Motivators for Student Academic Misconduct at a Medium Sized University in Alberta, Canada: Faculty and Student Perspectives

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Abstract

Academic misconduct describes a complex set of behaviours with many reported motivating factors. However, most research investigating the motivating factors behind academic misconduct has been conducted on American college students. To assess academic misconduct at our mid-sized university in Alberta, Canada, we conducted focus groups with students and faculty to further explore the motivational factors underlying academic misconduct. We conducted a thematic analysis on the interview responses in which two thematic categories of motivations arose: dispositional (or psychological) factors and situational (or contextual) factors. Both student and faculty participants reported a variety of motivating factors for academic misconduct, including but not limited to dispositional aspects, such as attitudes concerning academic misconduct or a lack of understanding, as well as contextual factors, such as taking a full course load and familial pressure. However, unlike their American counterparts, our participants did not discuss the impact that their peers have on motivating academic misconduct. We add our results to the growing body of research which focuses on identifying and analyzing Canadian trends in academic misconduct research.

Keywords: academic misconduct, Alberta, Canada, faculty perspectives, focus group interview, motivation, student perspectives, thematic analysis

Motivators for Student Academic Misconduct at a Medium Sized University in Alberta, Canada: Faculty and Student Perspectives

Academic dishonesty or academic misconduct is an umbrella term for prohibited behaviours which violate the norms that govern academic work to produce a better outcome for the student

(Miller et al., 2017). Some common examples of academic misconduct within an undergraduate setting include plagiarism, copying a peer's work, and cheating on exams (Christensen Hughes & McCabe, 2006). Recent studies estimate that 50% to 92% of North American undergraduate students will engage in some form of academically dishonest behaviour in their post-secondary career (Christensen Hughes & McCabe, 2006; Peled et al., 2019; Vandehey et al., 2007). There have been many suggested explanations for the increasingly high levels of academic misconduct across the literature, including the rise of technology in academic settings (Nilsson, 2016; Watson & Sottile, 2010), increases in the buying and selling of academic work (Bretag et al., 2019), and changing societal attitudes towards ethical conduct (Brimble, 2016). However, these general findings often fail to speak to the distinct dispositional and situational factors, or influences, which motivate students to partake in academically dishonest practice (Adam, 2016; Minarcik & Bridges, 2015).

Studies that focus on identifying the motives behind academic misconduct view it as a complex issue with various motivating factors (McCabe et al., 2001). Motivating factors have included various aspects of students' attitudes, personalities, and environmental circumstances (Lee et al., 2020; McCabe & Trevino, 1997; Whitley, 1998). Some reported motivations are consistent across these studies, whereas others vary. Some common motivating factors include engaging in academic misconduct in order to obtain a high grade (Genereux & McLeod, 1995; Minarcik & Bridges, 2015), a lack of understanding regarding academically dishonest practices (DeVoss & Rosati, 2002; Fishman, 2016; Newton, 2016), and the influence of peers in either encouraging academic misconduct or in encouraging academic integrity (McCabe, 1992; McCabe & Trevino, 1997; Jurdi et al., 2012; Rettinger & Kramer, 2009).

Additionally, most academic misconduct research is focused on American college students. Although Canadian students do share some similar trends to American students, there is growing body of Canadian research which highlights the different problems in Canadian academic misconduct (Gallant & Drinan, 2008; Jurdi et al., 2012; Eaton & Edino, 2018; MacLeod & Eaton, 2020). One major difference arises in demographic factors, as there are consistent demographic trends in academic misconduct among American students. For example, students who are younger are more likely to engage in academic misconduct in the United States (McCabe & Trevino, 1997). However, Canadian research found that students across age demographics engage in academic misconduct equally (Jurdi et al., 2011). Furthermore, academic misconduct is more common in younger men in the United States, whereas post-secondary students of all genders report high levels of academic misconduct in Canada (Bokosmaty et al., 2019; McCabe, 2016). Thus, Canadian researchers have argued that further Canadian-specific research is needed to address the unique concerns of their academic systems (Christensen Hughes & McCabe, 2006; Eaton & Edino, 2018; Eaton, 2020; MacLeod & Eaton, 2020).

