

# The Role of Cultural Values in Plagiarism in Higher Education

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Published online: 16 November 2014  
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**Abstract** Student plagiarism is a rampant practice and major concern in higher education. How students perceive the overarching American cultural values and their impact on the practice will inform educators and help them to better combat the practice. It is also valuable for educators to know whether the students perceive the practice to be part of the dominant culture, currently, on college campuses. This study reports perceptions of plagiarism by students in an introductory sociology course. Open-ended questions explored perceptions of extent, justifications, and American values affecting plagiarism. Participants were clear on definitions and seriousness, but most were able to justify the behavior and identify American values contributing to or deterring the practice. Findings were consistent across gender, course grade, class standing, and college major. The authors discuss the cultural values students use as justifications for plagiarizing and the larger implications for higher education.

**Keywords** Plagiarism · Student perceptions · Cheating culture · Justifications · Values

Plagiarism—the copying of others’ work or ideas without attribution, treating the material as if it were one’s own—can occur in any number of areas, including the copying of art, music, lab work, computer programming, and technology. However, the focus of this research is on *textual* plagiarism. Specifically, this is the “. . . reproduction of text from other academic sources, such as journal articles, books, or lecture notes without adequate acknowledgment of the source, copying some or all of other students’ assignments and even having assignments ‘ghost-written’ by other authors” (Selwyn 2008, p. 465). Investigators point to evidence that plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct are in part supported by a culture that both encourages and facilitates the practice (Callahan 2004). The present work reports on the role of cultural values in university students’ perceptions of and behavior regarding textual plagiarism. Accordingly, a class of 538 introductory sociology students were administered a questionnaire regarding their understanding of what constitutes plagiarism, how widespread it is, whether or not they consider the practice a part of the collegiate culture, how it might differ in its ethical

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implications from other forms of plagiarism, and the possible role of student cultural values in its practice and justification.

### Prevalence of Plagiarism

Hammond (2002) surveyed published estimates of cheating, including plagiarism, in Great Britain from 1941 to 2001. The 1941 survey revealed 20–25 % engaged in cheating; by the 1990s, the percentages were 60–65. Other studies pointed to increases in academic misconduct as well (e.g., Bjorklund and Wenestam 1999) and plagiarism in particular (e.g., Maslen 2003; McCabe 2001). Park (2003) concluded that there is mounting evidence that student plagiarism is increasing and is contributing to cheating epidemic, citing evidence from a variety of countries, including the United States (White 1993), the United Kingdom (Ashworth et al. 1997), South Africa (Weeks 2001), and Finland (Seppanen 2002).

Plagiarism is known to comprise a large segment of academic misconduct. A recent study of higher education alumni's retrospections on cheating indicated that of 19 cheating behaviors investigated, the most common forms were listed as: allowing others to copy, copying from another's assignment, reusing papers, and plagiarism (Yardley et al. 2009). A study by Hawley (1984) employing a one-campus survey of 425 undergraduate students found that: 12 % reported asking someone to write a paper for them; 15.6 % had actually turned in a paper written by someone else; and 5.6 % reported using a research service. Arguably, all these behaviors fall under the general category of plagiarism. Scanlon and Neumann (2002) in a compilation of plagiarism incidence literature found a high frequency of this behavior. Quantitative studies indicating the prevalence of plagiarism are not confined to the U.S., with reports emanating from the Bahamas (e.g., Gibson et al. 2006), Australia (Maslen 2003), Scandinavia (Bjorklund and Wenestam 1999), and the U.K. (Hammond 2002). However, the prevalence data from these studies are often drawn from students and, to a lesser extent, faculty and administrator surveys that include a variety of other forms of academic misconduct.

### Correlates of Plagiarism

Numerous studies have explored what factors correlate with academic misconduct. With regard to plagiarism, findings suggest that some students plagiarize because they do not really understand what it is or how to write academically (Devlin and Gray 2007; Iyer and Eastman 2006; Park 2003). Others may recognize their actions as inappropriate but feel compelled because of time management problems (Bennett 2005; Bernardi et al. 2008; Iyer and Eastman 2006; Yardley et al. 2009). They may see plagiarism as an efficient way to complete assignments (Devlin and Gray 2007; DeVoss and Rosati 2002; Stephens et al. 2007). Other students may plagiarize not because they feel pressured to complete an assignment but for more purely antisocial reasons; they may have little respect for authority (Bernardi et al. 2008; Callahan 2004; Devlin and Gray 2007) and negative attitudes toward their teachers or classes (Bennett 2005; Bernardi et al. 2008; Callahan 2004; Hutton 2006; Power 2009).

