

# **Upon this Rock: The Effect of an Honor Code, Religious Affiliation, and Ethics Education on the Perceived Acceptability of Cheating**

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*This paper tests a three variable model of contextual influencers on undergraduate student perceptions of the acceptability of cheating. Building on previous work examining the perceived acceptability of cheating (Bloodgood, Turnley, & Mudrack, 2010), we tested the hypotheses that institutional honor codes, religious affiliation, and religiosity will all directly influence the students' perceptions of the acceptability of cheating. Data collected from business students at two separate institutions, one religiously affiliated and one public, were used to test our model. Regression showed honor codes, religious affiliation, and religiosity were significant determinants of student perceptions of the acceptability of cheating, supporting our hypotheses.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Cheating has been found to be widespread (Smyth & Davis, 2004) and is now reaching the doors of even the most hallowed academic halls (College announces investigation, 2012). In a recent study 86% of business students studied reported engaging in cheating behaviors (Burton, Talpade, & Haynes, 2011). Cheating in college has been a rich area of research stretching back into the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (see: Crown & Spiller, 1998 for a full literature review). Findings show a strong correlation between cheating and other undesirable ethical behaviors like lying and shoplifting (Beck & Ajzen, 1991), cheating as a strong predictor of workplace cheating (Lawson, 2004), and more relaxed attitudes towards cheating by business students (Klein, Levengurg, McKendall, & Mothersell, 2007). Cheating challenges the learning process and makes equal assessment more difficult. Cheating can even be tangled up with ideas of ownership (Pauli & Arthur, 2012). While some have focused on the honesty and fairness norms of cheating (West, Ravenscroft, & Shrader, 2004) and others have debated whether cheating is even a wrong (Bouville, 2010), we are more concerned about the factors that reduce the student's perceived acceptability of cheating. This paper proposes and tests a four variable model of influencers on undergraduate student perceptions of the acceptability of cheating. Previous research has shown that

contextual factors can have a significant effect on ethical decision making (Singhapakdi, Vitell, & Franke, 1999) and specifically cheating behavior (McCabe & Trevino, 1993; 1997; McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 2002). So, building on previous work examining the perceived acceptability of cheating (Bloodgood, Turnley, & Mudrack, 2010), we hypothesize that three contextual factors (institutional honor codes, religious affiliation, and religiosity) will directly influence the students' perceptions of the acceptability of cheating.

## **THEORY**

### **Acceptability of Cheating**

We build on the work of Bloodgood, et al. (2010) and focus on perceptions of the acceptability of cheating. The authors measured acceptability as a combination of both academic and passive cheating. Academic cheating occurs within an academic or university setting and includes activities such as cheating on exams and assignments, the reporting of other's cheating activity, and/or the provision of unauthorized help or materials. This form of cheating can sometimes be considered by students as simply "playing the game so they can graduate" (Bloodgood, Turnley, & Mudrack, 2010, p. 25). To help broaden this limited academic world the authors also proposed a passive cheating measure. Passive cheating can occur anywhere, on or off campus, "when an individual knowingly benefits from others' mistakes" (Bloodgood, Turnley, & Mudrack, 2010, p. 25). Passive cheating is separate from the academic game for students and encompasses the broader range of human activities that students are involved in. Additionally, passive cheating is expected to be more sensitive to educational and social influences (e.g., honor codes, religion), as it is easy to convince oneself that any such gains are victimless crime or harmless. This ability to reconstrue the conduct to avoid self-sanctions (Bandura, 1999; Pauli & Arthur, 2006) becomes harder to maintain when provided contradictory standards or other ethical enlightenment.

### **Honor Code**

The first influencer expected to have an impact on students' perceived acceptability of cheating is the presence of an academic honor code. An academic honor code is defined as a public statement that contains a set of general expectations about shared moral commitments used to uphold the academic integrity of an institution (Bok, 1990; Pauli, Arthur, & Price, 2012). These organizationally defined codes of behavior are similar to organizational ethical codes. Through the development, communication, and enforcement of these codes, the organization's moral principles and standards of behavior can be clarified and codified (Pater & Van Gils, 2003). This formalization of ethical standards cannot cover every ethical dilemma or problem that a student may face. Instead, these guidelines nudge individual ethical perceptions towards the organization's moral values and standards of behavior (Pater & Van Gils, 2003).