The purpose of this study is to determine the dispositional and situational factors that the members of our university community identify as contributing to student academic misconduct.

To identify motivating factors at our mid-sized university in Alberta, Canada, we conducted focus groups with students and faculty members and asked them to share what they believe motivates academic misconduct.

Methods

Focus Groups and Interview

To understand participants' perspectives towards academic misconduct, we conducted focus groups at our medium-sized Canadian university located in southern Alberta. Participants were separated by affiliation into faculty and student groupings. All data collection was approved by the University of Lethbridge's Human Research Participant Committee and adhered to the Tri Council's Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans policy. Following a call from (Adam, 2016) to include more student voices in academic misconduct research, we sought student perspectives to better understand what motivates students to cheat. Professors can only speak to cases of academic misconduct that they have caught; however, they may provide some insight into student motivations for academic misconduct.

Focus group participants were recruited from a campus-wide virtual academic misconduct survey. Emails containing links to the survey were sent to all faculty and students in the Fall 2019 semester. Faculty (n = 130) and student (n = 1,142) survey participants represented 13% of the student population and 22% of the faculty population at that time. At the end of the survey, participants were invited to share their email address if they would like to take part in a focus group. Participants' survey responses were not tied to their email addresses. We then sent emails to 126 students and 15 faculty members inviting them to participant in a virtual or in-person focus groups.

Focus group participants self-reported their department of study and their gender. Efforts were made to conceal participants' personal information, including giving everyone name cards with aliases to use during the interviews when they entered the room, and were asked to not display their full name in virtual meetings. Faculty and student focus groups were asked similar questions, such as "what do you think motivates students to engage in academically dishonest behaviour?" but some questions varied to address each group's responses and different experiences with academic misconduct.

There were 17 focus group participants with 9 faculty and 8 students. We also conducted one interview with one faculty member. Faculty focus groups were comprised of five women and three men. Student focus groups consisted of seven men and two women. Both student and faculty groups had mixed representation from every major discipline (including the Arts and Science, the Dhillon School of Business, and Health Sciences faculties) except Fine Arts.

Thematic Analysis

After conducting the interviews, we transcribed the participant responses and uploaded them into the NVIVO 12 qualitative analysis software (NVivo, 2018). From there, we preliminarily coded the participant responses using content analysis to label and categorize different responses (Clarke & Braun, 2013). We then conducted a comprehensive thematic analysis of these codes to categorize the different motivations discussed in response to our research question (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Faculty transcripts and student transcripts were coded separately and analyzed to identify the unique themes produced by each group.

To better distinguish between motivating factors, we utilized a previously established framework to assess differing motivational explanations for academic misconduct and split motivating influences into two main categories—dispositional and situational (Minarcik & Bridges, 2015). Dispositional factors refer to an individual's personality and personal attitudes (Minarcik & Bridges, 2015; Whitley, 1998). Situational motivating factors for engaging in academic misconduct, which were context-dependent, refer to an individual's social and physical surroundings and other external pressures (Minarcik & Bridges, 2015; Whitley, 1998). As such, dispositional and situational motivators were the two main themes within our analysis, as all our participant's responses fit into these themes. Within both the dispositional and situational categories, we identified differing subthemes which represented distinct thematic patterns across our participant responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Results

Student Dispositional Subthemes

Four main dispositional subthemes were identified from the student responses, including student *attitude*, a *lack of understanding*, a student's *personality*, and their *relationship to their professor* (see Figure 1).

Attitude

The subtheme of student *attitude* included student responses that mentioned differing attitudes which they believed contribute to academic misconduct. Student participants viewed "attitudes" in relation to the values that one holds towards their education. They discussed generally negative attitudes towards education as a motivating factor for committing academic misconduct. Many students reported feeling that students who cheat or are academically dishonest are largely apathetic to what they are learning or what a university education teaches them. Students viewed their academically dishonest classmates as detached from their education and view their education as a means to an end, rather than as learning experiences. Students reported specific experiences with friends who "just wanted to graduate" and "have something to

put on their resume", which made them feel as if their peers did not have personal connections to their studies.