One reason plagiarism can become rampant on college campuses is that it is rarely detected or punished. With great temptation and little fear of getting caught, students may opt for the 'easy way out' and then are reinforced for this behavior when they receive no consequences for their actions (Bennett 2005; Pickard 2005; Selwyn 2008; Sileo and Sileo 2008; Stephens et al. 2007; Walker 2010).

## Role of the Internet

Adding to what appears to be a cheating momentum is the role of the Internet, where information is readily available and easy to copy-and-paste as one's own work. Paulhus et al. (2005) suggest that academic cheating is easier than ever because content can be downloaded from many sources and near instantaneously. An editor of *Ethics and Behavior's* special issue on academic dishonesty pointed to the Internet explosion as facilitating new forms of academic dishonesty (Wowra 2007a, b). In 2007, the results of an online survey of over 1300 undergraduate students showed that over 45 % admitted to using both conventional and Internet-driven methods to cheat (Stephens et al. 2007). Another observer noted that given students' propensity to cheat the Internet is simply a prolific resource (Milliron and Sandoe 2008). Thus, it appears that copying original work from the Internet now may be surpassing conventional forms of copying.

This plagiarism occurs in spite of the fact that students tend to underreport the practice, as they do not always know what constitutes plagiarism. While 90 % of the students surveyed admitted to cheating, they did not perceive digital plagiarizing, copying from digital sources (i.e., Internet), as academic dishonesty (Baker et al. 2008). Another found that almost 25 % of 698 students self-reported that they cut and pasted text from online sources without proper referencing (Scanlon and Neumann 2002). On a related issue, Martin et al. (2009) found when comparing students' self-reports and their plagiarism detection software score that the incidences of plagiarism were actually higher than students were willing to admit. Thus, the body of evidence suggests that plagiarism is a significant subset of academic misconduct, and the ease of digital cut-and-paste behaviors contribute to this ongoing problem.

## Role of Cultural Context

Both broad and sub-level cultural forces are associated with and, by inference, affect cheating behavior. Callahan (2004) has argued that a highly competitive environment in the United States against a backdrop of economic inequality has created a society without a moral compass. He goes on to look at the more specific dimensions of this phenomenon including: the "normalization" of the behavior (everybody does it); valuing the economic bottom-line (worship of profit); instrumental attitudes (the ends justify the means); character issues (bad values); regulatory failures that cause temptation (you are not really going to get caught); cheating by the masses (from stealing music over the Internet to inflating insurance claims); learning early how to work the system to get ahead; and lack of accountability and punishment for cheating in education and professional settings. These factors in a climate of inequality create a "cheating culture" that perpetuate the behavior until different cultural values take precedence.

## The Present Study

The focus of this research was on the applications of these general cultural factors to a specific type of conduct in a specific setting: plagiarism on a university campus. Since correlation evidence does not enable identification of processes underlying the decisions to cheat, nor does it lead to constructive recommendations on ways to reduce the amount of cheating that occurs in our schools and universities (Miller et al. 2007), it is important to investigate this further. Thus, a primary goal was to gain an understanding of students' perspectives regarding

plagiarism. The objective was to assist instructors in higher education in their efforts to communicate norms about the practice of plagiarism and to reduce its incidences. Accordingly, the study sought to determine: (a) whether students know the meaning of plagiarism and of Internet plagiarism; (b) whether students perceive plagiarism to be a widespread problem on college campuses; (c) whether students perceive Internet plagiarism and traditional plagiarism differently in terms of their ethical implications; (d) whether students perceive plagiarism to be a part of the culture on their campus; (e) what rationale students have heard to justify plagiarism; and (f) what American cultural values students think contribute to or deter plagiarism.

## Methodology

### Participants

Five hundred thirty-seven online undergraduate *Introduction to Sociology* students from a public state university in the southern region of the United States were invited to participate. The institution has a total undergraduate and graduate student enrollment close to 30,000, is predominantly (more than 80 %) Caucasian, and characterizes itself as a “student-centered research university.” The class was comprised of 263 freshman, 66 sophomores, 108 juniors, 100 seniors, and three graduate students. The students had completed a chapter within the previous month on culture—the concept, key elements, and applications. Students were advised that completion of the questionnaire would render full credit and content would not be graded.

