



# Academic Dishonesty is a Predictor of Criminal Behavior

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## Introduction

- Academic dishonesty is the violation of a school or professor's policy that delineates what is considered ethical when a student is completing tests and assignments.
- These requirements vary somewhat across institutions and classrooms, but common prohibitions include plagiarism, using unauthorized notes, working together on individual assignments, and purchasing another individual's work to submit as your own (Hamlin, Barczyk, Powell, & Frost, 2013).
- This presentation examines the commonalities between those who commit academic dishonesty and those who commit criminal acts.

## Personality Traits

- Two domains of personality appear in those who commit academic dishonesty and in forensic populations: impulsivity and psychopathy traits.
- Research shows that students who have a high rate of thrill seeking or risk-taking behaviors in general life activities are significantly more likely to have cheated within the last year than those who reported less risky behavioral choices (Korn, & Davidovitch, 2016).
- Similarly, a meta-analysis of forensic populations showed significantly higher levels of self-reported impulsivity than reference populations (Spaans, Molendijk, de Beurs, Rinne, & Spinhoven, 2017).
- The level of impulsivity decreases with the age of both populations, which coincides with rates of academic dishonesty significantly decreasing as students get older than 23-25 years of age (Miller, Shoptaugh, & Parkerson, 2008).
- Psychopathy trait ratings also have significant correlations with each population.

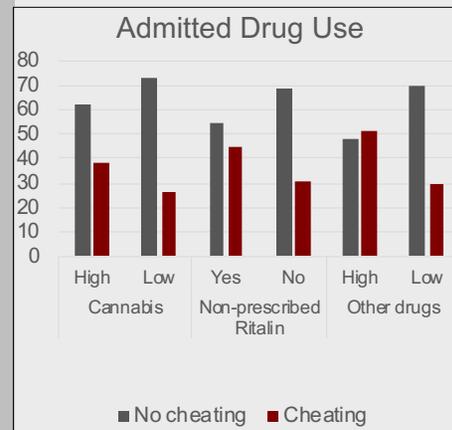
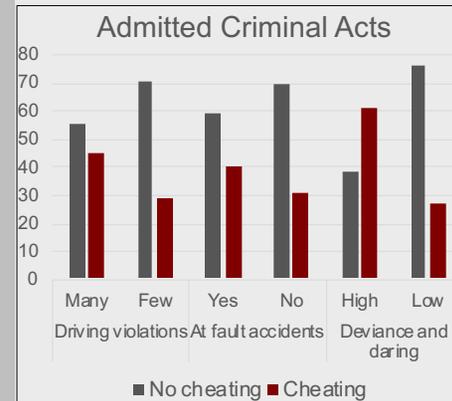
## Personality Traits (cont.)

- In a study with undergraduate participants, a higher probability of lying on an academic dishonesty scenario was found in individuals who scored higher on psychopathy and Machiavellianism (Baughman, Jonason, Lyons, & Vernon, 2014).
- Forensic populations examined by Spaans and colleagues (2017) showed antisocial and psychopathic traits that are significantly higher than in matched samples.
- Recent research examined the connection between psychopathic traits and academic dishonesty.
- Hosker-Field, Molnar, and Book (2016) found that students who had the highest rates of ethical-risk taking behaviors, including lying and cheating, had significantly more psychopathy traits than other participants.
- They also found that the older the student, the less likely they were to engage in ethically risky behavior.

## Links to Current Criminal Behavior

- Two studies to date have looked specifically at criminality and academic dishonesty.
- Williams and Williams (2012) asked students to report acts of academic dishonesty and acts of crime or delinquency in the last semester and at any time in the past.
- They found a significant positive correlation between academic dishonesty and every type of crime, both in the last semester and at any time in the past.
- The effect size between academic dishonesty and crime was moderate when all offense categories were combined.

## Academic Dishonesty & Criminal Behavior



## Links to Current Criminal Behavior (cont.)

- Students in this study reported a lifetime prevalence of cheating at 31.1%, and then a rate of 19.9% in the last semester (at follow-up).
- Korn and Davidovitch (2016) found that students who admitted to committing multiple driving violations, such as not stopping at a stop sign or running a red light, also admitted to having cheated at a rate 50% higher than students with few or no driving violations.
- Illicit drug use including cannabis and non-prescribed Ritalin use had similar correlations with academic dishonesty, although the use of "other drugs" including cocaine and ecstasy showed the highest correlation with those who used other drugs also reporting academic dishonesty at a rate of 51.4%, compared to those who did not at a rate of 30.2%.

## Conclusion

- Research shows a connection between academic dishonesty and criminal behavior, and research also shows that those who commit academic dishonesty share some personality traits with those who commit criminal acts.
- Although academic dishonesty is not by definition a violation of a public law and a prosecutable criminal offense, it is always a violation of an educational institution's policy or ethical guidelines.
- Students who commit academic dishonesty have a higher rate of criminality compared to their non-cheating peers, and as such they present a higher burden to the criminal justice system.
- For this reason, forensic psychologists and attorneys should be aware of the connection between academic dishonesty and criminality.