The student *attitude* subtheme also included responses which discussed a lack of passion for the material being studied. Students reported that they were more likely to cheat if they were not passionate about the subjects they were studying or the specific assignments they were working on. Some students felt that peers who engaged in academic misconduct had different educational values from students who did not. This subtheme also includes responses from participants who stated that they would never consciously engage in academic misconduct because they truly valued what they were learning. For example, a student who is interested in becoming a counsellor stated that they "see the value of everything [they are] learning. If [they] don't understand the concepts that [they] could be working with, [they] could screw someone up because [they] would be counselling them".

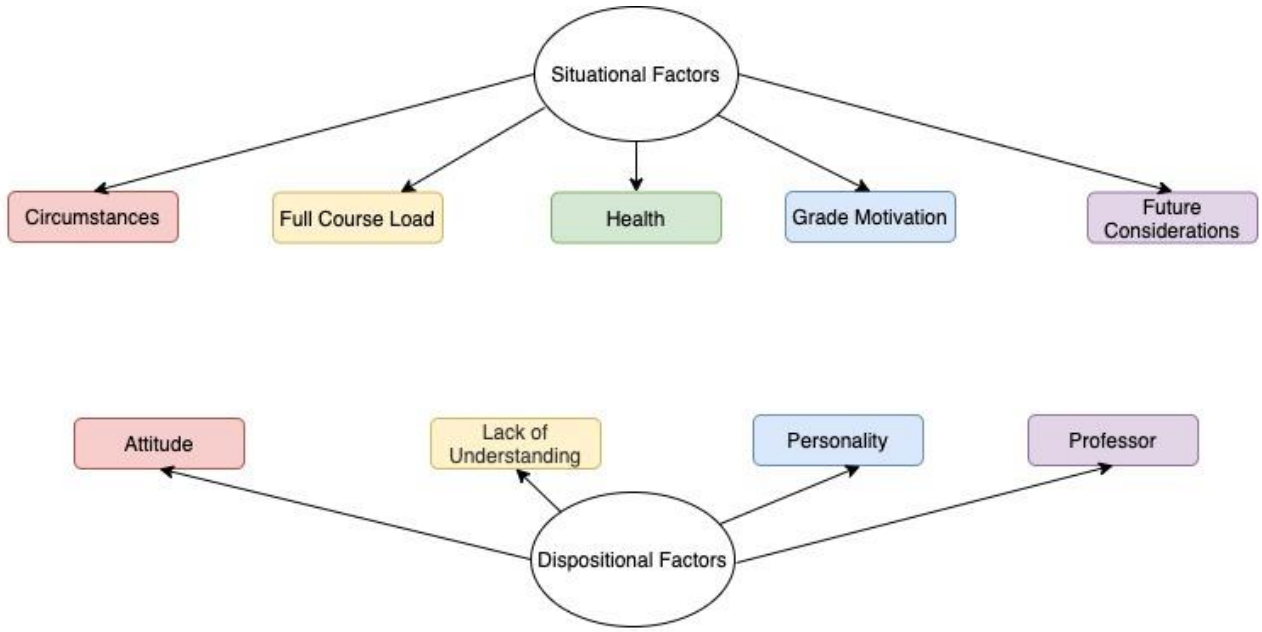

Figure 1. ***Thematic Analysis Tree of Dispositional and Situational Factors Contributing to Academic Misconduct.*** This represents the different dispositional and situational themes that arose during our student focus group interviews. Main themes are denoted by a large circle and sub-themes are represented by a smaller square attached to the main theme via an arrow.

Personality Traits

The second subtheme we identified from student responses was the idea that an individual's *personality* traits influence their propensity to engage in academic misconduct. Some students distinguished between "crimes of opportunity," where the learning environment can enable

students to engage in academic misconduct, and specific personality traits which predispose individuals to seek out cheating opportunities. During the discussion pertaining to personality, a manipulative personality trait emerged as one that would be more likely to engage in academic misconduct. Specifically, students stated that they believed people with a manipulative personality trait would be less likely to face consequences for their behaviour because they would be able to justify their actions to their professors if they were caught. Participants felt that not facing consequences led to the aberrant behaviour being reinforced.

