor evaluations and liked and respected their instructors less in the classes in which they cheated.

The role of perceptions of faculty in relation to cheating appears to be a strong factor in students’ decisions about cheating, and the current evidence indicates that further study of this issue needs to occur. Certainly students need to take responsibility for their own actions, but if faculty members can encourage students to do this as well as work to ensure that students do not have grounds to think they are unfair, uncaring, or ignore cheating, many students may choose not to cheat.

The importance of campus or classroom environments and faculty members in students’ cheating decisions may not be realized fully on many campuses, even though a number of researchers have recommended that changes in environment and faculty behavior will promote academic integrity (Clifford, 1998; Genereux & McLeod, 1995; Rudolph & Timm, 1998; Whitley & Kite, 1998; Whitley & Keith-Spiegel, 2002). How professors teach courses and students’ perceptions of their faculty seem to be of particular importance in students’ decisions about cheating.

**Peer-related Factors and Perceptions**

In addition to the campus and classroom environment, one of the most salient factors researchers have found related to cheating is perceived behavior and attitudes of peers regarding cheating (Clifford, 1998; Crown & Spiller, 1998; Hard, Conway, & Moran, 2006; McCabe & Treviño, 1993, 1997, McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 1999, 2001a, 2002; Rettinger et al., 2004; Vowell & Chen, 2004; Whitley, 1998). The perceived social norms of a student’s campus environment greatly affect the choice about cheating, as evidenced by the difference in honor code and non-honor code school cheating levels. Additionally, if students know of friends who
cheat or think that cheating is acceptable or perceive that their friends have these behaviors and attitudes, they are more likely to cheat.

Whitley (1998) found that peer influence and perceptions of peer behavior had a strong effect on decisions to cheat (d = .929, 16 studies). McCabe and Treviño (1993, 1997) and McCabe, Treviño, and Butterfield (1999, 2001a, 2002) repeatedly found in their studies that students who thought that friends cheated or thought that cheating was acceptable behavior were more likely to cheat than those who did not; likewise, students who felt that friends disapproved of cheating or that peers would report cheating behavior had low levels of cheating. Vowell and Chen (2004) also found that when controlling for multiple demographic characteristics and theoretical constructs for why students might cheat, measures pertaining to friends and perceptions of friends’ cheating accounted for 37.7% of the variance in cheating (out of a total of 53.2% explained by the final model). Vandehey, Diekhoff, and LeBeff (2007) found that students who knew of peer cheating or thought that peers deemed cheating as acceptable had higher rates of cheating than those who did not know or have such perceptions of their peers. Interestingly, Rettinger and Kramer (2009) found that direct knowledge of peer cheating was correlated with students’ own cheating, but there was no significant relationship between perceptions of peer cheating and individual behaviors. Rettinger and Kramer’s finding related to perceptions of peers may be an anomaly in the research as most other researchers have found a significant correlation between perceptions of peers’ cheating and one’s own cheating, including Jordan (2001) who found that students who cheated versus those who did not cheat assumed that more of their peers also cheated.

Further evidence of peer influence on cheating is that there is a higher level of cheating found among fraternity members as compared to other students (Harp & Taietz, 1966; Kerkvliet,
1994; McCabe & Treviño, 1997; Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2005; Robinson et al., 2004; Vandehey et al., 2007). Even though the high levels of cheating might suggest that cheating is the norm on college campuses, Carpenter et al. (2006) suggested that a norm of cheating was not prevalent, at least within engineering departments, because a majority of students responded that cheating was wrong. However, many researchers (see above) suggested that if students perceived that cheating is acceptable by other students or have a friend-group in which cheating is acceptable, they would be quite likely to cheat; therefore, cheating may not have to be a campus-wide norm, just a norm among a peer group for students to deem it as acceptable behavior.

A second means by which students consider their peers in cheating is through helping friends to cheat or not reporting friends and other students. Many students considered cheating for friends merely as “helping” not as cheating, and they also were unwilling to report friends or other peers for cheating behaviors (Ashworth et al., 1997; Kaplan & Mable, 1998; Whitley & Keith-Spiegel, 2002). Carpenter et al. (2006) reported that 60.4% of the students in their study reported that they would not help a friend cheat if asked; however, nearly 40% of students would help friends cheat, which is a large number of students. Also, no indication was given of how the 60.4%, who indicated that they would not help friends cheat, defined cheating, so they may be willing to help friends cheat but do not consider the behavior to be cheating. Therefore, the number of students who help friends cheat may be higher than Carpenter et al. (2006) reported. Whitley and Keith-Spiegel (2002) suggested that the increase in unauthorized collaboration on homework and other written work was evidence of the willingness of friends to help each other cheat, even if they did not consider it to be cheating.

Creating student cultures in which cheating is perceived as unacceptable seems to be an essential means by which cheating can be curbed (McCabe & Treviño, 1993; McCabe, Treviño,
& Butterfield, 1999, 2001a, 2001b, 2002). Understanding better how friends and other peers influence individual students’ behaviors and helping students to articulate an anti-cheating attitude are important for educators’ efforts to address the problem of cheating.

**Probability or Risk of Punishment**

As students ascertain the peer culture around cheating as well as how faculty will respond to cheating, they make determinations about how likely they are to be caught as well as the severity of punishment if caught cheating; researchers indicate that these risks are a part of students’ decision-making processes about cheating. As might be expected, most researchers have found that high levels of perceived risk of being caught or punished negatively correlated with cheating (Burris et al., 2007; Crown & Spiller, 1998; Davy, 2007; McCabe & Treviño, 1993, 1997; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 2002; Vandehey et al., 2007; Whitely, 1998). Tittle and Rowe (1973) found that in class self-grading situations, when the professor told student that random checks of self-grades would be done because cheating had been detected, levels of cheating decreased significantly. Also, students indicated that in-class deterrents such as carefully watching students would deter cheating (Davis et al., 1992). However, Smith et al. (2004) found that contrary to a previous study, in-class deterrents such as encouraging students to report cheating, telling students not to cheat, or carefully watching students as they take exams, was not significantly related to the reported likelihood of cheating. However, Davy (2007) found that for business students, the number and strength of “in-class deterrents” had a negative relationship with the likelihood of cheating (p. 297). Burrus et al. (2007) also found that if students perceived the strength of punishments to be high, cheating was decreased.

The discrepancies in the literature about how deterrents ed cheating are furthered by Passow et al. (2006) who found that perceived effectiveness of policies (measured by student and
faculty understanding of policies, faculty support of policies, and policies as deterrents) was not significantly related to test cheating but, oddly, was positively correlated with homework cheating. McCabe and Treviño (1997) found a similar result with students who reported higher levels of cheating also reporting perceiving penalties as more severe. McCabe and Treviño gave a possible explanation for this by stating that perhaps students who cheat pay more attention to policies or who have been caught know what the penalties are for cheating. As stated above, McCabe and Treviño (1993) and McCabe, Treviño, and Butterfield (2002), in the replication of the earlier study, also found differing results with regard to understanding and acceptance of policies and severity of penalties. McCabe and Treviño (1993) found that cheating correlated negatively with perceived penalties and understanding and acceptance of policies at both honor code and non-honor code schools. However, McCabe, Treviño, and Butterfield (2002) found that perceived severity of penalties was not significant for any of the code/policy conditions under study, and understanding and acceptance of the policy was significant only for code schools. Perhaps, students interpreted questions differently regarding acceptance and understanding of policies creating this discrepancy in the findings. Also knowing the severity of punishments may be a deterrent only if he or she thinks there is likelihood of being caught or reported, therefore making the severity of punishments a factor mediated by the risk of actually getting caught.

When students thought that they had a high chance of being reported for cheating, particularly in institutions where strict academic integrity policies or honor codes existed that required peer reporting and were enforced by peers, students had lower cheating rates than they did at institutions where such policies were not enforced with great regularity (McCabe & Treviño, 1993, 1997; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 2001b, 2002). Peer code/policy enforcement and reporting of cheating seem to be a strong deterrent of cheating, which is related
to perceptions of peers’ attitudes and behaviors as mentioned above. Additionally, Vandehey et al. (2007) found that students rated such “punitive deterrents” as “fear of receiving an F on the exam, fear of being dropped from class by the instructor, and fear of university disciplinary action” as effective in deterring cheating (p. 247). The effectiveness of punitive deterrents to cheating is also related to perceptions of faculty members’ willingness to report and sanction cheating. However, merely enforcing or strengthening rules may not deter students from all cheating, nor address why students cheat; enforcement merely makes cheating more difficult for students.

**Summary**

Researchers who study college student cheating have indicated that no clear set of factors exist to explain why students cheat. Situational factors and students’ attitudes and perceptions of others’ attitudes do explain much of the variance in cheating and are cited by students themselves when they are given the opportunity to talk about cheating. Researchers know that understanding of polices and student definitions, perceived pressures to succeed, classroom environment and faculty attitudes and teaching practices, peer influence, and perceived risk of being caught relate to students’ decisions to cheat. Worthy of note is the malleable nature of these factors. Faculty and other institutional personnel have some level of control over the factors and the environments created on their campuses.

Educators need yet to know why students feel that cheating is acceptable in some instances and what they can do to nullify those contexts. More importantly, educators need to know why students do not cheat. Educators cannot change students’ personalities or other static characteristics. The research reflecting the lack of understanding that students have for policies and what constitutes cheating as well as how classroom practices affect students’ behaviors are
areas that require further study, and educators can change how they interact with students, how and what they teach, and to what extent they help students to understand academic integrity policies and honor codes. Learning from students how they define cheating and why they cheat and do not cheat and what factors they consider relevant to cheating decisions will help faculty and campus personnel address and curb cheating behavior and will help to focus future research in areas that are congruent with each other and the issues that students deem important to the topic of cheating.

**Theoretical Underpinnings of Cheating Research and Guidance of Inquiry**

In much of the literature discussed above, relatively few researchers used a theoretical lens to guide their inquiry into college student cheating. Bernardi et al. (2004) used moral development theory in their study, but this study and past studies using moral development as measured by the Defining Issues Test (DIT) and like instruments have been found to have little correlation with cheating (Bernardi et al., 2004; Crown & Spiller, 1998; Whitley, 1998). Beck and Ajzen (1991), Passow et al. (2006), and Mayhew, Hubbard, Finelli, Harding, and Carpenter (2009) used the theory of planned behavior to examine college cheating. Using the theory of planned behavior as a lens to view cheating considers a person’s attitude toward cheating, perceived norm about cheating (making decisions based on the perception of what others deem appropriate), and perceived ease of cheating; these three factors relate to the strength of the intention to cheat, which in turn leads to the behavior of cheating (Beck & Ajzen, 1991). The theory of planned behavior was moderately successful at predicting cheating behavior (Beck & Ajzen, 1991). Planned behavior makes intuitive sense – that if someone has a favorable attitude toward cheating and plans to cheat that he or she will likely cheat if given the opportunity; however, the theory does not account for where the favorable attitude toward cheating comes
from or the genesis of the perceived norm and pays no attention to the context in which the individual resides. Similarly, a few researchers use criminological theories to frame their studies. Bolin (2004) used the general theory of crime to frame his study, but found that low self-control and perceived opportunity accounted for little of the variance in cheating. The theories used by the researchers mentioned above address individual action without much attention to the contexts in which students make decisions, thus they have not been successful in adequately explaining student cheating.

Researchers who use sociologically-based theories of deviance to inform cheating studies have been more successful in explaining variance in cheating than those who do not use such theories, explaining up to 40% of the variance in cheating (Hard, Conway, & Moran, 2006; Michaels & Miethe, 1989; Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2005; Smith et al., 2004; Vowell & Chen, 2004), which makes sense because contextual factors most strongly correlate with cheating. Michaels and Meithe (1989) found that “academic cheating is comparable to other forms of deviant behavior and, therefore, should be explainable by similar mechanisms” (p. 881). For the purposes of this study, I defined deviance from a normative perspective, meaning social norms guide behavior and that deviance is a violation of those norms (Adler & Adler, 2006; Clinard & Meier, 2004). Rules and specifications prohibiting and defining cheating are present on all college campuses, and presumably, all students know that cheating does violate the norm of academic honesty.

**Sociological Deviance Theories**

Researchers who seek sociologically-based explanations for deviance concentrate on the person’s relationship to or within society or a specific social setting to locate the causes of deviance. Modern socio-cultural theories of deviance stem from the Chicago School scholars
who drew on the works of Durkheim as well as German sociologists (Williams & McShane, 2004). In the early 1900s, researchers at the University of Chicago began examining social structures in the city of Chicago. From their study of deviant behavior, the Chicago School scholars found that social structures contribute to deviance directly and to the social and socialization processes that cause deviance.

The use of sociologically-based theories of deviance has a long history in the cheating literature. In 1964, Heatherington and Feldman published one of the first studies that considered the social and situational nature of cheating rather than just individualistic variables. Soon after Heatherington and Feldman’s study, other researchers began to publish cheating studies that focused on various elements of social structures, social control, and other conceptions of deviance (see Bonjean & McGee, 1965; Cochran et al., 1998; Eve & Bromley, 1981; Harp & Taietz, 1966; LaBeff, Clark, Haines, & Deikhoff, 1990; Lanza-Kaduce & Klug, 1986; Tittle & Rowe, 1973). As noted above, several researchers, more recently, have also used deviance theories to guide their studies of academic cheating (Hard, Conway, & Moran, 2006; Michaels & Miethe, 1989; Mustaine & Tewksbury, 2005; Smith et al., 2004; Vowell & Chen, 2004).

Additionally, other researchers point to the need for further research that focuses on social learning theory and the effect of the peer group on student cheating (Hard, Conway, & Moran, 2006; McCabe & Treviño, 1993, 1997; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 2002).

Based on a thorough review of cheating literature and deviance theories, I have chosen three theories that focus on the person’s interaction with the social world to guide my study. The theories I use to frame my inquiry are: (1) strain theory, (2) social control theory, and (3) differential association theory. Each of the theories is a criminological theory, but the theories are used to explain both criminal behaviors and non-criminal deviant behaviors, and the theorists
often used both terms interchangeably. I use the term deviance throughout this section except in
direct quotations in which the author uses the term criminal. In this section, I briefly explicate
each of the three theories and draw connections between the theories and current cheating
literature to demonstrate how the theories informed my study.

**Strain Theory**

Shifting the onus of student cheating away from the individual cheater likely is not a
popular stance, but I believe it is worthwhile and could provide a means to address the problem
of cheating. Strain theory focuses on societal structures as a cause for deviance. Strain theory
derives from Merton’s 1938 article “Social Structure and Anomie” (1968b, 1996b) and its
continuations (1968a, 1996a). Merton’s goal in developing the theory of social structure and
anomie was to “discover how some social structures exert a definite pressure upon certain
persons in the society to engage in nonconformist rather than conformist conduct” (1996b, p.
132, emphasis in the original). Three societal constructs interact to create conditions in which
deviating from the norm is considered a viable (or the only) option for behavior. The concepts
are cultural goals and values, behavioral norms to achieve goals, and opportunity structure.

**Cultural goals and values.** Cultural goals and values are objects, purposes, statuses, and
aspirations that are held to be important and “worth striving for” for all members of society
(Merton, 1996b, p. 132). In the United States, cultural goals include wealth, attainment of a
college or post-graduate degree, good grades in school, a high-paying job, or any other measure
of success that is desirable to achieve (Merton, 1968a). Cultural goals are transmitted to young
people by the family and educational institutions. The adoption of a common set of goals or
definition of success is engendered due to the pervasive “success-theme” in the U.S. (Merton,
1968a, p. 220). The doctrine (or cultural myth) of success states that everyone should want to
strive for the attainment of cultural goals, are expected to do so, and can achieve them. Failure to achieve cultural goals of success or quitting is not acceptable. Finally, people are in competition to achieve goals. With the success doctrine firmly in place in the U.S., almost all people, regardless of social strata or ability, think that they can and should be able to achieve success. The extent to which people assimilate cultural goals and values into their personal value structures influences how ardently and by what means they strive to achieve goals.

**Behavioral norms.** The second construct within the cultural structure is the normative means by which people should achieve cultural goals. Merton (1996b) explained that members of society who hold sway or power over cultural mechanisms, define the “acceptable modes” or “allowable procedures” for attaining cultural goals (p. 133). Merton cautioned that the means for attaining goals and success are “value-laden” processes or controls that represent “prescribed or preferential or permissive or proscribed patterns of behavior” (p. 133). Merton (1996b) stated that society is maintained when people strive to achieve goals by acceptable means and derive satisfaction from both achieving the goals and the processes of achieving goals. As stated above, people are in competition to achieve success, and Merton posited society will operate smoothly only as long as every position in society or outcome of the competition is rewarded.

**Opportunity structure.** Although the ability for all to achieve success is the ideal cultural goal, Merton (1968a) recognized that actual opportunity for all to achieve success is differential. Opportunity structure “designates the scale and distribution of conditions that provide various probabilities for individuals and groups to achieve specifiable outcomes” (p. 153). Social class is a primary basis of a person’s ability to access the means to success, but opportunity structure also has to do with demographic characteristics, where a person is located at a given time, natural ability, or other people with whom one might come into contact.
**Interaction of cultural constructs.** When cultural values and goals, normative behaviors, and opportunity structure interact, differential ability to succeed occurs, particularly in the U.S. where cultural goal attainment is highly emphasized and normative means to attain them are not. The success myth leads people to believe that they can and should attain wealth, status, education, and other goals of success. However, competition coupled with an opportunity structure that provides unequal access to the acceptable means, results in a large number of people unable to achieve success (Merton, 1996b). Competition becomes the process by which success is achieved; winning is emphasized rather than the process of working hard or doing well in school. The emphasis on only one piece of the cultural structure, coupled with unequal access to acceptable means, causes a breakdown in the structure itself, and people are “strained” and drawn toward deviant behavior.

**Strain and deviance.** Merton (1996b) outlined four possible strategies for “adapting” to strain: innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion. For the purposes of this study, I am concerned with innovation. As the name of the adaptation strategy implies, people who assimilate cultural norms and values as their own but do not have access to the acceptable means to achieve those goals will innovate new or non-acceptable means to achieve goals (Merton, 1996b). Innovation is a direct result of the competitive and success-driven nature of American society, and people who are in the lower strata of a system or lack the ability, for whatever reason, to succeed through normative means are likely to innovate. Merton (1968a, 1996b) noted that the cultural structure itself produces the pressures and strain that cause deviance rather than a person rationally choosing to act in a deviant manner.

Merton’s (1996b) “central hypothesis” is that “aberrant behavior may be regarded sociologically as a symptom of dissociation between culturally prescribed aspirations and
socially structured avenues for realizing these aspirations” (p. 134). When strained, some people determine that the only way to achieve success is through illicit means. Successful deviance, achieving the goal without being caught or reproved, causes others to notice the success of the deviant behavior and may serve to erode the ties between cultural goals and normative behavior and increase the practice of deviant behavior (Merton, 1968a).

**Summary.** Merton (1968b, 1996a, 1996b) posited that in a society that stresses achievement of culturally-defined success and provides unequal access to normative means to achieve success, strain will develop. In an environment that is strained, individuals with power and privilege define the meaning of success and how to attain it, and there is a high level of pressure to succeed. If individuals assimilate the socially-prescribed norms of success but are unable to achieve success through normative means (e.g., studying or working hard,) individuals will use deviant behaviors (e.g., cheating, lying, stealing) to achieve success. Successful deviation from the norms can increase deviation. The crux of strain theory is that deviance is caused by frustration from the inability to achieve cultural success goals.

**Cheating as innovation.** Strain theory is an appropriate lens through which to study cheating because attainment of a college degree and achieving good grades are cultural measures of success. Colleges are extensions of the success-driven, highly-competitive society and frequently reinforce or transmit cultural values while lacking strict emphasis or specificity on how to achieve success. Students often feel strained between the goals of achieving good grades or post-college success and the means by which to attain those goals. Many of the forces at work in strain theory are present on college campuses and in the literature about why students cheat.

Harp and Taietz (1966) looked at the social structures of colleges to study whether certain students would be more likely to cheat, and they found some evidence to support that strain
between educational and career goals and academic ability positively related to cheating. Vowell and Chen (2004) included in their survey measures of blocked opportunity, confidence, fairness of faculty, time constraints, and “effort versus outcome” to operationalize strain in their study. They found only minimal support for strain as a predictor of cheating, but this result could be due to incomplete operationalization of the concept. They did not consider the effect of the “dysjunction between economic [or career] goals and [educational] expectations” (Farnworth & Leiber, 1989, p. 264) and ability, which according to Farnworth and Leiber (1989) are necessary variables when using strain to predict deviance. Farnworth and Leiber contended that strain theory is appropriate to study deviance in students, but in doing so, researchers must look at students’ occupational goals in relation to their abilities and expected educational achievement to be consistent with Merton’s conception of strain.

A review of the cheating literature suggests that several factors related to student cheating fit with the notions of strain theory. The relation of cheating to outside pressure to achieve high grades and good jobs, focus on grades rather than on learning, perceived faculty unfairness and environments in which achieving high grades is not possible, and having slightly lower academic abilities (Crown & Spiller, 1998; McCabe, 1992; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 1999; Pulvers & Diekhoff, 1999) fits with strain theory.

Focus on grades. The societal emphasis on achieving goals rather than the process of learning is often found on college campuses and in cheating students’ reasons for cheating. Students who were motivated by extrinsic means, such as grades, were slightly more likely to cheat than students who were intrinsically motivated by such measures as learning for pleasure or personal satisfaction (Murdock et al., 2007; Rettinger et al., 2004; Rettinger & Kramer, 2008; Robinson et al., 2004). Additionally, students indicated that they cheated in order to achieve
entrance into graduate school or a well-paying job (Clifford; 1998; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield; 1999). However, the students did not come to focus on the success goal solely on their own. In studies using qualitative methods to gather data, students indicated that some classroom environments and actions of faculty members emphasized competition and grades, which students cited as reasons for cheating (Kaplan & Mable, 1998; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 1999). Parental focus on grades also may cause strain for students as perceived pressure from parents to succeed and the subsequent fear of failure are two of the most oft cited reasons for cheating (Clifford, 1998; McCabe, 1992; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 1999; Passow et al.; 2006).

**Unequal access to means to success.** Another reason given for cheating is inability to achieve high grades through normative means, indicative of a differential opportunity structure (or perception of it). In the literature, students with low academic ability were more likely to cheat than those with high ability (Crown & Spiller, 1998; McCabe & Treviño, 1997; Newstead et al., 1996; Smith et al., 2004), and students who perceive an unequal opportunity to access means to success also may cheat. Students who thought that teachers were not fair were likely to cheat (McCabe, 1992; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 1999; Whitley & Kite, 1998), and if students thought faculty members did not teach information needed to do well on exams or assignments, thereby withholding means to success, they reported cheating (McCabe, 1992; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 1999; Whitley & Kite, 1998).

Faculty members added to differential ability for success by not maintaining or enforcing norms of behavior. Lack of faculty consensus on a definition of cheating (Higbee & Thomas, 2002; Pincus & Schmelkin, 2003) and low levels of reporting cheating (CAI, 2005) may
influence cheating decisions and blur the already muddy definitions of acceptable practices with which to achieve success.

**Spreading deviance.** When faculty members fail to enforce behavioral norms with regard to cheating, they may weaken the cultural control structure (i.e., rules and regulations) (Merton, 1968a). Merton asserted that the control structure plays an important role in maintaining social norms of behavior and ensuring that non-normative acts are not rewarded. Students reported that when they knew faculty members did not or likely would not try to catch or report cheating, students would be likely to cheat (Broeckelman-Post, 2008; Genereux & McLeod, 1995; Kaplan, 1998; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 2001). Additionally, if students thought that their peers successfully cheated or thought that cheating was acceptable behavior, they would be more likely to cheat than if the opposite was true (Clifford, 1998; Crown & Spiller, 1998; Hard, Conway, & Moran, 2006; McCabe & Treviño, 1993, 1997, McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 1999, 2001a, 2002; Rettinger et al., 2004; Rettinger & Kramer, 2009; Vowell & Chen, 2004; Whitley, 1998).

Society in that success goals are emphasized and competed for and the means to achieve goals are varied. Although the acceptable means to achievement in college are clearer than society as a whole, students may choose a number of paths, rather than one prescribed path, to achieve success. For example, some students may study every night, attend every class, and regularly meet with professors as the means to achieving an “A” grade, while other students may do little work, regularly skip class and rarely communicate with professors and still achieve an “A” grade. Additionally, students experience the enforcement of rules and norms differently depending on their interactions with faculty members. Many students who go to college feel pressure to succeed and are filled with the promise that everyone can achieve success. Using
Merton’s (1968a, 1996a, 1996b) strain theory to view the problem of cheating helped me to focus on how students’ interactions with the college environment affected their perceived ability to achieve high grades and post-college goals as well guided inquiry with regard to students’ level of assimilation to societal norms (e.g., values, adherence to rules, and goals) and acceptable practices to achieve goals. Strain theory focuses primarily on environmental structure and goal attainment, but offers little direction with regard to students’ relationship with faculty or peers or with practices in the classroom other than with regard to policy enforcement. The other theories that guided my inquiry offered insight into how these factors influenced students’ decisions.

**Social Control Theory**

Social control theory is different than strain theory because it focuses on why people do not become deviant and looks to people’s relationships with family, friends, and educational or other institutions for this explanation (Hirschi, 2002; Williams & McShane, 2003). Social control theorists explain that people are prone to act in ways that suit their best interests, but internalization of societal values and norms and the need for approval from others causes people to follow rules and act in conventional ways. People internalize norms and act in accordance with them if they have a strong social bond to the people and institutions around them. The social bond consists of four parts: (1) *attachment* to family, peers, and educational institutions and personnel, (2) *involvement* in the community, school, work, and with friends, (3) *commitment* to societal norms of success such as high educational, family, and career aspirations, and (4) *belief* in and respect for authorities, rules, and the law. If persons have low levels of one or more pieces of the social bond, a weakening of social ties to society occurs that in turn causes deviance (Hirschi, 2002). For a person to resist deviant behavior, he or she must have all four pieces of the social bond. However, people may use various justifications for their behaviors, called
neutralizations, in order to maintain their social bond while simultaneously committing deviant acts. In this section, I will outline each of the elements of the social bond and discuss the types of neutralizations people may use to justify deviance.

**Attachment.** The first part of the social bond is attachment (Hirschi, 2002). Attachment to society or to one’s social group consists of feeling emotionally connected to others, such as family members, teachers, or peers, and liking one’s community, such as the family, church, or school (Hirschi, 2002; Williams & McShane 2004). When people are attached to their communities and society in general, they internalize the norms of the group and have a conscience or concern for others and their feelings and opinions. Attachment to the group also involves care and respect for others and the group as a whole, and when these feelings are coupled with an internalization of norms, people tend to be less deviant.

**Involvement.** Attachment to the community or group leads people to become engaged in the activities of the group, and this engagement makes up the second piece of the social bond – involvement. When people are involved in their communities, they devote much time and energy to the activities of the group, such as recreational activities, sports, studying, going to class, school and community activities and organizations, and talking with friends or peers (Hirschi, 2002; Williams & McShane, 2004). Hirschi (2002) posited that when people are busy taking part in the conventional activities of the group, they have less time to be bored and idle, which often leads to deviant behavior.

**Commitment.** When people feel attached to and are involved in their communities or society, they also likely will feel committed to that society. The notion of commitment as part of the social bond involves investing oneself in the community through building up a good reputation, working hard in a job, having a family, or working to achieve a high degree of
education (Hirschi, 2002; Williams & McShane, 2004). Within the commitment part of the concept of the social bond is the assumption that when people feel bonded to society, they have values that support that bond and are concerned with the upkeep of society, such as care for family and friends, helping others, and desire to learn for the benefit of oneself and others. Hirschi (2002) suggested that when people invest their time, money, or other resources into the community and their own endeavors that tie into the community’s needs and norms, they will be less likely to risk losing that investment by acting in a deviant manner.

**Belief.** Commitment to society leads to the final piece of the social bond, which is belief. Belief entails internalizing and espousing the shared norms and values of the group or society (Hirschi, 2002). Believing in the values of the group also includes thinking that rules and laws are fair. People who believe in the group values and rules are not likely to be deviant. However, Hirschi acknowledged that people who believe in the values of the group may still be deviant. One argument for why people can believe in the values and norms of society yet still be deviant is that people neutralize or justify their behavior.

**Neutralization.** Sykes and Matza (1957) developed neutralization theory stating that people can “temporarily suspend their commitment to societal values thus providing the freedom to commit delinquent acts” (Williams & McShane, 2004, p. 198). Sykes and Matza (1957) argued that people who act deviantly seek to avoid responsibility for their actions by justifying their acts or neutralizing the wrongful intent of the act, either before or after the act takes place, in order to maintain their bond to the group and belief in the group’s values. Sykes and Matza identified five types of neutralization for deviant behavior: (1) denial of responsibility, (2) denial of injury, (3) denial of the victim, (4) condemnation of the condemners, and (5) appeal to higher loyalties.
Denial of responsibility means that the deviant act was an accident or was the product of “forces outside of the individual and beyond his control” (Sykes & Matza, 1957, p. 667). An example of denying responsibility for cheating might be a student stating the cheating was due to an overwhelming workload or was caused by his or her peers. The second type of neutralization, denial of injury, means that no harm came to anyone because of the act so the act is not that bad. An example of denial of injury with regard to cheating might be that a student states that the cheating did not affect anyone so the act should not be harshly punished. The neutralization technique of denial of a victim has two possible meanings. First, the deviant person might state that there is no victim (like a lack of injury). Second, the person might contend that the act was done in retaliation and that the victim deserved the injury or brought on the act due to a previous act, meaning that the person harmed by the act was not a victim. Examples of neutralizing cheating behavior that includes denial of a victim might be that students cite unfair rules of the institution or that professors give unfair exams or do not teach well.

The fourth way to neutralize a deviant act is to condemn the condemners, which is blaming those who report or disapprove of the deviant act or saying the condemners are hypocrites or are deviant themselves. A way that students might condemn the condemners is by saying a teacher was unfair so deserved to have students cheat or that faculty and administrators do not treat all students that same or are unduly harsh on one person for spiteful reasons. The final neutralization technique outlined by Sykes and Matza (1957) is an appeal to higher loyalties, which means that people are “sacrificing the demands of the larger society for the demands of the smaller social groups to which the delinquent belongs” such as friendship groups (p. 669). An example of neutralizing cheating behavior due to appealing to higher loyalties might be a that a student states she cheated to make sure that a friend did not fail a course.
Summary. In Hirschi’s (2002) social control theory, people feel bonded to their communities and to society. The connection is actualized in people being attached to and liking those around them, peers and figures of authority; by spending time engaged in the activities of the group and society and internalizing norms, aspirations, and values of the group. When people feel that they are a part of groups and want to maintain their status and work to further the needs of the groups, they will be less likely to be deviant. Deviance occurs in one of two ways within the social control theory. First people who are not sufficiently bonded to the group act deviantly because they do not see the need to maintain group norms. Second, people may be sufficiently bonded to the group but neutralize their actions in order to maintain their bond and belief in the group’s values.

Social control theory and cheating. Social control theory facilitates the study of deviance because it focuses on the person’s commitment to those aspects of society that are normative. Several researchers have used aspects of social control theory and the social bond to study student cheating and have found social control theory useful in explaining cheating (Eve & Bromley, 1981; Michaels & Miethe, 1989; Vowell & Chen, 2004). Michaels and Miethe (1989) in their questionnaire study of 623 students found that attachment, as measured by friends who cheat, and belief, as measured by honesty of students and seriousness of cheating, were significant in explaining some cheating behaviors. Vowell and Chen (2004) found that a measure of attachment to school was significantly and negatively correlated with cheating.

In addition to the findings of researchers who used social control theory to frame their studies, findings from other studies also lend support to the use of social control theory to help explain cheating. In the case of cheating, students who feel isolated or alienated from peers or faculty or in the classroom might have weak attachment, involvement, or commitment bonds to
the school or to an individual course. Pulvers and Deikhoff (1999) found that students who felt a lack of personal attention or anonymity in classrooms were more likely to cheat. Students who approached school work and learning in order to achieve a grade or due to competition were more likely to cheat than students who learned for the sake of learning (Murdock et al., 2007; Rettinger et al., 2004; Rettinger & Kramer, 2009; Robinson et al., 2004). Also, students who did not think cheating was wrong or had favorable attitudes toward cheating were also more likely to cheat (Bernardi et al. 2004; Whitley, 1998), which is indicative of a lack of belief in community norms.

Sykes and Matza’s (1959) neutralizations also appear in the cheating literature. Lebeff, Clark, Haines, and Diekhoff (1990) explored the relationship between neutralization and cheating and found that students who disapproved of cheating did cheat in some circumstances and used neutralizing statements or attitudes to justify why their cheating was acceptable. Lebeff et al. found that students used the techniques of denial of responsibility, appealing to higher loyalties, and condemnation of condemners. McCabe (1992) interviewed students and explored the use of neutralization by students who admitted to cheating. McCabe found examples of all five neutralization techniques in use by the students in his sample. Additionally, several researchers have found a positive correlation between holding neutralizing attitudes with cheating behavior and viewing cheating as acceptable (Davy, 2007; Jordan, 2001; Rettinger & Kramer, 2009; Vandehey et al., 2007). The findings from these studies lend support to the notion that students attempt to avoid responsibility or a sense of wrongdoing in cheating but still hold onto their beliefs in or agreement with social norms and values.

Researchers’ findings provided support for using social control theory and the concept of neutralization to frame my study. Understanding why students cheat in some situations but not
others requires an understanding of how students experience differing situations and why cheating is occasionally deemed acceptable. Social control theory provided guidance for inquiry and interpretation related to the social bonds, or lack thereof, students had with the institution, specific courses, and faculty members. The theory also provided an explanation for how or why students cheat when they know or feel that cheating violates social and personal norms and values.

**Differential Association Theory**

The final theory I use to frame my inquiry into college student cheating is Sutherland’s (1924) differential association theory. In this theory, deviance is learned through one’s social environment (Sutherland & Cressey, 1974; Williams & McShane, 2003). Differential association theory seeks to explain both individual deviance and variations in group deviance. According to this theory, people learn deviant behavior and the values that accompany deviating from social norms from their immediate social groups, and different social groups espouse different norms and values. Thus the social group or groups in which people associate shape their values and behaviors, which explains why different people behave in differing manners. In the case of academic cheating, peer groups matter, and some students learn how to cheat as well as the values favorable toward cheating from close friends. In addition, students learn values or acquire attitudes favorable toward cheating from any person or the environment once the techniques of cheating are learned. Within differential association theory, in a situation where deviant behavior could occur, the person’s past experiences and relationships are a primary factor in how the individual defines the situation as appropriate for a deviant act (Sutherland & Cressey, 1974).

Sutherland posited that deviance was a result of people learning values and behaviors conducive to or supportive of deviance that influenced decision-making in a given situation.
(Sutherland & Cressey, 1974). As such, differential association theory focuses on the process of becoming deviant. Additionally, Sutherland proposed that differential social organization, the existence of multiple communities with differing norms in a larger society, contributed to differing rates of deviance and that social institutions, such as schools, have a role in the process of becoming deviant.

The process of becoming deviant, as outlined by Sutherland, is, first and foremost, a social process (Sutherland & Cressey, 1974). People are not born deviant nor inherit deviance; it is learned. Furthermore, deviance is learned from people with whom an individual has close and regular contact and communication, particularly intact groups of some kind. People learn not only how to be deviant but also the attitude that deviance is acceptable or how to convince oneself or others that it is acceptable. The act of being deviant, however, is based on a decision made in a particular situation.

Sutherland hypothesized that individuals who have had more intense associations with people who disagree with rules than with those who agree with rules will choose to act deviantly in a situation (Sutherland & Cressey, 1974). Finally, people commit deviant acts in order to achieve the same goals as people who follow social norms, so the purpose or goal is not a viable explanation for deviance. For example, both students who cheat and students who study hard might have the same goal of achieving an “A” grade, but their actions to achieve that goal are different. Differential association theory centers on the idea that an individual becomes deviant when in close contact with people whose attitudes and behaviors are in conflict with the greater social norms, without being exposed to social cues outside the group that counter the acceptance of deviant behavior, so the individual learns how to be deviant and that deviance is acceptable.
**Differential social organization.** Within differential association theory, a societal or large group norm exists; however, within complex societies in which multiple cultures exist smaller communities form, and individuals are a part of or influenced by many groups (Sutherland & Cressey, 1974). Within the various communities in a society, conflict occurs regarding norms and behavior. Behavior that is appropriate within a particular community might be considered deviant by other groups. Differing group norms may occur for a number of reasons – social structure, culture, or religion – but the influences of varying groups determines a person’s likelihood to act in accord with one set of norms versus another set. Those communities that are most salient in a person’s life are likely to have the largest effect on a person’s behavior, but messages from other groups are also important in reinforcing or teaching norms and behavior. Deviance results when a person takes his or her cues from groups whose norms are in conflict with those of the larger society or in conflict with some institution’s stated regulations or laws.

**Differential association and cheating.** Several researchers consider differential association to be a primary means of explaining college student cheating, and the literature supports the use of differential association as a means to studying cheating. Vowell and Chen (2004) found that when including measures for four sociological deviance theories in a regression model with cheating behavior, the differential association measure accounted for 37.7% of the variance. Additionally, perceptions of peer behavior and acceptability of cheating was one of the most highly correlated factors with cheating (Jordan, 2001; McCabe & Treviño, 1993, 1997; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 1999, 2001a, 2002; Rettinger & Kramer, 2009; Vandehey et al., 2007). Therefore, if students perceive that others, even those whom they do not know, are supportive of cheating, they may be more likely to cheat.
Students who received messages that cheating is acceptable behavior from close friends and peers were likely to cheat, which is indicative of learning both techniques and attitudes favorable toward cheating. Additionally, students reported that the lack of reinforcement of institutional policies and regulations about cheating were a factor in their decisions to cheat (Ashworth et al., 1997; Kaplan & Mable, 1998; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 1999; Zelna & Bresciani, 2004). Finally, the prevalence of cheating in college suggests that cheating is a norm for many students and is in conflict with the norms of the institution. The differing norms about cheating for groups of students or students in general may be largely responsible for student cheating and suggests that differential association theory is an appropriate theory to use to frame my study.

Based on the findings in the literature, differential association theory was an appropriate guide for my research because it addresses the influence of peers on students’ decisions about cheating. In this study, I explored students’ knowledge and perceptions of cheating and support for cheating within their friend groups, peer environments, and classroom environments.

**Summary of Theoretical Guidance**

From my review of the literature, I determined there was a need to better understand how and why the various factors found to relate to cheating might influence students’ decisions about cheating from their personal perspectives. Additionally, the contextual factors found within a classroom environment and students’ relationships with faculty members was an understudied area that seemed promising in adding to the understanding of why students cheat or do not cheat. The three sociological deviance theories discussed above provided me with guidance for exploring my research questions brought out by the review of the literature, and they addressed the contextual nature of cheating (i.e., why students cheat in some classes but not others). Most
researchers investigated cheating in relation to a host of variables measured in general; however, the few researchers who studied classroom- or faculty-specific influences on actual, particular cheating behaviors provided support for exploring cheating as a contextual decision (see Ashworth et al., 1997; Broeckelman-Post, 2008; Jordan, 2001; Kaplan & Mable, 1998; Stearns, 2001; Zelna, 2002).

With the guidance of the deviance theories, I sought to explain the complex and contextual nature of decisions about cheating. I also explored how students defined and understood cheating and experienced institutional and classroom culture pertaining to cheating, as much of the current literature is based on assumptions of student understanding of cheating. My research brought student narratives to bear on the current literature to fill gaps and add to the theoretical knowledge on the issue of academic cheating.

I did not set out to prove that cheating can be explained by the three theories, nor did I test the applicability of the theories. Although the theories guided my inquiry and interpretation of data, I did not analyze my data strictly through the theories. The cheating literature provided grounding for the use of the theories to serve as a guide for my research and provided initial direction toward what reasons students might give for cheating. In the following chapter, I discuss the methodology and methods employed in my research.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

In the previous two chapters, I outlined the importance of my research and presented a synthesis of the literature pertaining to factors related to college student cheating. I also discussed the three sociological deviance theories that guided my inquiry in order to explore and understand the complex and contextual nature of students’ decisions about cheating. The theories were used as a guide for my interview protocols and as a lens through which to extend my interpretations of the findings. In the present chapter, I explicate my research design and data gathering and analysis techniques as guided by a constructivist worldview.

I explored the principal research question: What influences students’ decisions about academic cheating? I also explored three related questions: (1) How do students define academic cheating?, (2) What are students' beliefs about academic cheating?, and (3) How do students think their classroom contexts affect decisions about academic cheating? In my research, I focused on gaining clarity on how individual students understood the concept of cheating, experienced institutional and classroom culture pertaining to cheating, and what influenced decision-making about academic cheating. My goal was to engage students in discussions about their decisions about academic cheating in order to build theory about influences on students’ decisions about cheating based upon their words and experiences.

In the following sections, I describe the methodology and methods employed in my research. First, I describe the constructivist worldview that underlies my study. I will then discuss the methodology and methods appropriate for theory building. Finally, I address the specific techniques I used to analyze my data and conclude with a discussion of the limitations of my study.
**Worldview, Methodology, and Research Traditions**

Studying deviance necessitates that the researcher takes a stance in which “understanding requires comprehending the world of the deviant as that individual experiences it” (Clinard & Meier, 2004, p. 60). Such understanding necessitates researcher openness to differing experiences and interpretation of experiences by the participants. To understand cheating from the perspective of college students who engage in or know about cheating, I needed to comprehend their world from their multiple vantage points. Therefore, my research was guided by a constructivist worldview and the research traditions of grounded theory. In this section, I discuss the tenets of a constructivist worldview, how my research techniques fit with this worldview, and the research tradition that guided my study.

**Constructivist Worldview**

A worldview, often referred to as a paradigm, is a “basic set of beliefs, a set of assumptions we are willing to make, which serve as touchstones in guiding our activities” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 80). The worldview that guided my research was constructivism. Underlying constructivism is the notion that truth or knowledge is socially constructed by multiple actors in their individual or communal efforts to “make sense of their experiences” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 86). Adherence to a constructivist worldview requires that the researcher interact with participants being studied and partner with them in the interpretive process. The role of the researcher is to understand and interpret the multiple experiences and realities of participants. Another aspect of constructivism is the comprehension that truth, knowledge, and the understanding of experiences may be negotiated by a community to provide a shared understanding of a particular phenomenon (Lincoln & Guba, 2000), and researchers should engage in and facilitate such interpretative negotiations with their participants. The stories and
interpretations of the participants lead the researcher to further questioning and iterative interpretation in an effort to understand the complex phenomenon under study.

Constructivist Grounded Theory

Creation of theory directly out of qualitatively derived and analyzed data is termed grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Charmaz (2005) offers an explanation of constructivist grounded theory. She explains that constructivist grounded theory retains the use of tools such as iterative analytic processes and multiple levels of coding of data that Strauss and Corbin emphasize. However, in constructivist grounded theory the researcher enters data analysis with particular frames of reference and experiences that enter into the analytic process, so “conceptual categories arise through our interpretations of data rather than emanating from them or from our methodological practices” (Charmaz, 2005, pp. 509-510, emphasis in the original). Thus, the researcher not only interacts with the participants but also with the data to interpret and reinterpret meaning using participants’ experiences as well as the researcher’s own experiences. Themes and categories emerge from the data through the researcher’s particular lens of interpretation. Another hallmark of constructivist grounded theory is that data collection, analysis, and further sampling decisions occur simultaneously and continuously in order to “develop your emerging theory” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 96). I followed the simultaneous data collection, analysis, and sampling procedures in my research.

In constructivist grounded theory, the theory generated is “interpretive theory.” In creating interpretive theory, I did not seek to fully explain or offer predictable and generalizable relationships between each of the cheating decision influences. Rather, I sought to understand cheating and interpret the multiple realities that emerged from the students’ stories about their perceptions and experiences in their environments (Charmaz, 2006). The use of a constructivist
grounded theory approach allowed for deeper understanding and analysis of students’ experiences on the issue of cheating because I continuously explored and re-explored questions and analysis of the data. Using constructivist grounded theory allowed me to interpret the intertwining of students’ perspectives in the data and enabled me to create a theory of how students are influenced with regard to decisions about cheating.

**Why a qualitative approach.** Currently, a dearth of qualitative studies exists amidst the vast body of research on student cheating. The wealth of information on the characteristics of cheaters or likelihood of student cheating does little to explain why students choose to cheat or how they understand cheating outside the constraints imposed by researchers’ measures. Researchers who use sociological theories to guide their studies have had some success in explaining what might drive student cheating, but these researchers approached their studies with an *a priori* understanding of cheating. I conducted a grounded theory study that incorporated group and individual interviews to explore students’ experiences and understanding of cheating rather than imposing my definitions or assumed reasons for cheating upon them. Although I was guided by three deviance theories, the themes emerged from my data before I interpreted the data through the lens of the theories. My goal in this study was to understand college student academic cheating as thoroughly as possible. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) stated that using qualitative research methods “demands that the world be examined with the assumption that nothing is trivial, that everything has the potential of being a clue that might unlock a more comprehensive understanding of what is being studied” (p. 5). This understanding of what qualitative data have to offer is precisely why I chose to use qualitative methods of research. I wanted to hear students’ individual and collective experiences and thoughts about cheating to understand how students made meaning of and decisions about cheating.
**Researcher Bias in Qualitative Studies**

In my study, I served as instrument, participant, researcher, and data analyst; therefore, I had to recognize and mitigate my own biases and assumptions about cheating and students who choose to cheat, as well as locate myself in the realities of the data. I am quite passionate about the topic of this proposed study, and my ultimate agenda is to curb cheating through educational processes. Additionally, mid-way through my data collection, I began a job working in a university office that handles cases of academic dishonesty. In my job, I create character and ethics education programming, present and educate on issues of academic integrity to students and faculty, and serve as a hearing officer for cases of violations of academic integrity. My job gave me insights into campus structures regarding cheating as well as students’ rationale for cheating. Additionally, I am partially responsible for efforts to stop cheating from occurring on my campus. As I continued my data collection and analysis, I reflected on and became aware of how my new role influenced my interpretation of the data as well as how I asked questions, but understanding and bringing my interpretative lens to my research fits with a constructivist grounded theory approach. However, Clinard and Meier (2004) caution that when studying deviance, researchers must find a balance between seeking to correct behavior and solely trying to understand the participants’ world. Further, Matza (as cited in Clinard & Meier, 2004) stated that seeking to understand deviance from deviants’ perspectives does not mean that the researcher “always concurs with the subject’s definition of the situation; rather, that his aim is to comprehend and to illuminate the subject’s view and to interpret the world as it appears to him” (p. 61).

I located myself within my own feelings about cheating and sought to understand how participants viewed cheating. While conducting my research, I reflected upon my actions and
reactions in order to recognize and control any bias that I might have brought to the data collection. If I noticed bias, I changed my practices in the subsequent interviews. This practice also allowed me to understand my own experiences as part of the data analysis. Additionally, I used the sociologically-based deviance theories and extant cheating literature to inform my initial questions, but not as a formal structure in data collection. As is necessary with qualitative research, I allowed myself to follow the paths down which the participants led me rather than attempting to lead the participants through a pre-set path.