Two hundred and forty usable questionnaires were returned, yielding a 45 % response rate. Demographic information for this sample is displayed in Table 1. Chi square analyses revealed that the gender,  $\chi^2(1) = 0.85, p = .36$ , and college major of the students,  $\chi^2(7) = 7.81, p = .35$ , who completed the survey were similar to that of the class as a whole. However, freshmen,  $\chi^2(4) = 12.659, p = .01$ , were more likely to complete the survey than were upper classmen, and students who received an A in the course,  $\chi^2(4) = 15.97, p = .003$ , were more likely than others to have completed the survey.

### Procedure

The Institutional Review Board of the university approved the study. Students were presented by the instructor with an opportunity to complete a questionnaire about plagiarism as an extra credit assignment to be turned in online. The instructor broadcast an email to all of the students through their online class email which included the survey as an attachment. Students were given 2 weeks to complete and return the survey via email. For those students who did not want to complete the survey, an alternative assignment was provided. Either assignment required approximately 20 min to complete. A follow-up email was sent 3 days prior to the deadline which also included an attached survey. In order to receive credit, names were included either on the questionnaire or in the email. They were advised that completion of the assignment would garner full extra credit, and content from the survey would not be graded.

### Instrument

The research instrument consisted of a questionnaire designed to elicit students’ cultural perspectives and understandings of plagiarism on college campuses. Note that students were

**Table 1** Gender, class standing, course grade, college of major

| Variable                      | Sample <i>n</i> (%) | Class <i>n</i> (%) |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Gender                        |                     |                    |
| Male                          | 82 (34.2 %)         | 202 (37.6 %)       |
| Female                        | 158 (65.8 %)        | 335 (62.4 %)       |
| Class standing                |                     |                    |
| Freshman                      | 147 (61.3 %)        | 263 (48.7 %)       |
| Sophomore                     | 17 (7.1 %)          | 66 (12.2 %)        |
| Junior                        | 41 (17.1 %)         | 108 (20.0 %)       |
| Senior                        | 35 (14.6 %)         | 100 (18.5 %)       |
| Course grade                  |                     |                    |
| A                             | 128 (53.3 %)        | 195 (42.4 %)       |
| B                             | 61 (25.4 %)         | 111 (24.1 %)       |
| C                             | 32 (13.3 %)         | 76 (16.5 %)        |
| D                             | 12 (5.0 %)          | 35 (7.6 %)         |
| F                             | 7 (2.9 %)           | 43 (9.3 %)         |
| College major                 |                     |                    |
| Arts & Sciences               | 66 (27.5 %)         | 152 (28.5 %)       |
| Business                      | 31 (12.9 %)         | 76 (14.2 %)        |
| Communication & Info. Science | 27 (11.3 %)         | 57 (10.7 %)        |
| Education                     | 21 (8.8 %)          | 48 (9.0 %)         |
| Engineering                   | 19 (7.9 %)          | 43 (8.1 %)         |
| Human Environment Science     | 21 (8.8 %)          | 70 (13.1 %)        |
| Social Work                   | 4 (1.7 %)           | 11 (2.1 %)         |
| Nursing                       | 51 (21.3 %)         | 77 (14.4 %)        |

not asked to report on their own use of plagiarism but they were indirectly asked their perceptions of it. The use of an indirect question is a commonly used method when a respondent may be uneasy about reporting their own behavior. It also is a direct question about the social norms of plagiarism (See Bradburn et al. 1978 for a discussion of the use of indirect questions.). The survey included seven open-ended questions developed based on the course textbook “Chapter 2, Culture” assignment. The textbook used for the course was *Society: The Basics 10th Ed.* (Macionis 2008).

In Question One, students were asked to define both plagiarism and Internet plagiarism. Responses were coded as to whether or not they could define such terms accurately. An accurate definition had to include elements of the following: reproduction or inclusion of another person’s creative work into one’s own work without properly attribution whether from the Internet or other sources. Question Two asked if they thought plagiarism was widespread on college campuses. The responses were coded as yes or no. Question Three asked if students think plagiarism is a part of the dominant culture, subculture, popular culture or not a part of their college campus culture. Responses were coded as dominant, subculture, popular or none.

Question Four asked if there is a difference in ethical implications between Internet plagiarism and traditional plagiarism. Responses were coded as Internet and traditional plagiarism having the same ethical implications, Internet plagiarism having more ethical implications, or Internet plagiarism having less ethical implications. Question Five asked what justifications students have heard for plagiarizing. Students were able to include as many justifications as they had heard.

