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Abstract

The present paper examines the effects of a classroom honor code at a non-honor code institution by comparing a class with an honor code (HC) to a non-honor code (NHC) class. The HC class had a peer-reporting requirement and unproctored quizzes and exams. The NHC class used traditional methods of enforcing academic honesty. Surveys were distributed to the students in both classes asking for self-reports of cheating and beliefs about the instructors' attitudes toward academic dishonesty. Despite the increased ease and temptation of engaging in academic dishonesty in the HC classroom, results showed that there was no difference in number of students who reported cheating or in number of students who witnessed cheating in the two classes. A greater proportion of students in the HC classroom than in the NHC classroom perceived the instructor to be trusting and respecting of students, and to hold academic integrity as more important than other instructors. These results suggest a classroom honor code may be a viable mechanism for promoting academic integrity through improvement of the student-instructor relationship.

A cademic dishonesty is a perennial concern on college campuses. Whitley (1998) estimated, based on a meta-analysis of many studies, that 70.4% of college students engage in acts of academic dishonesty. Rettinger, Jordan, and Peschiera (2004) reported that 83% of a sample of students from a small liberal arts college admitted to cheating at one point in their college career. Common ways in which academic dishonesty occurs include plagiarism and cheating on exams by copying, helping someone, or using unauthorized crib notes (McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 2001a). Increased availability of information on the internet has made plagiarism more prevalent and harder to detect (Scanlon, 2003). Although some faculty and institutions react by increasing proctoring and other similar sorts of "policing" strategies, other institutions have implemented a different approach, namely the use of an honor code (Whitley and Keith-Spiegel, 2001).

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Honor codes are contracts that typically include some of the following characteristics: use of a written pledge whereby students state that their work has been done honestly; unproctored exams; peer involvement in the judicial policies; and reporting requirements, in which students are encouraged to report on their peers' academic dishonesty (Whitley & Keith-Spiegel, 2001). Studies have shown that the frequency of instances of academic dishonesty is lower at institutions with honor codes (Arnold, Martin, Jinks, & Bigby, 2007; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 1999; 2001a).

Contextual factors (e.g., peer behavior, institutional policy) are more influential than individual factors (e.g., grade point average, sex) in predicting academic honesty (McCabe et al., 2001a). Whitley (1998), in his meta-analysis of studies of correlates of cheating, found that students who perceive that the social norm encourages cheating are more likely to cheat than students who perceive the social norm as unsupportive of cheating. Specifically, Jordan (2001) found that students who perceived their fellow students as academically dishonest were more likely to have cheated themselves. It is possible, then, that an institutional honor code may encourage a social norm where academic dishonesty is not supported by the student body.

Another deterrent to cheating at honor code institutions is the fact that students perceive that they are more likely to get caught cheating (Arnold et al., 2007). Because honor code institutions often do not proctor exams, the increased perception of the likelihood of being caught cheating may be attributable to a peer-reporting requirement that many honor code institutions have. Arnold et al. (2007) found that students at honor code colleges were more likely to report cheating and more likely to refuse to help another student cheat, as compared to non-honor code colleges, thereby potentially discouraging academic dishonesty. Likewise, McCabe, Treviño, and Butterfield (2001b) found that peer reporting is higher at schools with honor codes and that the expectation of getting caught is correlated positively with one's expectation of peer reporting by self or others.

Honor codes also may reduce academic dishonesty by clarifying the distinction between academically honest and dishonest behavior. Signing a pledge, for example, may serve as a reminder of the institution's expectation of appropriate behavior. Likewise, introduction to the honor code and academically honest behavior is typically included in an honor code school's orientation. These types of presentations and elaborations of the honor code would be expected to enhance understanding of the institutional policy, which was found to be negatively correlated with academic dishonesty (Jordan, 2001; McCabe & Treviño, 1993).