Data Collection Procedures

I conducted my research through semi-structured group and individual interviews. The students in my sample first participated in a group interview. After participating in group interviews, a subset of students who participated in group interviews also participated in individual interviews. However, the group and individual interviews were on-going with some students participating in group and individual interviews after other students had participated in their interviews. The study took place at a large, public, research university in the Mid-Atlantic region (Mid-Atlantic State University) during the Spring 2008, Summer 2008, and Fall 2008 terms; one interview was conducted early in the Spring 2009 term. In the following section, I describe the context of the research site and who my participants were. I will then describe the research design and data collection procedures in detail.

Research Site

I conducted my research at the main campus of Mid-Atlantic State University. Mid-Atlantic State University (hereafter referred to as Mid-Atlantic) is a large, land-grant, research university with approximately 35,000 undergraduate students. The institution has majors in pre-professional fields, applied fields, and pure disciplines. Students take both large and small
classes and interact with professors and teaching assistants as instructors. Students take general education requirements in addition to major requirements. Several academic majors have GPA standards for entrance into and continuation in the major. Mid-Atlantic has an institution-wide academic integrity policy, but the College of Business adopted an honor code specific to the College approximately one year prior to the beginning of my research.

Mid-Atlantic’s academic integrity policy nests the admonishment of academic dishonesty within a broader frame of integrity. The policy offers minimal elaboration on specific behaviors that might constitute dishonesty; however, it does set forth some general categories of behavior that may be deemed as cheating. Mid-Atlantic defines both academic dishonesty and academic integrity. Academic dishonesty is defined as follows:

Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication of information or citations, facilitation of acts of academic dishonesty by others, unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, and tampering with the academic work of other students. (“Mid-Atlantic State” Student Guide to General University Policies and Rules, 2006-2007, p. 12)

In this definition, cheating is a category within academic dishonesty yet is not defined itself.

Mid-Atlantic’s definition of academic integrity is not just the admonition of cheating but is much broader than the definition of dishonesty. “Mid-Atlantic State” Student Guide to General University Policies and Rules (2006-2007) includes the following definition:

Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest and responsible manner. Academic integrity is a basic guiding principle for all academic activity at [Mid-Atlantic] State University, and all members of the University community are expected to act in accordance with this principle. Consistent with this expectation, students should act with personal integrity, respect other students’ dignity, rights and property, and help create and maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the fruits of their efforts. Academic integrity includes a commitment not to engage in or tolerate acts of falsification, misrepresentation or deception. Such acts of dishonesty violate the fundamental ethical principles of the University community and compromise the worth of work completed by others. (p. 12)
Such a definition of academic integrity includes behaviors that go beyond not cheating to providing an environment conducive to academic excellence as well as general beliefs about honesty, respect, and ethicality.

In March 2008, results from an institution-wide survey on academic integrity were published (“Mid-Atlantic State” Survey #154, 2008). In the study, 1,232 students were surveyed about their own cheating behaviors and their perceptions of what constitutes cheating as well as asked why they would consider cheating in a course. Behaviors that students most often admitted to participating in were giving/receiving test information to/from students in other class sections (55.8%), not reporting a grading error (33.6%), collaborating on a take-home exam (30.4%), and allowing others to copy assignments (23%). However, collaborating on take-home work and allowing others to copy assignments were behaviors considered to be cheating by most students. Ninety percent or more students had not participated in a major, in-class test cheating behavior (e.g., copying answers from another student or use of an unauthorized aid while taking the test).

Reasons students gave for why they might consider cheating included grade-related performance issues (e.g., to get better grades or to not fail a course), lack of preparation, personal issues (e.g., stress, illness, emergencies, pressure regarding future careers or graduate school), poor time management, “lack of concern for academic integrity” (i.e., do not consider behavior to be cheating), instructional issues (e.g., poor teaching, perceived unfair exams or grading), and convenience and opportunity (“Mid-Atlantic State” Survey #154, 2008, p. 10).

Participants

The participants in my study came from the Colleges of Business, Education, Liberal Arts, and Science. I chose these four colleges because they represented students in pre-professional fields, applied fields, and traditional disciplines. Having participants from each of
the four colleges allowed me to look for similarities and differences across major fields of study. Within the four Colleges, I focused on recruiting students who were juniors and seniors so that they would have experience with multiple courses and have had the opportunity to make decisions about cheating; however, a few of my participants were first- or second-year students. The sampling strategy I employed was “typical case” sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Typical case sampling allowed me to seek participants whose experiences with cheating were likely those of the average student. I sought students who had cheated and who had not cheated. I chose typical case sampling because I wanted to build theory that could be used to help understand how the “average student” (i.e., a student who typically does not cheat) might make decisions about cheating, and in that way, the sampling was also purposeful in its aim.

To recruit potential participants, I contacted several gatekeepers, people who could help me gain access to participants (Creswell, 1998). The gatekeepers I contacted were faculty members of several classes and the Associate Deans of the Colleges of Science and Education. The Associate Deans helped me identify several classes and student groups to contact and granted permission for me to make further contacts. I contacted faculty member to request permission to visit their classes to recruit participants or to send an email message on my behalf to their students. The two means by which I recruited participants were in-person appeals and email message appeals (see Appendix A). I visited two large, 300-level business classes, four education classes (one large 200-level class and three small, upper-level classes), and one student group in the College of Science. Additionally, faculty members sent email recruitment messages to juniors and seniors in the College of Business, to two sociology classes, and four education classes. I continued to recruit students to participate in my research until I reached a point of
theoretical saturation, meaning that I was no longer hearing in my data any new categories or experiences or relationships between categories (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

In both the in-person and email recruitment of participants, I outlined the purpose of my research and invited students to participate in a group interview in which they would not be asked to share publicly any personal information about their cheating behaviors. During the in-class visits, students signed-up for group interviews. Students responded to me via email from the email recruitment messages. All students who expressed interest in participating in my study received an email from me with more information and to confirm the time of the group interview.

A total of 42 students participated in my study. Thirty-nine students participated in group interviews. Of the 39 group interview participants, 20 students participated in individual interviews. An additional 3 students who did not take part in a group interview participated in an individual interview. A total of 23 students participated in individual interviews. All interviews were conducted face-to-face, except for three individual interviews, which were conducted via telephone. Table 1 provides the information about my sample. Of the 23 students who participated in individual interviews, seven had cheated using their own definitions, seven had cheated using the university definition or were unsure if their behaviors constituted cheating, and nine students had not cheated in college. Seven students were education majors, eight students were business majors, five students were in liberal arts or sciences, and three students were double-majors in business and liberal arts.
<table>
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<th>Participant</th>
<th>Cheated in College</th>
<th>College(s)</th>
<th>Individual Interview</th>
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<td>Business</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark C.</td>
<td>Yes - depending on definition</td>
<td>Liberal Arts</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynn</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Business &amp; Liberal Arts</td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
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Semi-Structured Group and Individual Interviews

Stemming from the constructivist worldview, I engaged in the qualitative methods of group and individual interviews with participants to allow them to make meaning of the issue of cheating. I began my data collection with group interviews. The purpose of the group interviews was to gather data on student definitions of and perceptions about cheating and to solicit participants for the individual interviews as well as to help frame my individual interview questions. The individual interviews took place one week to two months after the group interviews, depending on students’ schedules. The purpose of the individual interviews was to gather data about students’ personal decisions regarding cheating and experiences in college that might influence their decisions. Group and individual interviews were on-going (i.e., group interviews with some students took place after I had conducted some of the individual interviews with other students). In total, I conducted 14 group interviews and 23 individual interviews.

Group interviews. I began each group interview by explaining the purpose of my research and having each participant sign an informed consent form (see Appendix B). I also administered a short questionnaire to gather demographic information on students, data on the number of times students had cheated in college, and information on their perceptions of and attitudes toward cheating (see Appendix C). The purpose of the group interviews was to allow me to gain an understanding of how students defined cheating as well as learn about their perceptions of and beliefs about the issue of cheating in college. Group interviews, also referred to as focus groups, provide an opportunity for participants jointly to engage in the construction of knowledge and meaning on a topic, build upon perspectives provided in the group, and offer divergent views so that the researcher may gain insight into a topic more fully than from a single person (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005).
In the group interviews, I engaged students in a conversation about cheating, how they understood it, and why they defined it as they did. I also asked students about their thoughts on what motivates students to cheat or not cheat at their institution. Although I did ask students about their personal cheating behavior on the pre-interview questionnaire, I did not ask students to discuss with their peers whether they had cheated; however, some students chose to discuss their personal behaviors in the group interview setting. I sought to create a safe space in which students felt comfortable expressing their thoughts as well as offering opinions that diverged from those of others in the group. I did this by asking students to maintain each other’s’ trust and confidentiality and assured students that I was researching the topic only to gain a better understanding of their thoughts on it and not to argue against cheating or to report participants’ comments to faculty members. I used a semi-structured interview protocol to guide my group interview questions (see Appendix D). I used a semi-structured interview protocol so I could frame my interview with a set of questions but still follow the direction taken by the students and the issues they discussed (Kvale, 1996).

**Individual interviews.** The data I gathered in the group interviews helped me to frame the semi-structured interview protocol I used in the individual interviews (see Appendix E) so I could focus on the most salient issues the students discussed in the group interview as well as follow-up on specific information individuals divulged in the group setting or on the questionnaire. The purpose of the individual interviews was to gather personal narratives about students’ experiences in their courses and with cheating and explore what influenced their decisions to cheat or not to cheat. Interviews as research methods provide the researcher with participants’ perspectives and rich descriptions about the topic (Kvale, 1996). Jointly, the researcher and the participant create meaning on the topic of exploration.
In semi-structured interviews, the researcher has few prepared questions. Semi-structured interviews are useful in qualitative research because they allow the participants to direct the conversation as they participate in storytelling and meaning-making of their realities (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Kvale, 1996). Charmaz (2006) stated that when used in grounded theory research, “qualitative interviewing provides an open-ended, in-depth exploration of an aspect of life about which the interviewee has substantial experience, often combined with considerable insight” (pp. 28-29). In semi-structured interviews, the researcher remains open and flexible and follows the participant’s lead, probing into matters not fully explicated by the participant and following emergent themes, thereby co-constructing meaning on the topic. I used semi-structured interviews to gather students’ stories about cheating and enable students to share their experiences and insights with me.

The individual interviews provided more in-depth and focused information than the group interviews. The focus of the individual interview was on students’ experiences in college classes and with decisions to cheat or not to cheat. I asked students to tell me about their personal experiences with cheating, why and when they cheated or did not cheat, and about the contextual influences that affected their decisions and attitudes about cheating. The purpose of the individual interviews was to develop a theory of contextual influences on students’ decision-making about cheating. I chose to use group and individual interviews because hearing the students’ stories in their own words and being able to immediately follow up with prompts for more information was vital to understanding the experiences of the participants.

**Analytical Methods**

Strauss and Corbin (1998) discuss research as “comprising a complex flow of work” (p. 29), and data analysis as an ever-constant part of the complex flow of the research plan. In
grounded theory research, data collection and analysis are simultaneous, iterative processes that inform each other. Therefore, I began analyzing data after my first set of group interviews through the use of reflective journaling; that analysis guided the direction of my remaining data collection. I continued to search for emergent themes in my data throughout the data collection process, which further informed my interviews. I employed the techniques of reflective journaling, multiple forms and phases of data coding, and peer debriefing. I discuss these techniques below. Each of these techniques allowed me to keep a check on my own biases and make sense of the large amount of data I had gathered. The techniques also helped me to see divergent and convergent themes in order to understand the varying facets of college student academic cheating and develop multiple storylines of cheating decisions from the participants’ narratives and collective meaning-making in order to build theory.

**Reflective Journaling**

One of the most difficult responsibilities of a qualitative researcher is to stay current with making sense of all data collection as it happens. One analytical approach to address this problem is reflective journaling (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Reflective journaling allows the researcher to reflect upon immediate sense-making and is done in addition to fieldnotes. Reflective journaling permits free-form reflexive thinking about the context and content of a particular data gathering session and how the researcher feels about the day’s data. Reflective journaling should be done immediately following the completion of an interview to provide the best recall of thoughts, feelings, and intangible (or unrecordable) information, such as how a participant reacted to questions, body language, patterns emerging from the data, and the researcher’s thoughts on her or his own behaviors.
I participated in journaling after conducting group and individual interviews in order to reflect on data collection, note emerging themes, and to keep my own feelings about cheating in check. My journal notes served as guideposts for questions to ask during my subsequent interviews. Additionally, some comment or incident that seems quite trivial may produce a key finding. I used journaling to put my thoughts on paper immediately in order not to lose my “gut” feelings or reactions to the data. When I coded my data, I used my journal notes to create initial codes, for example, in my journaling, I made a note about how students in several interviews mentioned that the “class didn’t matter,” which later became a code as the theme reappeared across multiple interviews.

**Data Coding**

To analyze my group and individual interview data, I used NVivo® Qualitative Research Software Package. Coding of data in grounded theory allows the researcher to begin to understand what the data mean and see the early stages of theory (Charmaz, 2006). In my initial coding phase, the forms of coding I used were open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and line-by-line coding (Charmaz, 2005) to construct the emic or in vivo codes present in the data, meaning that the codes were in the participants’ own words. I began my analysis by reading interview transcripts line-by-line and creating a list of open codes. Open coding is the process of allowing codes to emerge from the data rather than entering the data analysis with a pre-set list of codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Although I had a set of a priori codes based on the three sociological deviance theories, I did not use these codes or place data into the coding categories until after my initial coding was completed. I waited to analyze the data based on my a priori codes because I did not want to miss the themes emerging from the students’ own voices or shape the analysis based on what I thought might be in the data. Additionally, I wanted my codes
to reflect and be as close to the students’ own language as possible (emic in nature). Using the participants’ language to describe decisions about cheating was vital to this study, as I sought to know how students thought about cheating.

The second phase of coding in grounded theory research is focused on selective coding (Charmaz, 2006). “Focused coding requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorize your data incisively and completely” (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 57-58). In my second phase of coding, I grouped the emic codes into axial categories (broad categories that include sub-categories that are connected in some way) to begin to connect related ideas and potential causal chains in decision-making (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During the axial coding process, I evaluated the codes I developed and looked for relationships between codes. I then grouped the related codes into categories. By looking for relationships between codes and categories, axial coding led to theory generation. (See Appendix F for my list of codes and categories.)

**Peer Debriefing**

Throughout my data analysis and interpretation I engaged in peer debriefing with a number of individuals. Peer debriefing is the process by which the researcher engages with peers, who are not involved directly in the research but have knowledge of the methodology and methods, so that the researcher can talk through potential findings and interpretations (Creswell, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). When researchers have peer debriefing sessions, the peer debriefers ask questions about methods, analysis, interpretations, and researcher assumptions and feelings. The researcher outlines initial interpretation of findings to ascertain if the interpretation makes sense to the peer debriefer, and the peer debriefer challenges the researcher to account for the interpretation and offers alternative avenues for interpretation. During my data collection and
analysis, I spoke often with my dissertation committee chair and one of my committee members
to “test out” my findings and understanding of the emergent theory (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). My
dissertation chair and committee member challenged me to think about how I was reading data
or naming categories as well as what relationships might exist between categories for the
students in my study. I also had on-going conversations with several of my colleagues who have
knowledge of the topic of academic integrity and who work in the area of adjudication of
academic dishonesty cases. As I spoke with these individuals, we discussed how my findings and
initial theory related to the students we see in a judicial capacity for academic integrity
violations. The questions asked and feedback received from the peer debriefers helped me to
recognize assumptions I was making as well as to consider alternative interpretations of the data.
The efforts I took to communicate regularly with peers strengthened and lend credibility to my
data interpretation and the theory that emerged from my study.

**Quality and Trustworthiness of Qualitative Research**

Corbin and Strauss (2008) stated that “quality in qualitative research is something that we
recognize when we see it; however, explaining what it is or how to achieve it is much more
difficult” (p. 297). Quality refers to the goodness and trustworthiness of the research process,
procedures, and findings. Quality allows the reader “know” that the researcher engaged in
rigorous and robust research, used proper techniques, and culled the most fitting theory from the
findings. Quality also includes how the reader evaluates the researcher’s work and assures that
the reader can be confident in the work and theory presented.

Charmaz (2006) offered four criteria for evaluating constructivist grounded theory: (1)
credibility, (2) originality, (3) resonance, and (4) usefulness. Credibility refers to the use of
appropriate analytical procedures, ensuring that the data support the claims and categories
derived, that the theory makes logical sense, and that enough evidence is used to allow the reader to “form an independent assessment” and come to the same conclusion (Charmaz, 2006, p. 182). Originality refers to whether the researcher offers new conceptions of the issue, extends current theory, and adds to or challenges existing theory and literature. Resonance refers to representing the full experiences of the participants and whether people who share the experiences of those in the study would find their own feelings reflected in the findings. Finally, usefulness refers to the contribution of the work to further research and practice in settings outside the research site. To address credibility, I used methods appropriate to a constructivist methodology and have offered ample evidence to support the claims I made. My work has originality and has extended current theory and thinking about the issue of cheating. In presenting the evidence, I offered students’ experiences in their own words to demonstrate the complexity of their thoughts and realities in relation to cheating decisions. Finally, I provided numerous implications for practice and research from my findings, and this work has already begun to inform the work that my colleagues and I do on a daily basis. I invite readers to consider these four criteria as they read and evaluate the rest of my work with regard to its quality.

In addition to the quality of the work, the trustworthiness of the work is important. Trustworthiness refers to reducing bias, the rigor of inquiry and analysis, and ensuring “fit” of data to findings (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). My use of reflective journaling and peer debriefing was part of my analytic processes, but I also used these techniques to help build the trustworthiness of my findings, interpretations, and theory. As I discussed above, I addressed my own bias through regular reflection. I also used journaling to keep my assumptions “in check” as well as to begin the process of thinking about the meaning of the data. I carefully read each transcript twice (or more) to become as familiar as possible with my data.
and to double check that the codes came from the data. Through consultation with peers, I was challenged to explain my methods, discuss the fit of the codes, categories, and relationship with the data, and was able to “test” the logic of my conclusions. Throughout my research process, my aim was to represent and honor the experiences of my participants in order to build meaningful theory of substantial quality.

**Limitations**

One limitation of my study was the lack of participants from a variety of academic majors. Although the size of my sample was adequate, I lacked participants who were engineering majors, which is a group of students regularly studied with regard to cheating and who have been shown to have high levels of cheating behaviors. I, along with faculty in the College of Engineering, attempted numerous times to recruit engineering students for my research, but no students volunteered due to their other time commitments. Additionally, my sample had a dearth of students from the liberal arts, other than sociology, and students from applied fields, other than education. In the current study, I focused primarily on similarities across disciplines; however, in future research, I will include students from more academic majors in order to further refine my theory and to seek variation in student experiences and influences on cheating decisions.

The second limitation of my study was that I conducted all of my research at a single site. I intended to include two other institutions in my study, but I was unable to work out the logistics of conducting research at multiple sites for the current study. The nature of the site institution as a large, public, research university provided me with data across different types and sizes of courses. However, students from small or private institutions may have dissimilar experiences as they might have smaller classes or interact with faculty members on a more personal level.
Additionally institutions with honor codes or a widely understood and enforced academic integrity policy might have created a different set of experiences than I found with my participants. In future research, I plan to include participants from several different institutions.

A third limitation was that I did not include faculty in my sample or observe courses. Although my research focused on student realities and perspectives, the students spoke of their faculty and classroom contexts to a great extent. If I had included interviews with faculty members and observations of courses, I would have had first-hand knowledge of the course instruction and environment to provide additional context and interpretation to the students’ understanding of their courses and interactions with faculty members regarding the issue of cheating. However, given the retrospective nature of the interviews, the inclusion of appropriate faculty members and courses may have been difficult to arrange. In the future, focusing on a set of courses, students, and faculty members within a particular semester would provide insight into students’ varying experiences with the same course or professor and add depth to the theory presented in this study.

The fourth limitation was the small sample size and lack of generalizability of findings. Although the sample size was adequate for the purposes of and methodology used in my study, the findings are not generalizable; however, they were not meant to be generalizable. The purpose of my research was to build an initial theory about college student cheating that could be useful to educators in understanding how contextual factors might influence some students toward cheating. However, my theory should not be applied to all students or applied across all contexts, as the findings are specific to the institution and students in my research. The theory and findings may be transferable to similar institutions and students, but further research must be
conducted to add to and refine the theory in order for it to be transferable to multiple institution types or different student populations.
CHAPTER FOUR
DEFINITIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF CHEATING

My purpose in conducting the present study was to explore how students define and think about academic cheating and to gain understanding of students’ decision-making about cheating. In this chapter, I present findings from my data analysis related to how they defined cheating and their perceptions of cheating, including their attitudes about cheating and the role of faculty with regard to cheating. First, I will discuss how students defined cheating, including what behaviors were deemed cheating, what behaviors were not deemed cheating, what students thought of as “gray areas,” and how students came to hold their definitions of cheating. In the second section, I will focus on students’ perceptions of cheating, including how serious an offense they think cheating is, their attitudes toward cheating, and how students view the role of faculty with regard to cheating.

Defining Cheating

The 42 students who participated in my study spent a considerable amount of time discussing their varied understandings of the definition of the term cheating and how they came to know their specific definitions. The participants defined cheating in broad terms as well as listed specific behaviors that they considered to be cheating, and expressed that their primary sources for knowing the definition of cheating came from their K-12 educations. The students also cited reasons why they thought certain behaviors were not cheating, even if defined as cheating by faculty or institutional policy. Consequently, the students discussed confusion over how cheating was defined and described that there were degrees as well as several “gray areas” of cheating. The following sections will elaborate on these themes with regard to college students defining cheating.
Definition of Cheating

As students offered their definitions of cheating, two approaches to the definition emerged. In the first approach, students defined cheating in terms of how they perceived it or its outcome. In the second approach, students listed a set of specific behaviors that they considered to be cheating. Not all participants discussed cheating broadly, but for those who did, they talked of cheating in moralistic language of fairness, giving due credit, and honesty. More commonly, students listed specific behaviors to define cheating focused on exam-based behaviors and plagiarism.

Moralistic definition of cheating. Many of the students described their understanding of the term cheating in a moralistic way focusing on the fairness or rightness of an act and that cheating provided an unfair advantage for those who did it. Students’ moralistic definitions of cheating included taking another’s work without giving proper credit and representing it as one’s own original work, gaining an unfair advantage over others through cheating, and engaging in an action that was dishonest or wrong.

Not giving proper credit. One of the ways that students defined cheating was representing work as one’s own and not giving proper credit to the person or entity from which the work or information was gained. In stating part of her definition, Ashley said, “basically, just using someone else’s work and not giving them credit for it. It could be on a paper, using someone else’s study, or whatever they used to write their paper. It could be a friend or it could be a professional.” Mike also included not giving credit in his definition: “I guess I would define cheating as just taking anyone else’s work and representing it as your own whether it’s a homework, exam, or something without giving that person credit.” Adding to this definition, Jack S. explained his definition as,
To me it’s anytime someone blatantly takes information from another student, with or without their consent, so they could abet you in getting the information as well. But you blatantly get that information, whether it’s an exam, an essay, or a project you were blatantly seeking information, not giving that person credit for that information.

The students recognized the importance of giving others credit for work or information used in their assignments, whatever the assignments might be. Taking away credit or trying to claim credit for another’s work was seen by the students as unjust and therefore cheating.

**Unfair advantage.** Participants also defined cheating as gaining an unfair advantage over others. When giving her definition of cheating, Lily said, “Just basically anything that gives you an unfair advantage or information that you otherwise wouldn’t have. I think that’s it.” Similarly, Jenna expressed that for her cheating was “even just having an unfair advantage, like if you know more about the test beforehand, a lot of times it’s like you took it earlier [and knew] what was on it. That can mean that’s cheating also.” Elwood had a similar definition of cheating; he described cheating as “taking an unfair advantage on a test or assignment or what have you, that is not necessarily properly available to the other students on that same assignment or test.” In viewing cheating as a matter of fairness, the students demonstrated that they acknowledged that the act of cheating was immoral, in that it brought harm to others and created a situation in which some students had an asset not available to all students.

**Being dishonest.** The asset that gave the students an unfair advantage over others was also seen to be gained through illicit or dishonest means, which added to the moralistic interpretation of cheating discussed by some students. David defined cheating as, “providing oneself with an advantage that is illegal or unavailable to anyone else in the event or task.” Alex elaborated on this point about violating rules by stating that cheating was “using means that are
not legal and with the objective of improving your grades or doing better in school.” Both David and Alex brought together the ideas of gaining an advantage and using illicit means to do so as a definition of cheating. Lynn, quite succinctly, described cheating as “not being truthful,” and Mark C. stated that cheating was “just not being honest essentially.”

By labeling cheating as something dishonest or illegal, the students demonstrated that they viewed cheating as a moral wrong. Not giving a person proper credit for her or his ideas and gaining an unfair advantage over others through one’s actions were further moral issues that students described as a part of cheating. By defining cheating in this way, students showed that they saw cheating as an act that went against social norms and rules as well as brought harm to others. The students did not say that cheating was something that was defined by others as wrong but to them was not wrong; rather they had internalized and taken as their own the definition of cheating as a moral wrong. Although students readily saw the immoral nature of cheating, what may be more important for educators and for my research is knowing what specific behaviors students considered to be cheating.

Specific behaviors defined as cheating. When asked to list specific behaviors that they considered to be cheating, students focused primarily on behaviors related to exams and writing papers; this focus was noticeable in both the answers given on the questionnaire filled out prior to the start of the interviews and in the interview discussions. From the questionnaires, the two behaviors listed by the most students were copying or sharing answers during an exam and plagiarism. The students also mentioned in their initial questionnaire responses that copying homework and copying others’ work in general, using notes or cheat sheets on exams, and giving or getting test questions and answers were all forms of cheating. These responses continued to be
dominant in the definitions that students gave during the interviews. For example, Adelaide defined cheating as “Plagiary . . . and looking on someone’s test,” and Jane said, plagiarism definitely, especially in writing, is where I think in college a lot of cheating can come from. But, also, if you’re sitting next to a person taking a test, you look at their test, and then copy an answer. Those are the two biggest ones that I thought of. Responses similar to those of Adelaide and Jane were given by many of the students; however, some students mentioned behaviors concerning homework, lab reports, and other academic activities. The most oft cited behaviors that students considered cheating were copying from someone, plagiarism, using crib notes on an exam, getting or giving answers, and unauthorized group work when work was meant to be completed individually. As discussion occurred in the group interviews, some students stated that they had not previously considered some behaviors to be cheating until after their peers mentioned the behaviors.

**Copying another’s work.** Most of the students listed copying from other people as a behavior that they considered to be cheating, particularly pertaining to exams or papers. Joe said, “Basic cheating is pretty much just copying someone’s exam or looking at their answers to try to get your answers right.” Jack A. (a female student) added paper-writing into her definition; “blatant out copying is cheating, in my opinion. So whether you’re looking at someone’s exam and copying answers A, B, C, or if you’re taking somebody else’s paper and plagiarizing it essentially, definitely, definitely [is] cheating.” Lily further expanded the definition by stating, “I guess I would define cheating as specifically copying off of somebody’s homework, quiz, [or] test.” Additionally, Katie A., Jerry, and Jenna all added homework to the list of academic work that if copied was considered cheating. Overall, most of the students in my study agreed that copying from another person, particularly, on a test or paper was a cheating behavior. The
students also referred to this type of cheating as “taking” or “stealing” someone else’s work or answers and as “looking” at another person’s exam.

**Plagiarism.** Similar to copying work when writing papers, students cited plagiarism as part of their definitions of cheating. Kayla included in her list of cheating behaviors, “Using materials, either online or just actually taking word for word, or even paraphrasing in a paper or an assignment that you’re doing.” Pat also defined cheating as, “if you plagiarize or use someone else’s paper and use it for another class and claim it to be your own.” Alex, Sarah, and Joseph also referred to plagiarism as a cheating behavior when they discussed their definitions of cheating.

**Using crib notes.** Another behavior related to test cheating that many students discussed was the use of crib notes or “cheat sheets” of some kind. Frank brought up what several other students discussed regarding crib notes when he described cheating as, “if a professor . . . said no outside materials allowed on this test, and you have a piece of paper on the floor that you’re kind of looking at.” Other students elaborated on what crib notes might be. Joe included technology in his definition of crib notes:

> It could be cheating if I am bringing in some sort of little cheat sheet on a piece of paper or I guess with cell phones today looking it up online. That would be considered cheating also. I guess using outside sources other than what your professor tells you you’re allowed to use which is usually your mind and a pencil, sometimes a calculator but using something other than those resources.

Denise included writing notes on one’s self and described crib notes as “writing notes on your desk, your body parts, using your notes when you’re not supposed to.” Many students included
the use of unauthorized notes in varying forms as a type of cheating pertaining specifically to exams.

Giving and getting answers. Keeping with their focus on behaviors related to exams, participants discussed the practice of students who took an exam early in the day giving questions and answers to those taking the same exam later in the day. The students cited both the giving and the getting of answers as cheating. Bob discussed this behavior by saying, “If you were in the section after a friend though, and they were to tell you what the questions on a quiz or a test were before you got there, then you took it, that’s to me cheating too.” Italy echoed Bob’s sentiment as she included in her definition of cheating, “after you take the exam and talk about it with other friends, that’s considered cheating too, explaining what was on the exam.”

The students from the College of Business who participated in my study focused on the act of talking between exams more than some of the other students due to the type and structure of their core course examinations. John explained: “giving or receiving answers during an exam, or before an exam; or during the case of those computerized exams that go all day, after the exam and then telling your friends about it; using notes during an exam.” The computerized exams that John mentioned were given from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. in one, large computer lab, and about 1000 students took the exam, which had randomized questions from a question bank, throughout the day. The Business students in my study explained that students who took the exam late in the day would often “hang out” around the room and ask students coming out of the exam to tell them what questions were on the test, and students who took the exam earlier in the day would offer to tell others what questions they answered. Due to the structure of the exam and the students’ behaviors, the participants in my study explained that their faculty members had reiterated to them repeatedly that giving and getting answers during the computerized exams or
any exams was considered cheating. Students from all the majors, however, discussed the act of giving and getting answers to exams as a form of cheating.

Unauthorized group work. Some students brought up the behavior of working with other people on an exam or assignment that was meant to be completed individually as cheating. However, fewer students defined unauthorized group work as cheating than the behaviors listed above, and many students considered this behavior not to be cheating, which will be discussed below. John stated that he considered “having groups work together when it’s supposed to be an individual exam” to be cheating. Bob extended this behavior to include any assignment by stating that “working with other people to get class work done that you shouldn’t be working [on] together, when it’s supposed to be individual work” was cheating. Several students who listed unauthorized group work as a cheating behavior included in their statements the caveat that a faculty member must explicitly state that working together is not allowed in order for this behavior to be cheating. For example, Jack A. said, “If they [faculty] say you must do homework by yourself in the class and then you go and you work with somebody else then that’s cheating I think.” Joe also added the caveat about being instructed to do work alone in his statement, “If you’re specifically told not to work with someone for something and you’re working with them . . . that would be considered cheating.” Unauthorized group work was one of the few behaviors students mentioned that did not relate to exams and paper writing.

Group interview-based definitions. As participants in the group interviews discussed with one another their thoughts on the definition of cheating, some students indicated that they had not thought of particular behaviors when initially asked to give a definition, and other students indicated that they had not considered certain behaviors to be cheating until they heard their peers give their definitions. Frank mentioned that he did not initially think of plagiarism
when giving his definition of cheating and that through the discussion his peers reminded him of this behavior. Similarly, Christine said that she “forgot” about using others’ old tests or papers as a method of cheating. Sarah and Ashley both mentioned that they had not thought of working with others on homework or on on-line exams as cheating until those behaviors were brought up in the group interview. Several students mentioned that the group interview helped them to think more about cheating, and during his individual interview, Jerry shared how participation in the group interview and further discussions about cheating helped him to think about behaviors as cheating that previously had not come to mind or that he had not considered to be cheating. He said:

Well, after the focus group and then some more discussions in my classes about cheating, I kind of feel like it’s a lot of stuff that we necessarily don’t think of. Like it’s telling somebody what’s on the test or telling them what to study, even if you take it earlier, and you say, “Hey, make sure you study this part of this chapter.” I mean that’s cheating, or copying somebody else’s homework, copying somebody else’s test or bringing in a cheat sheet, kind of like anything that you’re not allowed to have for the exam, which is what one of the other people talked about in the focus group. So it’s pretty broad, and there’s a lot more to it than I initially had thought.

Although Jerry gained an expanded view of cheating, most of the participants shared a fairly basic definition pertaining to exams and paper writing, but through the course of the group discussions, several students indicated that they added more behaviors to their individual definitions once their peers mentioned them. Those behaviors they had not previously thought of or thought of as cheating had now become a part of their personal definitions of cheating.
In the list of behaviors defined as cheating, the students focused primarily on two types of academic work – exams and written papers. Although some students mentioned other types of behaviors and the discussion itself brought about additional behaviors, the overall behavioral definition of cheating that emerged from the data was not expansive. The students’ initial responses to the question of how they defined cheating showed that they thought of the term through a limited lens. John illustrated this point when he said,

I think that actually after you [Elwood] mentioned cheating on essays, and assignments, and things, I didn’t really consider that really either way for cheating until you mentioned that. So, when I thought of the concept of cheating, I just immediately thought exams, so I think that broadened my perspective on it a little bit. I think when I think about people cheating, it won't just be the exams.”

John expressed what many students also thought – when the term cheating was mentioned, they thought of the type of assignment that they most often had in their classes no matter the type of course in which they were enrolled. If a faculty member told students at the beginning of a class, “Don’t cheat in my course,” students likely applied that directive only to exams and written papers. The list generated by students provides insight into how students think about the word cheating and that their definitions lack many of the behaviors that faculty might consider to be cheating.

**Sources of Cheating Definitions**

The limited definition and scope of cheating held by the participants was likely due to the source of their definitions. In thinking about cheating in moralistic terms, the students cited family, personal values, and instinctual feelings of guilt as the sources for their definitions. With regard to the specific behaviors that students defined as cheating, the primary source for their
definitions was their K-12 education experience and teachers. Some students did mention that their college faculty added to their knowledge about what specific behaviors were cheating, but most of the students explained that their definitions of cheating were set before they started college.

**Family, values, and instinct.** The students credited their families, their own values, and a bit of common sense or gut instinct in forming their moralistic understanding of cheating. Jack S. credited his own “personal morality” and “integrity” as setting his definition of cheating, and stated that he did not know much about how the university officially defined cheating. John explained part of the source of his definition of cheating by saying,

> So, I think a lot of it is just like growing up and common sense. You know if it is wrong because you’re feeling like it’s wrong, and you know what you’re doing is kind of, or what someone else is doing is kind of, getting that advantage.

John discussed that feeling a sense of right and wrong influenced his definition. Elwood also shared that his instincts helped to frame his thinking about what cheating was. He said,

> I think to some point it’s instinctual, where even if you’ve never cheated before, there’s an instinctual thing where if you get close to the point where you are about to [cheat], something inside of you knows and tells you this is wrong.

The feeling that something was wrong was described by students as based on how they were raised. Christine mentioned that, “My parents, since day one, have been instilling the same thing into me, if you cheat you’re in trouble,” and for Christine, this message from her parents laid an unchanging foundation for her moralistic definition of cheating. Rahul, Jenna, Adelaide, and several other students discussed the fact that one or both of their parents was a teacher and that this helped to instill in them the idea that cheating was wrong. Jack A. also discussed the role of
family and personal values as a basis for her definitions of cheating. “Experiences that you have, and I think you know how you’re always kind of built up with morals and growing up with different morals from experiences and what not, I think that’s another thing.” For Jack A. being raised with a value system in which cheating was wrong led to her current definition of cheating. The ways students discussed the development of their moralistic understanding of cheating indicated that messages early in life from their parents were the basis for their current definitions of cheating.

**K-12 education.** For the specific behaviors that students defined as cheating, the principal source for their definitions was their K-12 education. Using the K-12 educational experience as a frame of reference helped to explain the narrow definition of cheating behaviors, as phrases such as “don’t look at another’s paper” or “don’t copy” are reminiscent of what an elementary school teacher might say to a class right before a test. Adelaide explained that her definition of cheating came from

- high school stuff and what we learned in middle school, like “don’t cheat; that’s looking at someone’s paper,” or you’re not allowed to copy without citing the work that you copy or the idea that you copy. So it’s just from previous knowledge about it, I guess.

From her pre-college educational experiences, Adelaide learned that copying on a paper and looking at someone’s test were cheating. These two behaviors, as stated above, were the behaviors on which most students focused in their definitions. Frank’s source for his definition of cheating dated even further back than middle or high school. Frank stated, “Cheating has been pounded in your mind since you were in like kindergarten. Ever since you started taking any sort of tests in elementary school, they’ve told you what cheating is and that you’re not supposed to
do it.” Mike, Elizabeth, Joe, Katie, Elwood, and John also mentioned that their definitions of cheating came from their pre-college educational experiences.

In addition to their teachers telling them what cheating was in their K-12 classes, some of the students mentioned that they observed cheating, which was then used as an example of what not to do, and that this experience helped to form their definition. Elwood gave an example from his elementary school experiences.

[A student] looked over on another kid’s paper and started copying the same sentence, and then the teacher . . . made a spectacle of him and said, “Class, this is not what you do, this is cheating.” And from then . . . that was what cheating was defined. And then from then on, we added more things to this category. As elementary school progressed, the category got redefined more, and more, and more.

Elwood discussed seeing cheating occur and a fellow student being used as an example. That example then became a definition of a cheating behavior. Other participants also mentioned observing examples of cheating as a source of their definitions, but the examples referred primarily to simple test cheating.

**College faculty members added some nuance.** Although most of the students attributed their definitions of cheating to their pre-college experiences, some students discussed that their faculty members in college reinforced their definitions. Additionally, for a few students, faculty members added some nuance and additional behaviors to their definitions of cheating. Elizabeth explained how her faculty reinforced the messages she received as a child. “Ever since you were little, you hear what cheating is and how it’s bad, so, and even now every syllabus you get has the integrity policy in it, so I guess that’s where I got [my definition].” Elizabeth saw the academic integrity policy that was included on her college class syllabi as reinforcing the notions
of cheating that were instilled in her as a child. Joseph also saw his faculty as reinforcing his pre-
college definition of cheating. Joseph explained that his definition came

pretty much [from] the teachers saying “don’t take anything that’s not yours. If you do,
label it and say that it’s such and such.” And before, when we were taking a test, they’re
like, “Alright, keep your eyes on your own paper. Don’t, I don’t want to see wandering
eyes. If you do, you’re going to get a zero,” and stuff like that.

The language that Joseph ascribed to his faculty was similar to what his K-12 teachers might
have said; therefore, his definition of cheating, however narrow it might be, was reinforced in
college. Mark A. mentioned that his professors addressed cheating much like Joseph’s did. Mark
A. said that when his classes have tests, “Every time, it’s like ‘keep your eyes on your paper, turn
your hat around backwards,’ it just is what it is.” For both Mark A. and Joseph, the signals they
got from their faculty members about cheating reinforced the exam-based definition of cheating
that they brought with them to college.

While some students saw their college faculty as merely emphasizing their previous
understanding of cheating, other students recognized that in college classes the definition had
more behaviors than previously thought or had nuance to it. Lily explained this point by saying,

I really didn’t consider resubmitting a paper you’ve written as cheating before I found out
that was in the honor code. I always knew plagiarism was cheating and tests. I guess the
things that this institution has told me about cheating are kind of add-ons to what I
already knew, because they don’t just start talking about cheating in college. They talk
about it in elementary school and high school and things like that, too. So I guess it’s
kind of the subtleties in cheating that I’ve learned more about and definitely the fact that
they emphasize it so much makes it seem really important.
For Lily, faculty members added to her existing understanding of what constituted cheating, but her core definition still came from her pre-college experiences. Other students discussed how their faculty viewed behaviors as cheating that were not part of their definitions prior to starting college, but rather than adding these to their personal definitions, as Lily did, they questioned whether the behaviors actually were cheating, as discussed below.

Most of the participants drew their definitions of specific cheating behaviors from their K-12 educations. However, the types and methods of assignments and tests in college are likely more sophisticated than those of K-12 classes, and the expectation of participating in a shared academic community is also greater. Transferring an elementary school- or even high school-based definition of cheating to college was problematic because students indicated that their faculty members did not spend much time going into detail about cheating, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next section of this chapter. Therefore, college students continued to think about cheating as related to the types of assignments they had in their K-12 educations. The early messages about cheating stuck with students and provided a frame of reference for future discussions about cheating. If college faculty members did not add to students’ lists of cheating behaviors, as Lily described, then it was likely that students would continue to think of cheating as a limited set of behaviors or question some behaviors that were not a component of their pre-college definitions.

**Not Cheating, Degrees of Cheating, and Gray Areas**

At the same time that students quickly listed behaviors that they considered to be cheating, they also listed behaviors that they did not consider to be cheating. They also explained their reasoning for their considerations, even if they thought or knew that faculty members or institutional policies deemed those behaviors to be cheating. Additionally, the students
acknowledged that coming to a definition of cheating was difficult and that what was considered cheating might depend on the situation or the professor and that there were many “gray areas” and confusion with regard to cheating. Throughout their discussions of what was not or might not be cheating, students incorporated perceived level of importance of assignment as well as classifying some types of cheating to be of a higher or lesser degree than other forms of cheating.

**Behaviors not considered to be cheating.** Much like the discussion on what behaviors students considered to be cheating, the conversations about what was not cheating focused on a few types of assignments. The assignments that the students discussed in these conversations were on-line tests or quizzes, take-home work (e.g., homework, take-home tests), and group work. The students gave five primary reasons why they did not consider working together or using unauthorized resources for these assignments as cheating, (1) the amount of an exam or assignment completed with unauthorized help or resources matters, (2) the assignments were not considered to be serious or major assignments, (3) due to the nature of the work completed at home with varying time restrictions or lack of restriction, the faculty should know or expect students will work together or use materials, (4) working together was helpful for learning, therefore it was not cheating, and (5) working together or looking up answers is what is done in “real life.” Some of the students indicated that these reasons overlapped or were considered jointly when determining if a behavior was cheating. The students also discussed whether a faculty member had specifically told them not to do a particular behavior as a part of how they determined if that behavior was cheating.

**Amount matters.** Some of the participants who considered copying from someone on an exam or plagiarizing to be cheating made a distinction between copying or plagiarizing large
amounts of work or answers versus small amounts. They did not consider copying small amounts to be cheating. Novali made this distinction,

I don’t actually think that [copying] one or two questions on a multiple choice test is cheating as long as you do the majority of it yourself. And, also, for papers, it is so easy to accidentally paraphrase something, something short, even just a sentence or two, and forget to cite it. I don’t necessarily think a student should be kicked out of college for [that].

Robert had a similar stance regarding determining if a behavior was cheating; he stated, “I don’t think one sentence, just one sentence entirely, say you’re doing a lab report, is cheating. You’re really not passing off somebody else’s work. Maybe you can’t close a paragraph, or you don’t know how to incorporate something in so you get help from somewhere.” Robert and Novali gave examples of how they thought that the amount of an assignment copied from someone or some other source had bearing on whether the behavior was cheating. Similarly, students considered the size of the assignment in their definitions of cheating.

Not serious or major work. Many of the participants quite candidly expressed that they did not think that work given to be completed outside the classroom was as serious or important as work given inside the classroom. Students expressed that they understood that their faculty members likely considered working with others, use of the Internet, or use of notes on assignments given to be completed at home to be cheating, but many of the participants did not agree that this behavior was cheating. Denise illustrated this point by saying, “I put more emphasis on cheating as far as exams, I see homework assignments that you can take home, I see it as, . . . I see like you can do that [work together], especially if it’s not important.” Students discussed the worth of an assignment in points or grade percentage as a factor in determining if a
behavior was cheating. Rahul made this point by saying, “When you cheat on a five-point quiz or something that you could know very easily if you just opened up the book and read for two minutes, I don’t think that’s cheating. I think cheating on a major test or copying someone’s entire paper and just typing in different phrases is cheating.” Rahul suggested that an assignment worth five points was not “major”; therefore, getting answers from someone during the quiz was not cheating. Jerry made a similar argument about how serious work was considered to be. Jerry said, “So I think homework is probably the biggest difference. It’s pretty obvious if you cheat on an exam or if you plagiarize a paper. But I think that’s kind of where the weight of the grades come in . . . , exams are going to mean more to your final grade than a homework assignment would.” Jerry did not think that assignments that carried little weight for one’s grade mattered as much as assignments with more weight; therefore, he did not think that copying or collaborating with others on the assignments worth few points was cheating.

Students used both the worth of a given assignment and how or where the assignment was to be completed in determining its seriousness. Mark A. summed up how many students felt about working together on non-serious assignments and why this was not cheating. Mark A. said, I mean if you consider doing homeworks together cheating, then yeah, I’ve done that. If you consider one person doing their quiz, and then passing the answers around, working together on a quiz so everybody does well, if you consider that cheating, then yeah, I’ve done that. I don’t consider that cheating, because if you don’t . . . want us to work together on it, then give it to us in the classroom.

For Mark A. and other students, work worth few points or given in an out-of-class setting was not deemed to be major. For many students, if the work was not deemed to be major, participating in what would be cheating behaviors for “major” assignments was not thought of in
the same way. What was considered to be cheating on major work, such as copying from others, working with a group, not appropriately citing a source, or using unauthorized resources, was not considered to be cheating on the minor or less serious assignments.

**Expectation and time.** Much like the quotation from Mark A. above, students thought working with others or using unauthorized resources was acceptable on work completed outside the classroom merely because the work was not done in a controlled classroom setting. Some of the students assumed that their faculty members knew or expected that students worked together or used notes on on-line or take-home work. The students’ thinking seemed to be that if faculty members knew that students were participating in the behavior and/or were not doing anything to stop that behavior, then it must not be cheating. Pat summed up what many of the other students expressed by stating,

I’m sure some would consider working together on an on-line quiz cheating. I believe that teachers should be aware that if given the opportunity to work together, then they [students] will work together. Having an on-line quiz and “promising” not to look at your books is a ridiculous belief that some teachers hold.

Rahul echoed Pat’s sentiments about faculty members knowing that students worked together. He said, “There’s on-line quizzes for chemistry. But the teachers know that you’re going to talk it through [with others]. . . . So I don’t consider that cheating at all. I feel like if it’s on-line, they have to know.” Mike also expressed his assumptions about faculty members’ knowledge of students working together on assignments. Mike stated,

The thing I feel about take-home exams or take-home quizzes is that when teachers give them and say you have to completely do this on your own, they have to be completely like . . . I feel like they expect students to work together. I don’t think there has ever been
a take-home test where 80% of the students haven’t asked each other a question, a least one question on the material.

Mike, Pat, and Rahul, explained that the behaviors they would consider to be cheating if executed on an in-class assignment were not considered cheating when completed on an out-of-class assignment. They, like other students, made the assumption that if a professor assigned work to be completed outside the classroom, then the professor should or did expect that students would use notes, look up answers, or work with other people; therefore, the behaviors were not cheating.