Questions Six and Seven asked whether there were any American cultural values that could contribute to or deter plagiarizing, respectively. Students were asked to list as many values as they deemed appropriate. The eleven American cultural values as defined by Williams (1970) discussed in the chapter were used to code responses, including: individualism, activity and work, practicality and efficacy, progress, equal opportunity, material comfort, democracy and free enterprise, freedom, racism and group superiority, science, and leisure.

### Data Analysis

Analyses were performed using SPSS for Windows Version 19. Open-ended responses were collapsed into similar categories based on the prominent themes of the responses, and direct quotes were used to exemplify each category with typical responses. Frequencies were used to determine the prevalence of responses in each category, and chi square analyses were used to explore the distributions of demographic subgroups across response categories, including gender, course grade, class standing, and college of major.

## Results

### Definition, Extent, and Ethical Implications

Table 2 shows that 100 % of the 240 students who responded to the questionnaire were able to define plagiarism and Internet plagiarism. In addition, the vast majority of students perceived plagiarism to be a widespread problem on college campuses. While there was considerable variation in students' perceptions of plagiarism as a part of collegiate culture, a strong majority of students (74.9 %) perceived it to be a part of their collegiate culture and that it was not just a subcultural view. In terms of its ethical implications, 87.7 % of students felt that there was no difference in the ethical implications between traditional and Internet plagiarism.

### Justifications for Plagiarism

A large range of responses were given as justifications that students have heard for plagiarism: everyone does it, won't get caught by faculty, student is too busy, student didn't have time to

**Table 2** Students' perceptions regarding plagiarism

| Variable                                       | n (%)         |
|--|---------------|
| Define <i>plagiarism</i>                       | 240 (100.0 %) |
| Believe widespread problem                     | 189 (84.0 %)  |
| Part of collegiate culture                     |               |
| Popular  | 72 (34.8 %)   |
| Subculture                                     | 60 (29.0 %)   |
| Dominant                                       | 23 (11.1 %)   |
| None   | 52 (25.1 %)   |
| Ethical implications: internet vs. traditional |               |
| Same   | 207 (87.7 %)  |
| Internet more                                  | 2 (0.8 %)     |
| Internet less                                  | 27(11.4 %)    |

complete assignment, easier to get assignment done, it wasn't the entire paper, forgot until last minute, had same idea different wording, to get a better grade, paraphrased, didn't know how to cite, if on the internet it is public/not copyrighted, faculty didn't explain assignment, paid for it, and couldn't find enough material. We collapsed these responses into eight categories (Table 3).

The most common justification for plagiarism students stated was that it was the *faculty's fault* (43.7 %). In the longer narratives, students said things such as an assignment was not being explained clearly, faculty expectations were too high, or that faculty would not be able to catch them. In this latter category, students alluded to the large number of papers the professor had to grade, big classes and resulting student anonymity, and the instructor not being computer savvy. Some students perceived that the professor simply "did not care." "If the professor cared they would check the sources and tell us we would be caught and punished—I think that would decrease the problem, but they really don't care. A student said, "It took so long for me to find this on the Internet I know she won't find it."

Many students also acknowledged that students were at fault for plagiarizing because of their own failings (40.3 %). In the narratives, students gave justifications for plagiarism such as lack of *time management* skills (e.g., "I am too busy." "I ran out of time.") to self-handicapping explanations (e.g., "I lost my syllabus and didn't know until I ran into a girl from class at a party the night before it was due." "Had a big date the night before—homework can be late.").

A large number of students (34.9 %) justified plagiarism by "blaming society" for developing the Internet as a public or "open" forum information. In their words: "Stuff on Internet is not copyrighted or published so it isn't theft." "Since there is no author listed it is for everyone to use at will. If they didn't want someone to use their words and ideas, they wouldn't put it on the internet."

The notion that plagiarism is simply an easier way of completing assignments or getting better grades, or simply as a *means to an end*, was given by 34.9 % of respondents. Responses ranged from "needing to graduate" to "I'm paying for it," to not disappointing parents.

The results in Table 3 were limited to the most frequently endorsed categories (30 % or more agreement) and then analyzed across demographics (gender, class standing, class grade, and college major). These results showed that justifications for plagiarism were the same for males and females ( $\chi^2(3) = 0.61, p = .89$ ). Justifications for plagiarism were also consistent across class standings ( $\chi^2(9) = 5.33, p = .81$ ), across class grades ( $\chi^2(9) = 5.73, p = .77$ ), and largely consistent across college majors ( $\chi^2(21) = 10.84, p = .97$ ).