In their comprehensive review of literature on collegiate cheating Crown and Spiller (1998) note several parallels between the literature on corporate codes of conduct and research assessing the efficacy of academic honor codes. Thus, a review of studies assessing the effectiveness of corporate codes may provide helpful insights.

Numerous empirical studies have examined the role of corporate codes of conduct on ethical behavior (see: Ford & Richardson, 1994 for a review). Six of the nine studies reviewed by Ford and Richardson found that the existence of a code of conduct or corporate policy statement on ethical behavior was significantly related to ethical behavior (Chonko & Hunt, 1985; Ferrell & Skinner, 1988; Hegarty & Sims, 1979; Laczniak & Inderrieden, 1987; Singhapakdi & Vitell, 1990; Weeks & Natel, 1992). However, three of these studies suggested that corporate codes were only predictive of behavior when accompanied by other factors. For example, Laczniak and Inderrieden (1987) found that codes alone had no effect on behavior, but increased in effectiveness when coupled with sanctions. Similarly, Weeks and Nantal (1992) found that corporate codes of ethics were only effective when they were well communicated. Ford and Richardson (1994) conclude that corporate codes indicate top management's commitment to ethical behavior. However, the efficacy of codes in an organization is dependent upon top management's willingness to effectively communicate and enforce such codes.

Similarly, research has examined the role of academic honor codes in reducing incidences of cheating in colleges and universities. Research has shown that the presence of academic honor codes is generally associated with lower levels of student academic dishonesty (Bowers & Bowers, 1964; Hall & Kuh, 1998; McCabe & Trevino, 1993; McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 1999; 2002; May & Loyd, 1993).

As far back as the 1930's researchers have been interested in the effectiveness of honor codes in reducing cheating. For example, in a seminal work Campbell (1935) compared the behavior of students under an honor system to those under a proctor system. He found that in instances where honor pledges were used students were less likely to cheat than when students were placed in traditional proctor conditions.

More recently, in an extensive survey of more than 6000 students at 31 academic institutions McCabe and Trevino (1993) found that students attending universities with honor codes reported significantly lower levels of cheating than students at universities without honor codes. Furthermore, the acceptance of the policy, the likelihood of being reported, and the severity of the penalty if caught all influenced the likelihood that students would refrain from cheating. A later study by the same researchers (McCabe & Trevino, 1997) replicated the original study and further supported the original's findings. Similarly, May and Loyd (1993) found a significant reduction in cheating for students at universities with honor codes.

A quick perusal of the literature on academic honor codes might lead one to believe that the mere existence of an honor code within an academic institution reduced academic cheating. The mere existence of the codes, however, has been found to be insufficient in changing the ethical climate perceptions of the institution, as only through the enforcement of those standards are students forced to focus and adhere to the rules within the honor code. Unless an honor code is embraced by the college community, the existence of an honor code by itself will not reduce cheating. (O'Neill & Pfeiffer, 2012).

In a recent study Bing, et al. (2012) suggest that simply creating and endorsing an honor code at an academic institution may not be enough to generate substantial reductions in cheating. Using an experimental design, the researchers examined the effect of situational factors (explicit presentations of an honor code reminder and of a realistic course warning) on business student cheating. Results of the study demonstrated that explicit reminders of a school's honor code together with a realistic course warning served to significantly reduce subsequent academic cheating relative to the control condition. As McCabe, et al. (2002) have noted, honor codes are not very meaningful unless students are continually made aware of them. Honor codes should be more than "window dressing." They must be well implemented and strongly embedded in the student culture.

Just as the existence of an ethics code emphasizes the organization's ethical orientation (Fritz, Arnett, & Conkel, 1999), likewise, an honor code within academics provides a message that ethics are important and valued and that members should perceive them as such. The existence of an academic honor code clarifies the ethicality of a wide range of behaviors, codifying the ethical standards of the institution even among students with a wide range of personal values and perceptions. McCabe and Trevino (1993) explain that honor codes may lead to lower levels of academic dishonesty because they clarify expectations and definitions of cheating behavior. Therefore, it may be more difficult to rationalize cheating behaviors because there are fewer grey areas.