Part of the reason why students thought that faculty members expected or knew that students would look up answers or work with others on on-line or take-home assignments was due to the amount of time given to complete the work, whether too much time or too little time. Pat discussed how being given a large amount of time to complete an assignment was a reason why he did not consider using unauthorized resources during an on-line quiz as cheating. He explained,

Now the thing that I don’t really consider cheating is if you’re given like an on-line quiz to take at home. . . . I guess professors want you to be on the honor system, not look at your notes or anything, but I think if you’re given like three days to take an on-line quiz with no time limit, I think it’s kind of hard not to look at your work, work that you’ve done, you’re in the comfort of your home, it’s kind of a gray area with that aspect.

Pat felt that by allowing students to complete the quizzes outside class, faculty members gave students the opportunity to use additional resources; therefore, the behavior was not cheating. While Pat discussed too much time being given for some assignments, other students discussed a lack of time to complete work as a reason why looking up or asking others for answers was not
cheating on take-home or on-line work. Novali explained why she thought that using the Internet to look up answers while taking an on-line quiz was not cheating. She said,

I know there’s little things I disagree with. Everybody’s taken . . . a class that has on-line tests or quizzes, or something, and they pull up Google; and you think to yourself, I go to all of the classes, I listen to all of the lectures, and I read, but I have ten minutes to finish this, this is timed, I have to get this done, and you pull up Google. Should I get in trouble for that? I really don’t think so. So, I guess my definition in that sense would be a little bit different because maybe the teacher would feel otherwise.

Novali made the argument that if she did all the required work for a class and attended class but did not have the time to complete the on-line quiz that looking up an answer using the Internet was not cheating, presumably because she could have gotten the answer legitimately if she had enough time. Rahul made a similar argument about why working with someone or using a Facebook group to find answers for an on-line assignment was not cheating. Rahul said that when pressed for time, he would look up homework answers “which I don’t really consider cheating, because I learn it later.” Rahul and Novali used the criterion that time constraints hindered their ability to complete the on-line work without using outside resources, and they coupled that reason with a discussion of whether a person could learn or would learn the information that she or he got from other sources during an on-line assignment to determine that the behavior was not cheating.

Learning and helping are not cheating. In the discussions regarding what was not considered to be cheating, several students focused not only on what could be learned later, as Rahul and Novali did, but also on whether the behaviors on out-of-class assignments were
immediately helpful or allowed for learning when determining their definitions. Jenna discussed why she thought that working with others on homework was not cheating; she said,

You’re both thinking and you’re both putting the time in to do the work. So many great ideas have come from collaboration . . . I don’t think teachers expect you to learn everything completely on your own, and if you can get help from your classmates that way, I think that’s acceptable on homework.

Jenna expressed that learning might be hindered if students did not work together on homework, which made the behavior not cheating even when the work was to be completed individually. Bob also made a distinction between helping for better understanding and cheating.

If somebody understands [the material] and you were to say help somebody do it, and it was more of a completion assignment, I don’t really find that cheating because it’s more of helping your fellow classmate out, understanding the content.

Many of the students discussed the idea that they learned better in groups and thought that they should be able to work with peers on assignments, other than in-class tests, and not have it be considered cheating. Sicilia articulated this point by stating,

if you’re working on a project or if you’re all doing homework . . . I think you should be able to work together, I mean to fuse ideas. Everyone has a different perspective or outlook, and it’s better to expand on everyone’s and learn from each person. That’s my truthful thought. It helps, it doesn’t hurt.

When discussing whether behaviors were cheating or just helping oneself or a friend to learn, Jack A. made the assumption that faculty members would not mind if students worked together or looked up answers as long as they learned. She said, “As long as [faculty] achieve that goal [of student learning], then they don’t really care that you cheated on one homework.” For Jack
A. and many of the students in my study, the primary criterion for determining if a behavior was cheating was – Did I learn? If they felt that working with others or looking up answers helped them to learn or gain a better understanding of the material, then they did not cheat and the behaviors should not be considered cheating by the faculty. As the participants made this point in their discussions, they often stated that “straight copying” from others was cheating, but working together in a collaborative manner was not cheating, rather it was a preferred method of learning.

*Working with others is real life, not cheating.* In addition to viewing working with others on assignments as helpful for learning, students also expressed that working together on projects happened in “real life,” so it should not be considered cheating. When the students referred to real life or the real world, they meant that once they began careers in their chosen fields, working with others would be the norm or using various resources to find information was encouraged rather than discouraged. Jack A. combined the reasons of learning and real life. She said,

If you’re working on a problem or something and you glance over and you see someone’s got the right formula, . . . [on an] exam and they’ve got a formula written down and you see it and you go oh that’s right, I forgot. I use that one. Then you’re still learning it, and you still understand it, and I think that’s what the purpose of an exam is. That’s kind of how life is really.

Jack A. and other students expressed that memorizing facts or formulas for exams was artificial, and when they were in their jobs, they would be able to look up that information. The facts and formulas were not as important as knowing how to apply them. Chris focused on the standard of working with others in his definition of cheating. “I don’t consider cheating like I meet with a friend of mine . . . chatting about homework together. I don’t think that’s cheating, I think that’s
working together. I think that’s real life.” Students knew that working in groups would be a major part of their future professions. They understood that talking with other people or looking up additional information to gain a better understanding of the material at-hand was going to be expected of them in the work world. The participants did not see behaviors encouraged in their chosen professions to be cheating in the university setting.

Participants were candid in their discussions about the behaviors they did not consider to be cheating and the reasons for their considerations. Students acknowledged that professors or institutional policies likely defined working together or looking up answers on out-of-class work or copying a few sentences or answers on tests or papers to be cheating, but many of the participants did not agree that these behaviors were cheating. For them, work given to be completed out of the classroom setting was not deemed to be as serious as the in-class work; therefore, they should be able to complete the work with help from others or outside sources of information. Furthermore, the participants thought that faculty members knew or should know that students participated in these behaviors, which should mean that the behaviors were not cheating. To emphasize their arguments, participants stated that the same behaviors were cheating if done on in-class or major assignments. The behavior was not the focus of the determination about cheating; rather, the type of assignment was the determining factor. Students readily made the distinction between talking to others or using notes on an on-line exam versus doing the same on an in-class exam. Novali thought that using Google during an on-line exam was not cheating but getting some similar type of assistance on an in-class test was cheating. Other students declared that they would never cheat on a test, but that getting help on homework was not a big deal.
In other situations, students considered their own learning and understanding of material in their definitions of what was not cheating. For them, the focus on learning made their arguments valid, as learning was the purpose of their college classes. If helping each other with homework or looking up answers during an on-line test helped students learn or better understand the subject matter, then neither behavior was cheating. Additionally, working with others and knowing where and how to find answers was considered to be a function of the real world work place. The students seemed to chastise their faculty for not recognizing this and for limiting their abilities to learn by restricting what actions they could take while completing work. Students questioned the dogmatic nature of policies and definitions of cheating by the faculty as counterproductive to or in some cases stifling of the true purpose of higher education – learning.

**Degrees of Cheating**

Although many of the participants agreed that the behaviors listed above were not or should not be considered cheating, some of the students did include them in their definitions of cheating. However, most of these students distinguished the behaviors related to out-of-class work or working together from other behaviors with the caveat that there were degrees or levels of cheating and that these behaviors were a lesser degree of cheating than behaviors undertaken on in-class tests or written papers. Frank discussed the degree of cheating between copying homework and copying an exam. He said,

You’ll see three people sitting at one person’s desk and writing real quick. Somebody will have their homework out, and they’ll be . . . just writing down answers for the homework, and it’s due that day. That’s, it’s not, I guess it’s considered cheating, and I see it like every single week. . . . I don't know about major cheating, where they don’t
know anything and then they cheat and they get 100 percent on tests. I don’t think you can stretch it that far that it’s that big of a deal.

Frank recognized that copying homework was cheating, but he saw it as a lesser degree of cheating than the same behavior would be on a test. Laura also discussed working with friends on out-of-class work as a lesser degree of cheating than similar behavior on in-class work. She stated,

I think that when it comes to homework, if it’s open-ended sometimes, people will sort of collaborate or work on an assignment or share ideas or double check what they’re doing, and it’s not necessarily that they’re copying; it’s more of a collaboration. And when it’s outside work like that, I guess I don’t consider that the same sort of cheating as having the answers to a test in front of you.

Laura realized that her faculty members considered working with others on homework to be cheating, but she saw collaboration as less serious than test cheating.

Jerry also made the distinction between cheating on homework and cheating on a test, but he based his thoughts on the worth of the assignment.

Let’s say you have a homework assignment that’s worth two percent of your points worth of your final grade, and you copy your buddy’s, that’s not ideal, but it’s not as bad as if you ripped off somebody’s paper [or] if you cheated on the final, it was worth half of your grade.

Jerry used the worth of the assignment to make his argument for why copying homework was less of a big deal than copying on a paper or exam; this argument was similar to the rationale that the students used in defining working with others or copying small bits of information as not
cheating. Alex also discussed the worth of the assignment pertaining to the risks related to cheating. He said,

There are different levels like when you are doing an assignment or homework, and you can share some answers with a friend. . . . It’s different like when it’s a big event like a final exam. The stakes are a lot higher, and the risk is a lot bigger.

For Alex, the bigger the stakes (i.e., the more an assignment is worth and the bigger the penalty might be if caught), the higher the level of cheating.

Once again, the type of assignment influenced how students thought about cheating behaviors. Students thought about cheating as a sliding scale of degrees of seriousness. The more an assignment was worth or if the assignment was to be completed in class, the more serious the offense of cheating. The same behaviors (e.g., copying, using outside resources, or working with others) used on assignments worth few points or given to be completed out-of-class were deemed a lesser degree of cheating. Students’ willingness to relegate out-of-class assignments as less serious and worth the risk of cheating suggests a lack of understanding of or disagreement with the reasons why faculty give differing assignments and what they can gain from completing them without cheating.

**Gray Areas and Confusion**

During the discussions about what was or was not cheating, students explained that the definition of cheating was not always clear to them. They mentioned that they were confused about some aspects of what might be considered cheating and that there were several “gray areas” with regard to cheating, even with some of the behaviors that they considered to be cheating, depending on the situation. Some of the gray areas that students mentioned had to do with the same types of behaviors that were considered not cheating or a lesser degree of
cheating. Plagiarism was another behavior that students considered to be a gray area or that garnered much confusion.

**Working together on homework.** Even for those students who defined cheating as copying homework or working together on homework, gray areas existed regarding the amount of information shared. Jack S. discussed how confirming answers was a gray area for him. An example would be, I think that it also could be sort of gray, my friend and I were working on our homework, and it was a mathematically-based homework, and we worked on the first part of it, did it all together, and then I worked on it with another friend, and I confirmed the answer with my friend, gave him the answers, but he had to do all the work himself, and you don’t get, you don’t get credit unless you do all the work. So he wanted to use those numbers so he could see if his numbers added up to being correct, to being right. To me, again, I think it’s almost subjective. To me, I wouldn’t guess that to be cheating. Someone else might consider that to be cheating. Jack S. was not sure whether this behavior was or was not cheating. He seemed to be trying to find a line or threshold before acceptable behavior became cheating, but that line was unclear to him. Other students discussed confusion about whether they could work together on homework or on-line exams and indicated that their faculty had not made clear statements about these behaviors. Joe discussed his confusion:

I can’t remember if my professor said it was open notes or not or if it you’re allowed to use your book and use the web and then answer the questions or if you’re even allowed to use a friend. They didn’t make it very clear to know what their version of a quiz was.

Like Jack S., Joe was confused about what behaviors were acceptable and was looking for a clear answer from his professor. Lily also expressed confusion about what was allowed for homework
and on-line quizzes based on lack of clarity from her faculty member. For the students, the absence of clearly stated *unacceptable* practices for their homework or on-line assignments resulted in the thinking that gray areas existed in the definition of cheating.

**Plagiarism.** The participants stated that plagiarism was a form of cheating. However, some students were confused about what actually constituted plagiarism and proper citation of material or ideas that were not their own. Also, differing messages about what and how to cite when writing papers added to their confusion about plagiarism as cheating. Bob expressed that faculty needed to talk about plagiarism, because to some extent it seems kind of loosely defined for [how it is cheating]. Whether they want citations for every single thing or whether they want it for just written material that you read, or if you read something but you’re not quoting it, you just [have] general knowledge, or you have people that don’t always know exactly what needs to be [done], so plagiarism to me is very, it can be gray, the understanding of it.

Bob’s confusion over the mechanics of proper citation and academic writing led to lack of clarity over what constituted plagiarism. He also indicated that different faculty members were more or less strict in their citation or writing requirements. He realized that not citing sources or ideas was plagiarism, but he did not know what to cite or how to do it, so this muddied the definition of plagiarism. Ashley had a similar experience where a faculty member did not require citations for papers, but Ashley then questioned if others would think she cheated on the papers she submitted for that class due to the lack of citations, even though the professor did not require them.
Another area of academic writing with which students struggled was the difference between paraphrasing and plagiarism and the difficulty of being original in one’s writing. Kayla stated,

I think that on a lot of assignments when you’re expected to summarize a program, or just anything informative, so few ideas are new ideas, and I think it’s difficult to complete an assignment when it’s not your idea but you’re expected to show academic honesty, but it’s not that you invented this or anything. So, I think between paraphrasing and plagiarizing, I think there are [sic] some confusion. . . . I just think there’s a big difference between using your own words and using your own ideas. I just did a paper where I had to summarize a Federal program. How many new ideas can I have about [the program], for example? I don’t. There’s one thing, I think cheating is if I find a resource and I literally were to copy and paste, and switch words around, or if I read that and write another sentence just like it. But, if you’re, I just don’t think that you can have your own ideas about everything, and I think that’s where the gray area is, between your ideas and your words, not copying word for word but just where’s the difference between, okay, I’ve read this and then I wrote my own paper. Is that cheating or is that academically honest?

Kayla was engaged in thinking about academic writing and originality of ideas but was confused by the rules of writing and the expectations of her faculty. Like other students, she had questions about the line between plagiarism/cheating and not plagiarizing. Mark C. also saw paraphrasing and using source material as a gray area in writing. He said,

I’m trying to write about [a topic], and you just start writing, and now I’ve got some info from Wikipedia whatever, whatever, whatever, trying to write a nice sentence you
weren’t sure if you could write yourself. You knew you could but this just said it so beautifully, so then you have to take that and kind of reword it but at least get that same point across. I don’t know if that’s cheating or not. Is it?

Mark C. asked if his example was cheating. Several students gave an example of an issue or behavior that was confusing for them and asked me if I thought their example represented cheating. The students’ confusion allowed them to think of the mechanics of proper citation and writing as gray areas in cheating.

Similarly, other students wondered if plagiarism would still be cheating if the person did not realize that he or she was plagiarizing. Joe explained his confusion.

The gray areas could be in plagiarism for one because as you read something and then you look back on it or you read something from a journal . . . and then you talk about that in your paper, and you don’t realize that you took that idea from someone that’s not common knowledge and you should have cited that source.

The students knew that plagiarism was cheating. They knew that copying and pasting from a source was plagiarism, but they were quite confused about what else constituted plagiarism. Plagiarism was a gray area for them because they did not know exactly how much latitude they had in their writing, what rules to follow and how and when to do so, and when they might be crossing the line into cheating.

Group projects. For many of the students, group work or the ability to work together with the stipulation of submitting an individual written piece also caused confusion about what might be considered cheating. John provided an example of confusion over group work from one of his classes.
I mean obviously talking, talking about answers, collaborating on a project where you should be doing it individual work [is cheating], although sometimes it’s tricky, because they say you need individual projects but you can work together, but don’t plagiarize each other, and so it’s kind of the back and forth. I can foresee us having trouble with that in one of my classes now. It’s one of those “work together as a team, but don’t write it as a team” [assignments]. But you’re going to all have the same thing pretty much, and it’s like it’s kind of ridiculous. It should probably be a group project, which kind of, I think those kinds of decisions probably encourage cheating a little bit, just because it’s really the line between plagiarism and group work together is really thin.

Even when students knew that they could work together or were assigned group projects, they had questions about where the line was between following the rules and doing too much together. John’s example pointed out how students were looking for clarity in the definition of cheating and how they saw certain types of assignments as grayer than other types of assignments in relation to cheating.

As the discussions about how cheating was defined and what constituted cheating progressed, students shifted from indicating that they had clear notions of what cheating was and its specific behaviors to indicating that they did not fully understand all the nuances of what might be considered cheating in all cases. Although they knew that plagiarism, working with others on assignments, and copying were cheating, they were not sure what those behaviors actually meant in some cases. The students tried to reconcile their confusion by indicating that there were degrees of cheating, that some cheating was worse or more blatant than other forms of cheating or that there were gray areas in which behaviors may or may not be considered cheating depending upon the situation. For many, their K-12 frame of reference for what constituted
cheating did not translate to college classes, and they recognized their confusion over the definition of cheating and its component behaviors.

**Desire for a Clear Definition**

In recognizing that what constituted cheating was partially unclear to them, the students vocalized their desire for clarity about the definition of cheating. Students seemed to be looking for someone (i.e., faculty members) to tell them what cheating was; they wanted to know exactly where the line was or what the threshold was before their actions became cheating.

Through the conversations about cheating during my interviews, many students realized that they did not have a full understanding of cheating or that others defined cheating differently than they did, which demonstrated a lack of a unified definition. Near the end of one of the group interviews, Laura summed up her thoughts on defining cheating this way,

I’m going to say that I think my definition when I came into it was very broad, like I know that so many students and teachers, they all hold ideas of cheating differently, and I think that that’s why there is no cohesive definition of [cheating]. People think so many different things about cheating that it’s hard to define and hard to find a way that’s going to correct it, because people think differently about it. So, I don't know, it’s still the same, but it’s hard to define.

Laura expressed what several other students also said, that she knew how she defined cheating but realized that others defined it differently, which meant that she did not have a clear understanding of what cheating was, particularly how her faculty members might define it. The concept of cheating was nebulous and nuanced. Laura and other students knew some specific behaviors that constituted cheating, but a specific definition that encompassed those behaviors eluded them. Elwood expressed this point by stating,
Most people, when you ask them what cheating is, they can't really give you a definition, they can only cite examples. I, myself, if you ask me to define cheating, I have no idea what it is, but I can give you examples of cheating. So, it's like an intangible concept I guess.

Students realized that because people cite differing examples of cheating, this method of defining cheating was problematic.

However, students wanted a clear definition. They wanted to have examples of as many types of cheating as possible so that they could know what the cheating threshold was rather than have to guess at it based on their own limited understanding of the concept. The participants explained that they wanted a definition and examples of what constituted cheating from their faculty members. Lily said, “Even professors don’t really establish whether you’re allowed to work together on [on-line tests] or whether it’s cheating, . . . but it’s not clear of a line, and people will share homework answers all the time and check their homeworks together.” Lily wanted to know if the behaviors she or some of her classmates were participating in were cheating. They did not have the answer to that question, so they worked together until specifically told not to do so. Joe also expressed frustration with not knowing a clear definition regarding what constituted cheating on “the online stuff. Like I haven’t had a clear cut definition yet of what is cheating and what is not cheating for these online exams or quizzes.” Students wanted their faculty members to give them a definition.

Joseph explained the source of some of the confusion about cheating. With regard to faculty discussions about academic integrity with students in class, he said,

We get it harped on like the first day of class, because it’s in every syllabus that gets handed out, and usually the teachers are like “Alright, you guys know what this
[academic integrity] is,” especially in the upper-level classes, because they feel that we’ve heard this spiel five, ten times. They think that we know it. Really, I don’t. I know what it means; it means don’t cheat. But then, other than that, I really don’t know what it means off the top of my head. I don’t recall what it means.

Joseph’s frustration was echoed by many students. They were not sure what cheating was, and they expressed that no one had taken the time to explain it to them. The students wanted a definition, and they wanted it from their faculty members. Dave perhaps said this best, when he stated,

You’ve got to define [cheating] by what the professor defines cheating as or the institution defines cheating as ‘cause sometimes, I’ve taken group tests before and things such as that so I mean I agree with all of what you [other students] say, but I also think it has to be defined as the professor and the institution ‘cause many times what we consider cheating in different situations isn’t, and there’s many gray areas so. . . . . I think sometimes we need to break it down for students and explain straight forward like in very simple language, this is cheating and this isn’t, and get rid of the gray areas, make it more black and white.

Dave called on faculty members to explain thoroughly what behaviors they considered cheating. Students wanted to know exactly what they could and could not do because they knew that their definitions of cheating were incomplete.

A few students talked about asking their faculty members what was allowed or not allowed and to clarify the definition of cheating, but for most of the students, they assumed that unless faculty provided clear instructions about what was allowed or not allowed, students could use their personal definitions and understandings of cheating. Students abdicated their own
responsibility for finding out how cheating was defined, and placed the onus on their faculty members for giving those definitions. Even though they knew they did not have a full understanding of cheating, the lack of definition from faculty allowed students to remain naïve, rationalize their behaviors, and have a semblance of hope that some of their actions might not be cheating.

As participants in my study discussed the definition of cheating, what was a definite set of behaviors became a muddled and hazy explanation of why some behaviors may or may not be cheating depending on the context. The students all but abandoned their generalized definition of cheating when applied to specific situations. Without fully recognizing it, the students shifted their definitions of cheating based on the class, assignment, professor, and other factors in their lives. The students were both certain and uncertain of the definition of cheating; they used the foundational blocks they acquired as children and the contextual cues of the present to reconstruct their definitions as needed in particular situations. For many of the students, the incongruity between the absolute, objective definition and the contextual, subjective definition, resulted in confusion, and the students then looked to others (namely, faculty) to provide the definition for them.

Perceptions of Cheating

Much like the pattern of personal clarity giving way to the need to be told how cheating was defined, the students in my study expressed similar sentiments about their attitudes toward and beliefs about cheating and the role that faculty members played in influencing their attitudes. In this section, I will discuss how the students thought about the issue of cheating and their perceptions of peer cheating behaviors. I will then provide an analysis of how the students
judged their faculty members’ speech and actions about cheating and what role the students saw their faculty members having in the cheating problem.

**Attitudes and Beliefs about Cheating**

In the questionnaire that I gave students prior to the group interviews, I asked students to respond to the statement: “to me, cheating is no big deal” based on a 5-point Likert-type scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. In keeping with defining cheating as an action that was morally wrong, 37 of the 42 participants in my study disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement (see Figure 2). Only two students agreed with this statement, and three students had no opinion about it. Based on attitudes and beliefs that had been ingrained in them since childhood, most of the students thought that cheating was wrong and understood the seriousness of the action, when speaking in a general and personal manner. However, as discussed above, the students’ opinions about cheating shifted somewhat depending on the situation, and they assigned a lesser degree of seriousness to some behaviors. Also, many of the students did not hold their peers to the same standards that they held for themselves. Additionally, students took cues from faculty members regarding how “big a deal” cheating was in their individual courses.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Cheated in College</th>
<th>Number of Times Cheated in College</th>
<th>To me, academic cheating is no big deal.</th>
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<td>10</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Disagree</td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
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<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Comment</td>
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<td>Jack A.</td>
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<td>2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
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</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Joseph</td>
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<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
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<td>Joe</td>
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**General attitudes and beliefs about cheating.** Participants thought that cheating was a “big deal” and a bad or wrong behavior in which to participate when asked the question without context. They expressed this sentiment both through their responses to the questionnaire and in their interviews with me. Mark C. quite simply said, “Cheating is bad.” Chase said that he was proud of himself for never having cheated and said that “it’s just something that has a moral connotation to it.” Jack S. stated that based on his “personal integrity” and “personal moral
beliefs” that “I just believe that [cheating is] wrong.” Lily and Jenna also discussed that cheating was an issue of right and wrong and that cheating was wrong. Most of the students agreed that cheating was both wrong and a big deal in a general sense.

**Cheating impedes learning.** In addition to thinking that cheating was morally wrong, several students thought that cheating was bad because it interfered with learning, the purpose of college. Sicilia made this point when she said,

> Cheating is bad because it’s taking away someone’s opportunity to actually learn. . . . if you work your ass off, the truth is that you’ll get anywhere you want, and don’t cheat the system because you’re only screwing yourself. It’s better to have the knowledge. If I’m taking all of these classes and I need this knowledge later on, what’s it going to do if some kid goes and takes my exam for me, it’s not going to help me later on, it’s just going to screw me over when I don’t know anything.

Sicilia understood that the result of cheating can be far more detrimental than getting into trouble. She realized that cheating would rob her of knowledge that she needed to be successful in her life and profession. She placed emphasis on learning over grades or fear of punishment. She saw the more abstract and long-term damage that cheating could cause rather than the immediate harm that could come from getting caught. Other students also focused on learning when discussing their reasons for why cheating was bad. Sarah said,

> if I get an “A” and I didn’t deserve it, like I didn’t do the work and my roommate did it for me, and I handed it in and I got an “A,” I didn’t learn anything out of it by her doing it. It’s better if you do your own work and you learn from it than to have someone write your paper, do the test for you, because otherwise what’s the point of going to school if you’re not learning?
Similarly, Lindsay said,

> Well, if you study and actually learn it or at least learn it for a little bit you should know it for the test. If you cheat . . . you haven’t really learned anything, so that’s not going to help you with your future job or on your final or whatever you need to know it again for. So I figure you just might as well just learn it the first time and remember it than look off the person next to you and learn it for two minutes.

Like Sicilia, Lindsay and Sarah were concerned about learning and saw cheating as impeding their ability to learn. Chris, Chase, Bob, and David also discussed that they thought cheating was bad because it took away from their learning and could hurt them in the future. David said, “If you’re going to cheat your way through class, you can pass it, but in the end if that class is really necessary and you didn’t learn anything it’s going to come back to bite you either way.” David made the point that by cheating you can either be harmed immediately if caught or harmed later in life if not caught because a person did not learn when cheating.

Thinking about cheating in terms of the learning lost demonstrated an advanced level of thinking about cheating. The students who considered cheating to be detrimental to learning put the value of education and their long-term career goals ahead of thinking about cheating with regard to the immediate risks or rewards that could come from it. For these students, cheating was a big deal because it was antithetical and harmful to the learning that occurred in college and the ability to use their knowledge in their future lives.

**Beliefs about others’ cheating.** As the participants in my study discussed their thoughts about cheating, they also talked about how they felt when others cheated. Some students did not care if others cheated, seeing it as a personal choice that affected only that individual. Other students said that knowing that others were cheating made them upset or annoyed.
Several of the participants thought of cheating as a personal decision, and even though they considered it to be bad or wrong in general, they thought that other students had the right to make their own choices and did not care much if their peers cheated. Chase, who did not like cheating in general, did not particularly like it if his peers cheated on major exams, but he said that “for the most part, I just feel like if that’s what they want to do, let them do it because I feel like sooner or later they’re going to get caught.” Chase thought that eventually his peers’ cheating would be discovered, but he did not see the behavior as having an effect on him personally. John made the argument that others’ cheating usually did not affect him, so it did not matter to him. John said,

In most cases you don’t [have your own grade affected], so even if they are cheating it’s like, well, it’s not going to affect me, it doesn’t really make that much difference anyway. . . . At least for me, I never cared really that people cheat because it’s not that they’re really affecting my score, if that makes sense.

Even though John did not like cheating, in general, he did not see a problem with others’ cheating as long as his grade was not affected by it. He saw cheating as a personal decision with consequences only for the person who cheated. Mark A. and Sicilia did not care if people cheated, as long as people were not trying to cheat off of them or ask them for answers. Sicilia said, “All I can do is worry about myself.” Sicilia was not bothered by other students’ cheating, and she did not think it was her responsibility to do or say anything if her peers were cheating. If students did not think that they could influence their peers’ actions or did not think there was a harmful effect from others’ cheating, they expressed a lack of concern and an unwillingness to hold their peers accountable to the same standards to which they held themselves.
While several participants showed little to no concern for peer cheating, other students said that they were annoyed or upset when fellow students cheated. Margaret explained that her roommate’s friends always call her [to] get her answers or come and get her notebook. She spends hours on [her work]. I don't know how, I would never be like, “Here, I spent like 22 days on it, here, take it.” I don't know; that bothers me whenever she does that stuff. Margaret was bothered by the fact that her roommate spent large amounts of time on her work and gave it to others to copy so they could spend very little time on the assignments. For Margaret, this type of cheating was an unfair exchange where one party received a valuable good for no cost. Jenna also saw time as a valuable commodity and peer cheating as taking away from the value of the work she did on her assignments. Jenna said,

    I put in a lot of time in all of my schoolwork and everything, so it’s so annoying to have someone come and want all of your work. . . . And, I think that’s what bothers me the most, if I dedicate my time, I don’t want that wasted.

Jenna did not want people copying the assignments that she spent time completing. She thought that if she could put forth the effort to complete her work, then others should be able to do the same. For Jenna, others’ cheating devalued her time and effort. Even Chase, who typically did not care if his peers cheated, was upset when a group of his classmates cheated on a “big” assignment that he put much time into completing.

When students saw peer cheating as taking away from the work that they put into completing assignments or studying for exams, they were upset or annoyed. Peer cheating, while not having a direct effect on students, was viewed as an issue of fairness and thinking of time as
a commodity. The students did not like their peers finishing assignments with little effort due to cheating when they dedicated the time necessary to complete the work through honest means.

For the students who thought that cheating was a big deal or were upset by others’ cheating, one might assume that they reported peer cheating or advised their peers against cheating. However, this was not the case for the participants in my study. The students viewed “telling on” a peer for cheating quite negatively and as inappropriate. Some students thought telling on peers was as bad a behavior as cheating. Jane gave an example of a student in her class who cheated on an essay exam.

This guy in our . . . class had written out his whole essay, it was really hard for us to be like, ”Now I have to do this in the time frame, and he is going to get away with it, and he is going to get a grade that he probably doesn’t deserve.” So, not only for us, he happened to show a lot of our classmates, but it’s also an unfair disadvantage to everyone else. So, not even about ratting out your classmates but also preserving it for the other people who are trying to.

Jane, Jenna, and Katie B. were in this particular class. All three of the women expressed that they “couldn’t” report the cheating student to the professor even though they were upset by the behavior. The women said,

Jane: You’re like tied; you don’t want to be that person to say anything. But, it’s kind of hard.

Jenna: It’s frustrating.

Jane: I think that you don’t, it’s not like you want something bad to happen to that person, it’s not like a malicious thing, but you also don’t want them to get away with something that you know is wrong and that you know is happening. So, yes, I didn’t want to be like, “I got you in trouble and now you’re probably going to fail this test” because then I would probably feel guilty about it in the end, even if not feeling guilty meant letting him get away with it. . . .
Jenna: I think if the stakes weren’t as high, you’d be like, quicker to, would be like, “Stop.” If you got more of a slap on the wrist . . . but because [the stakes are] so high here too you don’t want to jeopardize someone’s whole thing for one mistake also. I would feel really guilty about it too.

Katie B.: We didn’t say anything. We’re like, “Oh that stinks.”

Jane, Katie B., and Jenna said they were reluctant to report peer cheating because they did not want to be the cause of someone else being punished. In fact they said that they would feel guilty for doing so. Jane, Katie B., and Jenna saw the act of reporting cheating as problematic and the would-be cause of a peer getting into trouble rather than viewing the student’s own behavior as bringing about a negative consequence.

The participants did not want to be “that person,” the person who told the professor about other people’s cheating. Chase said that he was not “going to go to the teacher about it” when he knew that a group of students cheated in his class. Novali also said that if peers cheated, “you don’t go to anybody because, I don't know, you just don’t.” Novali was not able to explain why she would not report cheating. Joe explained his reasons for not reporting cheating in this way,

I probably would not say much unless it was something big. Unless it was something big and there was a lot of things going on, but sometimes, sadly, it’s easier to just not say anything and not worry about it. It’s easier that way.

For Joe, if peer cheating was not major, he did not see the need to be concerned about it. He did not think the cheating had an effect on him or the class in general. Only one student of the 42 in my study gave an example of reporting peer cheating. Katie B. explained that she reported students only when their cheating began to affect her own ability to work.

It was the final exam, and the same group of people had cheated on every test, the whole semester. There were three or four of them. And, I was like that kind of stinks because it was hard, and I studied a lot for it. But, whenever we took the final, they were sitting
behind me, they usually sat in front of me, and I couldn’t focus on my own test because they were talking and I could hear them. So, I did tell on them. That’s like the only time I’ve ever told on anybody, and I was just like, “Keep an eye out over there” [to the professor]. I didn’t point them out, but I could not concentrate on my test because they were talking. They didn’t get in any trouble, but she just went over. So I felt like that was different. I never thought I’d tell on anybody, but it kind of interfered with my own thing, so maybe that’s selfish.

As Katie B. recalled this story, she seemed apologetic for reporting her peers. She let their cheating go unreported throughout the semester, and only after it affected her and became personal, did she report them. Her final statement about feeling selfish for reporting her peers’ cheating demonstrated that she felt bad for going against the unwritten code that students did not tell on other students.

Students saw their peers’ actions as personal choices, and as long as they were not affected personally, they saw reporting someone as some sort of violation in itself. Sicilia used the term “narc” as she discussed whether she might report a person for cheating. Being a narc is construed negatively, as is reporting peers for cheating. Even though students did not like that other students cheated, they were unwilling to hold other students accountable for their actions. As illustrated by Sicilia’s statement that all she can do is worry about herself, students did not think that peer cheating had an affect on them, or they were worried about the social implications of “telling on” a peer or friend. In their decisions not to report cheating, the students removed responsibility for consequences from their peers who were cheating and placed it on themselves. Jenna, Jane, and Katie B. did not want to be responsible for others being punished for cheating. The students did not see the act of cheating as the cause of a potential sanction; rather, they saw
the act of reporting as the cause. For the students who did not want to tell on their peers for cheating, the focus was on how the punishment would affect the cheater rather than on how cheating itself had far-reaching effects for the individual and the campus community.

**General attitudes and beliefs instilled since childhood.** As the students described how they developed their thoughts about cheating, they attributed their attitudes and beliefs to their parents and their K-12 educations. Furthermore, the students expressed that their attitudes and beliefs were ingrained in them and had changed little since starting college. Joe stated that cheating was morally wrong and that he knew this from “elementary school, my parents always taught me to do your own work and don’t copy off someone else. So, yes, from the very beginning” he was told that cheating was wrong. The participants also assumed that their peers’ attitudes about cheating as right or wrong were also instilled in them before college and could not be changed. Elwood said,

> I’ve learned that growing up you know that it’s wrong so I mean people are now 18 and up, if they haven’t learned it yet there’s probably no hope for them. There’s no point for a teacher to try to bark at adults to say, “Hey, cheating is bad; don’t do it” at every class or every week.

Ashley had the same opinion as Elwood about how she and other students learned about cheating in terms of it being right or wrong. Ashley said,

> I think your behavior is already instilled in you. A lot of it comes from the way you were brought up. Not that anyone is brought up in a worse way, it’s just that what their parents or maybe their school emphasized. I think now those behaviors are so automatic, and it’s cheating is either right or wrong to you at this point. It would be hard for a college
teacher to really influence someone who doesn’t believe cheating is wrong to act with academic integrity.

Ashley thought that a person’s attitude toward cheating was fixed before starting college. She had a bleak outlook for those who were not brought up to think that cheating was wrong. Chris also thought that students came to college with their minds made up about cheating, but he focused on the punishment aspect of cheating. He said, “I think it’s already ingrained in our minds what can happen and what will happen if we get caught. So it doesn’t really matter what anybody says. We already have our opinion on it.”

The students seemed quite sure that their attitudes and beliefs about cheating were instilled in them before they got to college and that cheating was wrong and a big deal, but this conception was also based on their pre-college definitions, which were limited. Therefore, I was not surprised that many of the participants admitted that they had cheated during college (by their own definition or the university definition), even though they thought cheating was wrong; I will explore this point further in next chapter. Additionally, the students discussed certain contexts in which cheating was more or less of a big deal. Again, their pre-college thinking about cheating was quite simplistic and non-contextual, and many of the students contradicted their own general assertions about cheating when speaking about cheating in specific situations.

**Contextual attitudes toward cheating.** Students’ attitudes toward cheating may be influenced by the situation in which they find themselves. Many of the students were not as firm in their convictions about cheating as they thought they were when faced with a particular set of circumstances. Novali stated that for her, “academic cheating . . . is doing something wrong, but in a really major way, a really major way.” She also stated, “I have no respect for cheaters and get really angry when they make a grade the same as me and didn’t work for it.” Novali’s
general attitude about cheating was that it was wrong; she did not like cheating or cheaters; however, as quoted in the previous section, when discussing specific situations, she did not see cheating behaviors as wrong when there were time constraints or if they involved only a small portion of work. Mike also provided an example of a contextualized attitude toward cheating. He said, “I mean I would never copy off of someone on an exam, just because that to me is wrong, but homework, I feel is different.” Cheating was a big deal on big assignments, but on the work that students considered to be worth less, cheating was not as big a deal to Mike. Rahul also said that cheating on exams was a big deal but that cheating on “minor” quizzes or assignments did not “phase” him. Although most students did not realize they were being contradictory in their statements on how they thought about cheating, Alex recognized that the situation influenced him.

I think one of . . . the main things I guess in life is just to have integrity and especially when we talked about this subject [cheating], I mean I’m not going to say that I’ve never cheated, because I mean I think it comes, the situation sometimes comes, and you don’t realize it, you don’t plan, you don’t plan it to be, but then you end up doing it. . . . there are different levels like when you are doing an assignment or homework, and you can share some answers with a friend. . . . I’ve done some minor cheating, but I didn’t see cheating as a, like I guess it’s a big issue, especially when you start doing it, like after when you leave college and then you like your profession. . . . But at this stage or even before, like in high school, I really considered it minor, and not a big deal.

Alex realized that his attitude about cheating shifted in certain contexts, which then influenced his behavior. Alex thought that having integrity was important and that cheating in general was problematic, but various assignments and the collegiate setting influenced his thinking and, at
least temporarily, he did not see cheating as a big deal. Like Alex, other students who admitted to cheating also discussed specific situational contexts in which they viewed the behavior as appropriate. The shifting, situational attitudes and how they influenced actual behavior will be discussed in the following chapter.

**Perceptions of Peer Cheating**

The students’ shifting attitudes about cheating and ambivalence about peer cheating may have affected the extent to which they thought of cheating as a problem. Most students had witnessed or were aware of much cheating occurring at the university. David made this statement about his education classes.

I know people in Education who they sit down in class a week before a test and they scout out the people that they think they know what they’re doing, and then test day they position themselves in a way that they can just look at their Scantron.

David saw cheating occur on a regular basis in his classes. Laura also knew many people who cheated.

I know that a lot of my friends do work with each other outside of class, like if they have something that’s a take home exam or whatever and the teacher just says this is at home, well then people decide to do whatever they want when they’re at home. So, I just know a lot of people that call each other or talk about assignments and do share ideas or give someone input on a class that maybe they took last year.

Although some students knew of many people cheating, the students’ attitudes about cheating and perceptions of cheating as a problem were somewhat contradictory. The students thought cheating was wrong and a big deal because they had been told all their lives that cheating was bad. When discussing seeing their peers cheat, they said it was a problem, meaning that a large
number of students cheated, but when pushed further, many of the participants did not think the result of cheating was problematic. The students seemed to qualify their responses about the problem of cheating. Students seemed to offer me the answer that they had been trained to give – in general, cheating was against the rules; therefore, it was bad. But when discussing their peers’, friends’, or actual cases of cheating, they backed away from their declaration that cheating was bad.

Perhaps participants were confused about the problem of cheating because students did not often discuss the matter of cheating, positively or negatively. A few of the students gave examples of a friend disclosing cheating to them, overhearing peers making plans to cheat on an exam, or a few people saying that they succeeded in cheating, but the primary finding from my interviews was that students did not have substantive conversations with other students about cheating. Not only did students not discuss the concept or ethical issue of cheating, they rarely discussed whether they cheated. Bob said that people did not discuss cheating because “cheating is pretty much a taboo,” and Joseph said that students “don’t go out and broadcast it, because they don’t want to be called a cheater.” Lynn also mentioned the secretive nature of cheating:

I don’t talk about cheating, I mean it’s just like a, like a hush-hush place, you don’t do it, and well I don’t know, you don’t expect others, and you don’t want people to look at you differently, and so I don’t talk about really cheating with my friends. And I’m sure I’ve never heard anybody really talking about it.

Lynn’s point was that she and fellow students did not want to make it seem as if they cheated or have it known that they cheated, so they just did not discuss the subject. Lynn mentioned that the only time she had discussed cheating with her peers was in a business ethics class, but outside the class, she and fellow students did not talk about cheating “in the sense of, is it right or is it
wrong kind of thing?” Pat made a statement that encapsulated much of what the participants in my study said about student conversations about cheating.

I don’t think we do [talk about cheating]. I think it’s kind of like, those who do, it’s just an unwritten code, we know how to do it, we know who does it, the means to do it, how to get away with it, I don’t think anyone just comes out and just goes “Hey, how do you think we can cheat for this test?” Or “I’m really against cheating, you should be too.” I don’t think, at least in my experience, I don’t think anyone really has conversations like that with their friends.

Pat and the other students made it clear that they did not know how their peers thought about cheating or the actual extent of the cheating problem because the topic was just not discussed. However, as mentioned above, students occasionally overheard others planning to cheat, but this was not considered to be a conversation about the topic in general.

The students also did not know much about their closest friends’ thoughts about cheating. Many of the participants said that their friends varied in their attitudes toward cheating. Novali said, “I think some of them are perfectly okay with it, and I also think that some of them are like me, and they’re not.” Several students, including Alex, Mark C., and Mike, made similar comments indicating that some of their friends thought cheating was acceptable and others did not. Other students did not know how their friends thought about cheating, Azrael said, “There is no way I could know.” Bob, Joe, and Lily were guessing at their friends’ attitudes about cheating. Lily said, “We don’t really talk about it, but I think they all have pretty much the same values as I do.” Several students assumed their friends held the same attitudes and beliefs about cheating as they did but were uncertain how their friends actually felt about cheating. Discussing cheating, even with their closest friends, was rare for the participants in my study. In the end,
students were guessing at their peers’ feelings about cheating as few students discussed cheating with their friends.

**Students’ Perceptions of Faculty with regard to Cheating**

Even though students thought that their beliefs and attitudes about cheating were set before starting college and unchangeable once in college, they contradicted themselves by discussing the contextual nature of their attitudes and by discussing how their faculty members either reinforced or undermined the notion that cheating was a big deal through their classroom conversations and actions. As I talked with participants, I was aware of how much the students took their cues from faculty members about whether cheating was a serious issue. The students formed assumptions about how faculty members felt about cheating based on the ways in which faculty members talked about cheating and what efforts they put forth to curb cheating. The students then used these assumptions to inform their own contextualized notions of cheating.

**Classroom conversations about cheating.** The manner in which faculty members addressed cheating or academic integrity in the classroom influenced students’ attitudes about cheating for the particular class and on aggregate. When faculty members spoke at great length about cheating or repeatedly told students that they would watch for cheating, enforce the rules, and mete out punishments, the students said that they thought of cheating seriously for that class. However, the participants gave only scant examples of faculty who discussed cheating in depth. The majority of the students’ faculty members did not talk about the issue much beyond a cursory sentence or two on the first day of class or immediately before an exam or large assignment, and this lack of discussion gave students the impression that cheating was not a big deal for most of their professors and courses.
Faculty who spoke in-depth about cheating. When faculty members spoke about the issue of cheating and academic integrity in-depth or repeatedly in their classes, the students considered cheating to be a big deal and as an act not to be attempted in the particular professors’ courses. Sicilia received messages from several of her faculty members in multiple classes.

For all Business classes now, it is mandatory, I believe, that the professor at the beginning of class lecture us on the Academic Integrity Code. It is also a prerequisite of every exam that we take, now in the Business School, in the . . . Testing Center, before we take the exam, the Academic Integrity comes up, it shows us it, it says please don’t cheat, here’s why, this is what will happen to you, just don’t do it, it’s not the right thing to do. So, a lot of emphasis has been put on it lately. In my English classes, all of those classes, they say don’t cheat, don’t plagiarize, just don’t do it, it’s your own work, keep your work, it’s your work, don’t look off of someone else’s work, don’t copy someone else’s work. They stress it a lot. They don’t want it to happen. They just don’t want it at all.

Sicilia received messages in multiple classes not only about not cheating but about why cheating was not the right behavior for students. The messages were “stressed” regularly in both major and non-major classes. From these repeated and in-depth messages, she understood cheating to be a very serious issue and realized that her faculty members cared about academic integrity.

Sicilia was one of the few students with whom I spoke who gave examples of receiving multiple, comprehensive messages about cheating from faculty. Most of the students could only recount one or two instances of faculty speaking to them about cheating in more than a cursory fashion. Dave spoke about one professor who he thought “reinforced” the seriousness of cheating. Dave said that he recently had taken a course
where the teacher takes it extremely seriously, I’ve never had a teacher that forceful about cheating, and I think that also is a good deterrent, and she made us sign [the Honor Code] multiple times not just once, . . . so I thought that reinforced it I thought, so I think it’s a step in the right direction. . . . I think everybody has a professor that . . . really overstates how serious it is. And it is very serious. But I’ve had professors that don’t really talk about it too much, besides what they say on the day we receive our syllabus.

Dave had one faculty member who spoke about cheating and academic integrity regularly and included the honor code on all assignments. For Dave, the professor provided the “right direction” with helping students understand that cheating was a big deal and in curbing potential cheating behaviors. Dave knew that for this particular professor and course that cheating was a serious matter, but in his other courses, the issue was not treated with the same level of importance.

Adelaide also had a faculty member who reinforced her attitude that cheating was wrong. She shared an example of an English faculty member who spoke with the students about the importance of academic integrity and of not plagiarizing.

My English teacher said “It’s not fair for you to copy someone else’s work, and it’s not fair for them, and it’s not fair for you because you, it’s not like you’re doing anything. You’re not really doing anything. You shouldn’t take their work.” . . . I know not to plagiarize, so when she said that, I’m like “yeah, I agree with you.” I want to write my own material, because I can do it. I know how to write. So yeah, it affected me a little bit. But it just re-affirmed my ideas about plagiarism.

Adelaide’s English teacher took the time to discuss why plagiarism was unfair and detrimental to academic writing. In doing so, she strengthened Adelaide’s notion that plagiarism was wrong
and provided her with the rationale for why it was wrong. At the same time, Adelaide gained confidence in her own ability to use original ideas in her writing rather than rely on others’ work.

Margaret, Jenna, and Katie B. talked about a faculty member who provided specific examples of cheating and spoke about the consequences of cheating.

Margaret: I had one Ed. Pysch teacher that [sic] would [give] examples of it. Just like what she encountered, and how crazy they were, and how stupid she thought it was, but that was pretty much the only one [class] where you got an actual example of things [considered to be cheating], and you’re like, “Okay, so she knows to do this.”

Katie B.: Yes. We probably had the same Ed. Pysch teacher who talked about it a lot . . .

Jenna: Oh, yes. It was so intense . . .

Katie B: But, she was really intense. She would tell you, she’s the only one that really went over it. She would tell you all of the things that most people don’t think are cheating but are. It was very specific.