**Table 3** Rationales students have heard for justifying plagiarism

| Rationale          | <i>n</i> (%) |
|--------------------|--------------|
| Faculty's fault    | 104 (43.7 %) |
| Time management    | 96 (40.3 %)  |
| Means to an end    | 83 (34.9 %)  |
| Internet is public | 83 (34.9 %)  |
| Did not know       | 69 (29.0 %)  |
| Same idea          | 65 (27.3 %)  |
| Not whole paper    | 23 (9.7 %)   |
| Everyone does it   | 22 (9.2 %)   |
| Have not heard any | 17 (7.1 %)   |

## Influence of Cultural Values

Table 4 shows an alphabetic list of American cultural values that may contribute to or deter plagiarism. Multiple response data were used to help us to understand factors that may be related to these cultural values.

*Contributing Values* About one third of all respondents (32.9 %) indicated *individualism* as a value contributing to the prevalence of plagiarism. The concept of *personal success* was addressed in statements coded as individualism where a student may say, “Our culture tells us to do whatever it takes to be successful even if it means cheating.” The individual achievement at all costs concept was evident as another student stated, “There is a strong emphasis on making sure you are one step ahead of everyone else; hard work and self knowledge has taken a backburner.” “Instead of valuing the process by which an education is obtained, and the information learned through the process, our cultural value of individual achievement means that rewards are only based on grades.”

Over 18 % of students’ responses indicated that *science* as a cultural value contributes to the prevalence of plagiarism. Reasons cited included the society’s science and technology emphasis as “the hope for the future,” and growing up with the Internet. A respondent stretched it so far to say: “Our culture focuses on the use of technology to better our lives so we think that using the Internet to copy and paste information into our paper is bettering our lives.”

*Freedom* was included in 17.5 % of answers. To this population of students, freedom meant, “...we don’t have parents looking over our shoulder anymore, we get to do whatever we want.” This value was followed closely by *race/group superiority* at 16.3 %. One of these students expressed a retribution motive: “Students may feel oppressed or generally inferior to other students and develop the attitude that plagiarism is just ‘getting back’ at students they feel wronged them.” Another student alluded to intelligence and inferiority motives: “Students who feel ‘dumber’ than other students may think they have the right to plagiarize because of being inferior.” Other students went so far as to say having money or having group superiority contributed to plagiarizing. “If you can afford to buy a paper and have constant access on your smart phone or iPad to the Internet, why not use it to get your work done faster and easier than

**Table 4** American cultural values that contribute to or deter plagiarism

| Value                      | Contribute <i>n</i> (%) | Deter <i>n</i> (%) |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Activity / work            | 7 (2.9 %)               | 59 (24.6 %)        |
| Democracy                  | 2 (0.8 %)               | 54 (22.5 %)        |
| Efficiency / practicality  | 26 (10.8 %)             | 6 (2.5 %)          |
| Equal opportunity          | 20 (8.3 %)              | 21 (8.8 %)         |
| Freedom                    | 42 (17.5 %)             | 117 (48.8 %)       |
| Individualism              | 79 (32.9 %)             | 73 (30.4 %)        |
| Leisure                    | 34 (14.2 %)             | 20 (8.3 %)         |
| Material comfort           | 14 (5.8 %)              | 2 (0.8 %)          |
| Progress                   | N/ A                    | 12 (5.0 %)         |
| Racism / group superiority | 39 (16.3 %)             | 9 (3.8 %)          |
| Science                    | 44 (18.3 %)             | 6 (2.5 %)          |
| None                       | 25 (10.4 %)             | 7 (2.9 %)          |



everyone else?” “If you are in an upper class you have to maintain a certain image of being smarter—so you may have to plagiarize for it.”

A *leisure* dimension was mentioned in 14.2 % of responses, with one student even justifying plagiarism because Sunday is a religious day: “Some religions believe that Sunday is a day of rest and no work should be done that day. So, you have to copy someone else’s on Monday.” Several pointed to elements of leisure such as football or partying: “Our culture emphasizes that having a good time in college is more important than learning—especially at our school where football and partying is the main focus”.

Responses in Table 4 with at least 30 % agreement were examined in multiple response tables considering endorsement of contributing values to plagiarism across demographics (gender, class standing, class grade, and college major). The multiple response analysis found that contributing values for plagiarism were consistent across gender ( $\chi^2(1) = 0.09, p = .77$ ), class standing ( $\chi^2(3) = 3.39, p = .34$ ), grade ( $\chi^2(4) = 1.74, p = .78$ ), and college major ( $\chi^2(7) = 10.51, p = .16$ ).