Lack of Understanding

The third subtheme we identified was a *lack of understanding* surrounding various aspects of student educational experience. Students indicated a lack of knowledge in understanding what academic integrity entails. They stated that they are unaware of what practices are specifically dishonest and did not feel equipped to determine if different practices were dishonest, which frequently lead them to engage in academic misconduct. Students reported that an incomplete understanding of the details contained within the academic misconduct policy led them to making their own decisions about what constituted academic misconduct, which is not necessarily consistent with institutional policies and may violate policies. Specifically, students reported feeling very unclear about the extent to which sharing ideas and assignments with peers or group members was appropriate and when it became dishonest. Student participants also reported that they did not know what to do or what to say when approached by a classmate or a groupmate and asked to share answers or entire assignments.

Senior students stated that they gained an increased understanding of what constituted academic misconduct as they progressed through their undergraduate degree. For example, as they wrote an increasing number of essays across their university career, some students reported feeling more confident in understanding and avoiding plagiarism. They stated that this felt as if they were personally "training" in academic integrity as the years went on and as they were exposed to different assignment types and disciplines. Other students stated that as their discipline-specific skills grew, such as their comfort with their discipline-specific citation format, their understanding of academic integrity in their discipline grew as well.

Relationship to Professor

The fourth subtheme identified involved a positive student-teacher relationship a student has with their *professor*. Students stated that this could either contribute to their propensity to cheat or dissuade them from engaging in academic misconduct. Students who reported strong positive relationships with approachable professors explained that they would never cheat in their classes because they would not want their professors to be disappointed in them. Likewise, some participants stated that they believed that peers who engage in academic misconduct do not have positive relationships with their professors, do not like their personalities, or do not respect their teaching methods.

Student Situational Factors

Students identified five situational themes which they believed contributed to academic misconduct. These include themes of *circumstances*, a *full course load*, *health*, *grade motivation*, and *future considerations* (see Figure 1).

Circumstances

Students discussed the circumstances that shape their personal lives, and how these circumstances can affect their educational experience and the level of stress they feel. They stated that these circumstances can take differing amounts of their time, leading some people to engage in academic misconduct to compensate. One of the circumstances identified was the amount of familial pressure that students face. Student participants stated that family members frequently pressure students to obtain the highest grades possible, which causes students to feel as if they need to find ways to perform better.

Additionally, students discussed how their financial circumstances impact their educational paths and their propensity to engage in academic misconduct. Students felt that students with limited financial resources were more likely to engage in academic misconduct to ensure that they would not fail and would only have to take the course once. Although students at our university can typically withdraw from or re-take classes if they receive a low grade, our participants indicated that many students do not see this as a viable option due to the financial costs of re-taking courses.

Many students discussed the time constraints that arise from working one to three jobs outside of their classes. They stated that it was hard to balance their jobs with their academic work. Students thought that students who had demanding work schedules would be more likely to copy answers from peers or online resources because they would be looking for ways to save time on their assignments.

Full Course Load

Student participants listed taking full course loads (of three to five classes) and labs or tutorials as pressure-inducing. They stated that in taking a full course load, they often felt as if they could not devote adequate time to all their assignments, which led some students to commit academically dishonest practices, such as copying a friend's answers, to save time. However, they also specified that sometimes the number of classes was not the main problem, but rather it was the amount of workload across classes. Students felt that certain classes had higher workloads than others, making it difficult to try to evenly divide their time between classes. They stated that these inconsistencies may lead some students to engage in inappropriate academic behaviour to decrease the workload in one class to have more time for their other classes.

Health

The third theme that we identified was mental and physical health. Students spoke of needing to get to a healthy place mentally to succeed in their studies. They stated that students who were either physically or mentally unhealthy would not be able to devote adequate time to their studies, and thus would be left scrambling to complete their work or engage in academic misconduct. Students stated that health concerns often take priority over academic work and speculated that this could leave students with lower grades than they expected. They argued that lower grades cause students to engage in academic misconduct in later assignments to try to raise their grades.

Grade Motivation

The fourth theme we identified is the subtheme of *grade motivation*. Students stated that wanting to obtain the highest-grade possible led students to engage in academic misconduct, including plagiarizing ideas from online sources and copying answers from friends who have taken the class previously. Students discussed how some students seemed to incorporate their grades into their identity and self-worth and wanted to achieve good grades to boost their self-esteem, not because they wanted to best understand what they were learning. They stated that that these types of students would be more likely to engage in academic misconduct to ensure that they obtain the exact grade they feel they need.