This professor had an influence on the students in her class. She discussed with students specific examples of what cheating was, how she felt about cheating, and gave the impression that she would enforce the rules regarding cheating. The students said that this professor was one of very few faculty members who spoke at length about cheating. The women knew she took cheating very seriously, and consequently, in her class, the students also took cheating very seriously.

For participants, cheating was a big deal in the context of the particular course in which the faculty member spoke of it as a serious issue. The students knew that some of their faculty members were concerned about cheating or wanted to ensure that cheating did not occur in their classes because they took the time to speak about the topic both on the first day of class and throughout the semester. The messages delivered by faculty members reinforced the students’ attitude that cheating was wrong and portrayed cheating as problematic. However, the majority of the students could only provide one example of a professor who took the time to address the
issue of cheating with the class; most of the students’ experiences were with faculty members who spent very little time talking about cheating.

**Minimal discussion of cheating.** When faculty members spent little to no time speaking to their classes about cheating, the students typically assumed that cheating was not a big deal in that class or to the particular faculty member. Chase and other students thought that the professors in their major classes did not speak much about cheating because they assumed that the students had learned about the issue in previous classes, but by not talking about it, students did not take the issue seriously. Chase said that faculty members talked about cheating just during syllabus week, I think, because you hear the same spiel over and over again. They’ll just talk about, just for our Education classes, they’ll talk about their class in general, and then the stuff they’re forced to put in the syllabus by the university often gets skipped, “the disability statement, da-ti-da, academic integrity, da-ti-da”; they won't say it. But, it’s in the syllabus. So, when they do that, it kind of makes it feel like it’s not as important as the rest of it.

In Chase’s experience, many faculty members skipped over or rushed through the mandatory statement about academic integrity that appeared in the syllabus, partly because they thought the students already knew the information. Most students stated that the only time their faculty members mentioned academic integrity was on the first day of class while going through the syllabus, but many students had the same experience as Chase did with the topic getting short shrift, even in courses that they took during their first year of school. Robert said, “I think in my experiences as for talking about academic integrity in my gen ed classes there hasn’t really been much mention of academic integrity.” Frank said his faculty discussed cheating at the
beginning of your class, like your first day. If they’re going over the class syllabus, they always mention it. Usually, they don’t actually describe it, they just mention it. They say, “everybody knows what academic integrity is and that you have to keep it.”

When professors rushed through information about cheating, students got the sense that their professors only brought up the subject because they had to include it as a matter of policy. Jenna said, “I feel like now too they breeze over it, like okay, ‘You’re grading, alright, academic integrity, you can read that.’ So it’s like a real quick pass over to say they covered it.” Jenna got the impression from her professors that they discussed academic integrity only because they had to do so not because they wanted to do so.

Alex had the same experience with most of his faculty members discussing cheating on the first day of class and perhaps also immediately before an exam. Alex said,

on the first day, like when you come in and they read the syllabus, then most of them [professors] just read the Academic Integrity . . . Policy part, and they remind you during exams, . . . some remind you of the consequences, and but, I mean, but no, but it’s still, I don’t think it’s a big deal, like it’s not, it’s not like a big subject.

Alex thought that by faculty members not making cheating a subject that they spoke about in-depth that cheating was not a big deal. Mark C. also thought that if professors did not bring up the topic of cheating then it was unimportant, but he also took this to mean that the professor did not care about cheating. Mark C. said,

They don’t touch on it, and it’s obviously not important. They don’t want you to do it, but no one cares enough about it. They’re also doing their own thing. . . . It’s kind of just like you throw the policy out there and let them know it’s not okay.
The students’ primary experiences with discussions about cheating in the classroom were policy-based or reminders not to cheat but were not substantive or did not include a conversation about what cheating was or why it was bad.

Pre-exam discussion of cheating. As Alex mentioned, some faculty members did discuss cheating after the first day of class in order to remind students not to cheat immediately before an exam or major paper. However, the manner in which these reminders took place served to reinforce the notion that cheating was only an exam- or paper-based behavior. Novali spoke about how most of her professors mentioned cheating “at least during the first class, the introduction period, and then typically before something big. Usually before something big, not so much every assignment, just the big stuff, papers, major papers, final projects, final papers, final exams, bigger stuff.” Novali’s faculty members linked cheating to major assignments thereby leaving students without cues as to what might be cheating on lesser assignments or the thought that cheating behaviors were acceptable on minor assignments. Christine made an observation that highlighted what types of behaviors she thought were cheating and how she thought her faculty also defined cheating. Christine said that her teachers talked about cheating usually, right before a paper; they’re like, ‘You need to cite your sources and that will be academic integrity if you don’t.’ So, I usually find it before papers. But, then they always say ‘don’t look off of other person’s paper right before the test’. So, usually right before something that you’re able to cheat on.

Christine’s statement that faculty mention cheating “right before something you’re able to cheat on” linked cheating to papers and exams. Christine’s faculty did not discuss cheating for other types of assignments, so Christine’s limited notion of cheating was reinforced by how and when
her professors talked about the topic. Molly explained why she thought that she and her peers had a limited definition of cheating.

I think a lot of people, because [cheating behaviors are] not cited specifically by faculty, [students] just sort of don’t act like it even fits into [the definition], because they’re like, “Oh, well they didn’t specifically say blah, blah, blah.” I think plagiarizing from other big-time writers, like that sort of thing from a textbook or from stuff like that, is more focused on, and that’s really what people talk about the most. And I think they talk about cheating on exams and stuff, too. I think that’s the one that they always talk about.

Students tended to focus on the specific contexts for the behaviors that faculty mentioned and did not apply those behaviors to other contexts when thinking about what was cheating. When faculty members spoke about cheating immediately prior to an exam or paper and at no other time, students did not think that cheating on other assignments was a big deal.

As participants told me how faculty members talked about cheating prior to major exams or papers, the behaviors that were most prominent were similar to their K-12 understanding of cheating behaviors. Joe gave the example of his faculty members “before exams they might say, ‘Cell phones must be off, hats on backwards’ so that you can’t have something sitting up on you brim.” Mark A. also said that

I don’t think [cheating is] really talked about. Like syllabus week, some will be like, “Academic integrity, you’ve all heard it before, no cheating, don’t do this, that,” and then it’s over, and some before every exam they’re like, “Don’t do this, stay in your chairs, I can’t answer questions,” stuff like that.

Mark A. and Joe provided examples of their faculty members telling students not to do specific behaviors that some might consider to be the common methods of cheating (e.g., having answers
in the brim of one’s hat or using a cell phone to store or look up answers), but as Mark A. said, there was no conversation about cheating. Students were passive recipients of a professor’s orders and were expected to know or understand the rules and the reasoning behind the rules. The examples the participants gave were focused on tests and papers, reinforcing their definitions of cheating, and no students mentioned that faculty reminded them not to cheat before homework assignments.

Professors communicated to their students that academic integrity was not an important issue through their lack of emphasis on it in the classroom. Students perceived that faculty members only spoke about the issue because they had to as a matter of policy. The language that the students used when recounting how their professors discussed cheating was “blah, blah, blah” or “da-ti-da, da-ti-da”; the words did not register with the students, and the students felt that the topic was “breezed” through during the first day of class. Additionally, professors told students that they should already know the information. However, the students I spoke with explained that they did not fully know what cheating was or its nuances and did not learn this information in their first-year courses. I doubt that many students would willingly raise their hand on the first day of class and tell their professors that they did not know what academic integrity or cheating were, specifically, and ask the faculty members to discuss the issue more fully. The lack of discussion reinforced students’ limited, exam- and paper-based understanding of cheating, led them to think that the issue was not important, and portrayed cheating as a subject that faculty only discussed because they felt compelled or forced to do so.

**Student Perceptions of Faculty Members’ Feelings about Cheating**

When I asked students how they thought their faculty members felt or thought about cheating, most of the students responded in one of four manners. First, the students said that they
did not know how their faculty members felt because their professors did not talk about cheating beyond mentioning the university policy. Second, students made assumptions that faculty members did not care about cheating if they did not discuss cheating. Third, some students said that stressing the consequences of cheating conveyed that faculty cared about cheating. Fourth, students said that they knew how their faculty felt by what actions they took to prevent cheating.

**Faculty feelings unknown.** The participants stated that for those faculty who discussed cheating or academic integrity with their students, the focus was on policy, a few behaviors not to do, and some mention of consequences. The students told me that, other than the few examples given above, they did not know how faculty members felt about cheating because their professors did not talk about cheating in a personalized manner. Mark C. expressed that

> no one really makes a big deal of the cheating. . . . I don’t know. . . . But they always kind of breeze over it if they even talk about it. . . . It’s important, I guess, to what degree the teacher emphasizes the consequences of cheating.

Although Mark C. was not sure how his professors felt about cheating, he thought that for those who discussed the consequences of cheating, academic integrity was more important than for those who did not, and a discussion of consequences would make students take the issue more seriously, too. With regard to knowing how his professors felt about cheating, Bob said,

> It’s hard to say, being that they always, they always just copy and paste the same academic integrity thing from class to class. I don’t really know a lot of my professors and TAs on a personal basis to really be able to say whether they will be completely against cheating. . . . they never really give their own personal opinions of cheating. It’s mostly just a [university] academic standard.
Bob has had impersonal relationships with his faculty members and has not had a professor address the issue of cheating on a personal level. Jack S. also mentioned that the way his professors discussed cheating gave him no indication of their personal feelings on the subject.

I don’t really know exactly what my professors constitute as being cheat[ing], because they might talk about or put it in their syllabus “do not do this; this is considered cheating per policy 1AA of the student handbook.” They don’t specifically go through each instance or spend a whole lecture talking about what cheating is. They kind of expect you to have an idea of what it is. . . . It’s more implied. . . . They expect you to sort of have an idea. . . . But most professors probably have a similar stance, I think on it. I would say, but I don’t know, because they don’t really spend a lot of time talking about it.

Jack S. reiterated that his faculty members have provided very little information about cheating. He assumed that teachers had a “similar stance” on cheating, but he did not know for certain how they felt about cheating. Many students said that they were guessing at or making assumptions about how their professors felt about cheating. Novali assumed that her faculty did not like cheating because that is how faculty members should feel.

I do not know how they feel for a fact, because I’ve never been in a class where someone has been caught, and they’ve expressed their dismay. So no, I guess I can’t say that for real, and not to mention those are actually kind of the things that teachers don’t say. Teachers don’t always share their personal thoughts. . . . So it’s only speculating, but I can’t imagine that they would be okay with cheating.

Novali’s assumptions about her professors’ feelings were based on the idea of what teachers should care about given their profession. Other students, including Lily and Chase, also assumed
that their faculty members cared about cheating simply because, as teachers, they should care about cheating.

**Assumed faculty did not care.** Although some students made the assumption that faculty members cared about cheating even if they did not say anything about the topic, other students made the opposite assumption Mark A. said, that with regard to how his teachers felt about cheating,

You can tell [they care], like even the way they’ll say like ‘absolut[ly] no cheating,’ or and like on the syllabus, they’ll go through it, like these are consequences, and some won’t. Some won’t even talk about it. They’re like, ‘Here’s all the fine print if you want to know it, read it, do it.”

Mark A. thought that the faculty members who spent time discussing cheating, telling students not to cheat, and highlighting the consequences of cheating cared about the issue while he assumed that the professors who did not discuss the topic did not care about cheating. Rahul, Katie B., and Jenna based their perceptions of whether faculty cared about cheating on the types of assignments that they gave. Jenna and Katie B. discussed a class in which they had on-line exams.

Katie B.: I think it’s just easy to do, especially with all of the on-line quizzes. Some teachers don’t really care, but usually they do. But, with everything being on-line, it’s so easy.

Jenna: They’re used to it. Or just I think the idea of giving kids that option like here you have way more time than you need to take this test. He would give two and a half hours to take [it] . . . and he would just say, alright, do it, you have a huge block of time, and he just really didn’t seem to [care].

Katie B.: And, I think if they don’t seem to care as much, if they say, “Oh don’t do it,” you can justify it easier, like they don’t really care.

Katie B. and Jenna perceived that their faculty member did not care about cheating even though he told students not to cheat. They thought that the single statement was negated by the fact that
he gave them on-line quizzes, which were easy cheat on. They thought that if their professor was actually serious about not wanting student to cheat he would have been more emphatic in his language and given an in-class quiz. Rahul also thought that a dearth of messages against cheating coupled with on-line or small assignments meant that faculty did not care about cheating.

I feel like most, except for a few of the sticklers, feel that... on a quiz or homework, ... you’re going to ask people to work with you or look in the book while you’re taking it, that’s fine as long as you’re learning the material. ... I don’t feel they are worried about that [working together on quizzes or homework]. If they were worried about that, I certainly don’t think they’d have the on-line quizzes or on-line homework.

Katie B., Jenna, and Rahul made assumptions about their professors’ feelings about cheating due to a lack of discussion about the topic and whether the types of assignments given were easy to cheat on. For them, an assignment that lent itself to cheating meant that the teacher did not care if students cheated, at least for that particular assignment.

Mike also thought that some of his faculty members did not care about cheating, and he thought the reason for this was because they did not care about teaching in general. Mike said,

I think certain faculty honestly don’t care. I feel like they really don’t care about teaching in the first place. It’s just a nuisance for them. ... So they just want to come in, show some material, leave, give an exam, and then that’s it. They don’t really care if you cheat. Other ones I’d say are more serious about teaching and want you to do well, so they would be more serious [about cheating].
If the students perceived that their professors did not prepare for class, the assumption was that the professors did not care about teaching in general or if students cheated. Mark A. also thought that his professors’ interest in teaching related to how they felt about cheating. Mark A. stated,

There’s some professors that, I bet you, could care less if somebody was cheating in their class, because some of them are just here to do their research. . . . So they teach a class, they have to do it to get it done. I know there’s some that take it seriously, but I also think there’s some, I think there’s a spectrum. Some people that just don’t care; they care, but they aren’t going to be proactive about it.

Mark A. extended his comments above to include whether he perceived faculty members cared about teaching into his assumptions about faculty feelings on cheating. Mark A. also added a caveat about professors being “proactive” about preventing cheating as sign of caring about cheating when discussion was absent. Like Mark A., most of the students with whom I spoke had few examples of their faculty conversing with them about how they personally felt about the issue of academic dishonesty, so students made assumptions about whether faculty cared by how much emphasis they put on trying to stop cheating.

**Stressing consequences indicates caring.** Many of the students discussed faculty caring about cheating with regard to how vehemently their professors stressed the consequences of cheating. Novali explained that some of her faculty

- talk about it like it’s the absolute worst thing you could do; if you get caught cheating in any way, shape, or form, papers, exams, you’re going to get kicked out of the college; it’s not worth it; and all of this thunder and lightning; and “I’ve seen students cheat before; I know exactly what to look for; I know what kind of websites you get these papers off of” and a lot of “I’m watching you,” kind of big brother.
For Novali, when her professors stressed punishments and enforcement, she thought that they cared more about cheating than professors who did not place the same stress on these issues. Although students gave few examples of scare-tactic declarations about cheating, when faculty members made these types of pronouncements in their classes, students tended to think that they cared about students cheating. For many of the students, caring about cheating and attempting to prevent cheating were one in the same. Jane said that she could tell if faculty cared about cheating based on how emphatically they stressed consequences and prevention efforts.

I think some teachers make it really clear. . . . Our teacher was like, “You cannot cheat.” She’s like, “All of the TAs and I are watching you, and if we catch you, you’re getting a zero, and I don’t care.” But, then I’ve had a class in the same exact room with the same number of students for another Gen. Ed., and the teacher was like, “Eyes on your own paper.” So, I think based on how they approach it, you can gauge if it’s really, I guess you can gauge their response and relate that to how much they care about it. Jane’s two different experiences with how professors addressed cheating made her think that those who said they would try to stop it cared more than those who did not say much in a testing situation. John also experienced a faculty member who told students he would watch for cheating and ensure punishment for anyone caught cheating. John proctored for the professor who doesn’t like [cheating]. He has this thing called multiple exams that he has to try to screw the students up. . . . And he always tells them, “No, there’s no cheating. If I ever catch one of you every semester, you’re going to be kicked out of school,” like all these things, he’s pretty hard on cheating, which is cool, and I respect that.

John had a personal relationship with his professor, so he knew that his professor did not like cheating, but the professor relayed these feelings to the students in his courses by emphasizing
the extreme punishment that could occur if students cheated and telling them about the multiple
tests as a prevention measure that he used. Most of the examples students gave were exam-
related; however, Adelaide provided a plagiarism-related example. She said that her
English teacher, she’s like “I can take your paper if I feel like it’s been plagiarized, and
people can look on internet sites and see stuff.” I’m not sure if that’s just a threat. It
probably isn’t, they probably have stuff here that can do that, but yeah they care about
cheating.

By telling students she would or could check their papers for plagiarism, Adelaide’s professor
conveyed that she cared about cheating. Adelaide referred to this as a threat; the threat of
actively trying to prevent or catch cheating was seen by the students as an indication that their
faculty members cared about cheating. Lily also thought that teachers who stressed punishment
cared more than those who did not. She said that she could tell how her faculty members felt
just by their tone. They’ll straight out say they take it very seriously. They’ll bold or red-
face print their cheating policies in their syllabi. If you’re in a class where a teacher takes
it really seriously and there are a lot of TAs, they’ll maybe have 20 TAs for a three-
hundred person class. And so you feel you constantly have someone standing over your
shoulder. So I guess the verbal and the nonverbal things that they do. . . . But a lot of
them say that they feel very strongly about it and they will emphasize the punishment
component because I think they recognize that’s the most black and white thing that will
prevent people from cheating. They will have a lot of TAs in the classroom proctoring
exams. You feel like they are on top of you. They’ll say it, and they will show you and
stuff like that.
Lily thought that professors stressed punishment because students responded to a fear of getting caught. Discussing punishment, stating they “feel strongly” about cheating, and coupling their words with actions to back up their statements gave Lily the impression that faculty cared about cheating. For Lily, both the words and the actions were a factor in determining the extent to which a professor cared about cheating. Mark C. thought that a professor’s words mattered in conveying to students that they cared about cheating but that what a professor said had to be shown through action for students to think that faculty truly cared about cheating. Mark C. explained his point,

It’s important, I guess, to what degree the teacher emphasizes the consequences of cheating. If they let them know that they’re actually going to enforce that and keep a watchful eye on it, but there’s a difference between enforcing and keeping a watchful eye. “If I catch you you’re screwed,” but if you’ve got a teacher that says “I’m going to look for it,” you can have a lot of different attitudes and probably a lot of cheating.

Mark C. made a distinction between professors telling students they would look for cheating and actually enforcing a punishment if students were caught cheating. Mark C. implied that the latter would mean that faculty cared more about cheating. The students who provided examples of how professors stressing punishment conveyed to them how faculty felt about cheating were few compared to those who stated that they were unsure how their professors felt about the issue, and the examples given by the students who discussed stressing punishments were related to the actions that faculty members said they would take rather than personal feelings that faculty members expressed. When the students did not know how faculty felt about cheating from what faculty said to them, they made assumptions or depended, instead, on what their faculty said they would do or actually did in order to ascertain their feelings.
Faculty actions with regard to cheating. Although the manner in which faculty members discussed cheating gave students cues as to their feeling about cheating, faculty members’ actions carried much more weight in communicating to students how faculty felt about cheating. In fact, I was surprised that as I asked the question about how the participants thought their professors felt about cheating, the students’ responses tended to focus on what faculty members did or did not do rather than what they said or did not say in order to determine if a professor “cared” about cheating. The participants in my study thought that professors who noticeably tried to prevent cheating or watch for cheating cared if students cheated and that the professors who did not participate in any prevention-aimed actions did not care if students cheated.

For Jane, the lengths professors took in “controlling the environment” gave her an indication of their level of caring about cheating. She said,

I think also going back to controlling the environment. If you don’t ask kids to separate their seats or if you can spread your desks out, you’re not even making the effort to try and make it fair. . . . [In] my Econ Class, it was a teacher, a professor and a TA, and they had like five other TAs that came in on test days just to stand in the aisles in the [large classroom], and that shows you that it matters to them, and they’re making a conscious effort to prevent it. So, I think that’s a big thing.

Jane described an environment in which students were watched and separated with the aim to prevent cheating as conveying that a professor cared about cheating. She then made the assumption that if professors did not make these efforts that they did not care if students cheated. Jenna also thought that in addition to faculty saying that they care about cheating, that their actions showed if they cared or not. Like Jane, Jenna discussed what faculty did during a test.
Like in testing environments, just how they go about it. Some teachers bring in 20 TAs, and they watch you, and you’re like, “Oh, this is serious,” where others are just sitting at the desk reading a book. I think their actions in that sense show how they feel about it or the punishments that they think cheating deserves.

Jenna thought that if faculty members did not actively watch students during an exam that they did not care much about student cheating. Other participants also made this same assumption.

Mike explained how he determined if professors cared about cheating.

I’ve never, I don’t think I’ve ever had a professor right before an exam discuss cheating, but the fact that they will have you sit at opposite, sit a certain distance, and make multiple copies, . . . I mean they try hard to prevent cheating. And the fact that they’re walking around constantly monitoring everyone, walking through the aisles. I mean certain professors will just sit there and read a book or use their computer or something, but there’s certain people who walk through the aisles the entire time and that you can tell, I mean they really care about cheating.

Again, the act of continually watching students during an exam was a cue to students that the professor cared about cheating, while reading at the front of the room conveyed a lack of caring.

Alex and Elwood also spoke of watching versus not watching as an indication of caring about cheating. Time and again, when I asked students how they thought their faculty members felt about cheating, the students discussed actions taken to prevent cheating in exam settings communicating whether a professor cared if students cheated. Many of the participants needed their faculty members to actively watch for cheating and try to prevent it in order for them to assume teachers cared. Jerry talked about faculty watching students during exams, but he also discussed how professors prepared their exams or assignments.
Other professors, I mean you can just see them like when they hand out exams, they’re on their laptops or they’re reading the newspaper, or like the professors that don’t change their study guides or their exams from semester to semester. I mean that shows me that they don’t really care, because if they cared, they would take the time to change the exams and to change the study guides.

Jerry thought that if professors did not change exams then students could get access to old exams and use those to cheat; he saw this as a lack of caring about cheating. Students thought that if professors did not make it difficult or nearly impossible for students to cheat, that they did not care about cheating. Several students also discussed using multiple tests, numbering tests, spacing seats apart from one another, and students entering and exiting through different doors as cues that faculty members took the issue of cheating seriously.

Nearly all of the examples that students gave about faculty actions conveying feelings about cheating were exam-based and took place primarily in a physical classroom setting. The fact that strong words or action with regard to cheating took place in the exam context reinforced the notion that cheating was an exam-based behavior. Based on how faculty acted in the classroom, students made assumptions about how much their professors cared about cheating because discussion prior to an exam was one the only instances of faculty addressing the issue. By students forming their assumptions of faculty feelings about cheating based on what faculty members physically did, there were few ways that faculty could convey feelings about cheating for non-exam assignments (e.g., papers, take-home work, or group work). For example, Jenna had a professor who asked students not to cheat on an on-line quiz but stated that he could not prevent the behavior. Jenna gave this example,
It’s more of a sense, but I know like one of my teachers with the on-line quizzes, he’s like, “Guys please don’t work together, but there’s nothing I can do; it’s on you guys.” And then it kind of gives everyone in the class the feeling, “Okay, if he’s really not going through any extra lengths to look at it [the information about when and where students completed the on-line quiz], then he must not care.”

The professor conveyed to the class that he was not going to take any measures to prevent cheating, so, even though he asked them not to cheat, the students felt that he did not truly care. Students have been trained through the majority of their experiences that caring about cheating manifests in professors actively trying to prevent cheating during exams. Students have had few other experiences to contradict this, and the faculty members who regularly discussed cheating and expressed personal concern about the topic were seen as abnormal and did not change the notion that action equates to caring. In situations like the one Jenna described and for students who have classes that are not exam-based, students only had professors’ discussions of the topic to use as a basis for determining if they cared about cheating. If professors engaged in little discussion, or if the discussion was lackluster with no action around the issue, students were apt to assume that their faculty members did not care about cheating.

Additionally, when most of their faculty members emphasized cheating only at the time of an exam, students made assumptions about what behaviors constituted cheating. The students’ definitions of cheating were reinforced, and it made sense that students would then think that cheating behaviors on other types of assignments were not a big deal; they saw no indication of or emphasis on trying to prevent those behaviors from occurring because the assignments were completed outside the classroom. Students’ attitudes about cheating as being a big deal or a wrong behavior were reinforced in a classroom where the professor spent much time talking
about cheating or actively trying to prevent cheating. However, those same attitudes were undermined and shifted from thinking of cheating as unacceptable to thinking of cheating as acceptable if faculty members did not convey to students either that cheating was a big deal or that they themselves cared if students cheated. Some students seemingly added the caveat to their attitude that “cheating is a big deal if my professor makes it a big deal.”
CHAPTER FIVE
INFLUENCES ON STUDENTS’ DECISIONS TO CHEAT OR NOT TO CHEAT

As discussed in the previous chapter, students’ attitudes about cheating may change depending on the context. However, not all students cheat in a context that promotes pro-cheating attitudes. In my study, I explored two primary questions with students: what influenced their decisions about whether to cheat or not cheat and how the classroom context affected their decision-making. Of my 42 participants, 21 students admitted to cheating, either by their own definition or the University definition, and 14 of these students participated in individual interviews. Nine students who said that they had not cheated in college also participated in individual interviews with me.

For students who stated they had never cheated in college, their personal attitudes about cheating coupled with anti-cheating non-contextual and contextual influences guided their decision-making. Conversely, the students who had cheated expressed that myriad contextual factors influenced their decisions to cheat and made cheating acceptable even though they maintained an attitude that cheating was wrong or bad. In this section, I present a Theory of Contextual Influences on Students’ Decision-Making about Cheating (see Figure 1). I first will discuss the non-contextual influences on students’ decisions not to cheat. I will then discuss the contextual influences on students’ decision-making about cheating and how a particular context serves to override students’ general attitude that cheating is wrong, making cheating acceptable within that context.

As I analyzed the data from the group interviews, I developed themes regarding what factors the participants perceived as influencing students’ decisions to cheat or not cheat. The students’ perceptions were based on their own experiences, knowledge of others’ experiences, and, to some degree, assumptions about their peers. The themes emerging from the group
interviews guided the questions that I asked in my individual interviews. Based on the data from the 23 individual interviews, I crafted the Theory of Contextual Influences on Students’ Decision-Making about Cheating (Figure 1 below). When students discussed why they did not cheat or situations in which they could have cheated but chose not to, they spoke about their academic self-efficacy, the value of education, how strongly they adhered to societal or group norms, and their own sense of personal character and responsibility. Within the context of a particular classroom, the students discussed how prevention measures and fear of consequences, the relationship with their faculty members, the relationship to the material or subject, and the type of assignment influenced their decisions not to cheat. For students who admitted to cheating, contextual classroom-based factors influenced their decisions. The students spoke of the size and type of class, prevention measures, perceptions of faculty members’ demeanor and teaching, relationship with faculty members, relevance or understanding of the material or subject, type of assignment, and peer behavior and trust in a particular course. The students who cheated also discussed how grade pressure, time constraints and personal life circumstances, and their own definition of cheating influenced their decisions to cheat.
As depicted in the model, students come to college with a set of experiences and knowledge pertaining to academic integrity and cheating as well as a personal attitude toward cheating, which influences their decisions about cheating. As discussed in the previous chapter, most students held the attitude that cheating was a behavior that was bad or wrong. Additionally, students subscribed to one or more non-contextual factors that influenced their decisions. However, when students entered the context of a particular classroom or personal life situation, the non-contextual anti-cheating influences were either supported or weakened resulting in a contextualized attitude toward cheating. The contextualized attitude, then, informed the decision to cheat or not to cheat. Throughout the sections to follow, I will present the students’ discussion of how the various non-contextual and contextual factors influenced their decisions about cheating and use sociological deviance theories as a lens through which to interpret the data,
where appropriate. Students were influenced by the non-contextual factors in all situations; however, in particular contexts, the non-contextual influences were challenged or overridden by contextual influences. In particular contexts, students justified shifting their general attitude toward cheating to a pro-cheating attitude that fit the context. No two students voiced the same story; some students discussed a multifaceted set of influences while others discussed very few, yet powerful, influences on their decisions. However, similarities existed across the data. I present each of the influences separately for the sake of clarity, and at the end of the chapter, I will discuss the intersection of influences to demonstrate the complexity of the context in which students made decisions about cheating.

**Non-Contextual Influences on Students’ Decisions about Cheating**

As discussed in the previous chapter, most of the students in my study thought cheating was a “big deal” and that it was wrong to cheat, which was based primarily on their pre-college experiences and understanding of cheating. However, for many students, this anti-cheating attitude was not always sufficient to keep them from cheating. In the college setting, students indicated that several factors acted in conjunction with their general attitude about cheating and contributed to their decisions not to cheat. I spoke with 23 students who participated in individual interviews about why they personally did not cheat. Additionally, some of the students who participated in the group interviews also offered personal information about why they did not cheat. Four non-contextual categories emerged from my data referring to influences on the students outside the specific context at which time the cheating occurred. The four categories are: (1) academic self-efficacy, (2) value of education, (3) adherence to societal or group norms, and (4) personal character and responsibility. The data presented in the following section pertains
to the non-contextual, anti-cheating influences that students took into consideration when making a decision about cheating.

**Academic Self-Efficacy**

Zajacova, Lynch, and Espenshade (2005) define academic self-efficacy as how confident or comfortable students feel about their own abilities to do well in college and how well their abilities match with their expectations of themselves. As I spoke with students about why they did not cheat, many of the students explained that they did not cheat because they did not need to cheat. The students told me that they were confident enough in their own abilities to do well in their classes or earn the grades they wanted to earn without resorting to cheating. Students felt that they could succeed in college based on their own merits and hard work. Bob said,

> If you really want to cheat, there’s always an opportunity. . . . I’ve never cheated, because I don’t feel the need to cheat. I’m okay with [it] if I didn’t study enough, and I get a bad grade, well then that’s what I deserved, and I just need to do better next time or try harder.

Bob was confident in his own abilities to do well in his classes, and when he did not do well, he said that he was certain that he could achieve higher grades in the future if he studied more. Earning a grade less than what he wanted was not a reflection on his abilities; rather, the grade was a reflection on how hard he had worked. Lily also was confident that she had the academic abilities to earn the grades she wanted to earn without cheating. She said,

> I know that I can prepare, and so I’m not really going to take the easy way. It’s almost a test to yourself to see if you can do it on your own. . . . But if you can do it yourself why get help?
Lily wanted to do her own work and believed that she was capable of doing her own work, and her confidence in her abilities influenced her decision not to cheat. John, who admitted to cheating in specific situations, gave an example of why he typically did not cheat.

I feel like it’s more, for me, a self-concept thing, like I don’t want to think that I had to cheat because I feel like I could know the material enough or even if I don’t that I can do enough on the next one that I shouldn’t have to [cheat]. . . . I’d like to think that I’m better than [feeling the need to cheat] and that I don’t need to do that in order to get a decent grade.

John usually was quite confident that he had learned material well enough to earn a decent grade and wanted his grades to be the product of his own work.

Several students also discussed that they had more trust in their own abilities than the abilities of their peers. Jack A., who also admitted to two instances of cheating, said that she typically did not cheat “because I trusted myself a lot more than the other people. . . . I just never really found it all that necessary.” Like Jack A., Lindsay trusted in her own abilities. She said, “I just don’t feel the need to cheat. I figure I probably know as much if not more than the person sitting next to me.” Mike, Jerry, and Sicilia also said that they had confidence in their own abilities and understanding of material over that of their peers. Sicilia thought that she knew as much as or more than her peers so she had no need to cheat. Cheating would be of little help to the students who had high academic self-efficacy.

In addition to having confidence in one’s own abilities, some of students thought that their hard work and self-assurance in their academic work was rewarding and cheating would take away from their knowledge that they did well of their own accord. Elizabeth said,
I don’t really like to cheat because I’m a hardworking person, and I actually get excited for exams. . . . I like to see what I’ve learned and be assessed on it. . . . My grades give me self-confidence knowing that I’ve done so well. When you cheat, you don’t have that same self-confidence.

For Elizabeth, cheating would take away from her self-confidence because she would not know if her grades were based on her own abilities or the abilities of others. Rahul, Mike, and Jenna also discussed that having their grades reflect their actual knowledge and efforts was important to their level of academic confidence. Pat thought that his confidence in himself carried beyond his grades. He said, “If I know if I can do good [sic] in school, I know I can do good [sic] at a job, that I do my own work not other people’s work.” Pat’s academic self-efficacy extended to his confidence in his abilities to work in his chosen profession. Pat, and the other students, knew that they were capable of achieving high grades and learning and understanding class material, and their confidence in themselves influenced their decisions not to cheat.

Cheating on academic work would have diminished students’ confidence and introduced doubts about their abilities, thus undermining their academic self-efficacy. As students discussed their academic self-efficacy, they used language that conveyed ownership over their work and abilities. If the students received poor grades, those grades were the result of their own lack of preparation rather than the fault of an external source as an obstacle to their success. Students expressed confidence that through hard work their grades would improve.

Value of Education

When students discussed their confidence in their own academic abilities, they often talked about how much they valued education, as Elizabeth did above. As I spoke with participants about what influenced their decisions not to cheat, many of them brought up the
value of education because they were paying for college, they thought they needed their education for the future careers, or they enjoyed learning. Some students did not want to cheat themselves out of their education by participating in academic cheating behaviors. Katie B. said, “I want to learn. . . . I’m paying for all of my college so, . . . I go to classes, I don’t skip my classes, I want to get as much out of it as I can.” Katie B. wanted to learn in her classes, and she thought that cheating would take away from the purpose of college, which was to learn. Mike, who admitted to cheating based on the institutional definition, also discussed the purpose of a college education as an influence on him not to cheat regularly (based on his own definition). He said,

The point of going to college . . . [is] to get an education. So if you’re just going to cheat your way through it, then I mean you get a degree, but at the same time, you might not know anything when you get out, and that’s probably not a good thing.

For Mike, learning was important, and he thought that cheating would diminish his level of knowledge. Sarah also discussed wanting to learn in school saying, “It’s better if you do your own work and you learn from it than to have someone write your paper, do the test for you, because otherwise what’s the point of going to school if you’re not learning.” Chris, Jack S., and Chase also thought that a college education was valuable and, while in college, they should learn rather than cheat.

Jerry spoke of the value of learning and how much he liked learning as an influence on his decisions not to cheat in most situations. “I enjoy learning, like I want to know as much as I can pretty much about everything.” For some students, cheating would take away from the enjoyment of learning and take away the actual learning. Sicilia stated, “I choose not to cheat just
because I like to learn.” Sicilia valued learning and realized that cheating would diminish her capacity to learn. Jenna said:

I have this idea that everything I learn in class, whatever it is, will somehow help me, and I’ll use it some other time, and I just want to learn a lot. So, I think that idea helps; and pride in your own work; and if you think that you’re capable of doing it, it feels better when you just did it on your own.

Jenna truly loved learning and did not want to cheat herself out of knowledge that she would use throughout her life. Margaret said that one of the reasons she did not to cheat was because “I’m a huge nerd, so I want to learn.” Many of the students placed high value on their educations and took pleasure in learning, and they did not cheat because cheating defeated the purpose of their educations and took away from learning.

Excitement and passion for learning and the importance of being knowledgeable in one’s chosen field of study influenced some students not to cheat. Other students thought that gaining an education was valuable because they were paying for college or because of they saw value in attaining a college degree and being prepared for their future professions. Gaining a college education is a cultural goal and learning is a cultural value. The influence of the value of education on decisions not to cheat can be understood through the lens of social control theory (Hirschi, 2002). Valuing education demonstrates commitment to the societal goals of hard work and education as well as belief in those same values. Thus, the students whose decisions not to cheat are influenced by the value of education have a bond to society or the college community. The bond and shared commitment and beliefs provide an explanation for why holding education as valuable influences students not to cheat.
Adherence to Societal or Group Norms

For some students, cheating was a violation of societal norms, and the participants said they would feel bad for or guilty about going against a norm or rule. For other students, cheating went against the norms of a particular group to which they belonged. When students identified with a group and wanted to uphold group norms as a means to maintain standing within the group or not disappoint members, they were influenced not to cheat.

Societal norms. As discussed in the previous chapter, many students said that they were raised to think that cheating was wrong. As such, they said that they would feel guilty for cheating because it violated social norms. However, as many of the participants in my study spoke about the feeling that cheating was wrong or that they would feel guilty for cheating, those feelings were unexplained beyond simple statements. Some of students did not or could not elaborate on why they thought cheating was wrong or why they would feel bad for cheating. Katie B. said that she does not cheat because “I would feel extremely guilty.” Novali said, “I just don’t think it’s right. I wouldn’t feel right.” Novali did not explain why she thought cheating was not right, but she later stated, “Society tells you that it’s not right, and you just get it into your head.” Joe also invoked societal norms when discussing why he did not cheat, but he had difficulty clarifying what the norm meant. He said that he did not cheat because he knew that you’re not supposed to cheat. I guess I could go with what I said, morally wrong that you should know that is morally not right to do. I don’t know if it’s morally, but you’re not supposed to cheat.

Joe’s statement was somewhat disjointed as he searched for but could not find a reason why cheating was wrong. He just knew that cheating was wrong and that he should not cheat, and this influenced his decisions not to cheat. Lindsay told me that she thought that cheating was not
right, but when I asked to explain her statement, she said, “I don’t believe cheating is right or the right thing to do or is ethical. So I guess that’s why. I have it in my head; I just can’t figure out how to say it.” Lindsay could not clarify why cheating was wrong, but the societal norm that cheating was wrong influenced her decisions about cheating. Several other students, including Chase and Jenna, made general statements about cheating being “wrong” or “not right” but offered little explanation of their thoughts.

Regardless of whether the students knew why or had personal reasoning for why they thought cheating was wrong, the general societal rules and norms against cheating influenced some students not to cheat. Interestingly, most of the students who discussed their adherence to the societal norm that cheating was wrong also discussed other influences on their decisions not to cheat, typically fear of consequences if caught cheating, as discussed below. These students’ reasoning regarding how the societal norm influenced their decisions not to cheat seemed to be based on the external notion of law and punishment rather than on a personalized value set in which cheating had no place. The influence of societal norms on their decision-making was an example of the belief aspect of the social bond as outlined in social control theory. The students demonstrated that they believed in the societal rules against cheating, therefore, they were influenced not to cheat so as to maintain the order and norms of society.

**Group norms.** In addition to speaking about the general societal norms regarding cheating, students also discussed that the norms of specific groups to which they belonged influenced their cheating decisions. Membership in groups influenced students’ decisions not to cheat because students did not want to disappoint group members or go against the group values. Students discussed groups such as the Eagle Scouts, religious organizations, professions, and family groups. John was involved with a martial arts organization. He discussed the strong
values of the organization and that he served as a teacher to children. He said, “They would look pretty down upon cheating.” John was influenced not to cheat because he did not want to lose the respect of the members of the martial arts group to which he belonged. Elwood said that he wanted to do his best in school and not cheat because,

I’m an Eagle Scout, and so basically if I mess up and commit some kind of foul play I can lose that, and I make sure I put that on my resume wherever I go. It’s just something I worked really hard for, and I’m too afraid to lose it.

Elwood took much pride in his status as an Eagle Scout, and he knew that cheating went against the values of the scouting organization. He did not want to lose his standing within the group. Elwood also discussed that he would disappoint his parents if he cheated and that his chosen profession of business emphasized ethical behavior, and the three groups influenced his decisions not to cheat. Chase and Joseph talked about cheating as going against the norms of the profession of education and that being future teachers influenced them not to cheat.

Christine discussed her family group as an influence on her decisions not to cheat. She said that if she were to cheat, “the whole family finds out, everyone’s so ashamed of you, and you are like shunned for a little while, and that’s the worst feeling.” Christine’s decisions not to cheat were based in part on how her family would respond negatively to cheating. Elizabeth and Mark C. also discussed not wanting to disappoint their parents by cheating. Jack S. said that part of the reason he did not cheat was due to his “Christian background.” Jenna also discussed religion as an influence on her decisions not to cheat. She said, “With religion, you are instilled with this sense of, ‘Oh this is right; that’s not.’ And even if it seems arbitrary, it’s totally stuck with me.” Cheating went against the values of Jenna’s faith, and Jenna did not want to violate the tenets of her religion by cheating. Bob mentioned that “integrity is an Army value”
of the reasons he did not cheat was due to his integrity, which came partially from his involvement in the Army.

Some of the participants were influenced not to cheat because they felt bonded to a particular group in which not cheating was a norm. The students thought violating the norm or rule would reduce their standing in their group. The attachment and commitment to the group and the internalizing of the group’s values demonstrates social control at work in the group’s influence on students not to cheat. The influence of group norms on students’ decisions can be explained further through differential association. In this case, the groups the students spoke of do not espouse deviant behaviors as the norm, and the values of the groups have helped to shape the values of the individuals and influence their decision-making regarding cheating.

**Personal Character and Responsibility**

When many of the students discussed following societal norms, they did so with little explanation for why. However, some of the participants discussed their personal values, moral codes, and sense of integrity as influences on their decisions not to cheat. When they spoke in this manner, the students demonstrated internalization and personalization of the values and spoke of cheating as more than “just not right.” Cheating went against their personal values and was not fair to themselves or others. Although their values might have been based on societal or group norms, their decisions not to cheat were not related to disappointing others or violating the societal notion of right and wrong as in the section above. Rather, their decisions not to cheat were based upon not wanting to disappoint themselves by compromising their own values and beliefs.
Bob discussed his value system and that he wanted to “[live] up [to] a high level of integrity, as personal morality.” Novali said that she did not cheat because “I have a level of integrity.” Lily said,

I think somewhere along the way people develop a sense of kind of what’s right or what’s wrong and the scale of black and white on cheating is ambiguous for everybody, but for example for me to imagine cheating on an exam, like I could never imagine doing that. . . . a lot of it’s just your moral code.

Lily said that her moral code kept her from cheating. She understood that definitions of and attitudes toward cheating were ambiguous, but she had come to her own sense of right and wrong with regard to cheating based on her personal moral code. Azrael also had a personal moral code, and even though he did admit to two instances of cheating, he said, “I think it’s just a really dishonorable thing to do. I kind of live by a strict code that I have made for myself.”

Cheating went against his personal moral code that included the values of “honesty and integrity.” Jack S. described how his personal integrity influenced his decisions about cheating. He said that he had his own definition of what “constitutes cheating,” and

I think other people may have different definitions of it. I know the university has a policy on it, which I believe I’ve probably . . . read, but I couldn’t tell you much about it, but that’s my own personal morality. . . . It’s not worth sacrificing my integrity, whether it’s found out or not.

Jack S. also thought that if he cheated he would be cheating a lot of people, my class, myself, my professor, that individual [who would receive help through cheating]. I think it’s a thing that God’s not calling me to do. . . .
There’s just so many reasons why I just think it’s wrong, and why the grade is not worth it, and the time you’d save is not worth it.

Jack S. had a personal sense of right and wrong and thought that cheating would be harmful not only for himself but would also have an effect on other people around him. Some students, albeit fewer than those who mentioned general societal or group norms, had developed their own value sets and moral codes that influenced them not to cheat.

The students who discussed their personal morals did not want to let others down or be the cause of an unfair situation for others, but they also did not want to disappoint themselves or create a situation in which they made unfair gains. These students showed a level of bonding to others that surpassed that of merely following societal rules. The students who spoke of their personal character and responsibility had internalized values and came to a personal understanding of how their values and beliefs influenced their decisions.

For the students in my study who had never cheated and for the rest of the students who said that they typically did not cheat, one or more non-contextual factors of academic self-efficacy, value of education, adherence to societal or group norms, and personal character and responsibility in conjunction with their personal attitudes toward cheating, influenced their decisions not to cheat, at least in part. Students who spoke of the non-contextual influences on their decisions about cheating demonstrated attachment to the community, the desire not to violate norms, personalization of values, and that they had the ability to achieve desired goals with relative ease. In most situations, the option of cheating was viewed negatively and their attitudes about cheating were not challenged, thus students were influenced not to cheat.
Contextual Influences on Students’ Decisions about Cheating

As I spoke with the participants in my study, they discussed contextual influences that either complemented the non-contextual influences discussed above or overrode those influences and their attitudes about cheating making cheating temporarily acceptable. Students spoke of situations in which they were tempted to cheat but did not do so and situations in which they cheated due to the influences present in the particular situation.

From the individual interviews, the themes that emerged regarding contextual influences on students’ decisions about cheating were (1) classroom context (including size of class, prevention measures and fear of consequences, perceptions of faculty demeanor and teaching, relationship with faculty member, relevance or understanding of material or subject, type of assignment, and peer behavior and trust), (2) grade pressure, (3) time constraints and personal life issues, and (4) personal definition of cheating. The factors influencing decisions not to cheat were fewer than the number of factors students discussed relating to their decisions to cheat. In this section, I present the contextual influences the students discussed regarding their decisions about cheating. The data are inclusive of students who had never cheated, students who cheated by their own definition, and students who cheated by the institutional definition. My presentation of the findings regarding contextual influences juxtaposes the anti-cheating context with the pro-cheating context in order to provide better understanding of how the factors in the theory interrelate in students’ decision-making about cheating.

When I spoke with students about the non-contextual influences on their decisions not to cheat, they spoke primarily in a present-oriented voice. However, when I spoke with the participants in my study about the contextual influences on their cheating decisions, they spoke retrospectively. For those students who spoke about their decisions to engage in cheating
behavior, most of the students indicated that the conversation with me was the first time they had the opportunity to reflect upon and discuss what influenced their decisions to cheat. For some of the students, the cheating had occurred in the same semester as the interview, but for others, the cheating had occurred two to three years prior to the interview. Through the interviews, students talked with me about the context of the class in which their cheating occurred and what they thought influenced their decisions. For some students, their cheating was not planned in advance of it occurring, and for other students, the cheating was somewhat planned shortly before a test or assignment was due. Both the students and I realized that the thoughts they shared with me during the interviews might not have been fully formed at the time that they cheated, but they indicated that looking back, certain factors influenced them to act against their general attitudes about cheating or overrode non-contextual factors that typically influenced their decisions not to cheat. Although some rationalization of their behavior occurred, their stories portrayed particular situations that, at the time, created a temporary contextualized attitude about cheating on which they acted, which was different from the majority of situations in college in which they did not cheat.

**Classroom Context**

Students who had not cheated mentioned that the context of a particular class influenced their decision not to cheat if they were considering cheating or helped to reinforce the non-contextual influences or their attitudes that cheating was wrong. Additionally, for those students who admitted to cheating, the classroom context served to override the factors that typically influenced their decision not to cheat. The classroom context included size of class, prevention measures and fear of consequences, perceptions of faculty member demeanor and teaching, relationship with faculty members, relevance or understanding of course subject or material, type
of assignment, and peer behaviors and trust. Often the students mentioned several factors in tandem, and I had difficulty disentangling the issues presented by the students. No one, isolated factor was perceived to be the primary influence on students’ cheating decisions. As Rahul said,

I think some different variables [affect] academic integrity of the student, how caring and convenient and how much the teacher makes himself available, the importance of the class in the student’s perspective, importance of the class as conveyed to him by faulty and different things you might have come across reading [and] difficulty of the class.