*Detering Values* Table 4 also reports on American cultural values that may deter plagiarism. Very clearly, the most common response (48.8 %) was students expressed a *Freedom* theme, i.e., making a morally responsible choice to “do the right thing.” Sentiment was that *not* plagiarizing is a moral choice, that plagiarizing amounted to a “group project,” and that the moral high ground was not simply following others’ bad example. *Individualism* as a deterrent value was next most commonly mentioned (30.4 %), with students evidencing the importance of individual merit. “Taking someone else’s work doesn’t help you as an individual be successful.” “We are a competitive country and our achievements are based on personal merit—if you cheat through college you will fail at your job.”

The value of hard work (*activity/work*) as a deterrent was identified in 24.6 % of the responses. “We are taught that hard work will make you achieve more.” *Democracy* (or values students discerned under the term) appeared in 22.5 % of the answers. This theme was evidenced in a variety of ways, including viewing stealing as violating others’ rights by taking someone’s words and using them as one’s own. An *equal opportunity* or fairness value was evident in 8.8 % of the responses. “Everyone deserves an equal and fair opportunity; it isn’t equal opportunity for everyone if some are just cheating”.

Multiple response data were examined for the most frequently endorsed responses of deterring values across different demographics (gender, class standing, class grade, and college major). The results showed that there were no differences in the deterring values for plagiarism across gender ( $\chi^2(1) = 0.21, p = .64$ ). There were no differences in deterring values by class standing ( $\chi^2(3) = 0.43, p = .94$ ). Also, deterring values for plagiarism were consistent across class grade ( $\chi^2(4) = 0.49, p = .97$ ). For example, this means that “A” students versus “F” students do not differ in their values for deterring plagiarism. Finally, the results of the multiple response data showed that deterring values for plagiarism were consistent across college major, as well ( $\chi^2(7) = 1.30, p = .99$ ).

## Discussion

Students at this large southern university were unanimous in their responses about being able to define plagiarism. All indicated that they knew what it was and were able to discern the difference between traditional and Internet plagiarism. Other researchers have not found this

degree of knowledge and consensus (Devlin and Gray 2007; Park 2003). A number of variables may be in play here. There may be cultural differences by region of this country, in terms of both instilling and having awareness about what it is, and anticipating later discussion, its extent and seriousness as an issue. However, the university from which the data for this research are drawn does not have a concerted and across-the-board program to instill awareness about plagiarism specifically—what now is considered the most pervasive and dominant type of academic misconduct. Initiatives are largely left to individual professors.

In the present study, participants were students in an online course with the only mention about cheating contained in the course syllabus, as prescribed by university requirements. No specific mention is made about plagiarism. But the fact that *all* students in the survey were able to define accurately the term plagiarism, whether Internet or non-Internet, indicates that a poor understanding of what constitutes plagiarism (Dee and Jacob 2010), is not the case on this campus. This would suggest that we have finally reached the point that concerted efforts to educate students from the early grades up have had a cumulative effect on plagiarism awareness at least, though it seems particularly significant that such awareness does *not* seem to be a factor in deterring plagiarism. Research indicates that students are still highly engaged in the practice (Bretag 2013). Yet the fact that this particular research indicates that they do know what it is, that it is indeed cheating, and that it is serious seems to indicate that the ease of doing it without fear of being caught trumps cultural values.

Most students surveyed for this research (84 %) believed that plagiarism is widespread on all college campuses and indicated that they know who is doing it on their campus. One second-semester freshman student indicated that he already knew who the habitual plagiarizers were in each class. Almost three-fourths of the respondents thought that the practice is part of their campus culture. Thus, there is little ambiguity about plagiarism's prevalence and place in the university. However, beyond attributing the practice as part of their campus culture, students were divided over whether it is part of the popular culture (30 %), subculture (25 %), or dominant culture (9 %). When discussing culture in this context, other studies have either discussed the phenomenon of academic dishonesty as a conflict between youth culture and the norms of the educational system (Colnerud and Rosander 2009) or they have declared college campuses as having a "culture of cheating" (Callahan 2004, p. 197). Students in the present study were in an introductory sociology course and had read a chapter dealing with culture several weeks prior to the survey. Therefore, responses can be interpreted at least in part due to their comprehension of the material, more specifically, due to their heightened awareness of it and to the recency effect.