Furthermore, McCabe, et al. (1999) found that students at institutions with honor codes referred to the honor code as an integral part of a culture of integrity that permeated their institution. New students entering the institution were made keenly aware that they were now functioning within an academic code of honor. The peer culture that developed on honor code campuses made most forms of serious cheating socially unacceptable among the majority of students.

These studies suggest that student perceptions about the acceptability of cheating should weaken as honor codes are developed and enforced and student perceptions of organizational success and social conformity fall in line with compliance with the academic honor code. Therefore we hypothesize that the presence of a known and functional institutional honor code should be negatively related to student perceptions of the acceptability of cheating.

*Hypothesis 1: The presence of a known and functional institutional honor code should be negatively related to student perceptions of the acceptability of cheating.*

### **Religious Affiliation**

The second influencer expected to impact student perceptions of the acceptability of cheating is the presence and perceived strength of an institution's religious affiliation. Affiliation with a religious institution should, in ways similar to an honor code, clarify the organization's ethical orientation (Fritz, Arnett, & Conkel, 1999) and the organizational importance of ethics (Adams, Tashchian, & Shore, 2001). The institution should provide a strong cultural foundation upon which the students and institution can evaluate the right or wrong of various activities and behaviors.

Established religious institutions are generally founded on universal moral tenets (Ali, Camp, & Gibbs, 2000), which guide interactions among people with rules from outside themselves or their immediate organization (Ali & Gibbs, 1998). This is a cosmopolitan locus of analysis where members are guided by extraorganizational principles regardless of individual preferences (Victor & Cullen, 1988). This is similar to, but different from the effects of religiosity. While religiosity may be independent of organizational structure, institutional religious affiliation is an organizationally stated support for these moral tenets and a consideration of ideals that are greater than one self. This was supported in a previous study of students at an evangelical university who were found to be far less willing to engage in unethical behavior than students at non-religious institutions (Kennedy & Lawton, 1998). Other research has found that students at a church affiliated college rated infractions as being more serious than students from a non-church affiliated institution (Etter, Cramer, & Finn, 2006). This leads us to our second hypothesis which states that the presence of an institutional religious affiliation should be negatively related to the belief that cheating is acceptable.

*Hypothesis 2: The religious affiliation of an institution should be negatively related to student perceptions of the acceptability of cheating.*

### **Religiosity**

The third dimension expected to influence the acceptability of cheating is the student's relative religiosity. Religiosity has been defined as religious behavior (Conroy & Emerson, 2004) or motivations for religious behavior (Beck & Miller, 2000; Vitell, Paolillo, & Singh, Religiosity and Consumer Ethics, , 2005). McDaniel and Burnett (1990) defined religiosity as requiring both faith in God and a dedication to following God's principles. Previous studies suggest that religiosity is synonymous with religiousness and that they both refer to a person's faithfulness to the practice of religion (Kurpis, Beqiri, & Helgeson, 2008). For this study we use the definition of religiosity from Bloodgood, et al., as "understanding, committing to, and following a set of religious doctrines or principles" (The Influence of Ethics Instruction, Religiosity, and Intelligence on Cheating Behavior, , 2008, p. 559).

Research from Cornwall, et al. (1986) found that religiosity has three components: cognition, which refers to religious knowledge and beliefs; affect, which refers to religious feelings and attachment; and behavior, including church attendance and Bible reading. Bjarnason (2007) stated these dimensions as religious beliefs, religious affiliation, and religious activities. Religiosity is typically measured with behavioral indicators such as church attendance, religious affiliation, and frequency of prayer (Conroy & Emerson, 2004).

Previous research (e.g. Magill, 1992; Hunt & Vitell, The General Theory of Marketing Ethics: A Retrospective and Revision, 1993; Epstein, 2002; Conroy & Emerson, 2004; Kurpis, Beqiri, & Helgeson, 2008; Vitell S. , The Role of Religiosity in Business and Consumer Ethics: A Review of the Literature, 2009) shows that religion provides guidelines that influence ethical judgments and that enable its adherents to discern between right and wrong. Major organized religions contain broad assumptions and universal creeds (such as the Ten Commandments) that serve as a moral grounding. These tenets and expectations are internalized and influence both human behavior and attitudes, particularly for those where religion is vital (Weaver & Agle, 2002). In none of these creeds is cheating generally considered to

be appropriate. Those with a high degree of religiosity would especially be expected to view cheating as unacceptable, since they believe that God's laws are immutable and unerring and that violating those laws would be offensive (Conroy & Emerson, 2004; Bloodgood, Turnley, & Mudrack, The Influence of Ethics Instruction, Religiosity, and Intelligence on Cheating Behavior. , 2008; Lowery & Beadles, 2009).