Future Considerations

The subtheme of *future considerations* connected to many different aspects of the students' responses. One of these connections arose during discussions regarding grade motivation. Students stated that they wanted to obtain high grades to meet their later goals, including post-graduate programs and other academic graduate programs which are highly competitive and value higher grades. Student's recognized that the desire to attend these programs could help encourage students to devote more time to their academic work, but they also stated that the intensity of the competition could lead students to cheat to give them an academic edge over other applicant.

However, students described how some students viewed obtaining a degree as an important and necessary step to obtaining later employment but did not care about the knowledge gained or the grades received. They discussed students wanting to pass classes to graduate and not caring about what they learned otherwise; instead, they just wanted the "piece of paper." Students also discussed the idea that work experience is more important than grades to potential employers or valued more than a degree in some professions, leading students to care less about their grades and reduced scholastic work ethic.

Faculty Dispositional Factors

We identified five main dispositional themes which arose during the faculty focus group and interview, including the themes of *attitude*, *professor*, *no reported reason*, a *pattern of behaviour* and *personality* (see Figure 2).

Attitude

Faculty members indicated that they felt that students who were most likely to engage in academic misconduct held a largely apathetic *attitude* and lacked curiosity or passion for their subject. They reported feeling as if they had to convince most of their students that they had something important to teach them to pique their interest. Faculty spoke of teaching to "20% of their class" and reported feeling as if most students were merely there to get a degree or grade, not out of self-motivated interest or curiosity about the subject material. This led to professors feeling discouraged or unenthusiastic about their teaching.