Students in this survey were in agreement on the ethical implications of plagiarism; the vast majority indicated that the practice was wrong, whether through the Internet or not. Interestingly, however, a small group of students perceived Internet plagiarism to be slightly less serious than conventional plagiarism. This minority is consistent with previous research that suggests today's students see the Internet as the only viable remedy to writing papers or they felt that this behavior did not constitute plagiarism (Baker et al. 2008). Apparently, the newness of the Internet can no longer be said to be a factor in somehow explaining away or dodging the ethical implications of the practice. Recently, when students were asked if the practice was wrong, nearly all respondents believed that it was, but almost half of them felt that it is socially acceptable (Bernardi et al. 2008).

#### Justifications for Plagiarism: Implications for Higher Education

Some justifications for plagiarism are revealing in their implications for reducing it. Of particular significance was that close to half of the students believed that the faculty played

a significant role in some way in generating a permissive atmosphere for plagiarism. In short, they perceive that faculty often do not care, are too busy to monitor what they are doing, or do not have the technical expertise to detect it. They reported as being much less likely to plagiarize if the faculty indicated early on and often the serious nature of the offense and that they would be caught and punished. The primary threat to the plagiarizer is being caught by the professor. This is all consistent with previous research (e.g., Bennett 2005; Park 2004; Pickard 2005; Selwyn 2008; Sileo and Sileo 2008; Stephens et al. 2007; Walker 2010).

Thus, one can infer that an institutional shift in emphasis will have to occur. Higher education administration, to ensure the academic integrity of the teaching enterprise, should place much more emphasis than in the past on the role of the faculty in not only sensitizing students to the seriousness of plagiarism, but that they will be vigilant and competent in its detection, and that students will be held accountable for the behavior. This emphasis and focus represents the need for a re-balancing of priorities for large public research-oriented universities. Current emphases on faculty grantsmanship, research, and publication should be balanced with teaching function responsibilities that include faculty vigilance on academic dishonesty issues. The challenge of doing this is significant as institutions opt for larger classes, more online instruction, and the use of non tenure-track, contract instructors to carry heavy enrollment loads.

There is another dimension to the faculty responsibility issue. It can be argued that students recently out of the high school experience have a tendency to attribute any outside of the classroom assignments as “busy work.” Thus, since the very legitimacy of such assignments can be in question, some will rationalize plagiarism as a justified practice (Yardley et al. 2009). This points to the importance of faculty diligence in explaining the purpose of homework assignments and their linkage to course objectives. The bottom line, therefore, is regardless of class size and who teaches the class, individual instructors will need to a) emphasize the seriousness of plagiarism; b) impress on the students that they know how to detect it; and c) that offenders will be punished. The fact that these implications are inferred from student-derived perceptions of a cheating culture means that the students themselves see a problem with current practices to mitigate plagiarism. It is imperative professors to make it obvious how assignments link to course objectives and what the students will get out of them. Punishment and reward are both operative here.

Other insights into the prevalence of plagiarism coalesce around the usual challenges of being a student. Problems of time management (40.3 %) topped the list of reasons. Many students are not prepared academically or emotionally for the challenges of university-level work, or they are not focused on academic accomplishment as central to their university experience. But more concrete and immediate factors play a part. These are students mostly at the beginning of their college experience (61 % of those who participated in the survey were freshman). They may not yet know how to manage their time demands or yet know how much studying is required or expected of them to be successful. Therefore, it would behoove administration to include during freshman orientation a segment on time management skills.

Plagiarism as a means to an end is revealing of instrumental values of this generation of college students. Simply put, the emphasis is on getting a good grade for minimal work. This rationalization reiterates findings of previous research (e.g., Devlin and Gray 2007; DeVoss and Rosati 2002; Stephens et al. 2007; Yardley et al. 2009). The means-ends justification seems to link closely to the easy accessibility of others’ work and the anonymity of students. Students themselves note that large, impersonal classes and the fact that a majority of first and second year course requirements are the same provide incentive and easy access to others’ work. Since the trend towards large, impersonal, core classes appears to be continuing, further research of course design strategies to prevent plagiarism need to be investigated.