The reading and acceptance of religious beliefs should appeal to the religious imagination through theology and enhance ethical behavior (Magill, 1992) and idealism. Researchers (e.g. Barnett, Bass, & Brown, 1996; Singhapakdi, Vitell, & Franke, 1999; Vitell & Paolillo, 2003; Bloodgood, Turnley, & Mudrack, The Influence of Ethics Instruction, Religiosity, and Intelligence on Cheating Behavior. , 2008) have found that religiosity tends to have a positive influence on ethical idealism and a negative influence on ethical relativism. Ethical idealists acknowledge universal moral principles as absolute, so "thou shall not steal" is incontrovertible. Ethical relativism, on the other hand, feels that situational context must be considered and therefore there is no absolute right or wrong (Forsyth, 1980).

Religiosity was also been found to be negatively correlated with the acceptability of unethical behavior (Clark & Dawson, 1996; Bloodgood, Turnley, & Mudrack, The Influence of Ethics Instruction, Religiosity, and Intelligence on Cheating Behavior. , 2008; Fogel, McSween, & Dutt, Religious Affiliation and Ethics: Patterns Regarding Beliefs for Workplace Behaviours. , 2010). Parboteeah, et al. (2008) assert and work by Kurpis et al. (2008) supports that religiosity is much too complex to rely on overly simplistic measures such as church attendance or affiliation. Walker, et al. (2012) investigated the effects of religiosity on ethical behavior and found that general religiosity, a simple three item self report measure asking about frequency of attendance at church, frequency of prayer, and how religious they felt, was positively associated with the acceptability of ethically questionable situations, but this effect on ethical judgment was less than either age or gender.

Religiosity, while only seldom examined in cheating, has been linked with more developed ethical attitudes (Conroy & Emerson, 2004) and perceptions of ethical behavior (Allmon, Page, & Roberts, 2000). Kennedy and Lawton (1998), Allmon et al. (2000), Conroy and Emerson (2004), and Longenecker, et al. (2004) investigated the effects of religious intensity on one's willingness to sanction unethical behavior. All four studies found that respondents who are more religious are less likely to endorse unethical behavior than those who are less religious. Likewise, Vitell and Paolillo (2003) found that people with high degrees of religiosity are more likely to find ethically questionable consumer behavior inappropriate. Additionally, a more recent study showed students who reported higher religiosity and who participated more in religious activities were less likely to engage in unethical test taking practices (Burton, Talpade, & Haynes, 2011).

Findings indicate that people with a high degree of religiosity are inclined to believe traditional, conservative views of morality and are more likely to be ethical idealists. They therefore should be less inclined to cheat themselves or to find cheating behavior acceptable (Barnett, Bass, & Brown, 1996; Bloodgood, Turnley, & Mudrack, The Influence of Ethics Instruction, Religiosity, and Intelligence on Cheating Behavior. , 2008). This leads us to our third hypothesis which states that the religiosity of the student should have a negative influence on the individual's belief that cheating is acceptable.

*Hypothesis 3: The religiosity of a student should be negatively related to the individual student's perception of the acceptability of cheating.*

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design and Participants**

The research methodology utilized surveys presented to upper division undergraduate business students in two separate institutions of higher learning, one religiously affiliated and the other a public university. Participants completed questionnaires which assessed their perceptions of the acceptability of cheating, perceived honor code awareness and enforcement, religiosity, and various control variables. The total number of individuals completing the survey was 205, of these our final useable sample was 177

( $n=177$ ), due to listwise deletion of missing variables. The mean age of the participants was 24 (ranging from 20 to 54) and 48% of the respondents were female.

## **Procedure**

Students were informed that participation in the study was voluntary and that all results would be kept confidential and would not be associated with any of the classes. The participants were told that the study was examining academic perceptions and sought their perceptions about their specific institution. A series of questionnaire items measuring the variables in the study were then presented.

