

Why some students cheats



Academic cheating can consist of any activity which brings about a change in the rules of education in favor of oneself. Cheating is by its nature wrong and antithetical to the underlying goals of education. The educational system exists such that individuals will gain the necessary tools to be productive and happy adults. The existence of cheating arises primarily from the existence of a competitive environment. In nature, under the pressures of natural selection, animals will often try to cheat just to pass on their genes, even if they may not be the most fit to do so. Similarly, students who cheat on academic work do so because they feel the pressures of such an environment, and, lacking the means to pass the grade by their own skills and knowledge alone, they depend upon an unfair advantage to help them. Because of this, the rationale behind cheating is deeply embedded in human and animal nature, and the operations of the education system.

The education system does not exist to “enlighten” its students. Ideally, however, it does offer students what they will need in life, and the opportunity to seek those goals. Post-secondary education institutions market their product instead by stressing class differences and distinctions between those who have a degree and those who do not. The requirements of a typical University often make personal success contingent upon one’s ability to conform to the expectations and needs of the department. It is the expectations of the college department which move students to try their hand at cheating. They do so in an effort to avoid falling behind and potentially losing their chance to move further into the course of study they found themselves on. This fear is based on economics and personal expectations (those of the student, his parents, and faculty).

Ubiquitous access to the internet is often cited as the cause of a large

volume of academic dishonesty. But although the internet is a necessary cause, it is not sufficient. While the internet has made cheating a more efficient process for students, it has not made irrelevant the more fundamental reasons for students to decide to cheat. The root cause of most cheating is, as I have already identified, unrealistic expectations on the part of parents, teachers, and faculty. These individuals provide the selection pressures on the cheater and make it such that if he or she does not cheat, he or she will be selected against and not allowed to move on. This cheating is seen as “ natural” precisely because it is: all animals are instinctively drawn to cutting the odds against them in their natural environment to pass on their genes.

The most rigid expectation comes from parents. In middle school, parents expect their children to be studious and well-behaved. In high school, students are expected to be preparing themselves for the “ right” college, which includes being involved in an unimaginable load of extracurricular activities on top of the incredible coursework. Students are indoctrinated with the belief that getting into the “ right” college is the goal of one’s high school education, and that learning is not necessarily important. Cheating, which focuses on any other academic goal besides learning the material, allows one to act on this thought. When we deemphasize learning, what we are doing is deemphasizing the need to develop excellent character qualities and to be a good human being.

Of course, a major problem in resolving the prevalence of cheating is answering the moral question. Many students see nothing inherently wrong with cheating—a view reinforced by how common the practice is. A belief in subjective moral truths allows the student to rationalize his behavior as right

or wrong based on what his goals in education are. However, this view ignores the fact that an education is not subjectively good, but that it is objectively good for the individual and for society.