Rationalizations for the practice included the fact that the Internet is, after all, a public source of information. Although students defined Internet plagiarism accurately, and the vast majority stated it carries the same ethical implications as conventional plagiarism, some still feel justified in copying from the Internet rather than from conventional written works. Students often stated that ideas on the Internet were not copyrighted and therefore were for everyone to use at will. Thus, one can infer that the faculty's challenge is to reassert the concept of intellectual property, specifically in regard to information on the Internet. This also poses a challenge to institutions, as educating faculty on Internet copyright and intellectual laws may also be necessary.

### The Influence of Cultural Values on Plagiarism: Implications for Higher Education

When students were asked if any American cultural values contributed to plagiarism, a third of the respondents stated that individual achievement and personal success contribute to the practice of plagiarism, as it helps them get good grades and graduate. Hofstede concluded that when society increases the value of individualism the focus becomes taking care of oneself at all costs (1980; 1991). For example, "as the level of individualism for a country increased, students perceived unethical actions as being more acceptable" (Bernardi et al. 2008, p. 375).

America's emphasis on science to improve one's life was given in reference to using the Internet to plagiarize. The body of evidence indicates that digital or Internet plagiarism has surpassed conventional forms (Stephens et al. 2007). Individual freedom to do as one wants, and the need for leisure time were also indicative of the sample's newfound independence. Group superiority was directly related to the students seeing plagiarism as occurring within certain social groups and not in others.

Students felt overwhelmingly that American cultural values deter plagiarism rather than contribute to it. Personal freedom, to do what is right, topped this list of values. Respondents felt that plagiarism would not improve their personal success and thus concluded that individual achievement and success deters them from its use. Along those same lines, people in the U.S. tend to value action over reflection and taking control of events over passively accepting them, activity and work. Interestingly, respondents stated that democracy and free enterprise deterred them from plagiarizing, since stealing someone's ideas takes away their freedom of speech.

First, a case can be made that leaders in higher education need to reduce the emphasis on competition and grades. By deemphasizing competition and protecting students' privacy in terms of achievement levels, the process of learning becomes the desired outcome, instead of empirical measures and public acknowledgement. Students themselves acknowledge that learning isn't the goal but good grades are. Secondly, administrators need to encourage faculty to embrace teaching along with other academic pursuits. Priority should be given to achieving a better balance between educating students and the research function with its emphasis on grants and publication. Students currently perceive faculty to care more about their career than teaching. Lastly, a social norms campaign should be devised that directly addresses student misperceptions of the incidences of academic misconduct. From the perspective of social norm theory, much of peoples' behavior is influenced by their perceptions of how others behave (Macionis 2008). Accordingly, if students perceive plagiarism to be a significant part of their collegiate culture, they will be more likely to participate in the practice. By this logic, the effectiveness of an anti-plagiarism campaign depends on providing students with accurate information about their peers' behaviors, which allows them to adjust their perceptions.

## Limitations

Although these findings have potential implications for changing the student collegiate culture, they must be viewed in the light of some limitations. The sample is small and from a university from the southern region of the United States where academic integrity may not have been a primary emphasis over the past decade, due to the emphasis on research productivity, attracting a larger student base, and a number of other factors. The survey used in this study indirectly asks about plagiarism so that know about their perceptions but not necessarily their behaviors. Student perceptions in different regions of the country and collegiate emphasis may provide varying results. Since the majority of the sample for this study were freshmen, it would benefit future research to incorporate older students. As a slight majority of students receiving an A in the course completed the survey for credit, future research would benefit from having more students from all grade segments participating.

## Conclusion

Because perceptions of plagiarism are culturally conditioned, a strong case can be made that institutions of higher education actively participate in changing these perceptions and begin to facilitate a culture of academic accomplishment, rather than a culture of instrumentalism and cheating. Ample evidence suggests that all forms of academic misconduct should be dealt with at the institutional level (e.g., McCabe et al. 2001). This is premised on the assumption that administrators and faculty have as a primary responsibility defining the cultural environment and values of their campus.

To implement a culture of *learning*, administrators can support faculty by emphasizing teaching skills as at least co-equal with publication skills, requiring continued education of current technologies, and by limiting class size. Administration can assist students by implementing a social norms and values campaign for an academic code of conduct, as well as including time management training during orientation. Faculty can support students in building a culture of academic accomplishment by emphasizing learning over grades, connecting assignments to course objectives, and by deterring cheating. These are interconnected solutions.

Overall, these findings provide a better understanding of students' perceptions of plagiarism and the climate of cheating that can be pervasive in universities where learning is not the primary focus. These recommendations can assist administrators and faculty by creating awareness of critical issues and changing attitudes, values and beliefs to be more supportive of a learning culture.

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