## **Measures**

### *Cheating*

Individuals were asked to indicate their level of agreement to questions about their perception of the acceptability of cheating. The 15 items ( $\alpha = .89$ ) were based on the scale developed by Bloodgood, et al. (2010) that captured dimensions of both passive and academic cheating. Following the original instructions, participants responded using a 5 point Likert-type scale that had the following verbal anchors: (1) Strongly Believe it is Not Wrong, (2) Believe it is Not Wrong, (3) No Opinion, (4) Believe it is Wrong, (5) Strongly Believe it is Wrong. These items were reverse coded after collection, as was done in the original study, so that higher scores reflected greater acceptance of cheating. The academic cheating items were asked if it is wrong to: (1) review previous portions of exams from a "test file" not approved by the instructor? (2) copy another classmate's paper during an exam? (3) use unauthorized notes (a "cheat sheet") during an exam? (4) allow another student to copy your homework or class assignment? (5) borrow parts of a case analysis that someone else had done or that you found on the web? (6) turn in another student's work as if it were your own? (7) provide material to an unapproved "test file"? (8) provide unauthorized assistance to a classmate? (9) copy a fellow student's homework or class assignment? (10) get unauthorized assistance from someone on a take-home test? (11) allow another student to copy from your paper on an exam? The passive cheating items were asked as it is wrong to: (1) not say anything if you receive a good or service that you have not paid for? (2) not say anything if you receive too large a credit on your utility/cable/phone bill? (3) not say anything when you are given too much change? (4) not say anything when the bill is miscalculated in your favor? The scales were combined and randomly shuffled on the instrument.

### *Honor Code*

The awareness and enforcement of an institution's honor code was measured using participants reported perceptions on a five item scale measuring awareness and enforcement of their institutions honor code ( $\alpha = .85$ ). Participants reported their level of agreement using 5 point Likert scale (1= Strongly Disagree; 5= Strongly Agree). Awareness of an institution's honor code was measured using a two item scale: (1) Everyone is aware of the specifics of [specific institution]'s Student Honor Code; (2) I am fully aware of what [specific institution]'s Student Honor Code requires. Enforcement of an institution's honor code was measured using a three item scale: (1) Violations of the Student Honor Code are severely punished; (2) [specific institution]'s Student Honor Code is strongly enforced; (3) Any violation of the Student Honor Code is going to be caught.

### *Religiosity*

While religiosity has been operationalized in many ways (see: Lowery & Beadles, 2009 for a fuller list) there is no universally accepted measure. For our study we measured religiosity using the three dimensions of belief, behavior, and affiliation or attachment suggested by (Cornwall, Albrecht, Cunningham, & Pitcher, 1986; Conroy & Emerson, 2004; Bjarnason, 2007) recoded into a binary scale. We believe that this captures the rich spectrum of the religiosity construct and not the simplistic conceptualizations criticized by Parboteeah, et al. (2008). In addition, we structured the items to be inclusive of most major religions and not a single denomination. The first subscale was a belief in a supernatural world or place and was measured using a (0) No or (1) Yes scale for the questions: Do you

believe in life after death?; Do you believe in Hell? The second behavior subscale ( $\alpha = .87$ ) was measured on a 1-6 frequency scale (1=Never, 2=Occasionally, 3=Monthly, 4=weekly, 5= Daily, 6=More than daily) using the items: How often do you attend religious services? How often do you pray? How often do you read the Bible/Koran/Torah/etc.? The final affiliation subscale ( $\alpha = .94$ ) was measured using a 5 point Likert scale (1=Not True, 3=Somewhat True, 5=Very True) using the items: I consider myself religious; Religion is important to me; My religious affiliation is strong. The measures were combined into a single measure ( $\alpha = .89$ ) by dummy coding the subscales as (0) for No and (1) for Yes. Specifically, subscale 2 was recoded so 1 and 2, non-specific time frames were coded as (0) and 3,4,5,6 time specific frames were coded as (1). Subscale 3 was recoded so that responses of 1 or 2 were recoded as (0) and responses of 3,4, or 5 were recoded as (1).

*Religious Affiliation*

Religious affiliation was measured using a dummy variable. The non-religiously affiliated institution was coded as (0, n=107) and the religiously affiliated institution was coded as (1, n=70).