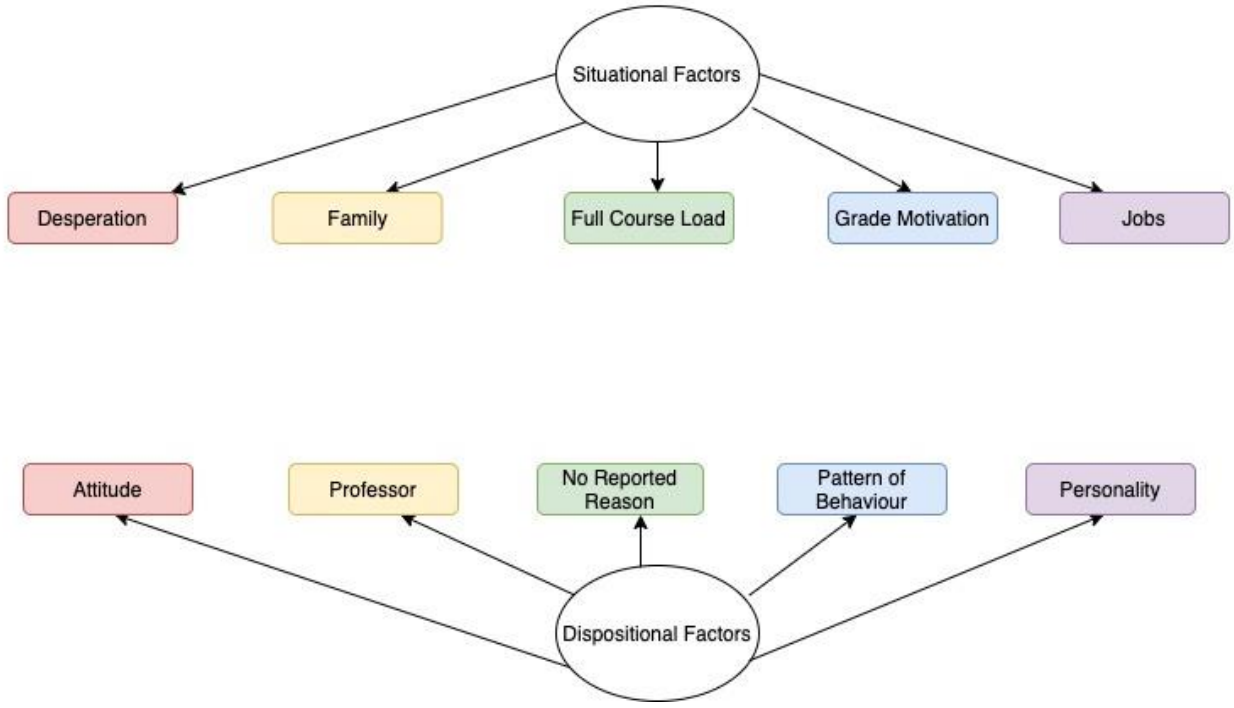

Figure 2. Thematic Analysis Tree of Dispositional and Situational Factors Contributing to Academic Misconduct. Faculty focus groups created their own unique set of subthemes. This image depicts the different dispositional and situational themes that arose during faculty focus groups. Sub-themes are represented by a smaller square attached to the main theme (which is in a circle) via an arrow.

Behaviour

The second subtheme we identified in faculty responses was the *behaviour* patterns accompanying academic misconduct. Faculty believed that academic misconduct stemmed from poor planning skills and poor time management, leading them to seek out riskier means of finishing assignments. Additionally, some faculty stated that students who were likely to engage in academically dishonest practices had many preconceived ideas about what academic integrity entails that are often wrong and misguided. For example, faculty members explained that students would argue that practices, such as inappropriately citing online resources, were acceptable because they previously did so in high school, or they have "always done it [that] way" in previous classes and were not reprimanded. Faculty members stressed that students' unwillingness to update their understanding of academic integrity contributes to students committing academically dishonest practices later in their university careers.

No Reported Reason

Some faculty reported that students caught cheating did not report reasons for their behaviour, and the professor could not determine a motivating factor for cheating. However, this does not mean that the student did not have a motivating factor, but rather, that students may lack a certain level of self-awareness and do not understand the underlying factors that motivated their cheating behaviour, or they were unwilling to share their motivations with their professor. Not wanting to share their reasoning with their professor can speak to specific psychological influences, such as embarrassment or possibility of reduced consequences, which kept the student from disclosing their reasons.

Personality Traits

The theme of *personality* was the fourth subtheme we identified from our faculty discussions. Although students discussed manipulative personality traits which allowed cheaters to get away with their infractions, many faculty members discussed the idea of a sense of strong self-worth or an "inflated ego" as the type of personalities which would be most likely to cheat. They identified this personality type as the hardest to dissuade from cheating, as students who possess this personality trait may disregard the professor's teachings surrounding academic integrity.

Professor

The fifth dispositional theme that we identified was *professor*-specific factors. This theme includes feeling unprepared to educate their students about academic misconduct, and that differing disciplines called for different methods to obtain understanding. For example, Computer Science and Mathematics faculty stated that it was fine for students to look up and copy small pieces of code (or integrate "code snippets" into their work), as it would allow the student to understand the reasoning behind the problems. However, life-science faculty reported having a

zero-tolerance for looking up answers online, as the student needed to use data obtained from the labs they participated in to complete assignments.

Some faculty also reported feeling that the cultural role of a professor is no longer valued amongst students. Faculty stated that students no longer view professors with respect and do not value their knowledge. A few faculty members were under the impression that this is a contributing factor leading to increased student academic misconduct because students do not believe that professors were invested enough to closely monitor their submitted work. Faculty discussed a lack of communication with students as a probable contributing factor. If students discussed assignments-related concerns with them, they could help alleviate student pressure by granting "automatic extension[s]" to students who would reach out to them.

Faculty Situational Factors

The situational factors identified from the faculty focus groups and interview include the subthemes *desperation*, *family*, *full course load*, *grade motivation*, and *jobs* (see Figure 2).

Desperation

Faculty members explicitly discussed the sense of *desperation* that students feel regarding their schoolwork. Some faculty members disclosed discussions with previous students they caught cheating, where students explained that a sense of desperation, caused by a lack of time, drove them to engage in cheating behaviour to ensure the student met the required deadline. Faculty revealed that differing time pressures, including but not limited to leaving assignments to the last minute, an increase in non-academic activities during periods when assignments are due, and not adequately planning and accounting for their academic work contributed to students' feelings of desperation. Faculty participants stressed that this was mostly due to students' poor planning skills, as opposed to not having adequate time to complete an assignment.