Rahul pointed out that numerous influences likely intersect when students cheat; however, I have parsed students’ statements for the sake of clarity in understanding the separate influences in the model. In order to maintain the richness and complexity of the students’ thoughts and of what might influence students to cheat, I will discuss the aspects of the class context together where appropriate. Not all of the students experienced all of the influences, but the findings presented below were prevalent across the students’ discussions.

**Class size.** Some students said that the size of the class either discouraged or encouraged cheating because it did or did not provide for the other classroom-based contextual influences. Joseph tied a small class size and type of class to having a relationship with the professor. He said that in “upper level classes, you have anywhere from 15 to 25 people in the class, that teacher knows everybody’s name, and [students] really don’t want to get on the teacher’s bad side. So the smaller classrooms will prevent [cheating].” Joseph thought that advanced, major-related classes tended to have small class sizes that encouraged a relationship with faculty members. Although students did not specifically tie the classroom context influences to class size when discussing what influenced their decisions not to cheat, as Joseph suggested, the resultant
influences likely were connected to the influences they discussed in relation to their decisions not to cheat.

**Class size influence on cheating.** Although students did not overtly relate class size to decisions not to cheat, they did discuss class size as an influence on their decisions to cheat. Students said that a large class-size was a factor in their decisions to cheat. Alex, a senior majoring in Economics, spoke of a required business class in which he cheated on an exam.

[The class] was a big class too, and I’m not a fan of big classes where you’re a spectator in a stadium, and you see the professor, like he’s tiny, so I didn’t plan on [cheating]. . . . I studied and prepared. I did what I could, and when the time came, I took the exam, but there were a lot of times that I was skipping questions, or skimming the exam, and getting desperate, . . . I felt that it was going to be hard to get caught I guess.

For Alex, the large class size gave him the feeling that the professor would not see him cheating. When Alex panicked during the exam, he made the decision cheat in part because of the large size of the class. Alex told me that if he had been in a smaller class, he might have decided not to cheat. Elizabeth also discussed how class size influenced her decisions about cheating. Elizabeth, a Junior in the College of Education cheated on an exam in a 600-person general education class in her first semester in college. She said, “I would never [cheat] now; my classes are 12, 20 people, and so I would never cheat because I would never want to get caught. That would be terrible. The 600-person class gave me a lot more comfort.” The large class-size provided a feeling of anonymity and safety from being discovered cheating, whereas in a small classroom Elizabeth thought there would be more likelihood that she would be seen cheating, which influenced her decision not to cheat. Jerry also mentioned that one of the classes he cheated in was “too big, and you don’t talk about enough, you just grace too many topics, so you’re not
really learning anything.” Many of the students who discussed large class-size as an influence on cheating linked it to several other factors, particularly prevention measures and relationship with faculty members.

The influence of class size can be better understood through social control theory (Hirschi, 2002). Molly described that large classes give students a feeling of “anonymity.” The anonymity creates a sense of detachment from the class and from the professor in many situations, thus making a bond difficult to achieve. When class sizes were small, students were able to form relationships with students and faculty, making a bond to the class easier to achieve. Class size alone likely was not strong enough to influence a decision about cheating; however, class size created the context for several other classroom-based influences on cheating decisions.

**Prevention measures and fear of consequences.** As discussed in the last chapter, students made assumptions about whether their professors cared about cheating based on their discussions about cheating and actions with regard to preventing cheating. Faculty discussion about cheating and attempts to prevent cheating were also thought to be influential on students’ decisions to cheat or not to cheat. Additionally, the participants in my study feared the consequences of cheating, which influenced their decisions not to cheat.

**Prevention measures and fear of consequences influence on not cheating.** One of the most oft cited influences on students’ decisions not to cheat was their fear of getting caught and the ensuing penalties. Students indicated that when strong measures were undertaken by their faculty members to prevent cheating or discuss the issue, not only did they think their professors cared about the issue, but they would not cheat because the consequences of being caught cheating were detrimental to their college and future careers.
Joe gave an example of an instance in which he could have cheated but chose not to due to the professor’s warning about cheating. Joe said,

I would really try to focus on my exam, or as the professor said, “You’re either looking at your exam or you’re looking straight at the screen. If I see you even looking left and right I will anticipate you were cheating. Even if you were only looking, I will just say that you were cheating, and I’m taking your quiz.” So I chose not to use my peripheral vision and look out to the left and to the right to see what they [peers] had [for answers].

Joe said that the he took the quiz in a large classroom with 300 other students and that he probably could have cheated without getting caught, but he did not want to take the chance due to the faculty member’s strict instructions about not cheating. Jack A. also had a faculty member who “kind of made a big deal about it too that she didn’t want people to cheat,” and the professor’s discussion influenced Jack A. not to cheat in the class even though she said that she did consider cheating. Jerry, who admitted to cheating several times, discussed how the professor’s demeanor with regard to cheating influenced him.

[For] some professors [cheating] was like the biggest thing, that I was more afraid of the professor than I was the university, or one of those things where it was like before there even was a situation to cheat, you’re like, “Well, I’m not even going to consider it,” because this guy is for real.

Jerry had been in situations in which he did not think that the professor would do much if he cheated, but in situations in which he knew or was fearful that the professor was serious about stopping and reporting cheating, he chose not to cheat. In addition to professors giving students strong warnings about not cheating, the students also mentioned that prevention efforts such as professors or TAs actively watching the students or walking up and down the aisles, spacing
students at least one seat apart during exams, emphasizing consequences, using “scare tactics,” and having discussions with students about why cheating was bad influenced them not to cheat.

In addition to faculty efforts to prevent cheating as an influence on decisions not to cheat, students also discussed fear of the consequences if caught cheating. Elizabeth, who cheated in a class in which she had little fear of getting caught, said that she typically did not cheat because

I’m really afraid to get caught. That’s probably a main factor, and then I can’t even imagine. [Professors] always scare you with academic integrity policy, that if you get caught, you fail out, you get FX or something, and they have to contact your parents. I can’t even imagine. But [I] definitely [do] not cheat because [I’m] of scared of what would happen. . . . . There are a lot of times when I knew my professor was prone to leaving the room or doing work or something during the class where I would be like what if I just took in a slip of paper with the answer or if it was written on my hand, it would totally be okay, but I just, I’m so afraid to get caught.

Elizabeth was clear in her statements that one of the reasons she did not cheat was that she was afraid of the consequences if caught. Jenna, Rahul, Mike, Chris, Jack S, and Elwood also discussed fear of getting caught and not wanting the severe negative consequences that would come from getting caught cheating as an influence on their decisions not to cheat.

Sarah summed up how many students felt about fear of consequences. She said, if she cheated, “there’s that small chance that you will get caught. If you do get caught, then that’s everything.” The participants in my study discussed the consequences of getting zero points on exams, receiving “F” grades for classes, and getting suspended or expelled from college. They also discussed the implications of having a disciplinary record due to cheating on their future careers. Many of these students talked about other non-contextual influences on decisions not to
cheat, but when coupled with preventative measures and fear of consequences, the desire not to cheat seemed to be stronger. As Lily said, “I don’t cheat because I don’t think it is the right thing to do, and I don’t want to get into trouble.” Not getting caught was not her only influence, but it reinforced her notion that cheating was wrong, thus she made the decision not to cheat.

**Prevention measures influence on students’ decisions to cheat.** When students talked with me about their decisions to cheat, they also discussed prevention efforts undertaken by their faculty members as an influence; however, they did not discuss fear of getting caught other than in terms of having little fear. The students thought that faculty members have the responsibility to keep them from cheating. Jack A. described the context in which she cheated on an exam in a required course for her major. She indicated that her professor did little to prevent cheating. She said, “He just, he was up in the front of the class and he was reading his own stuff, and he let all of us sit really close together.” Jack A. said that had the professor been “watching” the students closely or had he tried to prevent the cheating, she likely would not have cheated. Alex and Elizabeth also indicated that they did not think they would get caught because there were few preventative measures taken in the classes in which they cheated. John spoke of a language class in which he wrote information in his dictionary because he knew other students’ dictionaries actually included that information [for the test], and so I kind of looked at it as, “Well, if they have the information, and he’s letting them use it, because he’s too dumb to realize that they have the information that’s on the exam, . . . I can just say okay, well that’s fair.”

John knew that other students were not getting caught for having information in their books, so he thought that he would not get caught if he also had information in his book. John planned this cheating and took time to write information in his book prior to class. John took into
consideration the likelihood of getting caught when he decided to cheat. In another example that John shared, he discussed going early to a business class computerized exam and talking with friends about the questions and answers outside the exam, a common cheating occurrence mentioned by several students from the College of Business. He said, “The easiest thing they could do is just have the professor or some kind of proctor sit outside. Like if they did that, then all these problems would go away.” John was quite certain that had preventative measures been taken that he would not have cheated. In one of the examples that Jerry shared, he said that the fact that the exam was not being proctored influenced his decision to talk with a friend about a question on the exam. For participants, the minimal risk of being caught or lack of cheating prevention efforts from the faculty member was one of the most salient influences on their decisions to cheat.

In the students’ statements about how lack of prevention efforts influenced their decisions to cheat, students abdicated their personal responsibility for following rules and placed the onus on their professors to strongly enforce the academic integrity policy. The influence of prevention efforts and fear of consequences on students’ decisions about cheating was a diametrical relationship. When prevention efforts or fear of consequences were high, students decided not to cheat. When prevention efforts or the fear of getting caught were low, students adopted an attitude in which cheating was acceptable and chose to cheat. The influence of lack of prevention may be examined through strain theory (Merton, 1968a). When faculty members do not exercise prevention efforts, they might weaken the cultural control structure making the rules seem unimportant and unnecessary to follow. However, while prevention efforts may be a strong enough influence to act as an isolated contextual influence on a student’s attitude, lack of
prevention efforts, like class size, was only one of many influences on students’ decisions to cheat. No student stated that he or she cheated solely because there was no prevention.

**Perceptions of faculty demeanor and teaching.** Preventative efforts were not the only faculty actions that students considered when deciding about cheating. The way that students perceived their faculty members’ actions and discussion in the classroom and how they taught were important to students and influenced their decisions about cheating. Jack A. was one of the few students who discussed faculty teaching as an influence on a decision not to cheat. In a class in which she contemplated cheating, she chose not to in part because she said her professor “was a very good teacher, and I didn’t really think it was fair.” Jack A. placed the burden of not doing well in the class on herself and did not want to be disrespectful to her teacher by cheating. However, many students discussed the influence of their perceptions of their professors’ demeanor and teaching as influencing their decisions to cheat, and they seemed to be placing blame on faculty members for their decisions to cheat. Whether faculty members seemed to care about students, teaching, and cheating and how faculty members taught created a context for the students in which cheating became acceptable, which connects to the discussion in the previous chapter about students thinking that if faculty seemed not to care about teaching they must not care if students cheated. The students also stated that unengaging pedagogy, poorly designed tests, or general malaise in the classroom influenced their decisions to cheat.

Contrary to Jack A.’s example of deciding not to cheat based in part on her professor being a good teacher, when she spoke of her two decisions to cheat, she discussed her faculty members’ demeanors and teaching as an influence on those decisions. In the class in which she cheated on an exam, she spoke of how her professor seemed not to care about cheating and that she thought he was a bad professor who did not prepare students for the exam and that these
factors influenced her decision to cheat. In a situation in which she plagiarized a paper, Jack A. discussed the teacher of the class and said that he “wasn’t great” because

he’s just kind of hard to understand at times, and he slurs a lot of his words. So, you’d go to class and you’d get maybe half of what he was saying. Even what he was saying, he reiterated a lot, he repeated the same things over and over again, brought up old things like if you didn’t know it by then you probably shouldn’t be in the class anyway. He wasn’t very straightforward.

Jack A. did not think that her professor was a very good teacher and said that the class was boring, which played a role in her lack of enthusiasm for the class and in her decision to cheat. Other students also discussed their faculty in this way. Jerry told me that much of his cheating in college occurred at a branch campus of the institution where my study took place. Jerry completed his first two years of college at the branch campus and then transferred to the main campus. Jerry said that at the branch campus “the teachers seemed like they don’t really care” about cheating and that this influenced his decisions to cheat in some of his classes.

Students also discussed whether they thought their professors were good teachers as a factor in their decisions to cheat. John talked about the professor in his language class. John said, He set it up in the beginning, the instructor said, “You guys should all get ‘As’, because it’s easy.” And then when we ended up not getting “As”... But in terms of him being a teacher, he wasn’t good at preparing us for the exams he was going to give, or even putting exam questions on that were really fair, because he’ll have, he’ll take off for something that’s technically true, but he didn’t expose us to the knowledge that would allow us to answer that correctly.
John did not think that his professor taught well in order to prepare the students for the material on which they would be tested; therefore, John did not think he learned the material well enough to complete the exam without cheating. He said that if the class had been taught better that he might not have cheated. Jerry also mentioned that in one of the classes in which he cheated he felt that he was not learning, so cheating became an acceptable means by which to achieve a good grade in the class since that opportunity was not available through his own knowledge. When students thought that their teachers did not teach well or even care about teaching, cheating became an acceptable behavior, in part as a quid pro quo action in the classroom, albeit in a negative sense.

In discussing their professors’ teaching, some of the students’ assertions about whether faculty taught well may have been a reflection of their own ability to understand the material, but students counted on their faculty to help them understand and learn, and when that did not happen, the students blamed their faculty. The students mirrored the perceived or experienced demeanor, motivation, or commitment of their faculty members. Some of the students viewed the classroom as a transactional experience lead by the professor. If the professor did his or her job well, the student would reciprocate, and the opposite was true as well.

The influence of perceived faculty demeanor and teaching can be viewed through the lenses of strain theory and social control theory to further explicate why a contextualized attitude of cheating being acceptable is formed and acted upon. Within strain theory (Merton, 1968a, 1996a, 1996b), students view the teacher’s poor pedagogy and their own lack of learning as an obstacle keeping them from achieving their goal grades. Therefore, cheating becomes an acceptable means by which to overcome the unfair obstacle. With social control theory (Hirschi, 2002), when the students think that the professor does not care about them or teaching, they feel
alienated from the classroom and their teacher. Additionally, by blaming their faculty members and feeling as though their faculty members “deserve” the cheating because they teach poorly, students are neutralizing their behaviors by denial of a victim and condemning the condemners (Sykes & Matza, 1957).

**Relationship with faculty.** Closely related to how students felt about their faculty members based on their teaching skills and demeanor in the classroom was the contextual factor of the relationship with the professor. The relationship with the professor included whether the professor knew students’ names, students’ perceptions or knowledge of whether faculty members cared about them and their learning, if students felt comfortable talking to the professor, and whether there was mutual respect between students and professors.

**Relationship with faculty member influence on students’ decision not to cheat.** When students had a positive relationship with their faculty members, some of the participants said that the presence of the relationship or respect for their professors influenced them not to cheat. Alex said, “Knowing the professor well and that he knows you, that puts cheating out of the question.” Alex would not cheat if he had a relationship with his faculty member. Sicilia explained how having a relationship with her professors influenced her not to cheat.

I just haven’t cheated because I respect the professors that teach me, and in return they respect me, and I’ve worked very hard to build relationships in terms of friendship or business aspects with them. I want them to know my name, and in return, you know what I mean, we just work together. I respect them just so much that learning what they teach me or what comes out of their mouth is important, and that’s just why I don’t do it.

Sicilia had gotten to know her faculty members and in doing so, cheating was an act that would harm the relationship with her professors, which Sicilia did not want to occur. Adelaide also
chose not to cheat in a class in which she had a relationship with the professor. “I like the teacher, . . . and if I’m struggling, like he’ll probably help me if I get some wrong on the test, so I could actually learn it, instead of cheating.” Adelaide was confident that her professor would help her, and she chose to trust in the relationship with her professor rather than cheat.

Students also discussed the professor’s investment in their learning and the atmosphere of respect in the classroom as an influence not to cheat. Christine gave an example of a professor in whose class she said she and her fellow students would choose not to cheat.

I have a class of 150 right now, but our professor, she’s so, like her aura about her is so nice, and she even says, “I hope you guys know that you can come to me by now” and stuff like that. And, she’s so fun, and she comes to our level. . . . I feel that because she relates to us, we can relate to her. I feel like we take her more serious, and we want to know what she has to say.

Christine had great respect for her professor. She shared that that she felt comfortable enough to go to her professor for help with a problem not related to class. For Christine, the relationship and atmosphere created by a faculty member, even in a large class setting, engendered respect, and influenced her not to cheat because she did not want to betray the trust and respect of the professor-student relationship. Frank shared a similar story about a professor who he and his peers respected.

I had a teacher in my second semester Freshman year. . . . She was very nice, got to know us, knew our names, knew everything about us, not everything, but she really knew us, really cared about us, so we all respected her and wouldn’t cheat.

Many of the participants echoed this theme of the role of the professor-student relationship in their decisions not to cheat, and the message that they shared with me was that students mirrored
what they perceived in their faculty members. If students perceived that their professors cared about their learning and them, then students cared about learning and their professors and chose not to cheat.

**Relationship with faculty member influence on students’ decisions to cheat.** When students had no relationship or a negative relationship with faculty members and perceived that their faculty members did not care about them or their learning, many of them stated that this influenced their decisions to cheat. Jack A. and Alex both mentioned that they did not have a relationship with their professors in the classes in which they cheated. Regarding the class in which Alex cheated on an exam, he said,

I’m not a huge fan of big classes. It’s just that you totally lose the student-to-teacher, . . . I mean that there is not really a relationship between the teacher and the [student], like it’s just, it’s just a lot, it’s so much better when there are like 10 or 15 students. . . . But when you have like 300 people in a room, it’s, I mean it’s, I mean you don’t make a difference, it’s hard to get to know your professor, and that he knows you, your name, and so. And I guess . . . oh, okay, this makes, I mean, I guess this changes things when it’s a small class, and you know the professor, like he knows you, your name, your face, and then when I guess like during a, because I’ve had this, like during a difficult exam, and where I guess if I didn’t know the professor well, then you would say, “Oh I don’t care, like I’m going to cheat.” But when you do know the professor, then you feel like you would be betraying him. So it just makes like cheating out of the question.

Alex emphasized that if he had a relationship with his teacher he would not have cheated. Several students discussed how differing relationships with their faculty members affected their attitude toward cheating. Sicilia, who stated that she had never cheated, discussed a situation in
which she might be tempted to cheat by saying, “In a professor’s class that I don’t really like and that he doesn’t treat me well, I’m like, ‘Oh, well, if you catch me cheating that has nothing to do with my life because I don’t even like you.’” Even though Sicilia had chosen not to cheat, she expressed how a negative relationship with her professor might influence her to cheat. Many students seemed to share Sicilia’s sentiment, and classes in which students admitted to cheating were often large, impersonal classes where creating a relationship with the faculty member could be difficult, and they spoke with a certain amount of disrespect for their teachers.

The influence of the student-teacher relationship on students’ decisions about cheating is enhanced by using social control theory (Hirschi, 2002) to understand how a contextualized attitude is formed due to the nature of the relationship. When students have a strong, positive relationship with their faculty members, they are bonded personally to the professor and to the class. They will be invested in their own learning and in the success of the class as a whole because the professor makes learning and the creation of a positive class atmosphere a priority. Attachment to the professor and class is formed by care and respect. Additionally, students are engaged in the activities of the class. Students do not want to endanger their relationship or bond to the class by acting deviantly. Conversely, when the relationship is lacking or negative, students are not attached to the professor or the class and do not care about the success of the class. The lack of attachment, involvement, and commitment makes cheating an acceptable behavior because cheating cannot harm a relationship that does not exist. Additionally, students may neutralize their cheating behavior by “condemning the condemners” or by citing that no injury occurred (Sykes & Matza, 1957).

Relevance or understanding of material or subject. I was surprised to learn that students stated that one of the main influences on decisions about cheating was the perceived
relevance of or their understanding of the course or course material. This influence was based on whether students thought that the class or material was relevant to their personal or professional lives, whether they liked the course subject, or how well they understood the material. When students thought their classes “mattered” or when they liked the subject of the class, they chose not to cheat. Conversely, many of the students who admitted to cheating made statements about the cheating occurring in classes that did not “matter.” Classes that did not matter varied for different students; some students thought that general education classes did not matter and some students thought that some required or major classes did not matter. The main criterion for whether a class mattered was whether the students thought that the material they learned in the class was relevant or important to their professional or personal lives. Students also chose to cheat when they did not understand the material or perform well in the class.

**Relevance/understanding of material/subject influence on students’ decisions not to cheat.** In addition to having a positive relationship with the professor, students discussed how their experience with a particular course or course material influenced their decisions about cheating. For many students, the courses that “mattered” the most were their major courses. When students knew they would need to know the material to help them in their careers or lives, they said that they would not cheat. Mike said, “The important thing is you have to learn the material . . . because you plan on doing something in that field.” For Mike, what he was learning in his major course was important to his career. He knew that he needed to know the subject in order to fulfill the duties of his future job. If he cheated, he would put himself at a disadvantage. Denise also echoed Mike’s sentiment. Jerry, who had cheated in some courses, said, “I’ve never cheated in a major class, because I care, and because I want to learn those.” Joe and Sicilia also said that they needed to know the material in their major courses.
Christine said that she would not cheat in her major courses because, “I’m in all Math and Education classes right now, and that’s exactly what I’m doing, Secondary Ed. Math. So those are more to my career and what I want to do as my profession.” Chase, Jenna, Novali, Lindsay, and Chris also all discussed how needing to know material or being in a class that was relevant influenced their decisions not to cheat. Frank summed up what most of the students conveyed to me: “Why would you try to cheat your way through something that’s going to help you the rest of your life? It just doesn’t make any sense.” For participants, the class material and importance of the class influenced their decisions not to cheat because cheating would prove detrimental to their learning and future abilities in their careers.

**Relevance/understanding of material/subject influence on students’ decisions to cheat.**

A primary influence on students’ decisions to cheat was a not perceiving the course as relevant or not understanding material. Students thought that classes that were not relevant to their lives in some way, even if required, did not “matter,” and they often cheated in those courses. In the class in which she cheated on the exam, Jack A. mentioned that she thought that Physics was “crap” that she was never going to use again. She also thought the same way about the class in which she committed plagiarism. She said,

> It was the class I didn’t like. It was something that I knew I was never going to do. The biochemistry that they were doing was just so boring and I hated it. I’d go into lab, and I’d do it, and I’d get it done quicker than most people, and I’d have better results than most people, and stuff, but I hated it. It was just awful. From that moment on, I knew that I didn’t want to do that type of biochemistry ever.

Jack A. said that along with other factors, the fact that she did not care about the class “led up” to her decision to cheat. Alex told me that he cheated in a language class that he did not think
mattered. Alex said that part of the reason why he cheated was that the class was one that he did not “really prioritize” and that was not as “important as your major classes.” Likewise, Jerry said that part of the reason he cheated in his calculus class was because “I didn’t really care about calculus.” Jerry also said that although he enjoyed learning in general and thought education was important to him, “certain classes . . . weren’t as important to me, so I didn’t really care if I learned them. . . . I’m cheating to get by on things that aren’t important to me.” Jerry and some of the other students explained that the classes in which they cheated did not matter to them; they did not think they were important or useful classes and this influenced their decisions to cheat.

In addition to Jerry thinking that his calculus class was not important, he also said that he struggled to understand the material, which was an unusual problem for him.

I had tutors and stuff like that, and went to the professor for help, but I was really just trying to get it done, because I couldn’t get it. I just couldn’t understand it. I guess, it was also troubling, because I never had that problem before. I had never had something I couldn’t understand, so that was kind of frustrating also, which I think probably led me to [cheat]. I wanted to get through it more, to get it done.

Jerry did not think the class mattered and he did not understand the material. The pairing of not mattering and not understanding occurred for Jack A. and for Alex. Elizabeth also mentioned that she struggled to understand economics, which was a general education class and may have mattered less to her than her major classes. The other students who admitted to cheating did not discuss the importance of the classes in which they cheated, but they all discussed struggling to understand the material, which was atypical for them. Adelaide, an education major, told me that she cheated in a math class, which was a subject that she did not like. She said,
I had no idea what I was doing. . . . It made me mad, because like we learned it. . . . I don’t know why I couldn’t retain the knowledge that he already taught like four times. . . .

. It’s supposed to be really easy, but I’m just not good at math.

Adelaide did not plan to cheat, but as she was taking a quiz she became frustrated that she could not answer the questions. Her frustration over not understanding the material influenced her decision to cheat. Azrael also was frustrated that he was having difficulty understanding and retaining the material in a language class that he took. He shared his cheating example with me.

I wasn’t doing well in the course. I wasn’t blatantly failing, but at this point I was taking that language for a second year. For some reason, I just wasn’t picking up on it as quick as I did the year before. Every test I missed almost half the points every time. That . . . was a pretty crushing blow to morale.

Azrael was a student who did not like cheating; however, in a class in which he struggled to understand the material, he cheated twice with some deliberate planning – what he referred to “classical cheating.” His lack of confidence in his ability to do well in the class influenced his decision about cheating. John also mentioned that he was having trouble understanding the material in his language class and that he lacked confidence in his ability to do well on the tests.

Each of the students who spoke with me in individual interviews who admitted to cheating experienced unexpected difficulty understanding the material in the class. The difficulty with the material and the inability to do well in class challenged their academic self-efficacy (Zajacova et al., 2005). In those classes, students lacked confidence in their academic abilities and did not think they could achieve the outcomes they desired, based on the subject or task, which influenced their decisions to cheat. The lack of confidence in their abilities to achieve the desired academic outcome also coincided with a class that did not matter for several of the
students. The combination of lack of academic confidence and the unimportance of the class overrode the students’ non-contextual influences of high academic self-efficacy and value of education. On the contrary, when students thought that specific classes were necessary or were relevant to their lives or when they liked the course, the value of education was supported and students were chose not to cheat.

The influence of relevance and understanding of material or subject can be understood through both social control theory and strain theory. With regard to social control theory (Hirschi, 2002), when students see the relevance of the course material, students are attached to the class and feel a sense of commitment to learning the material. The students value the classes and do not want to demean the worth of the class by cheating. Many of the students with whom I spoke said that even if they struggled in a class that was relevant, they would not cheat. When students do not see the relevance of the material, they are detached and alienated from the class. They do not share in the value of the material nor do they have a sense of commitment to the class or material. Students have no bond keeping them from cheating; therefore, they choose to cheat. The absence of a bond allows students to neutralize their behaviors. The neutralization is similar to a “denial of injury” (Sykes & Matza, 1957) but goes beyond the idea that no one got hurt. When the class is not seen as relevant, the students neutralize their actions with the statement “the class does not matter.” The issue of mattering is not one of Sykes and Matza’s (1957) original neutralizations, but it fits with what a neutralization technique is because the thought allows students to act deviantly but still retain the overall values of a college education. The particular class does not devalue their education; therefore, students are not going against the values of the academic community as they perceive them.
The contextualized attitude influenced by a perceived lack of relevance or not understanding the class subject or material in which cheating is acceptable can also be understood through strain theory (Merton, 1968a, 1996a, 1996b). The students viewed the classes they deemed to be unimportant as hurdles to jump over in order to graduate. The classes were not necessary or relevant to any part of their lives; rather, they were perceived as unfair obstacles in their way of achieving the goals of high grades and a college degree. In order to overcome the obstacle of the non-relevant and difficult class, students chose to cheat as a means to achieve their goals.

**Type of assignment.** As discussed in the previous chapter, students partially based their definitions of cheating on the type of assignment given and in determining how “big a deal” cheating was. Likewise, the type of assignment influenced their decisions about cheating. When the students had assignments worth many points or an assignment that required independent or original thinking, they chose not to cheat. When students had assignments worth few points, assignments they considered trivial, or assignments completed outside the classroom (e.g., homework or on-line assignments), they often chose to cheat.

**Type of assignment influence on students’ decisions not to cheat.** Participants explained that they rarely cheated on “big” papers or projects or “major” in-class tests that accounted for a large percentage of their grades. Mike discussed the worth of exams: “If you’re in an exam in a room, and that’s basically a measure of what you know in the class, . . . and usually exams are the huge chunk of your grade, . . . like I wouldn’t copy off an exam.” However, Mike said he did not have a problem with copying on take-home exams or homework assignments because they were out of the classroom setting and worth few points. Mark A. had the same thoughts as Mike regarding worth of assignments and in-class versus out-of-class assignments. Jerry also
juxtaposed types of assignments when discussing his decisions to cheat or not cheat. “I would have never plagiarized a huge paper, but for some of the things that I saw, it was smaller incidents, and not as important, and I didn’t really see a problem with it.” Mike, Mark A., and Jerry were influenced by the type, setting, and worth of an assignment. Students chose not to cheat on assignments worth a large portion of students’ grade and completed in the classroom.

In addition to worth of the assignment, students also discussed difficulty of cheating on some assignments as an influence not to cheat. Several of the students indicated that they could not cheat on work that required comprehension and writing. Elizabeth said that exams that had “essays or short answers, you can’t really cheat.” Alex also thought that essay tests or assignments would deter cheating because wholesale plagiarism would be discovered and was just as much work as writing the paper. Mike agreed that copying on written work was difficult. He said that in classes where

\[ a \text{ lot of the assignments are writing assignments, . . . you really can’t copy someone’s essay word for word, or even on an exam, a short answer you really can’t copy that either, especially the writing, you can’t even read half of most people handwriting, so I wouldn’t say it’s that easy to cheat.} \]

Some students chose not to cheat in part because they would have had difficulty cheating on the particular assignment. Exams with written response, essay questions, or questions that required working out long problems were more difficult to cheat on than multiple choice exams or homework problems. Although the type of assignment was not the sole reason some of the students did not cheat, it was influential in keeping some students from cheating who may have considered cheating had the assignment been different.
Type of assignment influence on students’ decisions to cheat. The students’ discussion of how type of assignment influenced their decisions to cheat focused on assignments worth few points, take-home work, or work that involved rote learning. Three of the students, John, Azrael, and Alex, cheated on assignments for language classes that involved knowing characters or word endings. Alex said that he cheated

> doing homework that I don’t really think that’s a crucial class for me, so I could do it with a friend and do half or a quarter and just copy off the remaining part to save time and do something else. . . . I would say, that . . . [is] very minor, a minor scale of cheating.

Alex did not see the homework as important and the cheating was a lesser degree of cheating because of the type of assignment. When Jerry cheated in his calculus class, he copied study guides from a previous semester and turned those in to his professor rather than completing the out-of-class assignment on his own. Jerry also discussed a class that was a prerequisite for the business school. In the class, he had to complete

> worksheets, and it was like, it was worth ten points, which was like a few percent of your grade if that, and I realized that I had forgotten it, forgotten to do it. Right before class, I was in class, and I asked one of my buddies if I could just see his sheet real quick, so I just kind of wrote down the same answers as him.

Jerry discussed the small worth of the assignment as part of the reason that he chose to copy his friend’s work. As stated in the previous section, Jerry would not cheat on assignments worth many points, but he did not see cheating on small assignments as problematic. Novali, who cheated by institutional definition but not her own definition, stated that the quiz she cheated on was worth few points and that she would not have cheated on a large exam.
Several students discussed out-of-class work as influencing their decisions to cheat or as not considered cheating at all. Sarah, who did not realize that she had cheated until the group interview, said that she worked with a friend on an on-line submission exam. She said,

I didn’t know that having your friends help you with homework when your teacher says try your best to do it on your own at home, . . . was considered cheating. . . . The teacher should kind of expect that [working together] if they give you homework to do at home or stuff to do on-line.

At the time that Sarah worked with a friend when collaboration was not allowed, she did not think the behavior was cheating due to the nature of the exam being on-line rather than in the classroom. Rahul, Mike, and Mark A., also were influenced by the type of assignment because they did not consider their behaviors to be cheating due to the nature or worth of the assignment and the fact that the assignments were homework. Rahul, a student in the College of Science, said that for his Physics class, weekly, eight-question homework assignments were to be turned in through the on-line system. He said that he often used a Facebook group to get answers to the questions because

I’ve had weeks where I just didn’t have time to read that physics chapter yet, and I had other stuff to do, so I had to get that homework done, but I know I’ll learn it later. So I’ve gone to Facebook and just looked at their solutions and typed them in, which I don’t really consider cheating, because I learn it later.

Rahul did not think that copying answers on homework was cheating because he would learn it for the test, and the test was what actually mattered in the class. Mark A. thought that working with other people on out-of-class assignments was what students should do, and he did not consider that behavior cheating. Mark A. said,
I don’t consider that cheating, because if you don’t want me to work together, then don’t, then, or if you don’t want us to work together on it, then give it to us in the classroom. . . . I don’t understand how you can not work on something outside a class together. And I don’t think it’s like, I don’t know, you just do stuff together outside the class, and in class if you have an exam, you just sit down, shut up, and do it.

Mark A. stated that on an in-class exam he would never talk to others, but just by virtue of the work being given outside the classroom, talking to others was acceptable and not cheating. Mark A. also seemed to be blaming the faculty for not trying to prevent the behavior by giving a different type of assignment. Mike also talked with me about copying or working with others on homework assignments. Mike was a student in the College of Science who said that he had cheated approximately 25 times in college by the university’s policy but not by his own definition. Mike said that he knew that copying homework was considered cheating, but I’ve never copied off of anyone and like felt bad about it, like where I shouldn’t have done that. I should have tried to do it myself. I mean I know I should probably, I should definitely learn the material, but I’ve never looked, copied a homework assignment and then been like upset about the fact that I copied it off a friend. . . . I never considered it that big of a deal, just because my opinion, that’s what homework is for, just to, it’s pretty much a teaching tool, so it shouldn’t really be this huge one-third of your whole class grade. . . . I would never copy off of someone on an exam, just because that to me is wrong, but homework, I feel is different.

For Mike, copying on a homework assignment was not the same as copying on a test, so he did not consider homework copying to be cheating. Novali, Mike, Mark A., and Rahul all said that they would not copy or work with others on a major in-class test and considered that to be
cheating; however, the same behaviors – copying or working with others – on a minor or out-of-class assignment was not considered cheating, even though they knew those behaviors were considered cheating by their faculty members or institutional policy. For these students, their personal definitions of cheating based on type of assignment and the perceived importance of the assignment provided a context in which an otherwise unacceptable behavior became acceptable.

Many of the participants were influenced by the worth and setting of their assignments. Most of the students stated that they would not cheat on in-class exams worth a large percentage of the course points. However, some students cheated on “major” in-class exams when other classroom-based, pro-cheating influences existed. When assignments were to be completed outside the classroom or were considered trivial due to the low weight they carried toward the final grade, some students chose to cheat. Other students did not even consider working with others on such assignments to be cheating. As mentioned in the previous chapter, out-of-class work was perceived to be an indication of lack of caring about cheating by the professor. Students thought of out-of-class work as less meaningful than work completed in the classroom and as fostering cheating. Additionally, the students seemed to think that their professors did or should expect that students would work together or cheat on out-of-class assignments. In making statements to that effect, students again shifted responsibility to their faculty members to prevent them from cheating rather than the students expressing ownership over their own decisions.

**Peer behavior and trust.** Several students who admitted to cheating mentioned that an influence on their decisions was the behavior of their peers or friends in the particular class in which the cheating occurred. Some students mentioned that other students were cheating and not getting caught, thereby eliminating fear of getting caught and making the behavior more acceptable. Jack A. said that in the class in which she cheated on the exam,
Some kid went up and looked at the answer key. And like I said, [the professor] didn’t space any of the kids out or anything like that. He let us all four, there were four of us, let us all four sit right around each other. Actually, I think everyone cheated that day. I know the four of us did. I know every single one of the four of us cheated that day. And, I could tell that the other people were cheating, so it made it a lot easier to look over and see [the other student’s] answers.

For Jack A. seeing other students cheat influenced her decision because the action seemed accepted by her peers. John also said that many students in his language class were cheating and did not get caught, which influenced his decision to write notes in his dictionary. Rahul knew that many students in his class used the social networking site to copy homework answers. Rahul said that “even my roommate uses it for ones that he can’t get.” The fact that many students looked up and copied answers, including his roommate, who Rahul described as a “genius,” made copying seem acceptable and influenced his decision to cheat. Jenna also said that she was influenced to ask about an exam before taking it because several other students in her class had the exam. When students knew of or saw their peers in the class participating in cheating behavior, cheating became acceptable within the context of the class.

Other students said that they had friends in the class who they copied off of or worked with who would not turn them in for cheating, which helped make the behavior acceptable. When Elizabeth cheated, she copied off of a friend’s test. She said, “Being that it was my friend, I knew that if he saw me cheating... he would never say anything to the professor.” Elizabeth said that if she had been sitting next to a “stranger” that she might not have copied answers. Alex also discussed having friends in the class who would not report him.
I had one or two friends that were also taking it with me, so and yeah, I mean, I felt that it wouldn’t be a problem, that he was not going to raise his hand and say, “Hey, this guy is looking over at me.” So I felt in that sense, I felt that it was going to be hard to get caught I guess.

Alex trusted his friends not to tell the professor that he was copying their answers. Being with his friends provided a context in which cheating seemed to be a safe behavior. Jerry and Novali also spoke about having a friend in the class to work with during the exams on which they cheated, Jerry by his own definition and Novali by the institutional definition.

Seeing or knowing of other students in their classes cheating provided a context in which cheating seemed acceptable. The behavior of their peers or the feeling of security from having a friend to work with during an exam or on assignments influenced students’ decisions to cheat. The peer influence on students’ attitudes and decisions about cheating can be understood through differential association theory (Sutherland & Cressey, 1974). Within the peer group in the class, cheating seemed to be acceptable or a behavioral norm. Therefore, some of the students acquired a contextualized attitude that was favorable toward cheating based on the peer environment in the class. The peer environment in the class may be temporary, and students might not have any type of relationship with their classmates outside the class. The nature of the class as the social context in which students learn cheating fits with differential association but not as it is traditionally understood as pertaining to one’s closest social group. As mentioned in the previous chapter, students’ knowledge of cheating in their closest peer circle is not well formed and had little influence on cheating decisions. In the case of some of the participants in my study, the peer influence or acceptance of cheating was specific to a class or to a particular assignment. The students were not necessarily friends with the other students, but the perceived notion that
cheating was acceptable by others made the context seem safe for cheating. Additionally, some students, such as John and Jack A., neutralized their behavior by “condemning the condemners” for not stopping or punishing other students who were cheating (Sykes & Matza, 1957). The influence of the peer environment in a class relates to prevention measures and fear of consequences. In the students’ minds, lack of prevention led to peers cheating with no repercussions, and the combination of the two influences created a context in which cheating was acceptable.

**Grade Pressure**

Few students discussed a lack of pressure to achieve high grades as an influence on the decisions not to cheat. However, pressure to get and maintain high grades was one of the most salient influences on the students’ decisions to cheat. Although grade pressure was often discussed within the context of a class, the pressure to earn a high GPA extended beyond one class and affected the context in which students made a decision about cheating. Jack A. said that she was influenced to cheat on an exam because she did not “want to bottom out my whole grade off of this one exam because before that I had an “A” in the class. I didn’t want to bomb out the final and do really bad in the class.” Alex also discussed how he was afraid to do poorly on his exam, which would cause him to receive a poor grade. Alex said that one of the classes in which he cheated was four credits, so I mean it could hurt or sink your GPA, and I think the GPA is a very strong credential that all college students have, so I mean we, I think most of us value it a lot, and so having a low GPA is like a weight that you have to, I mean it’s on your shoulders that you have to carry, so my main objective was to get the highest grade possible, as in every class, just to keep up with my GPA or improve it . . . [Getting a high
GPA makes] getting a job a lot easier and [you] have more opportunities. . . . It’s very important that you don’t mess up and end up with a lower GPA.

Alex placed great emphasis on his GPA and did not want to harm his GPA by doing poorly on one exam. Elizabeth spoke of grade pressure and was particularly concerned about pressure from her parents to do well in her classes. Novali, who worked with a friend during a quiz but did not consider it to be cheating, said that she collaborated on the quiz because she was doing poorly in the course.

Most of the other students who admitted to cheating, either by their own definition or the institutional definition, discussed pressure to get high grades or to just pass a class in order to maintain a required GPA for their majors in their decisions to cheat. Jenna, a student who said that she was “morally gray” in finding out information that was covered on an exam before taking it, said that she got the information to “just get a better grade on the test” and that other students who had the entire test would get an “edge” because of their cheating. Azrael said that his cheating “paid off. . . . It accomplished its purpose as in I finished the quiz and got a perfect score. . . . I didn’t feel I was doing very well in the course.” Azrael was not doing as well as he wanted to in the class, so he cheated in order to raise his grade. John also discussed that he was doing poorly in his language class.

I ended up with a bad grade in the class, and so I think [the cheating] was more about doing well or doing better than I think that I want to, because I mean when you take night-time classes, you’re supposed to get “As” in them, and so it’s kind of frustrating because a two-hour class, twice a week, and you like don’t get, you don’t get an “A” in the class, like I got the lowest grade of all the [language] classes I took.
John was frustrated because he thought he should have been getting an “A” in the course, and he wanted to do well in the course, which influenced his decision to cheat. Jerry also talked about the need to receive good enough grades to move forward in his classes as part of the impetus for his cheating on several occasions. Jerry said that he cheated in the calculus class that he was retaking due to failing it previously because “I wanted to make sure that I didn’t have anymore problems, because it hurt my GPA.” Each of these students felt pressure to maintain his or her GPA and to get a higher grade than what seemed possible without cheating. The pressure to earn high grades was extremely influential in creating a context in which cheating seemed not only acceptable but necessary for the students. As Alex said,

When it comes to exams, I don’t, I don’t cheat, I wouldn’t cheat unless it was a very like a bad situation, like where I, I mean it was, like say I’m graduating now, and if I’m getting a “B” in the class and if I fail, like I have to stay one more semester, and then, everything is ready for me to cheat.

Alex admitted to cheating on an exam earlier in his college career because of his fear of receiving a low grade, and he was ready to cheat again on an exam if he was in danger of having to retake a class due to a below-passing grade. Alex made that statement at the same time that he said that he did not cheat on exams, demonstrating the context-based influence on his decisions about cheating. The pressure to achieve the highest possible GPA was so great for Alex, and the other students, that cheating became a viable option when normally viewed in a negative light.

Some students discussed the potential long-term effect of a earning a low GPA in college as influencing their decisions to cheat. Mike said that earning a high GPA was very important to him.
I’ve never been happy not getting “As” in classes, and also I just, just the world we live in today, I mean I’m planning on going to graduate school, . . . if you know all the material, but your GPA is not as high as someone who doesn’t know the material and still has a higher GPA, I mean his GPA is higher, he’s probably more likely to get an interview out of someone. . . . You might never get an interview, because your GPA wasn’t high enough. It’s just the world we live in I guess, competition, I mean you want to be the top student, you want to be the best student.

Mike was extremely concerned about his GPA being high so he could get into a good graduate school program. He said that if homework had not been graded or had been graded based on effort he might not have copied from others. Mark C. also discussed getting a high grade as an influence on his decision to participate in a behavior that was considered cheating in the eyes of his faculty member but not by his own definition. Mark C. said that he allowed another student to receive credit for a group project in which he did all of work because

I needed to get that “A.” I needed that “A”. . . . because, again, grades are the only way you can let your parents know what you’re doing, and a good GPA gets open doors too.

GPA is very important, the most important part of college on paper. . . . [With a] higher GPA you’re going to be considered for probably jobs or for better jobs, higher paying jobs. The higher GPA the more it shows that you have succeeded.

Mark C. was quite concerned that if he and his partner did poorly on their project that his GPA would be adversely affected. Like many of the students, Mark C. felt pressure to please his parents with high grades and to be able to use his grades to get a good job upon graduation.

The drive to maintain a high GPA permeated my discussions with students about what influenced their decisions to cheat. Participants who represented varying major fields of study
discussed the importance of GPA and the competition to get into a major and then to get a job or into graduate school. Grade pressure created a context in which students experienced the other contextual influences on cheating decisions. Although grade pressure alone was not the sole influence on students’ decisions to cheat, it seemed to heighten the influence of other contextual factors, particularly if students’ grades truly were in jeopardy. Strain theory (Merton, 1968a, 1996a, 1996b) aids in understanding how grade pressure creates a context in which cheating becomes acceptable practice. The desire to achieve high grades and a college degree is a cultural goal, which is linked to the goals of attaining a job and obtaining wealth. When students feel as though they are in danger of not reaching their goals, they act deviantly in order to assure success, particularly if they feel that an unfair obstacle stands in their way of success.

**Time Constraints and Personal Life Circumstances**

For some of the students, a contributing factor to why they felt under-prepared for exams and at risk of earning a sub-standard grade was due to time constraints and personal circumstances that affected their ability to devote time to their course work. When Jack A. plagiarized a paper, she said, “We didn’t really have that much time to do it. I had to study for other classes,” and she also said that she did not have the time to write the paper due to events going on in her life outside of school.

It was just the due date was getting later and later, my enthusiasm about school had plummeted. . . . It was getting close to Christmas, I didn’t have enough money to go out and buy Christmas gifts or anything like that so I wasn’t, I don’t want to say I was depressed, but I wasn’t in a very good mood anyway with everything that was going on, and my sister, all of this really good stuff was happening to her like she was doing really good in law school, my parents were really helping her out financially; I wasn’t getting
helped out financially. . . . But, it was just me and my sister always have had extremes of sibling rivalry, and I knew all of that was coming up and stuff, and I just really wasn’t in a really happy Christmassy mood anyway. My ex-boyfriend had been causing tons and tons of problems in my life. . . . It was just Senioritis, and I didn’t have any enthusiasm to do anything. . . . I didn’t have the motivation to do anything.

Jack A. said she had little time to complete the paper and had other classes to study for, so she missed the due date to turn in her paper. She also attributed her inability to turn the paper in on time to a number of circumstances in her life that reduced her motivation to work. Missing the due date in conjunction with the situation in her personal life influenced her to plagiarize from a paper a friend had turned in previously. Azrael also discussed stressful life events and a heavy workload as keeping him from devoting adequate time to studying for his quiz.

I really was not prepared for a mixture of reasons. One was work overload. Towards the end of the semester everything comes full circle. There was lack of sleep in there, though no lack of judgment because I was fully aware of what I was doing. . . . I was not prepared because I did not have the time to prepare is not accurate, did not have a proper amount of sleep. I’m sure stress was a huge factor.

Azrael’s cheating came at the end of the semester when he was busy with work from all of his classes. He also had personal circumstances affecting the amount of sleep he was getting and the time he could put into studying. Feeling a lack of time to prepare and cope with the various events in his life, Azrael felt stressed, and he said that these factors influenced is decision to cheat. Rahul, who cheated based on the institutional definition but not his own, said that he copied homework answers because “I’ve had weeks where I just didn’t have time to read that Physics chapter yet, and I had other stuff to do.”
Jack A., Azrael, and Rahul discussed cheating due to time constraints because of work in other classes and life circumstances; however, Alex discussed cheating on homework to save time, you’d rather have some more leisure time, like go out or do something and you don’t want to be like stuck all night doing them. So yeah, I mean, so it’s more often this situation comes more often.

