

Honor Codes, Cheating, and Pedagogy: What's an Instructor to Do?

Dwight Roblyer
Lecturer, POLS 206 & 207
Department of Political Science
Texas A&M University
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Format

- First, a story that lays out the stimuli of how I came to focus on this topic
 - Questions along the way are welcome
- Second, some observations from me, some behavioral scientists, and others
- Third, questions for me and from me

Stimuli – Honor Code(s)

- I was raised a Baptist by two trained school teachers – honesty was always expected...
 - ...although **not always delivered** (by me, it, or them)
- TAMU undergrad and Corps member (1980-84)
 - Aggie Code of Honor was business-as-usual, but there was a **bustling black market for dishonesty**
- USAF officer for 26 years
 - It's **Core Values**: *Integrity first, Service before self, Excellence in all we do.*
 - Research interests revolved around ethical codes of conduct in targeting
- Father of 8 children—have heard **a lot of lies**
 - Several of our adopted kids are great liars—necessary **survival skill** in orphanages

Do Honor Codes actually work?
Does applied ethics matter?

Stimuli – Cheating

- Personally witnessed or have credible evidence of the following:
 - Impersonation
 - Forgery (of excuse note)
 - Alteration (of excuse note)
 - Rule Breaking (“don’t copy my exam questions”)
 - Cheating (copying answers)
 - Cheating (clicking in for others)
 - Lying (little and big)
 - Complicity (or “*selective naiveté*”)
- Fully expect there have been many other instances:
“Where there’s smoke, there’s fire...”

Can cheating be dependably reduced?

Stimuli – High Costs for Us

- Student academic conduct exacts high costs on instructors and University resources
 - My **3 situations** last semester have so far redirected **100 hours** of my time (rewriting exams, interviewing 12 students, etc.)
 - I redesigned several aspects of my course, making it **less educational, but more secure**
 - The AHSO has 4 full-time staff members, yet had a **backlog of 100+ cases** throughout last semester

*Can instructors get back to teaching,
and students get back to learning?*

Stimuli – High Costs for Them

- Students are here for a myriad of reasons
 - Yet, **what they learn here** is the foundation for their adult lives
- Students come with **varying backgrounds** of past instruction and behavior in ethical decision making
 - One student last semester consulted parents, THEN committed complicity by doing what they all agreed upon
- **Habits of dishonesty** built or reinforced here bode badly for their personal & professional ethics

Ethical decision making is assumed,
not taught,
by the USAF, or by TAMU

Context – Institution

- The “Code” has a long history and **vaunted place** at this institution
- Students are **required** to follow the Code, and TAMU **enforces** consequences on many who break it
 - Multipage *Student Rule 20* details 9 types of academic misconduct and the enforcement process
 - Aggie Honor System Office oversees process
 - Required statements in syllabi
 - *Turn It In* tool made available
- Offers undergrad courses in ethics, but **relatively few** take them

Context – Instructors

- ◉ **Many methods in use** by which to emphasize, warn, and discourage
 - Multiple forms of exams
 - Assigned seats for exams
 - Assigned exam booklets
 - Students must present IDs
 - Proctors to help watch over students during exams

Context – “We’ve Had Enough!”

- *Industrial & Systems Engineering (ISEN)* faculty had an **intolerably high number of cases** of misconduct in Spring 2016, and the trend line had been sharply increasing before then
- In Fall 2016, they implemented a department-wide ***Zero Tolerance policy***
 - **Rewrote** their Honor Code statement and required it in all syllabi
 - **Required student signatures** on that policy statement
 - **Made an “F*” the standard consequence** for any instance of academic misconduct, independent of type or severity

ISEN *Academic Integrity Statement & Policy excerpts*

...Upon accepting admission to Texas A&M University, a student immediately assumes a commitment to uphold the Honor Code, to accept responsibility for learning and to follow the philosophy and rules of the Honor System. Ignorance of the rules does not exclude any member of the Texas A&M University community from the requirements or the processes of the Honor System.

...I, (instructor's name), as the rest of the Industrial & Systems Engineering Faculty, uphold the Aggie Honor Code as an axiom of our academic excellence. We consider its sincere observance to be essential for membership in our department and Texas A&M. We extend you the trust conferred to those who faithfully adhere to our honor code. Abuse of this trust is intolerable, thus I will report and assign an extreme penalty to those who do not stand with us in preserving the integrity symbolized by the Aggie Honor Code, "An Aggie does not lie, cheat, or steal or tolerate those who do." In this course the penalty for any violation of the Aggie Honor Code, as minimal as it may be, is F*.

Context – Students

- Most of them...
 - **Think they understand** the expectations of the Code
 - **Don't really understand** them very well at all

- Most of them...
 - **Don't know how to learn well** at the university level
 - **Struggle a lot** in multiple courses

There's probably a connection here!