Family

Faculty discussed the impact that familial pressure has on academic misconduct. Faculty reported learning about over-bearing parents from their students and believed that some parents pushed their children too hard and even sometimes encouraged academically dishonest practices. In one example, a participant shared that a student's mother wrote their essay for them, and later e-mailed the professor to complain about the grade their child received. Although not all examples were this extreme, participants frequently discussed a link between increased parental pressure and students engaging in academic misconduct to appease them.

Full Course Load

Taking a *full course load* was also identified as a situational subtheme. Faculty discussed both taking full course loads (e.g., three to five classes or 15 credit hours) and taking labs or tutorials

as pressure inducing. Unlike the student participants, faculty did not discuss the amount of work in specific courses, but instead focused on the total number of courses. They felt that students who are taking more classes would feel increased pressure to cheat in some classes to balance all their assignments and give adequate time to each class.

Grade Motivation

Faculty also discussed the theme of *grade motivation*. Specifically, they stated that students would engage in academic misconduct to get a better grade on an assignment or test. However, faculty also explained that they believed students engaged in academic misconduct to merely pass the class. They argued that the mantra of "C's get degrees", which references the fact that one can still graduate if they pass their courses, has led students to believe that all they have to do is pass a course. Faculty argued that if students are already disengaged with the material and apathetic to what they are learning, students will seek out riskier means to simply pass the course.

Jobs

The *jobs* theme was identified as a unique situational pressure which led students to generally have less time to work on assignments. Faculty participants conceded that some students who are struggling to juggle their various external commitments with their academic work may be more likely to engage in academic misconduct. They argued that the lack of time that accompanied working students made them feel as if they did not have adequate time to study and complete their work properly, leading them to seek out quicker alternatives, such as copying citations from the internet or copying answers from their peers. One participant mentioned hearing that their student only had a half an hour to complete the day's assignment before they headed to work.

Discussion

We conducted this study to outline the unique motivating factors of academic misconduct at our university. Our results align with attribution theory, a psychological concept that argues that individuals will come up with reasons, or "attributes," to explain behaviour (Heider, 1958; Weiner, 1985; Stephens, 2017). Core attribution theory argues that when presented with another individual's behaviour, such as cheating, individuals will either explain their behaviour as a result of the individual's unique psychological disposition, or environmental or situational circumstances. Just as Minarcik and Bridges (2015) found in their population of psychology graduate students, our findings indicate that both student and faculty participants view student academic misconduct as a multifaceted issue with multiple dispositional and situational motivators.

Many of the dispositional factors mentioned here, such as a student's attitude and differing personality factors have been previously identified within the academic integrity literature (Brimble, 2016; McCabe et al., 2012; Minarcik & Bridges, 2015). There are an increasing number of studies which analyze academic misconduct in relation to psychological personality traits (Lee et al., 2020; Lewis & Zhong, 2011; Wilks et al., 2016). Some studies have found that students who commit academic misconduct score lower in the Big Five traits of conscientiousness and agreeableness (Giluk & Postlethwaite, 2015), whereas others have found that higher levels of Dark Triad personality traits, such as narcissism, correlate with academic misconduct (Menon & Sharland, 2011; Rundle et al., 2019). Future research on academic misconduct at our institution may want to further explore the relationships between the psychological traits mentioned here, such as manipulation and narcissism, and academic misconduct.

Likewise, many of the situational subthemes mentioned here are commonly cited within the academic literature as situational pressures related to the modern university-student lifestyle, including financial pressures from paying for increasingly high education costs, the time pressures related to holding a job while attending university, taking a full course load, and parental pressure (Blum, 2016; Minarcik & Bridges, 2015; Wideman, 2011). Both faculty and student respondents identified similar pressures and seemed to generally understand the situational pressures that accompany present student lifestyles (Blum, 2016). However, some situational motivators, including the desire to achieve high grades and taking a full course load, were considered common motivators of student academic misconduct in previous generations of students and today's students.