The same factors that seem to lead to success of institutional honor codes could produce a successful outcome in an individual classroom at an institution that does not have an honor code. One might expect that an honor code, with strong peer support, could foster an atmosphere of academic honesty in a classroom. An honor code would act as a formal statement of the classroom policy on academic honesty. Having students sign a pledge to adhere to the honor code on every quiz and exam serves as a regular reminder of the policy. A peer-reporting requirement in a classroom could serve to encourage students to be academically honest.

Recently, Konheim-Kalkstein (2006) examined the use of a classroom honor code in a semester-long psychology class. In the class of 43 students, survey data suggested

that not only were cheating levels low, but of the students who reported they were tempted to cheat, half claimed they did not because of the honor code. Many students commented that they felt more trusted or respected, and that the honor code made them more aware of academic dishonesty. The honor code implemented by Konheim-Kalkstein (2006) had no peer-reporting requirement. In the present study, we compared student behavior and perceptions in a class with an honor code to a class without an honor code. The classroom honor code included unproctored quizzes/exams and a peer-reporting requirement. Based on the results of previous studies of institutional honor codes, we predicted that the honor code would improve the student-faculty relationship and possibly produce reduced levels of self-reported cheating.

Method

Participants

Participants were students in an upper-level Cognitive Psychology class (48 students) and students in an upper-level Sensation and Perception psychology class (110 students) at a large, public university in the Midwestern United States. Both classes met once a week on a weeknight for 2.5 hours. Both classes satisfied the same psychology major requirement and had weekly quizzes or exams. The majority of the participants were of traditional college age (ages 19-23). In the honor code (HC) class, 38 students (79% of the students who were registered for the class) completed the survey; in the non-honor-code (NHC) class, 77 students (70% of the students who were registered for the class) completed the survey.

The Honor Code Classroom

The honor code was implemented by the first author in the Cognitive Psychology class. On the first day of class, the instructor introduced the honor code system and discussed academic integrity. The instructor described the importance of academic honesty, the consequences of academic dishonesty, and her experiences with honor codes at other institutions. She explained that she trusted that the students would be academically honest, and she would not be tolerant of any violations of the honor code. The honor code they signed read as follows:

> *Honor Code: I will be fair and honest in my coursework. I will neither give nor receive unauthorized aid on any assignments, quizzes, or exams. I also understand that it is my obligation to report violations of this classroom honor code to the instructor.*

Neither quizzes nor exams were proctored. Students picked up quizzes from the front of the classroom, and then returned them within five minutes of the beginning of class. Some students took the quizzes before class officially started while other students were still doing last-minute studying. The instructor made no attempt to monitor the students' behavior. During exams, students were permitted to leave the classroom and complete the exam elsewhere if they chose to do so. At the end of both quizzes and exams, students signed the following pledge:

> *I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this quiz/exam. I have not witnessed any cheating.*

Students were told that if they did not sign the pledge, the instructor would privately contact them to find out why they did not sign it. Students also were told that if they reported cheating, their identity would be kept anonymous.

The Non-Honor Code Classroom

The Sensation and Perception class, for which the second author was the instructor, did not have an honor code and instead took traditional precautions to curb academic dishonesty, including proctoring, administering quizzes in essay format, and distributing multiple forms of exams. During the first class session, students were told that these precautions would be taken, but that they were being taken in order to protect the students rather than out of distrust on the part of the instructor. As part of this explanation, the instructor related the true story of two students who witnessed and reported a student cheating on an exam in a previous semester and who were very disturbed by this occurrence. The students who reported the cheating also recommended that the instructor take stricter precautions in the future.

Materials

The self-report survey on cheating behavior that was given to students is shown in the Appendix. The survey was piloted by having several undergraduate students read the survey for clarity. The validity and reliability of the survey were not formally assessed. IRB approval was obtained prior to distribution of the survey.

Data Collection

The survey was given to both classes during the week before the final examination. Survey questions asked students about their behavior and their perceptions. The survey also asked participants to note what other psychology classes they were taking during that semester in order to identify students who were in both the honor code and non-honor code classes. Students were assured that their survey responses would be anonymous, and that survey responses would be coded by someone other than the instructors.