Puzzle

(with hyperbole)

- What's an instructor to do?
 - **How can we** do anything more than what we are doing?
 - **Should we** do anything more?
 - **Can we** keep cheating from overwhelming the integrity of our classroom education process? ;-/
 - **Are we** witnessing the end of quality education as we know it? ;-)

Methodology

- Receive phone call from **honest student**
 - Learn that copies of **all 4** of my older exams are being passed around
- Initiate the *5 Stages of Grief*
- **Postpone** next exam to get breathing room
- Immediately **lock down** exam-review process
- Begin **interviews** with accused students
 - Marvel that it took **2 years** for 1 honest student to report the existence of the exam file
 - Hear statements of **amazing naiveté & friendship-trumps-rules**
- Find **diamond in midst of the ashes** of compromised exams: *(Dis)honesty: The Truth about Lies* (video)

A Video

- Recommended to me by a 50yo student
- **Great blend** of content and approaches
 - TED-Talk-*esque* instruction
 - First person testimonials
 - Lots of very accessible behavioral science
- Depicts dishonesty in **multiple dimensions**
 - “Part of life” but capable of **harming self, as well as others**
 - Explores motives, **contributing & inhibiting factors**
 - Communicates the **slippery slope** realities well

Website & Movie Trailer (1:45)

THE (DIS)HONESTY PROJECT

HOME FILM REQUEST A SCREENING STORE TRUTHBOX SUPPORTERS

The color of truth is grey.
- André Gide

Art is a lie that makes us realize truth.
- Pablo Picasso

Lying is the most simple form of self-defense.
- Susan Sontag

If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything.
- Mark Twain

<http://thedishonestyproject.com/>

“Matrix Experiment”

2.34	3.33	8.54
1.17	9.01	7.56
6.85	6.21	7.66
3.93	8.38	4.20
5.06	8.29	2.66

- Student sheet contained twenty 3x4 matrices
 - Only 2 numbers added up to 10
- Task is to solve as many matrices as possible in 5 mins
- Students then either turn in their paper for grading, OR shred their paper and self-report # completed
- Students paid \$1/matrix reported solved

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The Solution

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Ariely: *“But we didn’t tell them
that we played with
the shredder.”*

Results from “Shred Condition”

- **70%** of 40,000+ students routinely cheated, BUT only “**a little bit**”
 - Solved 4, but reported 6 (*on avg, by cheaters*)
 - “Stole” **\$50,000+** from investigation
- “**Big**” cheating happened **only 20 times**
 - “Stole” **\$400** from investigation
- Cheating behavior was fairly malleable
 - **Cheated more** when “**in-group**” member obviously cheated and got away with it
 - **Cheated less** when “**out-group**” member obviously cheated

Would an Honor Code alter these results?

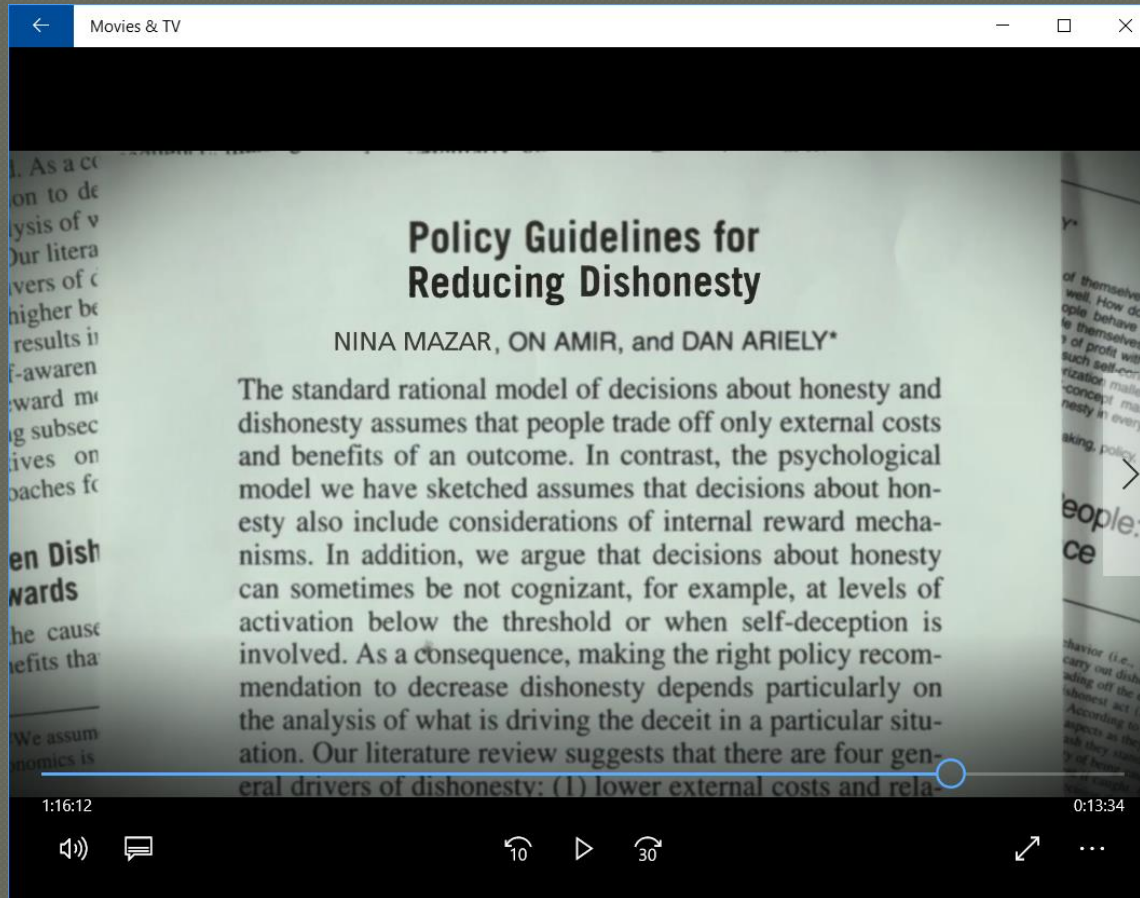
“Fudge Factor” — *How we slide into irrationality (and lie to ourselves, then to others*