Alex prioritized activities other than homework in his life, and cheating helped him to keep his priorities. Mike also discussed how prioritization of his time played a role in his decisions to copy homework. Mike said that at times he copied from others if I just have a lot of work and I didn’t have enough time to finish it, or well I probably did have time to finish it, but I mean, realistically I could spend plenty of time doing the work, but there’s so many other things to do, and nobody can just sit there and do work non-stop. . . . If I spend, I mean if I took all the time in the day that I always say I could, then I would definitely finish all the homework assignments, but I guess, I mean I’m in college, I still want to have some fun instead of doing homework, so … in the end if I didn’t finish something, then I’ll just end up copying off of it.

Mike prioritized relaxation over homework, so he often did not have the time to complete his homework. When he ran out of time, he copied from others. Due to procrastination and other school work, Mark C. and his partner left themselves very little time to complete their work. Mark C. said that he did not start the group project until the night before it was due because he procrastinated; therefore, he felt that his cheating actions were “necessary” in order to finish the project. Mark C. also cited time as a factor in the second example he gave of cheating, based on the university definition, that involved using a few sentences without citation in a paper he
wrote, which he did not consider plagiarism. He said that he did this “mostly . . . just because it’s quicker” than trying to come up with his own way of phrasing a concept or information.

Whether due to large workloads, life circumstances, or other priorities, some students did not manage their time in a way that enabled them to do their work or study well. When time seemed too tight, cheating became an option for completing their work. Students, like Jack A, who discussed multiple overwhelming forces outside her control, or students who discussed the immense workload as influencing their decisions to cheat, neutralized their behavior by “denial of responsibility” (Sykes & Matza, 1957). Neutralizing the behavior allowed students to hold the contextualized attitude that cheating was a temporary, acceptable means by which to complete their work. Additionally, many students discussed prioritizing the work for classes that “mattered” over the work of classes that did not “matter,” thus weakening the bond to some classes and further neutralizing their behavior.

**Personal Definition of Cheating**

Of the 23 students who spoke to me in individual interviews, seven students said that they cheated based on the institutional or faculty member’s definition of cheating but that they did not consider their acts to be cheating by their own definition. Most of these students knew that the acts they committed were cheating, but they chose to commit the cheating behavior despite the institutional definition. The seven students are included in the findings presented above; however, their personal definitions worked in conjunction with some of the other influences to create contexts in which they chose to cheat. Whether or not they considered the act cheating was not the only influence on their decision, but it seemed to strengthen the influence of the other factors to override their general attitudes that cheating was not acceptable.
The behaviors that students did not consider cheating intersected with or were themselves influenced by other contextual factors. Mark A., Mike, Novali, Rahul, and Sarah said that they did not consider their behavior to be cheating due to the type of assignment on which the behavior occurred (e.g., homework, on-line, or worth few points). Novali also determined that her behavior was not cheating because she thought her class was unfair and the professor did not try to stop the behavior. She said,

In my definition, I was not cheating; there’s no way. Because it was a small couple of points something, I was conversing with [a friend], I didn’t copy their paper. We worked it out together, because both of us didn’t know what we were doing, and the professor was right there; we were in the front row. So I think if anybody felt that it was a problem, it would have been said. I also felt at a disadvantage, I specifically use that as an example because I don’t actually typically do that. But I did in this class, because I felt like it was [the] odds were against me, the book didn’t match the lecture. The lecture and the book didn’t match the test or the quiz or homework assignment, anything. So we were always comparing work. . . . So I didn’t consider it cheating, but I do know that some people would.

Novali incorporated many of the other contextual influences into her reasoning for the behavior being acceptable and not cheating. Mark C. and Jenna said that they did not think their behaviors were cheating because their behaviors fell into “gray” areas of the definition of cheating, and they did not recall being told specifically that their behaviors were cheating.

The students who did not consider their behaviors to be cheating based their definitions primarily on the type of assignment given and what their faculty members did or said or did not do or say. These students disagreed with the stated rules of the institution, which weakened their
social bond to the university and class. They neutralized their behaviors by denying responsibility and blaming their faculty members (Sykes & Matza, 1957). Most of the students said that they would have considered their behaviors to be cheating in another context, but the compounding factors in one setting in conjunction with their view of policy influenced their decisions about cheating.

A Confluence of Factors Influencing Decisions to Cheat

As I spoke with students about what influenced their decisions to cheat, they did not speak of the influences individually. For ease of presentation in this document, I separated the influences into related, but separate, categories. The separation of the influences into categories, however, does not portray an essential finding from my study – that students’ decisions to cheat are influenced by several contextual factors occurring at the same time. The students told rich, complex stories that included several influential factors intersecting with each other that together created a context that influenced the decision to cheat. In order to preserve the richness of the students’ stories and honor the students’ voices, I will present one student’s story in full that is representative of how the students spoke of the contexts in which they cheated. Other illuminating examples of students’ stories that can be found in Appendix G.

Jack A. was a senior, in the College of Science. In the questionnaire she filled out during the group interview, Jack A. stated that she had no opinion about whether cheating was a big deal, but during the course of my interview with her, she mentioned that she did not like cheating. She also served as a student proctor for some large-class exams and had caught students cheating. Jack A. described herself as “just a big nerd, a science nerd, in that aspect. I really love to learn about it.” Jack A. felt much pressure to keep her GPA high, partly because she was applying to graduate programs. Jack A. revealed two instances in which she cheated,
once on a Physics exam and once by plagiarizing a paper, for which she was caught by the professor but not formally sanctioned. She said that she felt bad for the plagiarism incident and wished she had not plagiarized, but she did not feel bad about cheating on the Physics exam.

Below is Jack A.’s story about cheating in her Physics class, a class that she did not like and did not think “mattered” or that she would ever use again, even though it was required for her major.

[The cheating was] actually what I hate the most. It was this Physics class, and I got, I don't know, most of the way through the exam, I guess, and I was having a really, really, rough time with it. The teacher, he didn’t really care either. He just, he was up in the front of the class and he was reading his own stuff, and he let all of us sit really close together. It was just, to me, it was just kind of funny. I think I took like three answers, or maybe four, off of this one guy’s [test] that I just had no clue on. . . .

[I decided to cheat] because I tried really hard in that class. We studied. I read the book. . . . We did practice problems. I thought I was coming into that exam a lot better, . . . for all of the other exams I was fine. I think I got “As”, or like a really high “B” on all of the other exams. . . . I just came into this exam and was completely blown away because it was like nothing that we had seen before, I didn’t know how to do it, and I’m just not a Physics person. You had to take three equations and mix them around and stuff, and then you’d get an answer, and it was just too much, too much math and physics for me. But, it was the other exams that he had given were not nearly as hard as that one, and that was just like a ridiculous, everyone said that coming out of the exam too, they’re like that was a lot harder than the other ones, I was like yeah. So, the fact that I actually worked, and studied, and did the whole study group, and did the review sessions, . . . and we came in and this was just like a ridiculously hard exam, he had made a couple of mistakes on the exam, it was a really small class, I was kind of just like what's the answer, leaned over and got some answers. . . .

[I looked at the other student’s answers] because I knew he had the right answers. I wanted to get, I don’t want to bottom out my whole grade off of this one exam because before that I had an “A” in the class. I didn’t want to bomb out the final and do really bad in the class. So, that would be a big part of it.

I don’t really think [he professor] cared. I think he knew people were cheating, to tell you the truth. He was just in the front of the class. He brought the answer key with him. Some kid went up and looked at the answer key. And like I said, he didn’t space any of the kids out or anything like that. He let us all four, there were four of us, let us all four sit right around each other. Actually, I think everyone cheated that day. I know the four of us did. I know every single one of the four of us cheated that day. And, I could tell that
the other people were cheating, so it made it a lot easier to look over and see [the other student’s] answers.

I also asked Jack A. if anything would have prevented or kept her from cheating on the Physics exam. She said,

I think if [the professor] had maybe given us a little bit of warning, or given us practice problems that were a little bit more like that exam, that exam, everyone, walking out of the exam, everyone was like where did that come from. It was just a lot harder than anything else he had given us before. So, if he had been consistent in what he did, it would have been a lot different. But, the fact that the first exam I got an “A” on, and then all of the homeworks I had gotten “As” on, and understood it, and worked really hard in the class to try to do good [sic], and that this one exam everyone thought it was hard and they were like there was a couple of questions that it seemed like just came out of nowhere. To me, it was just an unfair exam. So, if he had been more consistent.

[If the professor has seemed like he cared, it would have prevented the cheating] because then it would have been harder to cheat. But, it was just like he didn’t care, and he was just kind of doing his own thing up front and not really watching the kids. Like I said, there were four people I was sitting next to, and I knew all of them were cheating, so it made it a lot easier to glance over and try to see somebody else’s answers.

Although Jack A. might not have cheated if the situation she was in had been different, she told me that she did not care that she cheated on the test because “it doesn’t really matter. To me, it wasn’t like that big of a deal, I’d probably do it again. . . . I wasn’t ever going to need to know that crap, and it was just the end of the exam.”

Jack A.’s story about cheating on an exam in her Physics class includes almost all of the influences that provide a context in which cheating becomes acceptable and seemingly necessary. Jack A. did not see the relevance of the material or subject; she did not think that the class mattered. She said that she would never need the subject material for her professional life, and she struggled to understand the material, which was unusual for her. During the exam, the professor took no prevention measures, and she had little fear of being caught since she saw other students cheating without any consequence (peer behavior). She perceived the faculty member’s demeanor to be one of not caring about cheating, and she did not think that the
professor adequately taught the class to prepare students for the test. Additionally, she had little to no relationship with the faculty member, which she spoke of elsewhere in the interview. She also thought that type of assignment (the test) was unfair and would greatly affect her grade. She was concerned about grade pressure and wanted to maintain as a high a GPA as possible. She did not want one test to ruin her GPA. For Jack A., the three influences that seemed to carry the most weight were the perceived demeanor of the professor, lack of prevention measures, and the lack of relevance of the material to her professional life. If the professor had seemed to care or made attempts to prevent cheating, or if Jack A. had cared more about the class or understood the material better, she might not have cheated.

Jack A. was a student whose personal attitude about cheating was that it was bad. She also valued her education and was generally confident in her academic abilities. However, in the context of her Physics class, Jack A. cheated. Jack A.’s story about what influenced her to cheat demonstrates the multiple factors that intersected to create a context in which she thought cheating was acceptable. Even though she did not plan to cheat and may not have thought as deeply about the influences at the time of cheating as she did during the interview, the influences were present at the time of cheating. Jack A. did engage in some retrospective neutralizing or justifying her behavior; however, she acknowledged that if some of the factors present at the time of her cheating had been different, she likely would not have cheated.

For the participants in my study who admitted to planned and unplanned cheating by their own definition, multiple influences created a context in which cheating was acceptable behavior. They stated that typically they did not or would not cheat and most of the students thought that, in general, cheating was a “big deal.” The context of a particular class, most prevalently lack of prevention and not seeing the relevance of or understanding the material, which often occurred in
a large class, coupled with grade pressure and in some cases time constraints shifted the students’ attitudes about the acceptability of cheating. Each of the students acted according to the contextualized attitude and chose to cheat.

For the group who did not define their behavior as cheating, the most prevalent influences were grade pressure and type of assignment, which is somewhat different than the primary influences for the self-defined cheating students. For the students who cheated by the university definition, most of the behaviors occurred on assignments that were completed at home where there was little risk of being caught and did not involve a spontaneous decision on an in-class exam, except for Novali’s example. These students’ statements underscore the findings presented in the previous chapter regarding the lack of understanding of what constituted cheating and how students’ definitions differed from that of faculty or the institution, particularly with regard to how the same behavior (i.e., copying another’s work) was cheating in one context but not in another. As discussed by the participants, the mismatched definition then became a part of the decision-making about participating in the cheating behaviors.

The participants in my study who had never cheated spoke about their decisions not to cheat based on their actual past decisions and their certainty about their future decisions not to cheat. For the students who had never cheated, the classroom context served in a secondary role to their general attitude about cheating and non-contextual influences. The students who admitted to cheating spoke of the classroom context as equally or more influential than the non-contextual factors when in a situation where they thought about or could have cheated. Additionally, the students who had not cheated spoke of relatively few factors that influenced their behaviors in contrast to the multiple factors mentioned by the students who had cheated.
From the individual interviews, a Theory of Contextual Influences on Students’ Decision-Making about Cheating emerged. Students’ decisions were informed directly and indirectly by their pre-college experiences as well as their general attitude toward cheating. The general attitude toward cheating supported and was supported by non-contextual influences. The non-contextual influences were (1) academic self-efficacy, (2) value of education, (3) adherence to societal and group norms, and (4) personal character and responsibility. The non-contextual influences informed the decision about cheating directly but also were strengthened or weakened by contextual influences. The contextual influences were (1) classroom context (including size and type of class, prevention measures, perceptions of faculty demeanor and teaching, relationship with faculty member, relevance or understanding of material or subject, type of assignment, and peer behavior and trust), (2) grade pressure, (3) time constraints and personal life circumstances, and (4) personal definition of cheating. The contextual influences could override an anti-cheating attitude about cheating to create a contextualized attitude in which cheating was acceptable, (and presumably the opposite could occur too). The contextualized attitude then informed the decision about cheating. An important finding from my study is that students experienced their classes differently and many of the influences were based on students’ perceptions of their classes and themselves. One student may experience a class as not important and the professor as a bad teacher while another student may have the opposite experience in the same class. How a student experiences specific situations and his or her personal life and beliefs influenced students’ attitudes and decisions about cheating.

The adoption of the temporary contextualized attitude toward cheating can be understood through the lenses of strain theory, social control theory, and differential association. If the context in which the cheating decision is made includes perceived obstacles to achieving a grade
goal, cheating becomes a means by which to overcome the obstacle. When peers in the classroom are cheating, the cheating behavior becomes normative and acceptable. Finally, if students are not attached or committed to the class or the professor, or do not share a belief in the value of the class, they lack the bond that would keep them from cheating. Students are then able to neutralize their behaviors in order to cheat while still holding on to their personal attitude toward cheating and belief in themselves as good people and non-cheaters. In neutralizing their behaviors, students externalize their decision-making about cheating. The students admit to their behaviors, but they place responsibility for their actions onto the context in order to view the acts as necessary or not wrong. However, the experience of the contextual influences is a real force within the students’ academic lives that drives much of their decision-making about cheating. For the participants in my study, the contextual factors weighed heavily into decisions to cheat and not to cheat. Although several factors working together influence a student’s decision, a change in the presence or absence of any given factor could change a student’s contextualized attitude, and consequently, change the decision to cheat or not to cheat.
CHAPTER SIX
SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

In the present study, I sought to understand how college students define and think about academic cheating and what influences their decisions to cheat or not to cheat, particularly within the context of an individual classroom. Forty-two students from four academic colleges participated in group and individual interviews to discuss their perceptions of and experiences with academic cheating. As a result of the research, I put forward the Theory of Contextual Influences on Students’ Decision-Making about Cheating to help educators and administrators address and curb cheating on their campuses.

In this chapter, I present a summary of my study, including a brief synopsis of the extant literature, the methods I used to conduct the study, and an overview of my findings and the theory built from the findings. I then offer a discussion of how my research relates to current literature and relevant theories as well as new understandings about cheating that come from this study. To demonstrate the usefulness of my research, I provide implications for theory and for the practice of educators and administrators. I also provide future directions for research on college student cheating based on my findings.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of undergraduate students’ decisions about academic cheating in order to generate a theory about what influences students’ decisions to cheat or not to cheat. I explored the primary question of: What influences students’ decisions about academic cheating? Three related questions I also examined were: (1) How do students define academic cheating?, (2) What are students’ beliefs about academic cheating?, and (3) How do students think their classroom contexts affect decisions about academic cheating?
Throughout my research, I focused on gaining insight into students’ personal understanding of and decisions about cheating.

Much research has been conducted about the topic of college student cheating. Researchers have investigated the prevalence of cheating on college campuses and noted that the average cheating rates are quite high (Dawkins, 2004; Hard, Conway, & Moran, 2006; Kidwell et al., 2003; McCabe, 1992; McCabe & Treviño, 1993, 1997; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 2001a, 2001b, 2002; Whitley, 1998). Researchers also have found that definitions of what constitutes cheating differ for both faculty (Higbee & Thomas, 2002; Pincus & Schmelkin, 2003; Whitley & Keith-Spiegel, 2002) and students (Carpenter et al., 2006; Higbee & Thomas, 2002; Levy & Rakovski, 2006; Schmelkin et al., 2008; Stiles & Gair, 2010; Whitley & Keith-Spiegel, 2002), which creates difficulty in understanding the problem from a research perspective and on college and university campuses.

Researchers have studied what factors correlate with cheating and have found correlations among cheating and academic ability as measured by GPA (Crown & Spiller, 1998; McCabe & Treviño, 1997; Newstead et al., 1996; Smith et al., 2004); motivation (Jordan, 2001; Murdock, Miller, & Goetzinger, 2007; Rettinger et al., 2004; Rettinger & Kramer, 2009; Robinson et al., 2004); fear of failure or a need to please others (Clifford, 1998; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 1999; Passow et al., 2006; Whitley, 1998); attitudes toward cheating and personal values (Bernardi et al. 2004; Bolin, 2004; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 1999; Nonis & Swift, 2001; Passow et al., 2006; Whitley, 1998); past cheating behaviors (Passow et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2004, Whitley, 1998); presence of an honor code and understanding of policies (McCabe & Treviño, 1993, 1997; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 1999, 2002); academic major (McCabe & Treviño, 1995; Newstead et al., 1996); classroom environment and perceptions of
faculty (Broeckelman-Post, 2008; Carpenter et al., 2006; Genereux & McLeod, 1995; Murdock et al., 2007; Kaplan & Mable, 1998; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 1999; Newstead et al., 1996; Pulvers & Diekhoff, 1999; Whitley & Keith-Spiegel, 2002); perceptions of peer behavior (Clifford, 1998; Crown & Spiller, 1998; Hard, Conway, & Moran, 2006; McCabe & Treviño, 1993, 1997, McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 1999, 2001a, 2002; Rettinger et al., 2004; Vowell & Chen, 2004; Whitley, 1998), and risk of punishment (Burrus et al., 2007; Crown & Spiller, 1998; Davy, 2007; McCabe & Treviño, 1993, 1997; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 2002; Vandehey et al., 2007; Whitley, 1998). Although researchers have found all of these factors to be correlated with student cheating, little is known about why students define cheating as they do or why they choose to cheat in some situations or courses when they do not cheat in other situations or courses. Additionally, a dearth of research is situated from students’ perspectives or explores students’ own understanding about cheating and their decisions about cheating. Researchers are left with an incomplete understanding of what influences students’ decisions about cheating, and administrators and educators have limited knowledge of what they might do to address the problem of cheating.

Although the primary purpose of my study was to build a theory based on what influences students’ decisions about cheating, I followed the advice of Michaels and Meithe (1989) and used sociological deviance theory to guide my inquiry and to aid in the understanding of how the data-derived influences enabled students to view cheating as acceptable or unacceptable. Three sociological deviance theories guided my inquiry during this research. Strain theory (Merton, 1968a, 1968b, 1966a, 1966b) provided a framework for understanding how students thought about grades as cultural goals, experienced pressure to succeed, overcame perceived obstacles, and negotiated lax enforcement of rules in their decisions about cheating.
Social control theory (Hirschi, 2002), along with its component part the concept of neutralization (Sykes & Matza, 1957), provided guidance in understanding how students experienced particular classroom contexts and relationships in relation to cheating decisions and how students knowingly violated social norms and their own values yet found cheating acceptable in those situations. I used differential association theory (Sutherland & Cressey, 1974) to help me understand the role that peers and peer groups had in students’ decisions about cheating. Using these three theories to guide my interview protocols and interpretation of findings enabled me to gain a better understanding of students’ decisions about cheating in relation to the social environment.

To conduct my research, I used constructivist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2005, 2006). Constructivist grounded theory prioritizes the relationship of the researcher with both the participants and the data. The researcher, in partnership with the participants, “stud[ies] how—and sometimes why—participants construct meanings and actions in specific situations” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 130, emphasis in original). To collect data, I conducted semi-structured group and individual interviews with the 42 participants. I recruited the participants through direct appeals in courses and through email via faculty members. When students indicated interest in participating in the study, I communicated with them through email. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. I used NVivo® Software Package for Qualitative Research to code and analyze my data. I employed open coding, line-by-line coding, and emic coding in the initial phase of data analysis. I used axial coding in the focused coding phase of analysis. Additionally, I regularly engaged in reflective journaling and peer debriefing to aid analysis and to bolster the trustworthiness of my research.
Four primary limitations appeared in this study. The participants came from only four academic colleges at the institution where I collected data. Although the students discussed both major and non-major courses, students from other fields of study might experience cheating and the classroom context differently and provide for a richer understanding of cheating and decision-making about cheating. The second limitation was the use of a single site for the research. Students in different institutional settings might experience cheating differently than did the students at Mid-Atlantic State University. Including several institutional types in the research also might have provided a deeper understanding of the issue of cheating and provided for greater divergence in the data. The third limitation was the exclusion of faculty and classroom observations in my study. Although the focus of my research was on students, including faculty interviews and observations of classes could have provided a richer interpretation and understanding of the students’ perceptions of their classroom contexts. The final limitation was the lack of generalizability of my findings due to the small sample size and single institution site. The purpose of my research was not generalizability; however, further study could provide a additional data to strengthen the theory and it use across institutional types and student populations.

From the data, several salient findings emerged. The first set of findings related to how students defined cheating. Students had a limited notion of what constituted cheating and based much of their definition on their K-12 education experiences related to exams and written papers. Students thought that copying, collaborating, or using notes on minor assignments or work completed outside the classroom was a lesser form of cheating or not cheating at all. Additionally, students were confused about what constituted plagiarism and how to ensure that they were not plagiarizing in their work.
The second set of findings related to students’ perceptions about the issue of cheating. The students thought that cheating was a “big deal” in general, which they learned as children, but when discussing specific contexts, cheating was acceptable behavior. Students took their cues from their faculty members about the seriousness of cheating or made assumptions about their faculty members thoughts on cheating if little was said about the topic. When students had faculty members who mentioned cheating briefly and did little to actively try to prevent cheating, students thought that cheating did not matter and that their professors did not care about cheating. When professors regularly engaged in discussions about cheating, including their personal feelings, and made efforts to stress the consequences of cheating and to prevent cheating, students took the issue quite seriously and thought the professors cared about cheating. When students perceived that their faculty members cared about cheating, the students thought that cheating was a serious issue in those classes and a behavior in which not to engage. When professors spoke little about cheating or made few efforts to actively prevent cheating, students perceived that professors did not care about cheating and did not think cheating was a serious issue; the behavior became acceptable within those contexts.

The third set of findings from my data related to what influenced students’ decisions to cheat or not to cheat. I developed the Theory of Contextual Influences on Students’ Decision-Making about Cheating (see Figure 2).
As depicted in the model, students enter college with experiences pertaining to cheating. Those experiences and their up-bringing affected their general attitude toward cheating, which for most of my participants was that cheating was bad or wrong. In conjunction with their general attitude toward cheating, non-contextual factors influenced their decisions not to cheat. The non-contextual influences were academic self-efficacy, the value of education, adherence to societal and group norms, and personal character and responsibility. Academic self-efficacy was the students’ confidence in their own abilities to do well in their courses and achieve their grade goals (Zajacova et al., 2005); students said that when they had confidence in their abilities they chose not to cheat. Value of education was how much value students placed on their educations, whether to get a degree, to learn for learning’s sake, or because they were paying for school; when students valued their educations, they chose not to cheat so as not to cheat themselves out...
of their educations. Adherence to societal and group norms was the degree that students saw cheating as a social wrong or as an act that would violate the values of a particular group; when students saw cheating as violating norms, they decided not to cheat. Personal character and responsibility referred to students holding personal values and morals that opposed cheating; when students thought that cheating would harm their sense of selves or their personal values, they chose not to cheat. Often, students considered several of the non-contextual influences together when making decisions about cheating.

The students’ personal attitude toward cheating and non-contextual influences were either challenged or supported in particular situations. Contextual factors that influenced students’ decisions about cheating were the classroom context, including class size, prevention measures and fear of consequences, perceptions of faculty demeanor and teaching, relationship with faculty, relevance or understanding of the material or subject, type of assignment, and peer behavior and trust; grade pressure; time constraints and personal life circumstances; and one’s personal definition of cheating. Within the classroom context, students indicated that in large classrooms opportunities to cheat became more accessible and provided further context in which cheating became acceptable. In small classrooms, students indicated that they typically would not cheat. When professors actively sought to prevent students from cheating or if students were afraid of the consequences of cheating, students chose not to cheat; however, if prevention efforts were lacking, students often decided to cheating. When students perceived that a professor did not care about teaching or cheating and did not teach well, students thought that cheating was acceptable behavior. The relationship between the faculty member and the student also was an important influence on students’ decisions about cheating. When students had a
positive relationship with their faculty members, they chose not to cheat; however, when a negative or no relationship existed, students said that cheating became acceptable.

How the student felt about the course material also influenced their decisions about cheating. When students thought that their classes were not relevant or did not “matter” or if they did not like their courses, they chose to cheat. Also, if students’ academic self-efficacy was challenged and they struggled to understand the course material, they decided to cheat. The type of work that faculty members assigned gave students an impression about whether cheating would be acceptable. Assignments worth few points or to be completed outside the classroom were seen as less serious than in-class work, and students then viewed cheating as permissible. Conversely, students indicated that they typically did not cheat on in-class assignments, exams, papers, and other work that required original thought. The final classroom context factor was peer behavior and trust. Students indicated that if they saw other students in a particular course cheating or could cheat with a trusted friend, they thought of cheating as acceptable behavior.

Grade pressure also entered into students’ decisions about cheating. Most of the students mentioned that they felt pressure to receive high grades in their classes. When students thought that their grades were in jeopardy, cheating became acceptable. Time constraints and students’ personal life issues also affected their decisions about cheating. Students stated that if they did not have time to study or complete assignments due to mounting workload or other life stressors that they were influenced toward cheating. The final influence was how students defined cheating. If students defined cheating differently than the institution, they chose to cheat, even though they knew that their behaviors violated the rules.

When students experienced several of the pro-cheating contextual influences at the same time, the influences overrode their typical anti-cheating attitudes producing temporary,
contextualized attitudes in which cheating was acceptable behavior, and students acted on those attitudes. Fewer contextual, anti-cheating influences were necessary to support the non-contextual influences and maintain their personal anti-cheating attitudes and non-cheating behaviors. The intersection of several influences within the cheating context demonstrated the complex nature of how students made decisions about cheating and how individual constructions of reality provided differing contextual experiences and contextual attitudes toward cheating.

Students’ ability to find cheating acceptable in some situations when they typically did not do so can be further understood through the use of sociological deviance theories. Strain theory (Merton 1968a, 1968b, 1996a, 1996b) provides a lens through which to understand how students viewed cheating as a necessary or acceptable means by which to overcome external and unjust obstacles to achieving high grades, such as perceived poor teaching or unfair exams. Strain theory also offers an explanation for how lax enforcement of rules breaks down the regulatory structure in a classroom and provides the opportunity to cheat without feeling as though one violated rules.

Social control theory (Hirschi, 2002) provides a lens through which to view students’ relationships with their faculty members and their classes as well as how strongly they believe in the values of the group. When students felt little or no connection to their professors or the material in their classes, they were able to find cheating acceptable because they were not breaking any bonds by cheating since the bonds did not exist. Additionally, by neutralizing their behaviors, students were able to maintain their general attitudes toward cheating and not feel as though they were violating the values of the group. Neutralizations (Sykes & Matza, 1957) such as blaming faculty members, stating that the class does not matter, or denying responsibility
allowed students to temporarily suspend their general attitudes toward cheating and act upon an attitude in which cheating was acceptable and necessary.

Differential association theory (Sutherland & Cressey, 1974) helps to explain how peer behavior influences students’ decisions to cheat. When students witnessed their peers cheating, cheating became normative within the class setting making cheating acceptable within that setting. Students’ experiences within particular contexts coupled with their ability to justify their behavior allowed them to act in a manner that typically would not be acceptable behavior.

Discussion

Researchers have conducted numerous studies about college student cheating, particularly with regard to what factors relate to cheating. However, researchers have not been able to explain sufficiently why students choose to cheat in some situations when they typically do not cheat. In order to address the issue of cheating, educators and administrators must know what factors influence cheating and why. My research supports and extends current literature on how students define and think about cheating and what influences their decisions about cheating. In some instances my findings diverge with the current literature. My research also provides a more complex and comprehensive theory of how and why students are influenced to cheat.

Cheating Undefined

Several researchers have found that students are generally confused over the definition of cheating (Blum, 2009; Burrus et al., 2007; Higbee & Thomas, 2002; Power, 2009; Zelna & Bresciani; 2004) or that the definition of or seriousness of cheating differs depending on the situation or type of assignment given (Higbee & Thomas, 2002; Passow et al., 2006; Schmelkin et al., 2008; Stiles & Gair, 2010). The participants in my study also were quite confused about the definition of cheating and used type of assignment to rate the seriousness of some behaviors.
Like the students in the Burrus et al. (2007) study, the students in my study also stated that they did not know how the institution defined cheating. Similarly, Power (2009) stated that students “have some profound misunderstandings of what constitutes plagiarism” (p. 657), a conclusion reinforced by the participants in my research. Students in my study knew that plagiarism was a form of cheating, but they did not know what plagiarism meant or how to avoid plagiarizing in their work. Additionally, students mentioned that their professors had differing standards for citation in their written work, which caused further confusion over what constituted plagiarism and, in some students, fear that they were violating rules by following the professor’s directions.

Students also were confused about how copying or collaborative behaviors outside the classroom fit with the definition of cheating, or they did not consider the behaviors to be cheating, which supports the finding by Stiles and Gair (2010) that out-of-class behaviors were considered “‘not cheating’ or ‘trivial cheating’” (p. 10) and the findings of Schmelkin et al. (2008) that students considered cheating on exams to be more serious than cheating on other assignments. My findings both support and extend the current literature. The students expressed that the reasons why they did not consider behaviors on take-home or on-line work to be cheating or serious cheating was due to the relatively little worth of the assignments and their perceptions that professors did not care if students worked together or copied on work outside the classroom. Much of the students’ confusion over the definition of cheating seemed to come from the lack of explanation by their faculty members. However, students wanted their professors to explain the definition and their specific expectations about behavior, which Bresciani and Zelna (2004) also found. When faculty members did not explain cheating, the students used their own limited notions of what constituted cheating to guide their actions. However, as Schmelkin et al. (2008) stated, “the problem inherent in academic dishonesty
appears to involve more than definitional issues” and that a set of complex factors would affect cheating. I found this to be true; several factors worked in concert to influence students’ decisions to cheat, of which the definition of cheating was only one.

**Academic Self-Efficacy**

Little research has been conducted about how academic self-efficacy relates to student cheating. Elias (2008) found that students who had higher levels of academic self-efficacy were more likely than students with low academic self-efficacy to view cheating as unethical. However, Elias measured students’ perceptions of cheating behaviors not their actual behaviors. Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as confidence in one’s abilities to perform a behavior in order to achieve the desired or expected outcome. Academic self-efficacy is confidence in one’s abilities to perform well on academic assignments (e.g., exams and papers) in order to achieve academic outcomes (e.g., high GPA, graduation) (Zajacova et al., 2005). High academic self-efficacy is related to achieving high grades and overall academic success. The finding from my study suggested that academic self-efficacy was also related to students’ decisions about cheating. Many of the participants indicated that they did not cheat because they were confident in their own abilities to do well on academic assignments and could achieve their desired grade and graduation goals through their own efforts. However, when students’ confidence in their abilities was challenged in a particular course, students chose to cheat. This finding suggests that course- or task-specific academic self-efficacy is influential on students’ decisions about cheating. This finding extends the current literature on college student academic cheating and points to the need for further research on academic self-efficacy and cheating.
Grade Pressure, Importance of Education, and Motivation

Related to academic self-efficacy were students’ goals for grade achievement, how much they valued their educations, and their motivation in specific courses. Genereux and McLeod (1995) found that pressure to achieve high grades was an influence on students’ likelihood of cheating, and they found that having a high GPA goal was related to cheating behaviors for men. Additionally, Kaplan and Mable (1998) and McCabe (1992) found that students cited pressure to achieve good grades as an influence on their decisions to cheat. My research supports their findings. Students in my study indicated that one of the strongest influences on their decisions to cheat was grade pressure. The grade-oriented culture weighed heavily on their minds. Students stated that they needed to attain high grades in order to gain admittance into and stay in their academic majors, obtain a good job, and for admission into graduate school. When students feared they would do poorly in a class, they decided to cheat, particularly when coupled with a class with which they did not think the material was relevant. When students thought their course material was relevant or understood the material well or did not feel pressure to earn a high grade, they indicated that the value they placed on their educations influenced them not to cheat. Many students indicated that they valued their educations for one of several reasons (e.g., love of learning, because they were paying for college, or because they needed their education to earn a degree and do well in future jobs), and valuing education factored into their decisions not to cheat.

Few researchers have studied the effect of grade pressure or valuing education on student cheating; however, several researchers have focused their studies on intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation, with intrinsic motivation measured by desire to learn or having a goal of content mastery and extrinsic motivation measured by desire to earn high grades or having a
performance-oriented goal (Davy, 2007; Jordan, 2001; Rettinger et al., 2004; Rettinger & Kramer, 2008). The researchers found that students who were extrinsically motivated were more likely to cheat or think of cheating as more acceptable than students who were intrinsically motivated. However, most of these researchers studied motivation and cheating behaviors in general rather than related to specific contexts in which cheating occurred. My findings indicated that motivation is not an “either-or” factor as depicted in the current literature. Many students were motivated both by performance (e.g., grades, degree attainment) and by mastery (e.g., learning). However, in particular courses, one type of motivation seemed to take precedence over the other due to the relationship with the course, fear or doing poorly, and how much pressure students felt to earn high grades. Bertram Gallant (2008) suggested that a class culture that emphasized grades over learning may result in student cheating, and Jordan’s (2001) findings also coincide with my findings. Jordan found that students who had cheated in college had higher intrinsic motivation scores in courses in which they did not cheat and higher extrinsic motivation scores in courses in which they did cheat. Additionally, Jordan found that the intrinsic motivation scores did not differ for non-cheaters and cheaters in the courses in which they did not cheat. Jordan’s findings support the notion that students are motivated by both intrinsic and extrinsic goals but strength of one motivational influence over the other may be mediated by the particular course a student takes. This was true for the students in my study as they spoke about grade pressure, the value of education, and the relationships they had with their courses.

Course Relevance

One of the most surprising findings in my research was the influence of how much a course “mattered” to students on their decisions to cheat. The students indicated that if a course mattered to them personally or professionally that they would not cheat, even if other pro-
cheating influences existed. If the course did not matter to them or if they did not like the course, students indicated that they chose to cheat in that course because they did not need to learn the material. The influence of the student’s relationship to the course material is understudied in the cheating literature. Genereux and McLeod (1995) found that students thought that valuing course material would decrease the likelihood of cheating in a hypothetical situation. My study adds to the current literature with the finding that the perceived relevance of the course material is highly influential on students’ decisions about cheating. Students needed to feel as though the course they were taking “mattered” either professionally or personally; they needed to understand why they were taking the class. When students did not feel connected to the course, they chose to cheat. Although not widely studied, this is an important finding, and it fits with social control theory, which will be discussed further below.

**Faculty Influence**

The influence of faculty members in specific courses was another salient factor that affected students’ decisions about cheating. Students indicated that their relationship with faculty members, how professors taught, and the demeanor of faculty members in the classroom influenced their decisions to cheat or not to cheat.

**Relationship.** Although an understudied area in the cheating literature, some researchers found that the professor-student relationship was a factor in student cheating decisions (Kaplan & Mable, 1998; Pulvers & Diekhoff, 1999; Stearns, 2001). Stearns (2001) found that students who cheated liked and respected their professors in the classes in which they cheated less than did non-cheaters. Pulvers and Diekhoff (1999) found that students who cheated indicated that their classes were less personalized than did non-cheaters. My research extends the literature regarding the professor-student relationship and cheating. When students had a positive
relationship with their faculty members, they decided not to cheat. A positive relationship included students feeling comfortable talking to professors, professors knowing students’ names, and mutual respect between the student and professor. When students had a negative or no relationship with faculty members, they chose to cheating. Additionally, students mentioned that the lack of a relationship with their faculty members often was coupled with large class sizes where they felt anonymous or like “a number” and had little opportunity to interact with their professors. When students had a relationship with their professors, they did not want to damage that relationship by cheating. Conversely, it was not surprising that students cheated in classes in which they had no relationship with the professor because they had no bond to keep them from cheating.

**Teaching.** In addition to the type of relationship students had with faculty members, they also judged their professors on how they taught. Several researchers found that quality of instruction and assignments related to student cheating (Bertram Gallant, 2008; Carpenter et al., 2006; Murdock et al., 2007; Pulvers & Diekhoff, 1999; Zelna & Bresciani, 2004). Carpenter et al. (2006) and Murdock et al. (2007) found that students indicated that cheating was acceptable when instructor quality was perceived as poor. Zelna and Bresciani (2004) found that students cheated when they thought assignments were meaningless. My study adds to the findings of previous research. The students who cheated discussed poor teaching, a lack of learning, and unfair exams as reasons that contributed to their decisions to cheat. In these discussions, students placed the responsibility for their cheating on their professors rather than owning their own decisions. Students indicated that had the professor taught better, prepared them for exams, or created more appropriate assessments, they might not have cheated. In essence, students blamed their faculty members for their cheating.
Demeanor. In addition to how faculty taught, students discussed whether they thought their professors cared about teaching or cheating as influencing their decisions to cheat. Students’ perceptions of whether faculty cared about teaching often mirrored their perceptions of teaching quality (i.e., perceived poor teaching indicated lack of caring). Students also equated caring about teaching with caring about cheating. When professors seemed not to care if students cheated, as determined by a lack of conversation about cheating or lack of preventative measures, students often chose to cheat. This finding adds to the work of Genereux and McLeod (1995) who found that students indicated they would likely cheat in a class in which the professor seemed not to care about cheating. The influence of faculty demeanor on students’ decisions to cheat demonstrated an externalization and rationalization of the cheating decision and placed blame on the faculty member, absolving students of responsibility for their actions.

Prevention and Consistent Enforcement

Students wanted and expected their professors to prevent cheating. Students decided not to cheat when they thought or knew that their professors were going to enforce policies and punishment would be incurred. Much research exists about how policy enforcement, the use of preventive measures, and likelihood of sanctions relate to student cheating (Burrus et al., 2007; Crown & Spiller, 1998; Davis et al., 1992; Davy, 2007; McCabe & Treviño, 1993; 1997; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 2002; Vandehey et al., 2007; Whitely, 1998). Researchers have found that when fear of punishment is high or deterrents are used, cheating and the likelihood of cheating decreased. Additionally Broeckelman-Post (2008) found that when professors discussed and defined cheating as well as policies and used prevention measures less cheating occurred. Genereux and McLeod (1995) found that the when instructors were highly vigilant in their efforts to prevent cheating, students indicated they would be less likely to cheat; the inverse
relationship was also found. Discussing and enforcing severe punishment also decreased the likelihood of cheating (Burrus et al., 2007; Davy, 2007; Genereux & McLeod, 1995). The participants in my study also indicated that prevention measures and fear of consequences factored into their decisions not to cheat. The students made suggestions for deterrents similar to what Davis et al. (1992) found; deterrents mentioned by my participants included repeatedly telling students not to cheat, explaining expectations for behaviors, explaining why cheating was wrong, spacing students apart during exams, giving more work to be done during class or giving assignments that required original thought, using several proctors to constantly watch students during exams, and telling students about the possible consequences if caught cheating. Students did not just want cheating prevented; they also wanted punishments enforced when cheating occurred. Stiles and Gair (2010) found that even when faculty discussed and tried to prevent cheating, if they did not consistently catch and punish students who cheated or if they punished students unevenly, students did not take their prevention efforts seriously. However, Stiles and Gair pointed out that often students did not know if their peers had been caught cheating or what punishments they had received due to privacy regulations, which accounted for some of the perceived discrepancy in faculty prevention and actual enforcement of policies. Supporting the findings of other researchers, the students in my study were clear that they thought preventing cheating was the professor’s responsibility. In doing so, they abdicated their own responsibility for their behavior and created a context in which cheating was acceptable if no efforts were taken or perceived to be taken to prevent it.

**Peer Influence**

Many researchers have focused on the relationship between perceptions of peer cheating and individual cheating behaviors and have found a strong relationship between perceived
acceptability of and participation in cheating by peers and individual cheating (Conway, & Moran, 2006; McCabe & Treviño, 1993, 1997; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 1999, 2001a, 2002; Vandehey et al., 2007; Vowell & Chen, 2004) However, the majority of the researchers studied students’ general perceptions of peer cheating in relation to cheating at some point in their college careers. My research diverged from the current findings and supported the work of Rettinger and Kramer (2009) who found that direct knowledge of peer cheating influenced student cheating but perceptions of others’ cheating was not related to individual cheating behaviors. Jordan (2001) also found that direct knowledge of cheating by peers influenced individual cheating. To further refine the potential influence of peers on student decisions about cheating, I studied the context in which the cheating occurred. Students seemed relatively unaffected by thinking or knowing that their peers cheated in general; in fact, students were uncertain about the rate of cheating by their peers. However, in particular courses at the time of an exam or assignment for which they had direct knowledge of their peers cheating, students explained their decisions to cheat were influenced by the knowledge of others’ cheating. My research indicated that the current findings in the literature relating perceived prevalence of peer cheating to individual behavior may not be as strong a predictor of cheating as researchers have suggested. A possible explanation for the strong relationship in the literature could be that if students have cheated, they might guess that many other students cheat too and artificially inflate the strength of the relationship.

**Theory of Contextual Influences**

The existing literature suggests that multiple situational factors influence students’ decisions about cheating. The theory that emerged from my data builds upon the existing research and furthers it by demonstrating the complex nature of how and why students made
decisions to cheat or not to cheat. The influences on decisions about cheating were not experienced in the same manner by students. Each student had a unique path to the decision to cheat or not cheat, but common factors emerged as influences on students’ decisions, the strongest of which were prevention measures and fear of getting caught, grade pressure, relationship with faculty member, and relationship with material. The present study provided a new understanding of why students were likely to cheat in some contexts and not cheat in other contexts. Most students reported that they did not cheat habitually, and most students thought that cheating was wrong; however, when multiple pro-cheating influences were present in a specific context, their anti-cheating attitudes and anti-cheating influences were overridden, and students adopted a temporary pro-cheating attitude and acted on that attitude. The theory provides an understanding of what influences students’ decisions about cheating. Although situated in the context of Mid-Atlantic State University, the theory is useful in understanding cheating in different institutional contexts because students discussed multiple types of classes; however, further research is necessary to explore how students in differing majors and institutions fit or do not fit with the theory I propose. Likewise, educators and administrators should also seek to understand if additional influences exist in students’ decision-making about cheating.

**Relationship with Deviance Theories**

My research supports the use of sociological deviance theories to guide further research about college student cheating. My work was guided by strain theory, social control theory, and differential association theory. Each of the theories provided an additional interpretive layer of understanding about why students were able to adopt a temporary, contextual, pro-cheating attitude and act on that attitude. Strain theory (Merton 1968a, 1968b, 1996a, 1996b) provided an
understanding of grades and degree attainment as culturally defined goals that people should strive to achieve. When the students met with perceived unfair obstacles to achieving those goals, they resorted to cheating to overcome the obstacles. My work set the cheating decision within the context of a particular class rather than the context of the university as a whole and built on the work of Harp and Taietz (1966) and Vowell and Chen (2004) who found only a moderate relationship between strain-related goal factors and cheating. Strain theory also can be used to understand how lax enforcement of rules and use of prevention measures weakens the cultural control structure both in a particular course and on the campus as a whole, thereby making the rules seem trivial or unimportant and cheating acceptable. My research points to the use of course-specific measures to operationalize strain theory in further research.

Social control theory (Hirschi, 2002) also has been used as a framework for studying cheating (Eve & Bromley, 1981; Michaels & Miethe, 1989; Vowell & Chen, 2004). However, in the existing research, the bonds created by attachment, involvement, commitment, and belief were operationalized at an institutional level rather than at the course level yielding only moderate relationships between social control-related factors and cheating. My research suggested that social control theory is a useful framework for further study of cheating. Several of the non-contextual and contextual influences on decisions about cheating directly related to the student’s relationship with the class, professor, and material, involvement in and commitment to the class and its purpose as well as students’ beliefs in the values of the class and of not cheating. The presence of a strong bond was strongly considered in students’ decisions not to cheat. When a weak or no bond existed, students were able to neutralize their decisions about cheating, making cheating acceptable.
The use of neutralization techniques (Sykes & Matza, 1957) in cheating decisions has been studied by several researchers (Davy, 2007; Jordan, 2001; Lebeff et al., 1990; McCabe, 1992; Rettinger & Kramer, 2009; Vandehey et al., 2007). The researchers found that students used neutralization techniques to rationalize cheating behaviors and that students who held neutralizing attitudes thought of cheating more acceptable than those who did not hold neutralizing attitudes. My research coincides with the current research about neutralizations. The students used neutralization techniques of condemning the condemners, denying responsibility, denying a victim, and denying injury to neutralize their decisions to cheat. Additionally, my research revealed a new, cheating-specific neutralization of “the class does not matter.” When using “the class does not matter” to justify their behavior, students explained that cheating did not disrupt the bonds to the class because no bonds existed and that cheating did not violate the values of education and academic integrity because the class did not contribute to the value of one’s education. The emergence of a new neutralization technique specific to cheating necessitates further research to explore if the technique is used by additional students in differing settings and majors.

Differential association theory (Sutherland & Cressey, 1974) also provided additional understanding of why students found cheating acceptable in some situations. As discussed above, when students witnessed or knew that their peers cheated in their classes, cheating became acceptable behavior because it was normative in the classroom setting. Although my findings differed from the majority of the research on perceptions of peer cheating, my findings support the use of differential association theory in studying cheating. However, future research should focus on the peer environment within the classroom in addition to perceptions of peers in general.
Relationship of Findings with Other Theories

Although sociological deviance theories guided my inquiry, in reviewing my findings, other theoretical lenses lend themselves to furthering the interpretation and understanding of my research and point toward the need for additional research. Students’ discussions of why cheating was right or wrong or acceptable or unacceptable revealed much about their moral reasoning with regard to cheating, particularly from a Kohlbergian perspective of moral reasoning. A second theoretical lens through which the findings can be explored is cognitive development theory, particularly Epistemological Reflection (Baxter Magolda, 2001). The students’ reliance on their faculty members to tell them about cheating without taking the initiative to ask questions, may be indicative of less developed cognitive reasoning. A third lens that may be useful in further understanding my findings is Ajzen and Fishbein’s model of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005).

Moral reasoning. In Kohlberg’s theory of moral development, Kohlberg describes six stages of moral reasoning based on how individuals determine what is “right” or “wrong” and on one’s relationship to society (Kohlberg, 2005). Stages one and two make up the first level of moral reasoning – pre-conventional reasoning. In stage one, people think in terms of cultural notions of good and bad and will do what is right or avoid breaking rules in order to avoid punishment. In stage two, people think about what is right in terms of what satisfies one’s own needs or in terms of an exchange. Stages three and four comprise the second level of moral reasoning – conventional reasoning. In conventional reasoning, people see themselves as members of a society with norms and laws. In stage three, people act in relation to their closet group and do what is right in order to gain approval or praise from others and will act on the norms or expectations of the group over one’s own feelings. In stage four, people understand
their role in the larger society, have respect for rules and laws, and view following the rules, thereby doing what is right, as a means to help maintain order in their society. In the third level of moral reasoning, post-conventional reasoning, people think about fairness for all in society and individual rights. People view “rightness” as that which is fair to others and that which does not interfere with others’ rights in society.