Results

The responses to each item were summarized in terms of the proportions of students in the honor code (HC) and non-honor code (NHC) classes who gave each response. For each survey item, a Pearson chi-square test was performed to test the significance of the differences between those proportions in the HC and NHC classes. Chi-square values are reported below only for significant differences between the HC and NHC classes. For ease of description of the results, the items were grouped according to commonalities in subject matter as indicated by the italicized headings below.

Perceived Ease of Cheating

A greater proportion of the students in the HC class (44%) than in the NHC class (17%) reported that it would have been "easy" to cheat [$X^2(2) = 14.22$, $p = .001$; item 5]. However, a lower proportion of students in the HC class (13%) than in the NHC class (21%) felt that additional precautions should have been taken to prevent cheating (item 6), although the difference was not significant.

Past and Current Cheating Behavior

Equal proportions of students in both classes reported having cheated in another class at the university (~20%; survey item 8). A larger proportion of students in the HC class reported being tempted to cheat in their current classes [37% vs. 17% in the NHC class; $X^2(1) = 5.64$, $p = .02$; item 1]. In response to the follow-up question of item 1, no students reported having cheated in their current classes. One student in the HC class reported witnessing two cheating incidents and five students in the NHC class reported witnessing six cheating incidents (item 2). The difference between numbers of students who reported witnessing cheating in each class was not significant.

Also in the follow-up to item 1, those that were tempted to cheat but did not were asked why. Although there were no significant differences between the proportions of students who gave each response, all 13 HC students answered "I felt a moral and ethical responsibility not to cheat." Most (10) NHC students answered the same; however, two students gave the reason "I was afraid I would get caught by my TA/instructor" and one student responded "other."

Responsibility to Report Cheating

A greater proportion of students in the HC classroom (75%) than in the NHC classroom (58%) reported that they felt responsible to report cheating, although the difference only approached significance (item 4). An equal proportion of students in both classes (~41%) said that they actually would report cheating if they had witnessed it (item 3).

Feeling nervous during quiz/exam

There was no significant difference between the HC and NHC classes in terms of the proportion of students who reported feeling nervous while taking a quiz or exam (HC: 31%; NHC: 47%; item 7). In the follow-up to item 7, of those who reported feeling nervous, 18% of the HC students and 31% of the NHC students attributed their nervousness to feeling that the instructor or proctors were monitoring their behavior (a non-significant difference).

Perceptions of the instructor

Although equal proportions of students in the HC and NHC classes perceived that academic integrity was "very important" to their current instructor (~76%; item 9), the remaining items regarding perceptions of the instructor (items 10-13) yielded the largest differences between responses by the HC and NHC students. The responses to those items are summarized in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1
Number of Students in HC and NHC Classes Who Gave Each Response to Item 11

		Completely Trusted	Somewhat Trusted	Somewhat Did Not Trust	Completely Did not Trust
(Item 11) How much did instructor trust students with respect to cheating?*	HC	32	7	0	0
	NHC	*18*	*52*	*7*	*0*

*p < .005

Table 2
Comparison of Students from HC and NHC Classes on Selected Survey Items

		Number of students who answered		
		More	Equally	Less
Compared to Other Instructors…				
(Item 10) how important was academic integrity to instructor?*				
	HC	26	13	0
	NHC	*11*	*65*	*1*
(Item 12) how trusted did you feel by instructor?*				
	HC	27	12	0
	NHC	*9*	*62*	*6*
(Item 13) how respected did you feel by instructor?*				
	HC	25	13	1
	NHC	*14*	*62*	*1*

*p<.001

Discussion

A higher proportion of students in the HC class than in the NHC class reported that cheating on exams/quizzes would be easy, and that they were tempted to cheat. However, there was no difference between the HC and NHC classes in terms of the proportion of students who reported having cheated or who witnessed cheating, which is inconsistent with research that shows that students from HC institutions exhibit reduced levels of academic dishonesty relative to NHC institutions (Arnold et al., 2007; McCabe et al., 2001a). Although there were no differences in cheating behavior reported in the HC and NHC classes of the present study, one could argue that the honor code was as effective in deterring cheating as the conventional precautions that were taken in the NHC classroom.