*Control Variables*

Control variables included consisted of gender (1=Male, 2=Female) and GPA (0-4). Both measures were self report measures. Gender differences have been found in some studies of ethical attitudes and in levels of religiosity (Bloodgood, Turnley, & Mudrack, 2008). GPA has also been suggested to influence ethics and cheating (McCabe & Trevino, 1993).

**RESULTS**

**Relations Among the Variables**

Study results were generally positive for our hypothesized model. Support was found for the negative influence of an honor code, religiosity, and institutional religious affiliation on students’ belief in the acceptability of cheating. Complete methodology, results, implications, and details are discussed below.

**TABLE 1  
MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS, AND INTERCORRELATIONS AMONG VARIABLES**

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1)Gender	1.47	.50	--				
2) GPA	3.18	.42	.10	--			
3)Honor Code	3.37	.84	.26***	-.14	--		
4)Religiosity	.69	.31	-.14	.09	.14	--	
5)Religious Affil.	.40	.49	-.25***	.11	.17*	.41***	--
6)Cheating	2.06	.61	.16*	-.21**	-.15*	-.17*	-.19*

NOTE: n=177, \* p< .05, \*\* p< .01, \*\*\*p< .001

The means, standard deviations, and correlations among the variables in the study are shown in Table 1. As depicted in the table, individuals reported generally positive levels of awareness and enforcement of honor codes in the two institutions. Additionally, the significant correlation between the honor code and religious affiliation is shown to emerge through a t-test analysis, which indicated that there was a significantly higher level of awareness and enforcement of the honor code at the religious institution, coded as 1, (M=3.55, s=.77) than at the non-religious institution, coded as 0, (M=3.25, s=.87),  $t(175)=-$

2.303,  $p=.022$ ,  $\alpha=.05$ . Another interesting correlation is the negative correlation between gender and religious affiliation. Additional analysis revealed that the number of woman was significantly different between the two institutions with the religious institution being more male, ( $M=1.32$ ,  $s=.47$ ) than the non-religious institution, coded as 0, ( $M=1.58$ ,  $s=.50$ ), t-test (equal variances not assumed)  $t(156)=3.405$ ,  $p=.001$ ,  $\alpha=.05$ . As expected there was a high positive correlation between religious affiliation and religiousness. The significant negative correlation between the perceived acceptability of cheating and the presence and enforcement of an honor code is a hopeful sign that as students perceive the application of honor codes they also perceive that cheating is less acceptable.

The table indicates a negative correlation between awareness and enforcement of honor code and cheating. This negative correlation provides initial support for the relationship proposed in Hypothesis 1. The table also indicates that there was a significant negative correlation between religious affiliation and cheating, providing initial support for Hypotheses 2. The negative correlation between religiosity and cheating provides initial support for Hypothesis 3.

### Honor Code and Cheating

To examine the relationship proposed between honor code awareness and enforcement and the perceived acceptability of cheating (Hypotheses 1), a regression was conducted which regressed the two control variables as a block, followed by the entry of honor code on cheating. As shown in Table 2, honor code did have a slightly significant effect on cheating ( $\Delta R^2=.023$ ,  $F=4.346$ ,  $p=.039$ ) after controlling for gender and GPA. Based on this finding, Hypothesis 1 was supported by the data. An examination of the standardized beta coefficients in Table 2 (Appendix) suggests that gender had no significant effect on cheating ( $\beta=-.096$ ,  $p=.210$ ).

**TABLE 2**  
**HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION RESULTS FOR HONOR CODE ON CHEATING**

Variable	Acceptability of Cheating		
	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1			
Gender	-.116		
GPA	-.321**	.063**	.063**
Step 2			
Honor Code	-.114*	.086**	.023*

Note. \*  $p<.05$  \*\* $p<.01$ , \*\*\* $p<.001$   $n = 177$  because of to listwise deletion of missing data.

### Religious Affiliation and Cheating

To examine the relationship proposed between institutional religious affiliation and the perceived wrongness of cheating (Hypotheses 2), a regression was conducted which regressed the two control variables as a block, followed by the entry of the dummy coded religious affiliation on cheating. As shown in Table 3, religious affiliation did have a significant effect on cheating ( $\Delta R^2=.045$ ,  $F=8.647$ ,  $p=.004$ ) after controlling for gender and GPA. Based on this finding, Hypothesis 2 was supported by the data.