Our student participants also discussed a motivating factor which kept them from engaging in academic misconduct. Students who said they would never cheat or engage in academic misconduct reported feeling a strong sense of connection to their professors. Indeed, previous research has identified this respectful professor relationship as a "moral anchor" for students that discourages dishonest practices because they feel as if they have someone to hold them accountable (McCabe & Pavela, 2004; Simkin & McLeod, 2010). These reports support previous research which focused solely on individuals who commit academic misconduct; self-admitted cheaters often viewed their professors as inadequate and do not respect them personally or the assignments they use in their courses (McCabe, 1992). Likewise, our faculty participants expressed feeling as if students who engage in academic misconduct found them inadequate and failed to respect them; they identified the negative professor-student relationships as motivating students to engage in academic misconduct. However, there may be other reasons why students do not engage in academic misconduct which were not captured in our responses. Previous research which explored reasons why students do not engage in contract cheating found that the student's personal moral beliefs and their desire to fully learn material kept them from engaging in academic misconduct (Rundle et al., 2019).

However, our results deviate from the literature about the impact of peer pressure on student academic misconduct. Our student and faculty participants did not identify peer pressure as a motivating factor in committing academic misconduct, which is surprising due to the depth of research discussing the effect of peer influence on a student's propensity to commit academic misconduct (see Jurdi et al., 2012 for a review). This finding does not rule out the possibility that peers do motivate students at our university to engage in academic misconduct, but rather, that our participants did not explicitly discuss the roles their peers play in either motivating academic integrity or academic misconduct. Our participants largely viewed academic misconduct as an individual issue, which is influenced by many aspects of the individual's life, as opposed to something that is socially enforced.

The lack of peer influence reported here differs greatly from research on American college campuses, where peer influence remains a strong motivating factor in academic misconduct research across time (McCabe & Trevino, 1997; McCabe et al., 2001; McCabe, 2016). Additionally, a strong peer influence is also reported as a major contributor of academic misconduct globally. For example, academic misconduct research on Romanian college students found that the behaviour of their peers was the strongest correlate of a student's intention to cheat (Teodorescu & Andrei, 2009). They found that if students reported high levels of student cheating within their institution, they were more likely to cheat as well (Teodorescu & Andrei, 2009). Likewise, researchers in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) found that students felt socially obligated to help their peers with their work, even when sharing was not permitted (Aljurf et al., 2020).

So, why did our Canadian sample not identify peer pressure as a motivator of academic misconduct? One possible explanation for this contrast comes from Canadian research on behaviours that students consider to be academic misconduct. One such study found that Canadian undergraduate students viewed self-interested cheating as more serious than "selfless" cheating, which includes behaviours such as cheating to help a friend succeed (Jurdi et al., 2012). Thus, it is possible that our participants did not mention peer influences regarding academically dishonest behaviour because they did not consider helping a friend to be academically dishonest. Further research with clear definitions of academically dishonest practices is needed to better explore the link between peer influence and academic misconduct in Canadian universities.

Our study is limited by a low number of focus group participants. Typically, smaller focus groups hold 4-6 participants, and standard focus groups have 8-12 participants (Kidd & Parshall, 2000; Krueger, 2014; Plummer, 2017; Sim, 1998). None of our focus groups had more than six participants. Although smaller groups are limited to fewer experiences, they do allow participants to further expand on their own experiences (Krueger, 2014; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). We found that smaller focus groups with 1-2 participants lead to more concordance of opinion and an increased sharing of similar experiences, whereas focus groups with 3 or more participants presented a wider breadth of opinions. Thus, as with all qualitative data, our results

may not be entirely generalizable to the general population of faculty and students at our institution and suggests a cautious interpretation of our results.

The purpose of this study was to determine motivators of academic misconduct at our university by questioning those who are most likely to run into it– the members of our university community. The reported motivations paint a complex picture of academic misconduct at our university, where it is largely an individual phenomenon fueled by both dispositional and situational factors. Although both our faculty and student responses could be categorized in similar thematic categories, our results suggest that there is a disconnect between what specific factors faculty think motivate academic misconduct and what students identify as motivating factors. We encourage academic integrity researchers to include both student and faculty participants in their studies to illuminate the differences across both group's perspectives, which can help to identify instructor biases and inform institutional approaches. Our research aims to add the voices and opinions of our students and faculty participants to the growing body of academic integrity research which focuses on the distinctive landscape of higher education in Canada.

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