Although the HC students were more likely to feel it was their responsibility to report cheating, they were not more likely to indicate that they actually would do so. In contrast, McCabe et al. (2001a) found that students at HC institutions were more likely to report cheating than students at NHC institutions, but the likelihood of peer reporting in both cases was very low. McCabe et al. (2001b) suggested that a peer-reporting requirement influences students' perceptions of their chances of getting caught and that the requirement may foster an atmosphere in which students are held responsible for academic integrity. The increased sense of responsibility due to the peer-reporting requirement, in turn, may lead to a decrease in cheating incidents. Hence, it seems important to the effectiveness of the honor code to include a peer-reporting requirement.

Although both instructors were reported by most students to consider academic integrity "very important," a higher proportion of HC students than NHC students indicated that academic integrity was more important to the instructor relative to other instructors. This latter result is interesting, particularly given the freedom that the HC students had in taking the midterm out of the classroom and in taking unproctored quizzes.

While the honor code may influence student behavior directly through the introduction of a sense of ethical responsibility, it is possible that it influences behavior indirectly through some other mechanism. One possibility is that the honor code makes students feel more respected and causes them to have more positive feelings toward the instructor. These positive perceptions of the instructor may cause students to show more respect toward the values of the instructor, including the honor code. Pulvers and Diekhoff (1999), for example, have proposed that aspects of the classroom environment, including the instructor's interaction with the students and personal concern for students, may act as a contextual influence in reducing academic dishonesty. Stearns (2001) found that academically dishonest students gave lower instructor evaluations than academically honest students, supporting the idea that prevalence of cheating is negatively correlated with opinions about the instructor. McCabe et al. (1999) propose, based on their qualitative investigation of students from honor code and non-honor code institutions, that students in honor code institutions sense that they need to comply with certain standards in exchange for privileges such as unproctored exams. Thus, the increased perceived trust and respect may have served as a kind of reward for being academically honest. In the present study, more students in the HC class indicated feeling more trusted

and respected by the instructor than other instructors. This increased perception of trust by the instructor may have served to check the temptation to cheat that was provided by the lack of other conventional security measures.

The present results showing that the HC instructor was perceived as trusting students more than other instructors is inconsistent with the findings by Cummings and Romano (2002). Cummings and Romano (2002) found that there was no difference in students' perceptions of the instructor's trust in students between honor code and non-honor code classes. However, in contrast to the honor code used in the present study, the honor code used in the Cummings and Romano (2002) study consisted only of a definition and discussion of academic dishonesty and its consequences, and a pledge that students signed on quizzes and exams to adhere to the honor code. Unlike the present study, there was no indication that quizzes and exams were unproctored. In the present study, the perception of greater trust on the part of the instructor may have been attributable to the instructor's show of faith in students in the form of unproctored exams and quizzes.

The present study has a number of limitations that should be considered. One limitation stems from the fact that the classes were taught by different instructors. Some of the most robust differences between the results from the two classrooms in the present study involve the perceptions of the instructors. Students in the HC class perceived that academic integrity was more important to their instructor relative to other instructors, and the students felt more trusted and respected. Such differences between the perceptions in the two classes could easily be attributable to differences between the instructors rather than to effects of the honor code. In order to control for this confound, future research should examine two classrooms that are taught by the same instructor, one classroom with an honor code and one without.

Another limitation of the present study is related to the fact that the survey was voluntary and depended upon self-report measures, which might be expected to produce low estimates of cheating behavior. It is noteworthy, however, that students in both classes did report to past cheating at levels that are consistent with other research (e.g., Stearns, 2001). Measures of cheating behavior that do not rely on self-report have been used in previous research. For example, Perrin (2000) used a method in which, unbeknownst to the students, the teaching assistant awarded everyone an extra point on a quiz. The students were told that an error was made in grading the quiz and they were asked to report to the instructor whether their score should be adjusted upward or downward. However, because every student had gotten an extra point, the only honest answer was that the score should be adjusted downward. In order to bolster the present results, it might be desirable to use an objective measure such as this one in future evaluations of the effectiveness of honor codes.