The participants in my study reasoned about the rightness or wrongness cheating primarily from pre-conventional and conventional levels of moral reasoning. For example, when students spoke about cheating being wrong or not wanting to cheat because of the consequences that could be incurred, they demonstrated stage one reasoning. As mentioned in the previous chapter, often the fear of consequences was a large factor in students’ decisions about cheating. When students discussed not cheating in order to maintain their confidence in their own abilities or, conversely, cheating in order to achieve their goal grades, they demonstrated stage two reasoning in which they were thinking about their own needs. Additionally, when students discussed the relationship with their professors as transactional, they also exhibited stage two reasoning. In thinking about the student-teacher-student relationship as transactional, students demonstrated cheating or not cheating as a form of reciprocity for perceived good or bad teaching. Cheating was right or acceptable if students perceived their professors’ teaching as poor, and cheating was not right or not acceptable if students perceived their professors’ teaching as good.

When students spoke about maintaining the norms or rules of the group and wanting to maintain relationships within the group, they demonstrated conventional reasoning. The examples that students gave about not wanting to cheat in order to maintain the good relationships they had with faculty members, they demonstrated stage three reasoning, in that
they did not want to incur a negative reaction from their faculty. As Jack A. pointed out, she considered cheating, but decided not to because of the relationship she had with her faculty member. In that situation, Jack A. put her own feelings aside in order to live up to the expectations and remain in the good favor of her professor. Students demonstrated stage four reasoning when they discussed cheating as being wrong because it is against the rules of the university or of the larger society. When students mentioned that they knew cheating was wrong because society had told them this throughout their lives, they showed that they saw themselves as members of society whose responsibility it was to help maintain order by following the rules. Most of the students demonstrated reasoning in the first four stages of Kohlberg’s theory; however, for those students who discussed cheating as being an unfair advantage over others, they demonstrated post-conventional reasoning. The students who thought about the fairness of cheating to others showed that they were thinking beyond themselves or the rules about cheating and viewed cheating as an issue of potentially causing harm to others by artificially boosting one’s own grade.

The findings in my study are revealing about how students reason about the moral issue of cheating, however, most of the students with whom I spoke reasoned about cheating from multiple stages at the same time, which diverges from how Kolhberg’s theory typically is applied. For Kohlberg, people tend to reason primarily from one stage and move linearly through the stages (Kohlberg, 2005). The students in my study, however, demonstrated reasoning from several stages simultaneously. The students seemed to understand that the issue of cheating has multiple moral considerations to it and is either right or wrong for several reasons, some of which depended upon or changed based on the context. When making decisions not to cheat, the multiple reasons for not cheating being right were retained. However, when making decisions to
cheat, students tended to allow their own needs or perceptions about fear of consequences (pre-conventional reasoning) to guide their decisions even if they demonstrated a more developed sense of reasoning at other times.

As mentioned in chapter two, researchers who study moral development and cheating found little correlation between level of reasoning and cheating behavior. However, this result is, perhaps, expected for three reasons. First, the DIT, the instrument used to measure moral reasoning, measures just that—moral reasoning; it does not measure behavior. Second, if students were asked to think retrospectively about cheating behavior, their level of reasoning may have changed from the time that they cheated. Third, as the results of my study indicate, students might reason about cheating from several stages; therefore, assigning students to one stage of reasoning is an inaccurate portrayal of how they think about the topic of cheating, and perhaps other moral issues. Additionally, based on the context of the situation, the students in my study expressed one stage of reasoning more strongly than others, even when they were able to reason from several stages at one time. I suggest that further research should be conducted to study how students reason about cheating, if one stage of reasoning outweighs others, and what contexts elicit what stages of reasoning more strongly.

**Epistemological reflection.** One of the primary findings of my research is that students abdicate their own responsibility for learning what constitutes cheating, in general and in specific courses, and expect their faculty members to provide them knowledge on all aspects of cheating. Additionally, if faculty members do not discuss cheating in full detail, students make the assumption that the issue is of little importance. Students’ lack of personal responsibility with regard to learning about cheating can be further understood through an exploration of Baxter
Magolda’s (2001) theory of epistemological reflection, a theory about cognitive development of college students.

Baxter Magolda (2001) describes four ways of knowing exhibited by college students. The first type of knowing is “absolute knowing.” In absolute knowing, students perceive their instructors to be the authorities on knowledge and expect their professors “to communicate knowledge clearly to them” (Baxter Magolda, 2001, p. 27). Some students are passive recipients of knowledge and do not seek to interact with the faculty, while other students may interact with the faculty but in a manner that mirrors the faculty member rather than seeking to gain new knowledge. The second type of knowing is “transitional knowing.” When students learn more about a particular subject, they enter transitional knowing in which students recognize that knowledge is not certain and that people have differing opinions or ideas on the same topic. Rather than looking solely to a single authority for the “correct” answer, students will choose the idea or opinion that seems to offer the best path to success. Students expect to interact with peers and faculty and exchange ideas. For some students the relationship with peers and the faculty member in particular, are important for learning. The third type of knowing is “independent knowing.” In independent knowing, students view themselves as equal with their faculty in being a source for knowledge, and multiple viewpoints are accepted as valid and considered. The fourth type of knowing is “contextual knowing.” In contextual knowing, students take in, integrate, and evaluate knowledge from various experts and weigh that in relation to their own thoughts, and based on the context, determine what is the most appropriate or best information.

The students in my study exhibited, to an increasingly lesser degree, the first three ways of knowing with regard to cheating. When students discussed that they expected their faculty members to tell them about cheating and to be responsible for preventing cheating, they
demonstrated absolute knowing. The students indicated that they made little to no attempt to ask questions or gather information on their own about what constitutes cheating. The professor was viewed as the authority on the subject, and if the professor did not discuss the topic fully, students not only did not seek information on their own, they did not think that the topic was of much importance. If students are not exposed to new information on the subject of cheating, there is little reason to expect that they would seek it out or move to a different type of knowing on the subject.

Students who did hear multiple or differing messages about cheating exhibited transitional knowing on the topic. These students recognized and accepted that various faculty members and their peers had differing perspectives on cheating. When students chose to accept the definition of cheating that suited their needs the best, they demonstrated transitional knowing. For example, when students discussed thinking of working together on homework as a topic that some faculty members defined as cheating and others did not, in the absence of discussion from other professors, students often chose not to define collaboration on homework as cheating because it provided them with a rationalization to work together. Additionally, when students expressed that they were not sure of the exact definition of cheating or accepted that no definitive definition existed because many people defined it differently, they demonstrated transitional knowing. Without an impetus to further explore the definition or meaning of cheating, students continued to think about cheating in from a transitional knowing perspective.

For the few students who did think about the definition of cheating and came to a personal definition of the term, they exhibited independent knowing. The students who exhibited independent knowing understood that multiple definitions of the term existed, but chose to adopt their own definition of cheating. Student such as Mark A. and Novali exhibited this type of
knowing in discussing how they did not view their actions as cheating even though they knew that others would and that based on the university definition their behaviors were considered to be cheating. These students, however, did not provide a sound rationale or evidence for why they held the definition that they did, rather they chose amongst multiple definitions based on their own opinions.

Moving from one type of knowing to another requires continued engagement with and exploration of a particular topic. Baxter Magolda (2001) describes the movement from one type of knowing to another occurring as students interact with faculty and peers and come to know that multiple perspectives exist and as students learn how to evaluate what information is most important or most valid based on the context. The subject of cheating is different than academic topics because, at least from an institutional perspective, a definitive answer or definition exists. However as discussed by the students, both faculty and students have their own opinions and definitions on the topic. Thus, if the subject is not taught as other subjects are, students will not have or take the opportunity to learn and think about cheating in order to understand and think about it from an advanced type of knowing, even if they think about other subjects from an independent or contextual perspective. Using epistemological reflection as a lens through which to view my findings aids in understanding why students remain both ignorant and confused about the topic of cheating. There are no researchers, of whom I am aware, who study how students understand or think about cheating from a cognitive development perspective. Incorporating measures of cognitive development into research on cheating could be helpful in gaining a better understanding of why students define cheating as they do, which has an influence on their decisions about cheating.
Model of reasoned action. Ajzen and Fishbein (2005) in studying the effect of attitudes on behavior proffered the model of reasoned action as a means to predict behavior based on attitudes and beliefs. In the model, one’s intention to act, which informs actual behavior, is influenced by behavioral beliefs, normative beliefs, and control beliefs. Behavioral beliefs are formed by the possible consequences or outcomes of the action and advantages or disadvantages that can come from committing the action. If a person thinks that the behavior will have negative consequences or has fewer advantages than disadvantages, the person will form a negative attitude toward the behavior and vice versa. The behavioral beliefs lead to the attitude which informs the intention to act. Normative beliefs are formed by a person’s perceptions of the “likely approval or disapproval of a behavior” (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005, p. 193) by those he or she is closest to or respects. The normative beliefs lead to subjective norms about the expectation of acceptability of the behavior. If individuals think they are expected to act in a certain way or that others are acting in a certain way, individuals will act in accordance with the norm. If individuals think there is no expectation or pressure to engage in a certain behavior, then the subjective norm will lead to the intent not to engage in the behavior.

Control beliefs are those beliefs about the ease of performing the behavior or one’s ability to perform the behavior. The control beliefs lead to “perceived behavioral control” (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005, p. 193). If people think the behavior is easy to perform and that they are capable of performing it, they will be more likely to engage in the behavior. Together, the three types of beliefs inform behavioral intentions through the “attitude toward the behavior,” the “subjective norm,” and “perceived behavioral control” (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005, p. 194). Ajzen and Fishbein (2005) recognize that one of the influences might weigh more heavily than the others on
intention and subsequently actual behavior and that all of the beliefs may be informed by background characteristics, environment, and context of the situation.

Using the model of reasoned action as a lens through which to further understand my findings is helpful in thinking about how the contextualized attitude is formed and how the contextual influences combine to influence behavior. Most of the non-contextual and contextual influences that emerged from my data fit into the three types of beliefs providing a set of variables that could be used to study cheating from a reasoned action approach. Within the behavioral beliefs, the influences of value of education, fear of consequences, grade pressure, and relevance or understanding of material or subject might lead a student to think favorably or unfavorably about cheating based on positive or negative outcomes or advantages of the action. Within the normative beliefs, the influences of adherence to societal and group norms, perceptions of faculty demeanor and teaching, relationship with faculty, and peer behavior and trust might lead to a subjective norm in which the behavior of cheating seems both acceptable and expected or vice versa. Finally, within the control beliefs, the influences of academic self-efficacy, class size, prevention measures, type of assignment and time constraints might lead to perceived behavioral control in which a student thinks that he or she has the ability to cheat and that cheating will be easy to perform or vice versa.

The findings of my study can expand thinking about the model of reasoned action to provide for differential actions of the same type based on situational context. Ajzen’s and Fishbein’s current model is a psychologically-based model that predicts a general behavior. The model takes context into consideration, but the prediction of action is not situated within a particular context in which a decision about the same behavior (e.g., cheating) can or will be different in differing settings. I based my theory in the context of the situation and explored how
the same decision is different based on the presence or absence or strength of the influences. The use of the model of reasoned action might provide a means by which to test the predictability of cheating based on the influences found in my data.

As mentioned in chapter two, a few researchers have used the theory of planned behavior (a relative of the model of reasoned action) to study and predict cheating behaviors and have had some success (Beck & Ajzen, 1991; Mayhew et al., 2009; Passow et al., 2006). However these researchers used the model to predict cheating generally rather than focus on the context of a class and did not include the number of contextual influences involved in the formation of the normative and control beliefs that I found to be influential. Mayhew et al. (2009) asked students about their intentions to cheat in a given semester, about their general attitude toward cheating, how important people in their lives view cheating or would think of them if they cheated, whether students thought they could easily cheat without getting caught, and whether cheating was personally morally right or wrong. Mayhew et al. found that the model was a good fit for predicting cheating, however, they ignored the context of a specific class, which I found to be highly influential in students decisions about cheating. I think that including the influences found in my research in a study that uses reasoned action or planned behavior as a predictor of cheating could be quite helpful in continuing to understand how students’ attitudes and beliefs affect their behavior. I suggest that future applications of the model of reasoned action or theory of planned behavior incorporate the contextual influences that I found salient to informing students’ decisions about cheating.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of my study and the creation of the Theory of Contextual Influences on Students’ Decision-Making about Cheating, I offer seven conclusions.
1. *Students do not know or understand the definition of cheating/academic dishonesty and its component behaviors.* As seen in Chapter 4, students had a limited understanding of what constituted cheating and based their definitions on their pre-college educational experiences, and students had little knowledge of institutional policy regarding cheating. Students primarily defined cheating as pertaining to in-class exams or written papers. Students relegated other forms of cheating or cheating behaviors on “minor” or out-of-class work to a lesser degree of cheating, a gray area of cheating, or not as cheating at all, often due to the small worth of the assignments. Even when students knew that specific professors defined copying or collaboration on out-of-class assignments as cheating, students were reluctant to agree, partly because few professors took the time to thoroughly discuss and define cheating and because they regularly saw their peers participating in cheating behaviors on out-of-class assignments with no consequences.

2. *What faculty do and say in the classroom regarding cheating affects students’ beliefs and attitudes about cheating.* The norm for students was a lack of discussion about the definition of cheating and specific cheating behaviors, why cheating was deleterious to their education, faculty members’ personal feelings and expectations regarding cheating, and the consequences for cheating. Due to the lack of discussion about cheating relative to the amount of discussion on other topics in their classes, students thought that faculty saw cheating as unimportant. When students perceived that their faculty members viewed cheating as unimportant, students viewed cheating as unimportant. In the few examples that students gave of professors dedicating a large amount of time to discussing cheating, students indicated that they took cheating
seriously in those specific courses because they knew that those faculty members thought that cheating was important. In addition to students thinking that cheating was unimportant, the lack of time spent discussing cheating led students to think that their professors did not care about cheating or did not think cheating was a “big deal.” However, more than professors’ lack of discussion, lack of action to prevent cheating was a cue to students that faculty did not care about cheating or if students cheated.

3. *Prevention measures and policy enforcement are crucial to curbing cheating behaviors.* Although only one of several factors in cheating decisions, the determining factor for many students in their decisions to cheat or not to cheat was the likelihood of being caught and the ensuing consequences. Students were clear in stating that prevention efforts were vital to keeping them from cheating. To prevent cheating, students wanted faculty to make anti-cheating statements and explain expectations for completion of assignments before they were due. More importantly, students wanted their professors to take preventive measures such as assigning more in-class work, spacing students apart during exams, monitoring behavior by walking around the classroom, and having additional proctors in the room during exams. However, the students did not discuss how to curb cheating on out-of-class assignments other than implying that collaboration should be allowed and not viewed as cheating.

4. *Cheating decisions are made in particular courses, and students’ experiences in those courses influence their decisions about cheating.* In addition to prevention measures taken in specific classes, students’ experiences with the course material, with how a faculty member taught, the demeanor of the professor, and the types of assignments given influenced decisions about cheating. Of particular importance was how the
student viewed the material of the course. When students liked the course subject or thought the course was relevant to their lives in some way, they chose not to cheat. However, when students did not think the course mattered, struggled to understand the material, or did not like the course, they chose to cheat. Additionally, if students perceived that the professor did not care about teaching or did not teach well, cheating became an acceptable behavior.

5. *The professor-student relationship is a key component of students’ decisions about cheating.* The presence of a positive relationship with faculty members made cheating unacceptable because students did not want to disappoint or be disrespectful to the professor or damage the relationship. Students respected professors who took the time to get to know students, interacted with students, and seemed genuinely caring in the classroom. When students did not have a relationship with the professor or had a negative relationship with the professor, cheating became an acceptable behavior.

6. *The perceived grade-oriented culture influences students toward cheating.* Both students who cheated and students who did not cheat emphasized the pressure they felt to earn high grades. They were experiencing a culture in which grades were perceived to be the determining factor of success and avenue to future success. When students were confident in their abilities to achieve high grades through their own hard work and merits, they were influenced not to cheat. However, when students thought their grades were in jeopardy, particularly if perceived to be due to poor teaching or unfair exams and assignments, students were influenced toward cheating. Grade pressure was one of the strongest influences on students’ decisions to cheat.
7. Cheating decisions are complex and dependent on students’ contextual experiences.

No one influence drove students’ decisions to cheat or not cheat; however, fewer influences were involved in non-cheating decisions. As seen in Chapter 5, a confluence of factors occurring at the same time intersected to create a context in which cheating was both contemplated and considered acceptable. Although some factors were stronger than others, the influences differed for each student. Therefore, all influential factors must be addressed and given attention in order to curb cheating behaviors, as students experience differing influences on their decisions to cheat or not cheat.

**Implications for Theory, Practice, and Research**

Based on my findings from the present study, I offer an implication for existing theory, several implications for faculty and administrators to aid in efforts to curb cheating, and implications for further research on college student cheating.

**Implication for Theory**

As mentioned above, the use of neutralization techniques to justify cheating behavior is a finding in much research, and my research yielded findings indicating that students neutralize their cheating behaviors. However, in addition to Sykes and Matza’s (1957) techniques, my participants used the neutralization “the class does not matter.” The use of this type of neutralization technique suggests that “mattering” is an important consideration in students’ thoughts about whether to act deviantly. The appearance of this neutralization in my data provides new insight into how individuals justify their actions and should be studied further within the scope of neutralization theory and cheating to see if the technique is used by other students. Additionally, “mattering” might be an important consideration in other types of deviant behavior. Mattering or not mattering suggests the presence or absence of a social bond, and I
suggest that research conducted on deviant behavior in general include the concept of mattering as a part of the social bond as a possible neutralization technique to further the understanding of neutralization theory.

**Implications for Practice**

From my findings, I recommend practices that faculty and administrators can undertake to help students better understand cheating as well as prevent students from choosing to cheat. In this section, I make recommendations related to discussing and defining cheating, prevention and enforcement, teaching practices and course relevance, reducing grade pressure, and student coping strategies.

**Discussing and defining cheating.** Messages about cheating and academic integrity should occur early and often in students’ college careers. The students in my study did not fully know what cheating was or know institutional policy. Once students have been admitted to the institution, staff members responsible for new student programs and orientation should include information regarding the institutional academic integrity policy and the seriousness of the issue of cheating at the institution in materials new students receive. During on-campus orientation programs, a representative from the office that adjudicates matters of academic integrity and faculty members should speak with students about institutional policy regarding academic integrity and offer a comprehensive definition of cheating and academic dishonesty, highlighting differences that may exist between students’ K-12 education definition of cheating and that of the college or university. Additionally, students should hear messages about why academic integrity is important to their learning and knowledge acquisition. A number of campuses offer web-based academic integrity tutorial programs, particularly pertaining to plagiarism, to help students understand the nuances of cheating. Dee and Jacob (2010) found a web-based
plagiarism tutorial to be efficacious in helping students understand the definition and nuances of plagiarism, and the program reduced incidences of plagiarism. I suggest that more campuses implement the use of a web-based academic integrity tutorial for all new students.

Once students begin classes, faculty members must reinforce the messages about cheating and help to further define cheating. As the students in my study indicated, when messages about cheating were scant, they thought that cheating was not a “big deal.” Therefore, all faculty members must make time to discuss cheating in their classes, provide examples of what constitutes cheating, and outline expectations for all assignment in their classes. Broeckelman-Post (2008) found that “discussing specific expectations for behavior, especially in relation to particular assignments” was more effective in helping students understand cheating and curb cheating behaviors than speaking in broad terms about cheating (p. 210). Faculty members should continue to mention expectations and acceptable behavior before any assignment is due, particularly expectations for work completed outside the classroom.

Faculty members at all levels of teaching should discuss cheating in order to provide constant messages about cheating. However, in order to provide consistent messages about cheating, faculty members must also understand institutional policy and define cheating in the same way. When students were given differing definitions of cheating, they were confused and chose the definition they wanted to follow. I suggest that leaders within the faculty in conjunction with staff members responsible for adjudicating the academic integrity policy provide explanatory material to faculty on a regular basis and offer workshops to help faculty members better understand policy as well as offer guidance for how to address cheating in the classroom. All new faculty members and Teaching Assistants should be required to attend such a workshop in their first year at the university.
Finally, when faculty members discuss cheating in the classroom, they should encourage students to ask questions to clarify any misunderstanding or misconceptions about the nebulous issue of cheating, particularly regarding plagiarism. The mechanics and conventions of good academic writing and source attribution must be taught at all levels of students’ careers and reiterated from class to class. Ultimately, students will make the decision to cheat or not to cheat, but the students in my research indicated that they often abdicated their responsibility for decision-making. Students must be empowered to take an active role in understanding cheating and maintaining academic integrity. Faculty members should help students gain responsibility for their own educations and knowledge, a part of which is acting with integrity. Such discussions will help students understand why cheating is wrong and deleterious to their educations. Additionally, the discussions may also help students to see cheating as a violation of social norms and to internalize academic integrity as part of their personal moral codes. Faculty members and institutional administrators should approach educating about cheating in the same manner that any subject is taught. As such, faculty members should regularly discuss with students why academic integrity in the college setting is important to the academic community and to them as students, provide examples, encourage personal exploration of the topic, and provide multiple methods of education.

**Prevention and enforcement.** Although most students do not cheat regularly, even with the strongest efforts to define cheating and provide messages about cheating, some students may attempt to cheat. As participants indicated, when enforcement and prevention are lax, cheating becomes quite tempting for some students. Therefore, faculty members must actively and consistently work to prevent cheating and enforce policy. In his interview with me, Jerry compared cheating to speeding. He said, “With cheating, you’re always told it’s wrong, but it’s
one of those things like speeding is wrong. It’s one of those things that’s . . . not wrong until you’re caught.” Adelaide also compared cheating to speeding, saying “Like if you’re speeding, like in a car, you’re still going to speed, and then finally you see that cop car, you’re going to slow down. But and then after the cop car goes away, you speed up again.” The analogy of cheating to speeding is quite apt. Like speeding, students see cheating as a rule that is seldom and inconsistently enforced. If police officers are always on the highways or individuals are regularly ticketed for speeding, drivers likely would drive the speed limit. However, as the students said, due to inconsistent enforcement, people speed until they get caught or see a police officer. Cheating is far easier to police than is speeding.

Even though the students’ assumptions that faculty members do not care about cheating if they do not actively patrol a classroom or use technology to check out-of-class assignments are likely incorrect, students do make these assumptions which then become their realities. Therefore, I recommend that professors take active measures to prevent cheating. Walking around the classroom while students take tests, checking for suspected plagiarism, and monitoring the submission of on-line assignments may require a bit of extra effort; however, the potential outcome of reducing cheating warrants the effort. Additionally, I recommend that faculty members report or handle cases of suspected cheating according to university policy. As Stiles and Gair (2010) found, “congruency between the faculty’s ‘walk and talk’ is necessary for a culture of integrity to be perceived as genuine” (p. 11). Although some faculty consider the task of reporting suspected cases of dishonesty to be onerous, doing so is necessary in order to curb further cheating. To provide students with knowledge about how policy is enforced, I suggest publishing a monthly report in the student newspaper or on the campus website.
indicating the number of academic integrity violations that were reported and the outcomes of those cases so students understand that their peers are being held accountable for their actions.

**Teaching practices and course relevance.** In addition to how faculty members convey messages about cheating, some faculty members may need to change their teaching practices in order to engage students more fully in the classroom and help students understand why the class is important. Bertram Gallant (2008) stated that “student academic misconduct might be greatly reduced if faculty paid more attention to their teaching” (p. 54), thus creating a learning-oriented environment. Following the lead of Bertram Gallant, I suggest that faculty members work to make the classroom more personal and interactive and create assignments and assessments that challenge students to produce original thought rather than reproduce memorized facts or concepts. I acknowledge that knowledge of factual information is necessary; however, how students are assessed on that knowledge can change.

Students must feel engaged in the work of the class. Engaged pedagogy focuses on student expression and understanding (hooks, 1994). Engaging pedagogical strategies help students to develop personal connections to and understanding of material and keep students interested in the class. Examples of such strategies include encouraging discussion in the classroom in addition to brief lecture, asking students to keep reflective journals or do short writing assignments to delve into and explore their own understanding of the subjects discussed in class, collaborative learning projects with peers, or projects in which students apply the concepts of the class to real-life problems or cases (McKeachie & Svinicki, 2006). Engaging pedagogical strategies and assessments require students to become actively involved in inquiry and knowledge production, which is likely to encourage critical thinking and cognitive development. As students’ levels of cognitive development increase, they gain more ownership
over their learning (Baxter Magolda, 2001), which should reduce their propensity to cheat.

Additionally, in an engaged classroom, the professor becomes an active participant in the class, thus helping to build the professor-student relationship.

When students are able to situate themselves within the material by exploring how the concepts apply to their own lives or real-life situations, the course also will become more relevant to them. Students must not think of certain courses as hurdles to jump through in order to earn a degree. University faculty and students affairs staff members should work to help students understand the relevance of general education requirements and the benefits of learning from multiple disciplines as important to their whole development rather than viewing courses as important to only one aspect of their lives. Lave and Wenger (1991), in discussing situated learning, stated that all learning activities must emphasize “comprehensive understanding involving the whole person rather than ‘receiving’ a body of factual knowledge” (p. 33). Students must be encouraged to explore the relevance of history, music, geology, nutrition, statistics, or English classes to their own lives. Students need to understand why they are taking these courses. General education courses aid their holistic development and provide a broad foundation of knowledge. Major classes, even if not directly related to a student’s specific program or career goals, have a purpose. Students need to understand that purpose. Faculty members must explain the relevance of courses to students’ goals and provide assignments that allow students to apply the concepts to their lives in a meaningful way, which are also engaging pedagogical approaches. Students who are actively engaged in relevant courses likely will not cheat or will not be able to cheat due to the types of assignments given.

Reducing grade pressure. A learning-oriented classroom should be focused on what and how students learn rather than on what grades they receive. However, the culture that often exists
in American institutions of higher education and in American society is focused on high grades as a measure of achievement and the standard by which to judge students. The focus on grades creates “benefit of cheating [that] may far outweigh the costs of not cheating” (Bertram Gallant, 2008, p. 56) due to the perception that few students get caught or that sanctions are not severe. Institutional administrators and faculty members can and should promote learning over grades.

Although the necessity of giving grades is not likely to change, how those grades are earned can change. Rather than assigning a grade for each exam or assignment and averaging those grades at the end of the term, professors can give grades based on overall improvement from the first exam or paper to the last exam or paper. Additionally, grades can be given based on originality of thought and ability to apply concepts to real-life scenarios, which requires critical thinking rather than rote learning. To encourage a culture focused on learning rather than grades, professors should emphasize, early and often, that learning and original thought are more highly valued than grades and require that students create a portfolio demonstrating their learning as a culminating project prior to graduation that can be used during job interviews or as part of a graduate school admission package. If the pressure to earn high grades is reduced, students may not feel the need to cheat in order to save a GPA.

**Student coping strategies.** When students feel that they are under a great amount of stress or have not managed their time well, they may resort to cheating. However, college campuses offer a variety of resources aimed at helping students cope with academic and personal stress. Although students may be aware of such resources, they may not be using the resources. During new student orientation, more attention should be paid to the usefulness of resources, such as the campus learning assistance center, tutoring options, the writing center, the counseling center, or academic success and time management workshops, that are offered on campus.
Students need to understand that there is no stigma attached to seeking help. If not currently being employed, institutional personnel should start first-year seminar courses for all new students that include discussions about academic integrity, coping with stress, academic success, and campus resources.

For students who live in campus residence halls, resident assistants and other resident life staff should regularly check in with students about how they are coping with stress in their lives and how their classes are going. If students indicate that they are feeling pressure or not getting their work done in a timely manner, staff should refer students to the appropriate resource center. Also, resident assistants should bring speakers into the residence halls to speak to students about how to achieve academic success and cope with personal life stress while in school. Student organization advisors should also talk with the students they advise concerning how they feel about their classes.

Additionally, faculty members should periodically talk with their students about how they are feeling about the class and the workload. Faculty members may not be able to change when assignments are due, but students likely will appreciate that their professors care enough to ask how they are feeling. Professors should encourage students to use the appropriate resources on campus and avail themselves to students in a welcoming manner, as some students do not feel comfortable going to their professors’ office hours. If sufficient resources exist, professors who teach large classes without pre-set small group sections should consider adding small sections to their classes so students have the opportunity to interact with the professor or teaching assistant in a setting more conducive to conversation than a 600-person lecture hall.
Implications for Research

The purpose of my research was to gain understanding of what influences students’ decisions about cheating. To that end, I generated theory from my data. To strengthen the theory, the present study should be extended to multiple institutions of varying type and include students from additional academic majors. Increasing the number of students in the research would allow researchers to examine whether the theory I proffer holds for a larger sample of students and would add to the theory based on diverging data that are likely to come from a large participant sample. The addition of differing institutional types will allow researchers to explore similarities and differences of influences on cheating decisions that derive from institutional context as well as classroom context.

Furthermore, once the theory is refined or expanded based on additional research, the categories of influences should be operationalized in order to test the theory through large-scale survey research. Even though each student’s story was unique, some of the influences seemed to be stronger than others on the cheating decision. Survey research would aid in better understanding the relationships between the influences and the relative strength of the influences on students’ cheating decisions.

In addition to extending the present study, my findings indicate a need for future research to examine student cheating within the context of the cheating decision, particularly the classroom context. A more nuanced understanding of how such factors as motivation orientation, relationship to the institution, perception of peers, or understanding of policies may be found when studied in relation to actual cheating decisions rather than when studied in general. Additionally, researchers should ask questions pertaining to specific classroom factors, assignment types, and faculty practices in order to gain a fuller understanding of decisions about
cheating. Researchers also should ask questions pertaining to whether students define their acts as cheating and the level of seriousness they assign to their cheating behaviors.

Based on my theory, an interesting research study could be conducted within a set of particular classes in which cheating is regularly detected. The researcher could employ multiple methods of data collection, including a survey at the beginning of the class, group and individual interviews to gain insight into how the students experience the class and to ascertain if students have cheated, and classroom observations throughout the semester to study the dynamics of the classroom and add further understanding to how the students perceive their environment. Such research could be quasi-experimental if the researcher also employed a test group of classes in which the professor discussed cheating and academic integrity at length, changed pedagogical practices, or the students received an intervention to teach them about cheating. The results might yield valuable new insights into how the classroom context influences students’ decisions and how students differently understand or experience the same classroom and professor. Dee and Jacob (2010) conducted a similar quasi-experimental project and found that an intervention was successful; however, Dee and Jacob did not include interviews or observations in their research.

Finally, I suggest that given the important role that faculty members have in students’ classroom experiences and cheating decisions, researchers should include faculty members in their research. Researchers who study faculty members should go beyond studying their perceptions of student cheating or definitions of cheating. Researchers should also study how faculty members address cheating and what they think their roles are regarding student cheating. Such research should be conducted through interviews in order to hear the faculty members’ own voices and for the researcher to interpret the varying perspectives present in the data. Students’
perceptions of their professors’ roles with regard to cheating might be vastly different than professors’ perceptions of their roles; therefore, coupling the findings from a faculty study with a student study will illuminate differences and enable researchers and administrators to create recommendations that will aid in decreasing cheating.

**Closing**

It’s a hard definition; I mean I guess it’s different in every situation. And at the same time, you can’t, you have to define it somehow, you can’t just say when a situation arises we’ll determine if it’s cheating. Because then if you didn’t know it was cheating, then you’re really not cheating I guess. But I don’t know, it’s a tough definition. I don’t think there’s really a way to fully define it. (Mike, research participant)

Throughout my conversations with students, a full definition of cheating remained elusive and nebulous. However, as students gave voice to their struggles with understanding cheating, they also voiced their desire to learn about cheating and academic integrity in order to make better informed decisions. They called on faculty and administrators to teach them about cheating, to demonstrate concern about cheating, and to prevent cheating. They were willing to be engaged about the topic of cheating, but they looked to their faculty to lead the discussion and provide an example to follow. They paid attention to their faculty members, and their behaviors are, in part, a reaction to their perceptions of their professors.

The students recognized that cheating on college campuses is a common occurrence, and researchers have shown no indication that the rates of student cheating will decrease. However, by telling their stories about cheating and not cheating, the participants in my study have given educators tools with which to better address the problem of cheating. The students’ messages were clear; teaching, learning, respect, relationships, and a healthy dose of fear go a long way toward creating an environment in which cheating is unacceptable behavior. Although students demonstrate irresponsibility when they relieve themselves of culpability for their cheating
behaviors, educators must be careful not to contribute to the conditions that foster students’ feelings of blamelessness. As the students have given educators insight into curbing cheating behaviors, educators can, in turn, help students gain a sense of responsibility for their actions and return the onus of the cheating decision back to the students, who ultimately make that decision. The problem of cheating is not a student problem; it is not a faculty problem; cheating is a problem of the educational community as a whole, and all members of the community must work together to solve the problem.
REFERENCES


Alwin, D. F. (2001). Parental values, beliefs, and behavior: A review and promulga for research into the new century. In S. L. Hofferth, & T. J. Owens (Eds.), Children at the millennium: Where have we come from, where are we going? (pp. 97-139), Advances in life course research, (vol. 6). New York: JAI Press.


APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT SCRIPTS

Group Interview Recruitment Script – In-Person and Email

Dear Students,

My name is Brenda Lutovsky, and I am a Ph.D. student at Penn State in the Higher Education Program. I invite you to participate in a research focus group about academic integrity and cheating. The purpose of the research is to find out what students think about the subject of academic integrity and cheating for my dissertation. Cheating has gotten much attention on college campuses and in the media lately, but few people actually ask students what they think about it. The focus groups will provide you with the opportunity to share your thoughts on the subject of academic integrity and cheating. In the group discussion, you will not be asked to reveal any personal information. Your participation will help me figure out what students in different majors think about cheating so I can help faculty members and the institution address academic integrity.

Here is the information about the research groups. Also, please feel free to invite friends to join you for the focus group discussion.

Participate in a Research Focus Group about Undergraduate Academic Integrity & Cheating
Share your thoughts on what cheating is and why students might do it.

Contact Brenda Lutovsky at BRL153@psu.edu or 717-860-4690 to sign up to participate or to ask questions about the research.

- Dissertation research about academic integrity and cheating
- Looking at different majors
- Participate in a focus group interview
- Participation entails
  - Filling out a short questionnaire
  - 1 hour 15 minute group discussion
  - In discussion you will not be asked about personal behaviors – just thoughts on the subject
- Answers to questionnaire and in group discussion will be confidential
- Free Pizza

Focus Group dates and times
[insert times and dates for specific groups]

Contact Brenda Lutovsky at BRL153@psu.edu to sign up to participate in one of the groups or to ask questions about the research.

Each group is limited to the first 9 people who sign up.
Free Pizza and Soda
Individual Interview Recruitment Script – Email

Dear [name].

Hi [name]. My name is Brenda Lutovsky. I am a doctoral student at Penn State University, and you participated in a group interview with me last month about academic cheating for my doctoral dissertation research. After the interview, you indicated that you were interested in participating in an individual interview with me as a part of my research.

I am sending you this message to see if you are still interested in participating in an individual interview with me. And, if you are still interested, to see what dates and times work for you to meet. The interview will last approximately one hour and fifteen minutes.

Please respond to this message to let me know if you are still willing to participate in an interview for my research and when you could do so. Also, feel free to call me at 717-860-4690.

Thank you very much, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Brenda R. Lutovsky
Ph.D. Candidate, Higher Education
Penn State University
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORMS

Informed Consent Form for Group Interviews

Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research
The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Understanding Why College Students Cheat IRB #27011

Principal Investigator: Brenda R. Lutovsky, PhD Candidate
Center for the Study of Higher Education
The Pennsylvania State University
400 Rackley Building
University Park, PA 16802
(301) 648-6453; br1153@psu.edu

Advisor: Dr. Robert Reason
400 Penn State Building
University Park, PA 16802
(814) 863-3766; rreason@psu.edu

1. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to understand better the phenomenon of undergraduate academic cheating as well as build theory about why students cheat or do not cheat.

2. Procedures to be followed: You will be asked to fill out a 19-question questionnaire and participate in a group interview discussion. You will be asked to answer questions about your thoughts on and experiences with academic cheating.

3. Duration: It will take about 10 minutes to complete the survey, and the group interview will last no longer than 1 hour and 15 minutes.

4. Statement of Confidentiality: Your participation in this research is confidential. If you speak about the contents of the focus group outside the group, it is expected that you will not tell others what individual participants said. The data will be stored and secured on the researcher’s computer in a password protected file. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.

5. Right to Ask Questions: Please contact Brenda R. Lutovsky at (301) 648-6453 with questions or concerns about this study.

6. Voluntary Participation: Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

7. Audio Recording: The focus group discussion will be digitally audio recorded.
   a. Digital recordings will be stored on the principle investigator’s computer in a password protected file;
   b. Recordings will be destroyed by January 1, 2012;
c. The principle investigator will have access to the recordings, and for transcription purposes a professional transcription expert will have them for a short period of time.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

____________________________________________  ______________________
Participant Signature                        Date

____________________________________________  ______________________
Person Obtaining Consent                     Date
Title of Project: Understanding Why College Students Cheat

Principal Investigator: Brenda R. Lutovsky Quaye, PhD Candidate
Center for the Study of Higher Education
The Pennsylvania State University
400 Rackley Building
University Park, PA 16802
(301) 648-6453; brl153@psu.edu

Advisor: Dr. Robert Reason
400 Penn State Building
University Park, PA 16802
(814) 863-3766; rreason@psu.edu

8. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to understand better the phenomenon of undergraduate academic cheating as well as build theory about why students cheat or do not cheat.

9. Procedures to be followed: You will be asked to participate in an individual interview with the researcher. You will be asked to answer questions about your thoughts on and experiences with academic cheating.

10. Duration: The interview will last approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes. If the interview lasts longer than two hours, you may elect to stop and meet with the researcher a second time to finish the interview.

11. Statement of Confidentiality: Your participation in this research is confidential. The data will be stored and secured on the researcher’s computer in a password protected file. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.

12. Right to Ask Questions: Please contact Brenda R. Lutovsky Quaye at (301) 648-6453 with questions or concerns about this study.

13. Voluntary Participation: Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

14. Audio Recording: The interview will be digitally audio recorded.
   a. Digital recordings will be stored on the principle investigator’s computer in a password protected file;
   b. Recordings will be destroyed by January 1, 2012;
   c. The principle investigator will have access to the recordings, and for transcription purposes a professional transcription expert will have them for a short period of time.
You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

_________________________________________________________________________  __________
Participant Signature                        Date

_________________________________________________________________________  __________
Person Obtaining Consent                    Date
APPENDIX C: QUESTIONNAIRE

Understanding Why College Students Cheat: Questionnaire

Pseudonym ___________________________________

Please write in or circle you answer.

1. Age _____

2. Year in college: 1st 2nd 3rd 4th 5th 6th

3. Gender: Female Male

4. Were you a DUS or major College admit? ________________

5. Major ________________

6. Did you start college somewhere other than the [Main] campus? Yes No

   If so, where? ____________________________________

7. Race/Ethnicity (circle all that apply):

   African American/Black Latino/a Asian American/API White Other ____________

8. Number of hours you work per week – on-campus: __________

9. Number of hours you work per week – off-campus: __________

10. Current GPA: __________

11. Do you have a scholarship that is dependent on GPA? Yes No

12. Do you know if your institution has a policy on Academic Integrity/cheating? Yes / No

   → If yes,

   13a. Have you read the institution’s policy on academic integrity/cheating? Yes / No

   13b. How did you find out about the policy on Academic Integrity/cheating?

      ____________________________________________________________

      ____________________________________________________________

      ____________________________________________________________

14. Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statement: To me, academic cheating is no big deal.

   Strongly disagree Disagree No opinion Agree Strongly agree

15. How many times do you think students at Penn State cheat during a typical semester? ______________

   In your College? ________________ Your close friends? ________________

16. Have you ever cheated in college? Yes / No
→ If yes,

17. Approximately how many times have you cheated in college? ________

18. Have you ever been sanctioned for cheating (by a faculty member or administrative board)? Yes / No

19. What do you consider to be cheating in an academic setting? (in general and specific behaviors)?
APPENDIX D: GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Understanding Why College Students Cheat: Group Interview Protocol

Introduction:

My name is Brenda Lutovsky, and I am a PhD student at Penn State University. I am working on my dissertation, which is about student academic cheating. There has been so much attention in the media lately about student cheating that I started wondering what students thought about the subject, and that’s why I’m here today: to ask you all what you think about cheating.

I am holding multiple group interviews, like this one, in various classes in different majors in an effort to hear as many thoughts on cheating from as many different types of students as possible. And I am interested in everyone’s thoughts and opinions, even if they seem different than other people’s. However, if you are uncomfortable answering a question, you can skip it.

We are tape recording the conversation, but we will keep all of the information you discuss today confidential, and no names will be associated with any comments. Also, since this is a group discussion, I ask that anything that is said in the group stays in the group to maintain confidentiality and to keep this a safe space to talk freely.

I have a few ground rules I would like to cover before we get started. You all know each other already, but for my sake, I would like to know your names too, so please write them on the cards I handed out and put them in front of you. Also, please feel free to speak up and express your opinion. If several people want to talk at once, I’ll try to keep track and make sure everyone has a chance to speak. As I said, we want everyone’s thoughts on the subject, so I may have to move on from some comments and make sure that no one person is dominating the conversation. Finally, we ask that we all respect one another’s thoughts and experiences. I also ask you to turn your cell phones on silent mode and turn off any lap tops.

Are there any questions before we get started?

Protocol:

1. How do you all define the term cheating?

2. When do people at this institution talk to students about cheating?
   - Prompts: orientation, classes,
   - Follow-up: Who talks to you about cheating?
     - Prompts: faculty, administrators, students

3. How does the definition you gave earlier relate to the definition given to you by faculty or in institutional policies (or others they mentioned in the previous question)?
   - (or – do faculty and institutional personnel define cheating the same way that you do?)
4. How serious of a problem is cheating on this campus?
   Prompts – types of cheating that occur, numbers of students perceived to cheat

5. Why do you think that students cheat?
   Prompts – pressure, to help friends, laziness, aren’t prepared/able to do work, major

6. Why do you think students decide not to cheat? Or What keeps students from cheating?

   6a. For those students who cheat, what would stop them from cheating?
   Prompts: faculty, friends, types of tests, values, fear

7. Tell me about how cheating is discussed or thought of in your major versus other majors or in gen ed classes?

8. At the beginning of the discussion I asked for your definitions of cheating. As a result of this conversation, has any person’s definition or thinking about cheating changed? (follow-up with how so?)
APPENDIX E: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Understanding Why College Students Cheat: Individual Interview Protocol

Introduction:

Hi. Thanks for meeting with me today. If you remember from the group interview I did in your class, I am trying to understand how students think about cheating. In the group interview, I asked about cheating in general, but today I want to talk about your personal experiences with cheating decisions. Everything we talk about today will remain confidential, but if you are uncomfortable answering any questions, you can skip them.

Do you have any questions before we start?

Protocol:

1. First, just tell me a bit about yourself – where you’re from, how you did in high school, what your major is, what your involved in, that kind of thing.

2. What’s important to you in life and as a college student?
   a. Prompts: bonds to friends & family,

3. What are your goals for after you are done with college?

4. How well do you do in classes?
   a. Prompts: perceived academic ability, pressure to succeed, how much time spent on class work,

5. What do you like about classes / your faculty?

6. What don’t you like about classes / your faculty?

7. Tell me more about your involvement on campus.

8. Tell me about your friends on campus.

9. To you, what is academic cheating?

10. Have you ever cheated in college?

11. (if yes) How many times?

12. When did you cheat / what class?
13. Why did you decide to cheat?
   
a. Or what types of things did you think about before you made the decision to cheat? (friends, family, grades, pressure, fear, faculty, etc.)

14. Were you caught cheating?
15. (if yes) What was that like? (sanctions, meetings with faculty, etc.)
16. What would have stopped you from cheating?

17. (if no to #10) Have you ever thought about or had the opportunity to cheat?

18. Why haven’t you cheated?

19. How do your friends feel about cheating?

20. How does your family feel about cheating?

21. How often do your faculty members talk about cheating in classes? What do they say?
   
a. How do your faculty members feel about cheating?