Ariely:

- *“As long as we cheat just a little bit, we don’t have to pay any price”*
- *“...everything that changes the fudge factor changes people’s ability to be dishonest”*

Honor Codes & Cheating (3:30)



(Starting at 1:16:11)

What didn't work & what did

- Intensive academic integrity education had **little or no effect** long months or years afterwards
 - *Fudge factors* hold sway over strategic education
- “**Stroking the moral fibers**” of students in any of multiple ways **ELIMINATED** cheating in his experiments
 - Fascinating result: not just reduced, but removed
 - Equally effective whether school actually had an Honor Code, or whether students identified with an Abrahamic religion

Little changes had a BIG effect

Other Pertinent Findings in Related Studies

- Students who cheated successfully were **more willing do so again, as well as tell their friends how to do it**
- Persistent mild cheating has a **more damaging effect** than one outright fraud
 - True economically
 - (True in education?)

Putting it into Practice

- Classroom instructors “have point”
 - Don't simply remind that the Honor Code exists
 - Instead, intentionally educate students about academic misconduct
 - What it is (all 9 forms)
 - What it looks and sounds like at street level
 - How to respond & how to report
 - How serious the university is about the problem
 - How little control they have after a violation is reported
 - How much they can lose
 - Find ways throughout each week of semester to “stroke the moral fibers” of the students
 - ...and to remind them of our mutual penchant for irrationality

If we don't, who will?

My Own Steps: Syllabus & Exams

- Revamped syllabus
 - Goal: to be **blatantly clear** about responsibilities, expectations, and consequences
 - **Expanded** honor statement, borrowing some from ISEN (*blanket permission already exists*)
 - Added applicable **“Warning” statements** throughout syllabus and eCampus
- Retaining “lock down” of exam materials
 - Permitting review only under tightest supervision
 - Would like to back this off in future
- Brief **“Honor Moment”** before each exam begins
 - My comments + class signs honor statement together
- Instituting **assigned seats during exams**
 - Considering assigning exam booklets

My Own Steps: Homework

- **Homework #1 & #2** are the *(Dis)honesty* video (streamed via library—*thanks Wendi!*)
 - *Includes 56 questions I wrote to check understanding of important points (auto-graded via eCampus)*
- Each remaining **weekly homework** will include **3-ish questions** about the Code and ethical decision making
 - *From Student Rule 20*
 - *From slides in the AHSO's "So you just got reported for violating the Honor Code..." presentation*
 - *From other resources, once developed/discovered*

My Own Steps: Other

- Will use bonus materials from The (Dis)honesty Project as “**half-time**” **breaks** during lectures
- Switched from i>Clickers to **REEF** for participation tracking
 - Student report from last semester had **one student** using **5 clicker remotes** during one lecture
 - REEF is not cheat-proof, but brings other good things, too
 - Will use assigned seats for lectures if fresh evidence of cheating with REEF occurs
- Will continue to **work closely** with AHSO and to **report all** students who appear to have violated the Code

My Own Steps: Wish List

- Guidance video for students on **how to “...not tolerate those who do”**
 - Fellow student testimonials who have or have not tolerated
 - Why “tolerating” is not “protecting” a friend
 - Ethical do’s and don’ts about talking to the suspected perpetrator and reporting to faculty
 - Depictions of various scenarios
- Gather **first-person student testimonial** materials in order to best communicate these messages to current students

The Video & the Book

- Video: *(Dis)honesty: The Truth About Lying*
 - DVD is in PSEL collection (both 60 and 90-min versions, captions available)
 - Wendi Kaspar at PSEL will stream to you or to your class
 - Download or DVD can be purchased on website:
<http://thedishonestyproject.com>
 - YouTube has related TED Talk by Dan Ariely, and has an unauthorized copy of the CNBC version of the video
- Book: *The (Honest) Truth About Dishonesty*
(Ariely)

Questions for Us

1. Is academic misconduct a significant, detrimental factor at TAMU? In this dept? In your course?
2. What are the causes for this misconduct?
3. Have you successfully dealt with these issues in the past? How?
4. Is the “zero tolerance” approach the right one? Why or why not?
5. Should instructors help fill the void in educating students about the practical aspects of course-related ethical decision making?
 - If not, who should be doing this?
 - If so, how can this be done?