The survey used in the present study only addressed cheating on exams and quizzes and did not examine other forms of cheating, such as plagiarism on written assignments. Other types of assignments might vary in terms how easy it would be to cheat and may be more or less influenced by the presence of an honor code.

The comparison between our results in an honor code *classroom* and other studies from honor code *institutions* should be interpreted with caution. At honor code institutions, students are often oriented to the honor code before they begin their first

semester of college. In addition, there is usually an established institution-wide system of enforcing honor code violations. The fact that the honor code is more pervasive at such institutions might lead to greater effectiveness than in a single classroom at an institution that otherwise has no explicit honor code.

A classroom honor code is an option for instructors whose institutions do not have honor codes and who would like to appeal to students' ethics in an attempt to create an atmosphere of moral responsibility in the classroom. Whitley and Keith-Spiegel (2001) call this approach an "integrity strategy," where the focus is on active promotion of ethical behavior rather than a reaction to dishonest behavior. The evidence suggests that this approach may be effective in reducing academic dishonesty and in creating a more positive environment in the classroom. Furthermore, a goal of an integrity strategy is to effect change in student character, such that students will value integrity and honesty beyond their college years.

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Appendix

Academic Integrity Survey

1. Did you ever feel tempted to cheat in this class on quizzes/exams?

      YES
      NO
          →If NO, go on to question 2.
          →If YES, did you ever cheat?
                    YES → If YES, how many times did you cheat? _____

                    NO → If NO, Which of the following BEST describes why you
                              did not cheat (choose only one).
                        I felt an ethical/moral responsibility not to cheat.
                        I was afraid that I would be caught by the
                            instructor/TA.
                        I was afraid that other students would report me.
                        Other

2. Did you ever witness anyone cheating in this class on quizzes/exams?

      YES   →If YES, How many incidents of cheating did you witness? _____
                      Did you report any of the incidents to your instructor/TA?   YES   NO
      NO

3. In this class, would you have reported cheating if you had witnessed cheating?

      YES
      NO

4.   In this class, do you think it was your responsibility to report cheating if you had witnessed cheating?

      YES
      NO

5.   Cheating on a quiz/exam in this class without being caught would be _____.

      Impossible
      Difficult
      Easy

6. Do you think that additional precautions should have been taken to prevent cheating on quizzes/exams?

      YES
      NO

7. Did you feel nervous while taking quizzes/exams in this class?

      YES →If YES, was your nervousness in part because you felt that the instructors/proctors were
          monitoring your behavior?   YES   NO
      NO

8. Aside from this class, have you ever cheated in another college class at this University on an exam/quiz?

      YES
      NO

9. How important do you think academic honesty is to the instructor of this course?

      Very important
      Somewhat Important
      Somewhat Unimportant
      Very Unimportant

10. Compared to other instructors you have had at this university, how important do you think academic honesty is to the instructor of this course?

      More important
      Equally important
      Less important

11. How much do you think the instructor of this course trusted students, with respect to cheating on tests/quizzes?

      Completely trusted students
      Somewhat trusted students
      Somewhat did not trust students
      Completely did not trust students

12. Compared to other instructors you have had at this university, how trusted did you feel by the instructor of this course?

      More trusted
      Equally trusted
      Less trusted

13. Compared to other instructors you have had at this university, how respected did you feel by the instructor of this course?

      More respected
      Equally respected
      Less respected

14. How important is academic honesty to you?

      Very important
      Somewhat Important
      Somewhat Unimportant
      Very Unimportant

15. Compared to other students at this university, how important is academic honesty to you?

      More important
      Equally important
      Less important

16. Which of the following classes are you registered for this semester?

Cognitive Psychology, Psy 3051
Sensation and Perception, Psy 3031
Biopsychology, Psy 3061

Note

These results were presented at a poster at the Association for Psychological Science in Washington, D.C. on May 24, 2007.