22. Anything else you want to share?
## APPENDIX F: DATA ANALYSIS CODE LIST

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actual Examples of Cheating</td>
<td>Students' stories about cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual Why Cheated</td>
<td><strong>Main Category -- Influences on Students' Cheating</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment-Related</td>
<td>Influences on cheating related to type of assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor assignment</td>
<td>Assignment worth few points or given out-of-class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-line assignment</td>
<td>Assignment completed on-line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfair test</td>
<td>Student thought that test was not fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Context</td>
<td>Influences related to the logistics of the class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because opportunity was there</td>
<td>Student thought opportunity to cheat existed in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big class</td>
<td>Large class size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failed class previously</td>
<td>Student failed course previously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative class experience</td>
<td>Student had a negative experience in the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wasn't learning in class</td>
<td>Student thought he/she was not learning the material of the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enforcement Measures</td>
<td>Influences related to lack of enforcement or prevention of cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little risk of getting caught</td>
<td>Student thought he/she would not get caught cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No prevention</td>
<td>Student perceived that the faculty member did not try to prevent cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Demeanor</td>
<td>Student perception of faculty member feelings about cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty didn't seem to care</td>
<td>Student perceived that the faculty member did not care about cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty-related</td>
<td>Influences related to faculty words and actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad teacher</td>
<td>Student thought faculty member was a poor teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blame faculty</td>
<td>Student blamed faculty member for cheating decision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn't know professor</td>
<td>Student did not have a personal relationship with faculty member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn't like teacher</td>
<td>Student did not like the faculty member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty should have known</td>
<td>Student thought that the faculty member should have known cheating was occurring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade-related</td>
<td>Influences related to grade pressure felt by students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure to do well</td>
<td>Student felt pressure to earn a high GPA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get better grade</td>
<td>Student wanted to earn a higher grade in the class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To pass class</td>
<td>Student was afraid of failing the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-related</td>
<td>Influences related to peer behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend in class to copy from</td>
<td>Student had a friend in the class to cheat from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help a friend</td>
<td>Student cheated to help a friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likes to help others</td>
<td>Student enjoyed helping other people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others were cheating</td>
<td>Peers in course were cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal definition of cheating</td>
<td>Influences related to students not defining actions as cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn't think of it as cheating at the time</td>
<td>Student did not think that action was cheating at the time committed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides help in writing</td>
<td>Student thought cheating action was helpful to writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand material</td>
<td>Student thought cheating action aided in understanding material better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal life circumstances</td>
<td>Influences related to student's personal life issues, panic, and time constraints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couldn't remember how to do work / Panic</td>
<td>While taking exam, student did not know or forgot material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desperation</td>
<td>Student panicked and felt cheating was only option</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of preparation</td>
<td>Student procrastinated, felt stress, wanted to save time, or otherwise did not complete work on time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship to material or subject</td>
<td>Influences related to student's relationship with the course material or subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class doesn't matter</td>
<td>Student though the course was not relevant to his/her life or profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustration with not understanding material</td>
<td>Student struggled to understand the course material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual Why Don't Cheat</td>
<td>Main Category - Influences on Students' Decisions Not to Cheat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic self-efficacy</td>
<td>Influences related to student confidence in his/her own academic abilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't need to cheat</td>
<td>Student felt confident enough that he/she would earn high grades without cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades not that important</td>
<td>Student did not measure him/herself based on grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades should reflect what is actually learned</td>
<td>Student wanted his/her grades to be a true reflection of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know more than others</td>
<td>Student thought he/she knew more than peers in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-fulfillment</td>
<td>Student thought of academic work and earning high grades as bringing personal self-fulfillment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>Student did not want to help others get ahead in competitive environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't want to help slackers</td>
<td>Student did not want to help students who did not work hard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Relationship</td>
<td>Influences related to student's relationship with faculty member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disrespectful</td>
<td>Student thought cheating was disrespectful to faculty member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty says don't cheat</td>
<td>Faculty member asked students not to cheat, students honored faculty member's wishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like professor</td>
<td>Student personally liked faculty member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with faculty</td>
<td>Student had a personal relationship with faculty member, knew faculty member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for faculty</td>
<td>Student respected faculty member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just don't</td>
<td>Student does not cheat - no reason given, though</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning important</td>
<td>Influences related to the importance of education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likes to learn</td>
<td>Student enjoys learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want to learn or interest</td>
<td>Student has an interest in the subject matter and wants to learn it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay for school</td>
<td>Student pays for education, therefore values it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not crafty enough to cheat</td>
<td>Student did not feel he/she knew how to cheat or would get away with cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal character and responsibility</td>
<td>Influences related to student's personal character and responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A higher grade is not worth it</td>
<td>Student did not think that a higher grade was worth compromising integrity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheating is a sign of weakness</td>
<td>Student thought that cheating displayed personal weakness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dishonorable</td>
<td>Student thought cheating was a dishonorable action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>Student thought that cheating showed a lack of independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not fair to others</td>
<td>Student thought that cheating was unfair to peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own fault for not studying</td>
<td>Student blamed self for not preparing for exam or assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal integrity</td>
<td>Cheating would go against personal sense of integrity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value hard work, pride</td>
<td>Student takes pride in working hard and sees cheating as antithetical to hard work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would feel guilty</td>
<td>Student did not want to feel guilty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant class and material</td>
<td>Influences related to relationship with class or material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class matters</td>
<td>Student thought that class was relevant to professional or personal life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to know material</td>
<td>Student thought that he/she needed to know the course material and cheating would inhibit knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk and Consequences</td>
<td>Influences related to prevention measures and fear of consequences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty stress penalties</td>
<td>Student does not cheat because faculty member talks about consequences of cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of getting caught</td>
<td>Student is afraid to get caught</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Got caught previously</td>
<td>Student previously got caught cheating and does not want to get caught again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term consequences</td>
<td>Student does not want to incur the long-term consequences of cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Societal and Group Norms</td>
<td>Influences related to adherence to societal and group norms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family influences</td>
<td>Student has been raised not to cheat and does not want to disappoint family members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group would view person negatively</td>
<td>Student belongs to a group that views cheating negatively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional ethics</td>
<td>Student thinks that cheating goes against ethics of future profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standards emphasized</td>
<td>Student sees or hears that high standards are important in academic major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think cheating is wrong</td>
<td>Student thinks cheating is wrong because it violates a rule or norm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of assignment</td>
<td>Influences related to the type of assignment to be completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impossible to cheat</td>
<td>Type of assignment does not lend itself to cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major assignment</td>
<td>Assignment is worth many points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Actual would have prevented cheating</strong></td>
<td><strong>Main Category - Student's discussion about what would have kept them from cheating</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring more about class or material</td>
<td>Student would not have cheated if course mattered more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>Student did not know what would have kept him/her from cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enforcement-related</td>
<td>Reasons students would not have cheated related to enforcement and prevention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enforce rules to prevent cheating</td>
<td>Student would not have cheated if faculty member had enforced rules or tried to prevent cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More proctors</td>
<td>Student would not have cheated if more proctors were used during the test to watch for cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty-related</td>
<td>Reasons students would not have cheated related to faculty members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better teaching</td>
<td>Student would not have cheated if professor had taught better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have an example to help</td>
<td>Student would not have cheated if professor had given an example of how to complete assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing the professor</td>
<td>Student would not have cheated if he/she had a personal relationship with professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistent with material taught and test</td>
<td>Student would not have cheated if the material taught was consistent with what was on the test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explain not to cheat, give expectations for work</td>
<td>Student would not have cheated if the professor had told class not to cheat or explained expectations for completing work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade not on the line</td>
<td>Student would not have cheated if not in danger of receiving a poor grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others not cheating</td>
<td>Student would not have cheated if peers were not cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small class</td>
<td>Student would not have cheated if class had been small in size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of assignment</td>
<td>Reasons for not cheating related to the type of assignment given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-class work</td>
<td>Student would not have cheated if assignment was to be completed in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work was bigger percent of grade</td>
<td>Student would not have cheated if assignment was worth more points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AI versus Cheating</td>
<td><strong>Main Category - Student understanding of the relationship between Academic Integrity and Cheating</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Caught Cheating</strong></td>
<td><strong>Main Category - Student stories about being caught cheating</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect of being caught</td>
<td>Student discussion of the effect of being caught cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be better at cheating</td>
<td>Student learned to hide cheating better after being caught</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little effect</td>
<td>Student was not greatly affect by being caught cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bo real penalty</td>
<td>Student did not experience a penalty for cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cheated by University Definition not by Own Definition</strong></td>
<td><strong>Main Category - Student explanations of why actions were not considered to be cheating by their own definitions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn't benefit me so not cheating</td>
<td>If action did not benefit student directly, then not cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty should not give outside work</td>
<td>Work completed outside of the classroom is not cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gray area</td>
<td>Student was not sure if action was cheating or thought action fell into a gray area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learned correct answer</td>
<td>Student learned by cheating action, therefore not cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made up a source</td>
<td>Making up a source is not considered cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed messages about group work</td>
<td>Students were not sure if peers could work together on all parts of an assignment when assigned group work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-line work</td>
<td>Student did not consider cheating action on on-line work to be cheating because of the nature of the assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor bad teacher</td>
<td>Student blamed faculty member's poor teaching for need to cheat, therefore not cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor didn't stop it</td>
<td>Student blamed faculty member for not stopping cheating action, therefore not cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small percent of grade</td>
<td>Student did not consider cheating action on work worth few points to be cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why copied</td>
<td>Reasons why students copied from one another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade important</td>
<td>Student needed to earn a high grade in the class or a high GPA overall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lack of time to finish work</td>
<td>Student did not have time to finish the work, so copied, but did not consider copying to be cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work means more if in class</td>
<td>Student did not think that work completed outside the classroom meant very much, therefore not cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working together when should be individual</td>
<td>Students thought that they should be able to work together on assignments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Classroom Discussion about Cheating**

- **Main Category - Students explained when and how cheating was discussed in the classroom by faculty members**

  - **Before exam or paper**
    - Faculty discussed cheating prior to an exam being given or a paper begin due
  - **Depends**
    - Different faculty talk about cheating differently, the message was dependent on the course of faculty member
  - **Don't talk about**
    - Faculty members did not discuss cheating in class
  - **Effect on students**
    - Students explained the type of effect discussion about cheating had on them
  - **Faculty expect it is known**
    - Students thought that faculty did not talk about cheating because the faculty expected students to already know about cheating
  - **Faculty have to talk about it**
    - Students thought that faculty members only discussed cheating because they had to do so
  - **Honor code on assignments**
    - Faculty included the College of Business honor code on assignments
  - **In-depth discussion**
    - Faculty members discussed cheating in-depth
  - **Provide examples**
    - Faculty members provided examples of what constituted cheating
  - **Repeated messages**
    - Faculty discussed cheating repeatedly over the course of the semester
  - **Scare students**
    - Faculty talked about cheating using scare tactics
  - **Syllabus**
    - Faculty discussed cheating when going over the syllabus on the first day of class
  - **When an incident happens**
    - Faculty discussed cheating when cheating occurred

**Definitions of Cheating**

- **Main Category -- How Students Defined Cheating**

  - **Accidental or not knowing**
    - Indication that some cheating is accidental or that students do not know they are cheating
  - **Advanced Definition**
    - Moralistic definition of cheating -- Definitions of cheating beyond examples of specific behaviors
    - **Being dishonest**
      - Cheating is a dishonest behavior
    - **If you feel guilty**
      - Students know what cheating is because cheating brings feelings of guilt
    - **Not giving another credit**
      - Not providing attribution or credit to the originator of an idea or words
    - **Unfair advantage**
      - Cheating provides an unfair advantage to those who cheat
  - **Basic definition**
    - Behavioral examples of cheating
    - **Copy and paste from a source**
      - Copying and pasting from a source without giving credit
    - **Copying another's work**
      - Copying answers from a peer on an assignment
    - **Exam-related**
      - Exam-related behaviors
    - **getting answers**
      - Receiving answers or information about a test before taking it
    - **looking at another's paper or test**
      - Looking at a peer's exam paper and copying answers while taking the exam


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>maintaining test files</th>
<th>Having access to old copies of exams to use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>using crib notes</td>
<td>Using a cheat sheet or other unauthorized notes during an exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving answers</td>
<td>Giving answers or information to other students before they take an exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group work when should be individual</td>
<td>Working with others when work is meant to be completed individually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plagiarism</td>
<td>Not citing or attributing sources appropriately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resubmitting work turned in for another class</td>
<td>Submitting work that was completed for another class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stealing another's work</td>
<td>Stealing the work, words, or ideas of another to use as one's own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking another's work</td>
<td>Taking the work, words, or ideas of another to use as one's own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using book on on-line exam</td>
<td>Using the textbook or other unauthorized material during an on-line exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using old tests or homework</td>
<td>Using previously administered tests or a peer's homework from a prior semester to complete one's own work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using something not allowed</td>
<td>Using any material during an exam or to complete an assignment that is not authorized by the faculty member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case by case</td>
<td>Cheating can only be defined on a case-by-case basis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degrees of cheating</td>
<td>Some cheating is more severe or serious than other cheating behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliberate or intentional</td>
<td>Cheating must be intentional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn't think of at first</td>
<td>Items cited by students after conversation with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty versus student definitions</td>
<td>Student definitions differ from faculty definitions of cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gray areas</td>
<td>Cheating has many gray areas and confusion regarding the definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large versus small amount</td>
<td>Large amounts of cheating are more serious than small amounts of cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning not cheating</td>
<td>If students learn from a cheating behavior, the behavior is not cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No definition</td>
<td>Student is not able to define cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not considered</td>
<td>Items students did not consider to be cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor defined</td>
<td>Cheating must be defined how the professor defines it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning if cheating</td>
<td>Students asking if a behavior is cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>The source of students' definitions of cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common sense</td>
<td>Students cite that cheating definition is common sense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty or university</td>
<td>Students know definition from what they learn from faculty or through the university definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Student definition learned from family members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel it is wrong</td>
<td>Students know cheating because it feels wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Students learn definitions of cheating from friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-12 Education</td>
<td>Definition of cheating acquired from K-12 education and teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Students have self-created definition of cheating</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Differential Association</th>
<th><strong>Main Category -- Items related to Differential Association</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes about cheating</td>
<td>Students' attitudes about cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better to emphasize punishment than moral aspect</td>
<td>Thought that threat of punishment was more effective at preventing cheating than a moral appeal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changed over time</td>
<td>Students' attitudes about cheating changed over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheaters are going to cheat</td>
<td>Thought that some students will cheat and nothing will stop them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheating like speeding</td>
<td>Comparison of cheating to speeding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheating takes away from learning</td>
<td>Belief that cheating is detrimental to learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depends on how brought up</td>
<td>Attitude about cheating is based on up-bringing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going to be a teacher so cheating is a big deal</td>
<td>Cheating is problematic and viewed as wrong because it goes against the profession of education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor cheating is not a big deal</td>
<td>Small amounts of cheating or cheating on minor assignments is not big deal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upset when others cheat</td>
<td>Students are upset when peers cheat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will cheat if know not being watched</td>
<td>Student will cheat if no prevention efforts are taken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family influence</td>
<td>Students are influenced by their families not to cheat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group of choice influence</td>
<td>Student belongs to a group that views cheating negatively, therefore views cheating negatively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major influence</td>
<td>Student major has an influence on how cheating is viewed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer influence and culture</td>
<td>Peer-related factors that influence student attitude about cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business majors cheat</td>
<td>Perception that students in the College of Business cheat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know how friends feel</td>
<td>Perception that students in the College of Education are anti-cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education majors against cheating</td>
<td>Thought that friends are anti-cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends against cheating</td>
<td>Thought that friends have likely cheated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends okay with cheating</td>
<td>Thought that friends are fine with cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends vary</td>
<td>Student's friends vary in their thoughts about cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers do minor cheating</td>
<td>Friends participate in minor cheating behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception that others cheat so need to cheat to even out</td>
<td>Thought that if peers are cheating, student must cheat to stay at a level playing field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of peer cheating</td>
<td>Students' perceptions of prevalence and type of peer cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enforcement of rules and sanctions</td>
<td>Student examples of how rules about cheating are enforced and what sanctions are given</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Faculty**

- **Bad faculty**
  - Can't relay information to students: Teacher has difficulty conveying information to students in an understandable manner
  - Doesn't make you think: Students are not challenged to think in faculty member's class
  - Don't pay attention to student questions: Faculty member does not listen to or answer students' questions
  - Don't really teach: Faculty member does not teach material to students
  - Not approachable: Faculty member seems unapproachable to students
  - Not prepared: Faculty member seems unprepared to teach class
  - Reads off slides: Faculty member lectures to students by reading off of slides
  - Talks down to students: Faculty member seems to place self above students and speaks to them with an air of superiority
  - Teaching seems unimportant to them: Students think that faculty member is not interested in teaching
  - Unhappy person: Faculty member seems generally unhappy

- **Good faculty**
  - Inspires students: Faculty member inspires students to learn and do well in the class
  - Passionate: Faculty member is passionate about the subject he/she teaches
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sense of humor</th>
<th>Faculty member has a sense of humor and shares humor with students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prepared</td>
<td>Faculty member is prepared to teach class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know subject</td>
<td>Faculty member is knowledgeable about subject he/she is teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gets to know students</td>
<td>Faculty member takes the time to get to know the students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have work experience in field</td>
<td>Faculty member has experience working in the field he/she is teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available - approachable</td>
<td>Faculty member makes him/herself available to students and students feel comfortable going to the faculty member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relates material to real world - examples</td>
<td>Faculty member makes the course material relevant to students lives by using real work examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourages discussion</td>
<td>Faculty member encourages discussion among students in the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takes time to explain material</td>
<td>Faculty member makes time to help students understand material by providing explanations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect students</td>
<td>Students feel respected by the faculty member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interested in teaching</td>
<td>Faculty member seems interested in teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care about class and students</td>
<td>Students feel that the faculty member cares about them, their learning, and the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made class fun</td>
<td>Faculty member brings enjoyment to the course through teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want students to learn</td>
<td>Students feel as though the faculty member wants them to learn the material</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Teaching practices - NEGATIVE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching practices - NEGATIVE</th>
<th>Faculty member does not speak clearly or is not understandable by the students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doesn't speak clearly</td>
<td>Faculty member lectures through use of slides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read off slides - lecture only</td>
<td>Faculty member gives daily quizzes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Busy work</td>
<td>Faculty assigns rote learning work or assignments requiring little thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple choice tests</td>
<td>Faculty member gives multiple choice tests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of teaching assistants</td>
<td>Teaching assistants teach classes rather than professors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam different from material in lecture</td>
<td>The exam does not match the material presented in lecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tests only</td>
<td>Faculty member bases grades solely on few exams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too much reading</td>
<td>Faculty member assigns much reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not relevant to work after college</td>
<td>Faculty member provides information or assessments that students are not able to relate to their real lives or professions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group work</td>
<td>Faculty member assigns group work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay exams</td>
<td>Faculty member uses essay exams</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Teaching practices - POSITIVE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching practices - POSITIVE</th>
<th>Faculty member spends part of class time going over students' homework assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discusses homework</td>
<td>Faculty members encourages students to learn on their own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourages self learning</td>
<td>Faculty member assigns essays or papers to students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essays - papers</td>
<td>Faculty member gives assignments that challenge students to think critically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fosters critical thinking or application</td>
<td>Faculty member engages students in discussion during class time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fosters engagement in class - discussion</td>
<td>Faculty member assigns group work to students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Actions</td>
<td>Main Category - How faculty address cheating, prevention of cheating, or lack prevention efforts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty defining cheating</td>
<td>Students' thoughts on how faculty define or do not define cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty definitions differ</td>
<td>Students notice that faculty give differing definitions of cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need clear definitions and examples</td>
<td>Students want clear definitions and examples of what constitutes cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclear definitions</td>
<td>Faculty members give unclear definitions of cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fostering cheating</td>
<td>Faculty actions foster cheating in courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevention</td>
<td>Actions faculty take to prevent cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasize penalties</td>
<td>Faculty try to prevent cheating by emphasizing harsh penalties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scare tactics</td>
<td>Faculty try to prevent cheating by scaring students into not cheating due to consequences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasize right before exam</td>
<td>Faculty try to prevent cheating by mentioning not cheating prior to giving an exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enforce rules</td>
<td>Faculty members prevent cheating by enforcing rules and catching students who cheat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example of someone who got caught</td>
<td>Faculty members prevent cheating by providing an example of a person who got caught cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explain what cheating is</td>
<td>Faculty members prevent cheating by explaining what constitutes cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical act to prevent</td>
<td>Faculty members prevent cheating by their actions during an exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>different tests</td>
<td>Faculty use different exams to prevent cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enter and exit through different doors</td>
<td>Faculty members ask students to enter and exit through different doors so they cannot speak between exams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prof and teaching assistants walk around</td>
<td>Faculty and teaching assistants walk around during an exam and watch students closely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seating during exam</td>
<td>Faculty members have students sit at least one desk apart during the exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevention is difficult</td>
<td>Students think that preventing cheating is difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk about cheating</td>
<td>Faculty prevent cheating by talking about cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turn-it-in</td>
<td>Faculty members prevent plagiarism by using Turnitin.com software</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should do to prevent cheating</td>
<td>Actions students think faculty members should use to prevent cheating from occurring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different assignments</td>
<td>Faculty should give assignments that require original thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasize consequences</td>
<td>Faculty should emphasize the consequences of cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasize moral aspect</td>
<td>Faculty members should emphasize that cheating is morally wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seating arrangements for tests</td>
<td>Faculty members would have students sit at least one seat apart during exams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk about it</td>
<td>Faculty members should discuss cheating with their students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watch closely</td>
<td>Faculty members and teaching assistants should watch students closely during exams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking won't change attitudes</td>
<td>Students think that just talking about cheating without action will not prevent cheating</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Faculty Feelings about Cheating**

**Main Category - Students perceptions of faculty feelings about cheating**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Can tell by actions</th>
<th>Students know if faculty members care about cheating if they act to prevent cheating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of preventative action perceived as not caring about cheating</td>
<td>Students think that lack of preventative action means that faculty do not care about cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know how faculty feel</td>
<td>Students indicate that they do not now how their faculty feel about cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guessing or assuming faculty feelings</td>
<td>Students make assumptions about how faculty feel about cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't want cheating so can see how well teaching</td>
<td>Students think that faculty do not like teaching so that they will know how well they are teaching the students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty differ</td>
<td>Students think that faculty members differ on their feelings about cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty don't care</td>
<td>Students think that faculty members do not care about cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty expect cheating</td>
<td>Students think that faculty members expect cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let minor cheating go</td>
<td>Students think that faculty members do nothing about minor or small amounts of cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Say that cheating is bad</td>
<td>Students know that faculty members do not like cheating because they say that cheating is bad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supposed to not like cheating because teachers</td>
<td>Students think that faculty do not like cheating because teachers shouldn't like cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust students not to cheat</td>
<td>Students think that faculty members trust students not to cheat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How Students Like to Learn or be Assessed**

**Main Category - How students like to learn or be assessed on their learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exams</th>
<th>Students like to be assessed through exams</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group work</td>
<td>Students like to participate in group work projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing papers or reports</td>
<td>Students like to learn by writing papers or reports</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Marks of Success or Learning**

**Main Category - How students measure their success**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade not important</th>
<th>Students measure success by what they have learned not their grades</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade-oriented</td>
<td>Students measure their success based on their grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perceptions Why don't Cheat</strong></td>
<td><strong>Main Category - Students perceptions of why their peers do not cheat</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic self-efficacy</td>
<td>Students cite reasons for not peers not cheating related to their confidence in their own abilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easier to learn material</td>
<td>Perceive that students do not cheat because learning is easier than cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-confidence</td>
<td>Perceive that students do not cheat because they are confident in their own abilities to do well on academic exercises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apathy</td>
<td>Perceive that students do not cheat because they do not care enough to cheat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class or assignment related</td>
<td>Perceptions for not cheating related to the course or assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment not conducive to cheating</td>
<td>Perception that the type of assignment does not lend itself to cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy class</td>
<td>Perception that class is easy so students do not need to cheat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small class</td>
<td>Class is small so students will get caught cheating or know professor well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure during exam</td>
<td>Students are sitting apart from one another during exam so cannot cheat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too difficult to cheat</td>
<td>The type of assignment is difficult to cheat on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing-intensive classes</td>
<td>Class has writing assignments that require original thought and cannot be cheated on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn't occur to them</td>
<td>Perception that students do not think to cheat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't like cheating</td>
<td>Perception that students do not cheat because they do not like cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't want others to do better</td>
<td>Perception that students do not help other cheat because of competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty relationship</td>
<td>Perceptions related to a student's relationship with a faculty member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty know students</td>
<td>Perception that students do not cheat because they have a relationship with the faculty member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good faculty</td>
<td>Perception that students do not cheat because the faculty member is a good teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for faculty</td>
<td>Perception that students do not cheat because hey respect their faculty members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilt</td>
<td>Perception that students do not cheat because they would feel guilty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning important</td>
<td>Perceptions related to learning being important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in subject or want to learn</td>
<td>Perception that students do not cheat because they want to learn the material or like the class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not fair to others</td>
<td>Perception that students do not cheat because they think it is unfair to their peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paying own way</td>
<td>Perception that students do not cheat because they are paying for college and do not want to cheat themselves out of education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal character and responsibility</td>
<td>Perceptions related to personal character and responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception</td>
<td>Personal integrity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant class or material</td>
<td>Perceptions related to the relevance of the course material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to learn material</td>
<td>Perception that students do not cheat because they need to know the course material for the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk and consequences</td>
<td>Perceptions related to consequences and prevention efforts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't want to be embarrassed</td>
<td>Perception that students do not cheat because they do not want to be embarrassed if caught cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of consequences</td>
<td>Perception that students do not cheat because they are afraid of the consequences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term consequences</td>
<td>Perception that students do not cheat because they do not want to incur the long-term consequences of cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor watches</td>
<td>Perception that students do not cheat because the professor or teaching assistant is watching closely during an exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-fulfillment</td>
<td>Perception that students do not cheat because learning and earning grades on merit provides self-fulfillment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Societal and group norms</td>
<td>Perceptions related to societal and group norm adherence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engrained from young age not to cheat</td>
<td>Perception that students do not cheat because they have learned since a young age not to cheat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty care about cheating or strict</td>
<td>Perception that students do not cheat so as not to disappoint faculty members who tell them not to cheat or break a rule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future profession against cheating</td>
<td>Perception that students do not cheat because of professional ethics of future profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taught that cheating is bad</td>
<td>Perception that students do not cheat because family taught them that cheating is wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think cheating is wrong</td>
<td>Perception that students do not cheat because cheating violates a rule and is wrong to do</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Perceptions Why Might Cheat

**Main Category - Students perceptions of why peers might cheat**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment-related</th>
<th>Perceptions of why peers cheat related to the type of assignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On-line class</td>
<td>Perception that students cheat because class is all on-line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-line tests</td>
<td>Perception that students cheat because given on-line tests or assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived as difficult or time consuming</td>
<td>Perception that students cheat because assignment is difficult or will take much time to complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small assignments / busy work</td>
<td>Perception that students cheat because assignment is worth few points or requires rote learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>take home work</td>
<td>Perception that students cheat because work is done outside of class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfair or trivial test</td>
<td>Perception that students cheat because test is thought to be unfair or meaningless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Busy - time</td>
<td>Perception that students cheat because they do not have enough time to finish all of their work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheated in high school</td>
<td>Perception that cheating is a behavior that carries over from high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class-related</td>
<td>Perceptions of peer cheating related to the course or classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big class</td>
<td>Perception that students cheat because class is large and cheating will not be detected or prevented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class dependent</td>
<td>Perception that students cheat depending on how they feel about the class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't care about or like class/subject</td>
<td>Perception that students cheat because they do not like the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education not encouraged</td>
<td>Perception that students cheat because learning is not emphasized in society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't need material for future</td>
<td>Perception that students cheat because they do not need the material for the course in the future - class does not matter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam-heavy class</td>
<td>Perception that students cheat because grade is dependent on few exams in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard class</td>
<td>Perception that students cheat to make it through a difficult class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less important work</td>
<td>Perception that students prioritize some work over other work and less important work is cheated on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative class experience</td>
<td>Perception that students cheat because they have had a negative experience in the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't understand how to paraphrase or cite</td>
<td>Perception that students plagiarize because they do not understand the rules of writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easier to cheat than study</td>
<td>Perception that students cheat because cheating is easier than taking time to study and learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enforcement measures</td>
<td>Perceptions of peer cheating related to lack of enforcement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty didn't prevent it</td>
<td>Perception that students cheat because faculty did little to prevent cheating from occurring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of enforcement or prevention</td>
<td>Perception that students cheat because no prevention efforts were taken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty demeanor</td>
<td>Perceptions of peer cheating related to demeanor faculty member -- seems uncaring about cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed messages about cheating</td>
<td>Perceptions that students cheat because faculty give differing messages about cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun</td>
<td>Perception that some students cheat because they find cheating to be fun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade pressure</td>
<td>Perceptions of peer cheating due to grade pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deserve grade because paying tuition</td>
<td>Perception that students cheat because they think they deserve a good grade because paying for college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of failure</td>
<td>Perception that students cheat because they are afraid to earn poor grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future job goal, school</td>
<td>Perception that students cheat to earn a high GPA needed for a future job or graduate school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get ahead</td>
<td>Perception that students cheat to earn high grades than peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loans and scholarships</td>
<td>Perception that students cheat because they need to maintain loans or scholarships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental pressure</td>
<td>Perception that students cheat to please their parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had to cheat due to life events</td>
<td>Perception that difficult life events necessitate cheating because student has no time to study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of personal responsibility</td>
<td>Perception that students cheat because they lack integrity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of preparation</td>
<td>Perceptions of peer cheating related to lack of preparation to complete exam or assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desperation</td>
<td>Perception that peers cheat because they panic and do not know what else to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not prepared to study at college level</td>
<td>Perception that cheating is due to inability to perform at college-level requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other activities take precedence</td>
<td>Perception that students put other activities before studying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack self-confidence</td>
<td>Perception that students cheat because they are not confident they can do well on their own merits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laziness</td>
<td>Perception that students cheat because they are lazy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-related</td>
<td>Perceptions of peer cheating related to other peer behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>Perception that peers cheat because courses and majors are highly competitive for grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help a friend</td>
<td>Perception that students cheat to help others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others are doing it</td>
<td>Perception that peers cheat because other peers are cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal frustration</td>
<td>Perception that students cheat because they are frustrated they do not know the material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realized not prepared during exam</td>
<td>Perception that students panic during an exam if do not know the answers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship to faculty</td>
<td>Perceptions of peer cheating related to students’ relationships with faculty members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blame faculty</td>
<td>Perception that students blame faculty for their cheating because they do not teach well or prevent cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't like or respect faculty</td>
<td>Perception that students cheat because they do not like their faculty members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society - technology</td>
<td>Perception that society encourages cheating, particularly through the use of technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survival</td>
<td>Perception that students need to cheat in order to remain in school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal Feelings about Cheating</strong></td>
<td><strong>Main Category - Students personal feelings about cheating</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t like cheating</td>
<td>Students do not like cheating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt bad for cheating</td>
<td>Students felt bad for their cheating behaviors in college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Control Theory</strong></td>
<td><strong>Main Category - Codes related to Social Control Theory</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bond to university</td>
<td>Ways that students are bonded to the university as a whole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic focus</td>
<td>Students bonded to university due to classes or academic-related activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family history with university</td>
<td>Students bonded to university because family members went to university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Involvement</td>
<td>Students bonded to university through involvement in many activities on campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just so-so</td>
<td>Students feelings about university are ambivalent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice focus</td>
<td>Student bonded to university through activities related to social justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likes university</td>
<td>Student bonded to university because likes the institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low bond</td>
<td>Student not bonded to institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low involvement</td>
<td>Student involved in few activities - not very bonded to institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service focus</td>
<td>Student bonded to institution through service-related activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social focus</td>
<td>Student bonded to university through participation in social activities and groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonds to class</td>
<td>Ways that students are bonded to their classes in general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depends on class</td>
<td>Bond to class depends on the class in question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't spend time on classes that aren't needed</td>
<td>Student not bonded to class if feels that class is not necessary to life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depends on professor</td>
<td>Bond to class depends on the professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't like</td>
<td>Student does not like classes in general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't like gen ed</td>
<td>Student does not like general education classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like major classes</td>
<td>Student likes courses in academic major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like material</td>
<td>Student bonded to class if likes material of the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low bond to class</td>
<td>Student has low bond to classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spend little time on classes</td>
<td>Student spends little time doing course work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spend much time on classes</td>
<td>Student spends much time on course work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spend time on hard classes</td>
<td>Student spends time doing work for courses that are difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want to do well</td>
<td>Student bonded to classes because wants to earn good grades in classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why don't like class</td>
<td>Reasons students gave for not liking certain classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big class</td>
<td>Don't like big classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn't meet expectations</td>
<td>Don't like classes that do not live up to expectations for what should be learned in the class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn't understand material</td>
<td>Don't like classes if did not understand the material being taught</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't like subject</td>
<td>Don't like class if don't like subject matter of class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty didn't teach well</td>
<td>Don't like class if student thinks that professor does not teach well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty not serious enough</td>
<td>Don't like class if professor does not take class and teaching seriously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty too liberal</td>
<td>Don't like class if professor seems too liberal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language barrier</td>
<td>Don't like class if professor does not speak English well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monotonous assignments</td>
<td>Don't like class if given busy work or rote learning assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No relationship with professor</td>
<td>Don't like class if student has no relationship with professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taught by teaching assistant</td>
<td>Don't like classes that are taught be teaching assistants rather than faculty members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test-dependent</td>
<td>Don't like classes in which grades are dependent on few exams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unnecessary work</td>
<td>Don't like classes in which work does not seem relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why like class</td>
<td>Reasons students gave for why they like their classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can use in real life</td>
<td>Likes class because can use material in personal or professional life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concepts applied well</td>
<td>Likes class because professor helps to apply the concepts to real life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged in class</td>
<td>Likes class because class is engaging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends in class</td>
<td>Likes class because friends are in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good professor</td>
<td>Likes class because thinks the professor is a good teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor leads discussion</td>
<td>Likes class because students are able to engage in discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor responds to needs of class</td>
<td>Likes class because professor responds to needs and questions of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interesting material</td>
<td>Likes class because finds the subject matter interesting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like faculty member</td>
<td>Likes class because likes faculty member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes you think</td>
<td>Likes class because the professor challenges students to think deeply about topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple types of assignments or assessments</td>
<td>Likes class because professor gives multiple types of assignments for grading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with professor</td>
<td>Likes class because student has a relationship with the professor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Small class | Likes class because it has a small number of students
---|---
Bonds to friends | Students are bonded to friends by spending time with friend group
Not many friends | Student has few friends on campus
Bonds to teacher | Student is bonded to teacher
Faculty-student relationship matter in cheating | Student thinks that relationship to professor influences cheating decision
Neutralizations | Codes related to use of neutralizations in cheating decisions
Appeal to higher loyalties | Student neutralizes behavior by saying cheating done to help others
Class doesn't matter | Student neutralizes behavior by saying that cheating occurred because the class is not important or relevant
Condemnation of condemners | Student neutralizes behavior by blaming the faculty member for the cheating occurring
Denial of injury | Student neutralizes behavior by saying that cheating does no harm
Denial of victim | Student neutralizes behavior by saying that the faculty member deserved to have cheating occur
Denial of responsibility | Student neutralizes behavior by saying that multiple outside forces were the reason behind the cheating decision
Respect for rules and authority | Student make statements related to their respect for rules about cheating

**Strain Theory**

**Main Category -- Codes related to Strain Theory**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Dream</td>
<td>Students subscribe to the American Dream of success in life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in Learning</td>
<td>Students are interested in learning for learning's sake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived academic ability</td>
<td>Students perceptions about own academic ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depends on effort put in</td>
<td>Achievement related to amount of effort put forth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depends on motivation</td>
<td>Achievement related to amount of motivation in the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did better in smaller classes</td>
<td>Student earned higher grade in small class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do well</td>
<td>Student earns good grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do well in classes that are interesting</td>
<td>Student does well in class that he/she finds interesting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does average</td>
<td>Student earns average grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-College goals</td>
<td>Students' goals once they are finished with college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be happy</td>
<td>To be happy in life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Become a teacher</td>
<td>To become a teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching</td>
<td>To be a coach for K-12 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td>To be a doctor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>Does not have goals set at this time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>To have a family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grad school</td>
<td>To go to graduate school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping - making a difference</td>
<td>To help others and make a difference in one's community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>job</td>
<td>To get a job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge - learning</td>
<td>To learn and gain knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>To be in the military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td>To earn much money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-material - personal development</td>
<td>To engage in activities that relate to personal development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own a home</td>
<td>To own a house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>To travel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>To work a good job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure to succeed</td>
<td>How students experience pressure to succeed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference between majors</td>
<td>Pressure is different for different majors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't feel pressure</td>
<td>Student does not feel pressure to succeed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel pressure</td>
<td>Student feels much pressure to succeed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source of Pressure</td>
<td>Where pressure to succeed comes from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>Pressure is felt in academic college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition in major</td>
<td>Pressure is due to competition with peers in academic major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group involved with</td>
<td>Pressure comes from the groups students are involved with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Parents pressure students to do well and earn high grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Puts pressure on self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society</td>
<td>Pressure comes from societal notion that all must succeed at high levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Feel Pressure</td>
<td>Why students feel pressure to succeed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get into grad school</td>
<td>Feel pressure to earn high grades for graduate school admission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA is important</td>
<td>Think that GPA is very important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents are teachers</td>
<td>Parents are teachers so feel the need to live up to expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paying for school</td>
<td>Paying for own college tuition so student wants to do well in school to make money spent worth it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get a good job</td>
<td>Pressure to earn high grades in order to secure a good and well paying job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wants to be the best in class - get good grades</td>
<td>Pressure to compete with classmates and earn the highest grades</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Values - Important Things in Life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Category - What students value in their lives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doesn't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hobby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martial arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eagle Scouts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martial Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being well-rounded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having people, things you love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping - making a difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People-oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends - being social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profession-related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varying experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work - area of study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student activism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success-oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA - Forced importance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success - achieving goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To pass classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have fun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| Attitudes about cheating ingrained before college | Students attitudes about cheating are set before they get to college |
| Cheating is not planned | Students do not plan to cheat |
| Contradiction | Students contradict themselves about whether they cheat or not |
| Cultural differences | Cultural differences related to cheating |
| Don't drink, so few friends | Student does not drink and feels the lack of drinking causes him/her to have few friends on campus |
| Don't know penalties | Student does not know the potential sanctions if caught cheating |
| Enforce rules when young | Students think that rules about cheating would be enforced in K-12 education to help teach students that cheating is wrong |
| Expectation of not cheating | Students think that faculty expect that students will not cheat |
| Faculty address honor code | Professor in the College of Business discuss the honor code |
| Faculty should expect cheating on on-line work | Students think that professor should expect cheating to occur on work that is done on-line |
| Gen Eds | Student discussions about general education classes |
| Messages about integrity | Students hear message of integrity in their classes |
| Other campus comparison | Students compare experiences at Main campus and other colleges/campuses |
| Perception of problem | Students perceptions of the problem of cheating |
| Personal character | Student thinks that cheating is related to personal character |
| Prioritizing classes | Students prioritize their classes |
| Proctor experience | Student has experience proctoring exams and catching people cheating |
| College of Business Honor Code | Student discussions about Honor Code in college of business |
| College of Business Junior Core classes | Student discussions about college of business core courses taken in the junior year |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student discussion about cheating</th>
<th>Students do not regularly discuss the topic of cheating with fellow students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unwritten list of easy cheat classes</td>
<td>On campus students know which courses are easy to cheat in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wants to make a difference</td>
<td>Students want to make a difference in their communities and help people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX G: STUDENT STORIES ILLUSTRATING CONFLUENCE OF FACTORS ON CHEATING DECISION

Alex’s story:

Alex, a senior majoring in Economics, told me about two experiences he had with cheating. Alex cheated in a course that many people say it’s one of the harder or hardest business courses. . . . for me the first two exams were not bad, and I was really very optimistic about the final and everything, but the final was pretty, was quite hard, and it surprised me a bit, and I was, I mean, if I did, if I did well, and it was very heavy weighted, so if I did well, like I would, I was going to end up with a B, but I was like at that line, not very comfortable situation, and but if I blew it, and didn’t do well, then I could get a C, or even if I did poorly, I would even get a D and have to take the class again. So at that time, I mean the stakes were very high. I was in a very uncomfortable situation. I didn’t like the professor too much. Well there was a big class too, and I’m not a fan of big classes where you’re a spectator in a stadium, and you see the professor, like he’s tiny, so I didn’t plan on [cheating]. . . . I studied and prepared. I did what I could, and when the time came, I took the exam, but there were a lot of times that I was skipping questions, or skimming the exam, and getting desperate, and I had a friend. I had one or two friends that were also taking it with me, so and yeah, I mean, I felt that it wouldn’t be a problem, that he was not going to raise his hand and say “hey, this guy is looking over at me.” So I felt in that sense, I felt that it was going to be hard to get caught I guess. . . .

That class was four credits, so I mean it could hurt or sink your GPA, and I think the GPA is a very strong credential that all college students have, so I mean we, I think most of us value it a lot, and so having a low GPA is like a weight that you have to, I mean it’s on your shoulders that you have to carry, so my main objective was to get the highest grade possible, as in every class, just to keep up with my GPA or improve it . . . [Getting a high GPA makes] getting a job a lot easier and have more opportunities. . . . It’s very important that you don’t mess up and end up with a lower GPA.

I’m not a huge fan of big classes. It’s just that you totally lose the student-to-teacher, and the feeling that, it’s more like a not a show, but a, you feel that, I mean that there is not really a relationship between the teacher and the professor, like it’s just, it’s just a lot, it’s so much better when there are like ten or fifteen students. . . . But when you have like three hundred people in a room, it’s, I mean it’s, I mean you don’t make a difference, it’s hard to get to know your professor, and that he knows you, your name, and so. And I guess … oh, okay, this makes, I mean, I guess this changes things when it’s a small class, and you know the professor, like he knows you, your name, your face, and then when I guess like during a, because I’ve had this, like during a difficult exam, and where I guess if I didn’t know the professor well, then you would say “oh I don’t care, like I’m going to cheat.” But when you do know the professor, then you feel like you would be betraying him. So it just makes like cheating out of the question.
The context in which Alex cheated was on in which several factors came together that created the attitude that cheating was acceptable. He was concerned about his GPA and not confident that he could do well on the exam. He did not like the large class or the professor and had no relationship with the professor. Alex also thought that he had little chance of being caught due to the large class size and a friend who would not turn him in for cheating. Like Jack A. Alex did not plan on cheating. He tried his best to prepare for the exam but was shocked when he did not know that material on the test. However, he recognized that a smaller class-size and a relationship with the professor would have kept him from cheating. Also, if he was not concerned about his GPA, he likely would not have cheated.

Elizabeth’s story:

Elizabeth was a Junior in the College of Education who likes to learn and work hard in her classes. She does not like cheating and typically does not cheat because she is afraid of the consequences if caught. However, she did cheat. She told me about a general education economics class he took in her first semester of college in which she cheated.

Freshman year in econ, I had a really hard time, and so another kid I went to high school with and was in the same class as me, . . . we had six hundred people lectures, so I’m sure I looked at his paper. . . .

I did terrible at Econ. I would go to the class, I would take notes, but I would still do really badly. And it just didn’t click, . . . so that’s probably why I resorted to cheating.

I was borderline D, . . . so I wasn’t doing as well as I hoped. And you have to get a 3.0, and that was my first semester, so I was so worried about failing out and everything. [There was] pressure from my family, pressure from my friends. I was really worried about it, even joking about joining the Peace Corps because I was doing so terrible. . . .

[I cheated] because I had been doing bad up to that point and I knew that this was how I could bring my grade up, so that’s why.
I would never [cheat] now; my classes are twelve, twenty people, and so I would never cheat because I would never want to get caught. That would be terrible. The six-hundred person class gave me a lot more comfort I would say, and being that it was my friend, I knew that if he saw me cheating, he would never be like “oh my gosh.” He would never say anything to the professor. But if it was a stranger and they turned around and see it, they would be more likely to alert someone who would get me in trouble.

When I asked Elizabeth what might have kept her from cheating in her economics class, she said,

Maybe if I felt more comfortable with my grade, I wouldn’t have done it or if it were a smaller class, I definitely would not have done it. And plus that there were only two proctors, so and I think they were both standing at the bottom of the room, so I knew they wouldn’t be able to tell.

Elizabeth was fearful of getting a poor grade in her class and was frustrated with not understanding the material. She took comfort in the fact that the class was large and there was little prevention of cheating, so she did not think she would get caught. If not for the grade pressure, if the class had been smaller, or if there had been prevention measures, she likely would not have cheated. Each of the stories presented above is an account of unplanned cheating for students who stated that they typically would not cheat in their classes. For each of the students, a specific context occurred in which they deemed it acceptable to cheat. Grade pressure, the size and type of class, lack of prevention, and their relationships to the material were the most salient factors influencing their decisions at the time.

Novali’s story:

Novali was an education major who said that she did not cheat because she had a “level of integrity.” She indicated to me that she had not cheated in college, but as we spoke, she seemed to question if actions she took while taking a quiz in a statistics class were cheating. She thought that talking with a friend to work out problems during the quiz might be considered cheating by the University standards, but in her definition, it was not cheating. As I continued to speak with
Novali about the quiz, she told me about several contextual factors that entered into her decision to talk with a friend and why she did not consider the action to be cheating. Novali said,

In my definition, I was not cheating; there’s no way. Because it was a small couple of points something, I was conversing with [a friend], I didn’t copy their paper. We worked it out together, because both of us didn’t know what we were doing, and the professor was right there; we were in the front row. So I think if anybody felt that it was a problem, it would have been said. I also felt at a disadvantage, I specifically use that as an example because I don’t actually typically do that. But I did in this class, because I felt like it was odds were against me, the book didn’t match the lecture. The lecture and the book didn’t match the test or the quiz or homework assignment, anything. So we were always comparing work. . . . So I didn’t consider it cheating, but I do know that some people would. . . .

The class was a stadium in [a large lecture classroom], so that’s always a problem. So it was only lectures, rarely any questions to be asked. He wasn’t a teacher, and I think that was the big issue is he did something else for the university, and the classes were part of his contract. He had no teaching qualifications; he didn’t want to be a professor. . . . I’m a pretty smart student, I study decently hard, and I had no idea what the man was talking about ever. . . . And it was ridiculous, and so no, I didn’t consider it cheating because I thought in that situation, well not in that situation, I do think that if I did that randomly during a class quiz on something that was my responsibility, and it’s your responsibility as a student to study and follow along, but that was just impossible. That was not my responsibility. It’s not my responsibility to make sure the lecture and the book match. That has nothing to do with me, and if you don’t do that right, it affects me, and that’s not fair. And then for neither one of them to match the test, and I never cheated on the test. I guessed. I never tried looking over the shoulder, because there’s something about the higher level that makes it wrong, and I don’t know if that’s valid or possible, but it’s something I feel different on a two-question pop quiz than on a final exam. I feel like it’s much more a severe situation. Even if it’s not fair, cheating’s not an option. Looking and conversing is just not an option. I wouldn’t even think of doing it.

It was a five-question something, and the only reason that we ever conversed is because you got fifteen of them throughout the semester, and they added up to twenty-five percent of your grade. So even though it was just a five-question small quiz, you still wanted to do fairly well on them, because you knew you weren’t doing good on the final, and I was expecting that. . . . He just wasn’t a teacher. . . .

The first two weeks were actually important, . . . and I could actually use it because it was how to read tables, and where the information comes from, which is not about what was later doing about creating and doing and making stats that I wasn’t good at. . . . Two weeks into it, it stopped being important. I had no idea of what was going on. So I gave up on that one. . . .
I have absolutely no confidence that I could ever cheat, really cheat on something important or big or in a class where the professor actually cared about that. Because he didn’t; he looked, he’s like “you guys talking?” And I looked at him; I said “we don’t understand it. Yes, we’re conversing about it.” I didn’t hide anything. But I think in another class it obviously would have been different.

Novali’s stated that she gave up in her class and abdicated her responsibility for learning the material, and she acknowledges that the situation she was in was unusual for her and greatly influenced her decision to talk to her friend during the quiz. In talking through the situation Novali mentioned several of the influencing factors outlined above. She discussed the nature of the assignment being a quiz worth few points rather than a major test. She discussed her desire to get a decent grade in the class, which was affected by the combined weight of the quizzes. She thought that the professor was a bad teacher who did not care about teaching or about cheating, she said that her professor did not try to stop her and her friend from talking. She thought that the professor created an environment that was unfair and in which she could not do well. She also discussed the lack of a relationship to the class material as the class was unimportant to her and because she did not understand the material, which was not typically the case for her. She also discussed the large size of the class as having an effect on the situation. For Novali, her actions were completely due to the situation, and she drew clear distinctions about how she would not participate in the same behavior in another situation because it then would be cheating. In this instance, though she did not consider the behavior to be cheating. Each of these factors influenced Novali’s decision to talk with her friend during the quiz, and in that situation, an action she normally would not take became acceptable, necessary, and defined differently.
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- Instruct/administer e-thos ethical development seminar
- Assess ethics and character-related learning outcomes for office programming and initiatives
- Serve as the Campus Advocate
- Advise the University Student Judiciary Education Team and Community Advocates

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