CALIFORNIA SCIENCE & ENGINEERING FAIR
2018 PROJECT SUMMARY

Name(s)

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Project Number

38767

Project Title

Perceptions and Decisions about Cheating: A Cross-Institutional Comparison

Abstract

Objectives/Goals

The study investigates how high school students classify and evaluate personal cases of academic misconduct. The study also investigates how socioeconomic profile plays a role.

Methods/Materials

Participants were recruited from two high schools with distinct socioeconomic profiles, Mission San Jose High School (MSJ) and Watsonville High School (WAT). Participants were asked to (1) describe a past act of cheating or plagiarism, (2) explain their motivations for acting, and (3) evaluate the permissibility of their actions.

Results

Cheating and plagiarism were pervasive across both schools: 98% of participants self-reported an action that falls under our definition. 71% of MSJ participants evaluated their actions as not wrong, while 59% of WAT participants did so. Participants across both schools provided a wide variety of motivations and justifications for their actions and evaluations.

Conclusions/Discussion

Cheating is a common occurrence in high schools. MSJ participants commonly referenced the pervasiveness of cheating in school, suggesting a prevalent cheating culture. Students balance competing considerations in their evaluations, suggesting that their perspective on cheating is complicated. Teaching practices can incorporate these insights to reduce rates of cheating.

Summary Statement

This project investigates the student perspective on academic misconduct through structured interviews with high school students about their personal experiences.

Help Received

I conducted the study in collaboration with a research group at UC Santa Cruz, supervised by Dr. Audun Dahl and PhD Student Talia Waltzer. The research group obtained university IRB approval. The design of this study was based on past studies conducted by this research group.