**TABLE 3**  
**HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION RESULTS FOR RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION ON CHEATING**

Variable	Acceptability of Cheating		
	$\beta$	R <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1			
Gender	-.238**		
GPA	-.239*	.063**	.063**
Step 2			
Religious Affiliation	-.272**	.108***	.045**

Note. \* p<.05 \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001 n = 177 because of to listwise deletion of missing data.

**Religiosity and Cheating**

To examine the relationship proposed between religiosity and the perceived wrongness of cheating (Hypotheses 3), a regression was conducted which regressed the two control variables as a block, followed by the entry of the measure of religiosity on cheating. As shown in Table 4, religiosity did have a significant effect on cheating ( $\Delta R^2=.029$ , F=5.579, p=.019) after controlling for gender and GPA. Based on this finding, Hypothesis 3 was supported by the data.

**TABLE 4**  
**HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION RESULTS FOR RELIGIOSITY ON CHEATING**

Variable	Acceptability of Cheating		
	$\beta$	R <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1			
Gender	-.199*		
GPA	-.257*	.063**	.063**
Step 2			
Religiosity	-.341*	.093**	.029*

Note. \* p<.05 \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001 n = 177 because of to listwise deletion of missing data.

**Overall Model and Cheating**

To examine how the relationships proposed between honor code, religiosity, and religious affiliation interact with the perceived acceptability of cheating, an extra regression was conducted which regressed the two control variables as a block, followed by the entry of the three measures as a block on cheating. As shown in Table 5, the variables when entered together have a significant effect on cheating ( $\Delta R^2=.061$ , F=4.00, p=.009), after controlling for gender and GPA. However the individual beta values of the non-control variables have dropped to non-significance. This indicates that there is an effect from the constructs, but it is comingled among them and not clearly identified in any one.

**TABLE 5**  
**HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION RESULTS FOR COMBINED VARIABLES ON CHEATING**

Variable	Acceptability of Cheating		
	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1			
Gender	-.204*		
GPA	-.260*	.063**	.063**
Step 2			
Honor Code	-.068		
Religiosity	-.190		
Religious Affil.	-.192	.125***	.061**

Note. \*  $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$   $n = 177$  because of to listwise deletion of missing data.

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that various contextual factors can significantly influence students' perceptions of the acceptability of cheating. Those participants who reported higher awareness and perceived enforcement of an honor code, were at a religiously affiliated institution, and tended to report higher levels of religiosity tended to report lower acceptability of cheating levels.

### Integration with Previous Literature

Some have suggested that the development, publication, and enforcement of honor codes helps to clarify and codify the organization's moral principles and standards of behavior (Pater & Van Gils, 2003). An ethics code has been found to emphasize an organization's ethical orientation (Fritz, Arnett, & Conkel, 1999) and the organizational importance of ethics (Adams, Tashchian, & Shore, 2001) Enforcement of an institutional honor code has also been found to be important (Wotruba, Chonko, & Loe, 2001; Malloy & Agarwal, 2003; Stevens, 1996; Kaye, 1992). Previous research has also found an honor code to significantly improve an institution's ethical work climate (Pauli, Arthur, & Price, 2012). The current research reinforces these contentions about the importance of the honor code on ethical perceptions and expands them to perceptions of the acceptability of cheating.

The current paper also supports the role that religion can play in reinforcing and supporting the perceptions of ethical behavior, specifically cheating. Students are constantly looking for shortcuts and quicker ways to complete tasks, so cheating is a natural result. Religiosity, by developing more fully understood ethical attitudes (Conroy & Emerson, 2004) and perceptions of ethical behavior (Allmon, Page, & Roberts, 2000), clarifies the wrongness of cheating for students. The current results help us to understand that students who report higher religiosity and participated more in religious activities are less likely to engage in unethical test taking practices (Burton, Talpade, & Haynes, 2011), because they simply understand that cheating is wrong and no amount of relativistic reasoning (Singhapakdi, Vitell, & Franke, 1999) will make it right. The role of the institution's religious affiliation would appear to serve to reinforce the basic beliefs of the individual and reinforce them with institutional structures and processes. An institution founded on religious traditions and theology (Magill, 1992) is then able to further enhance ethical behavior or in this case reduce the perceived acceptability of cheating.

## Strengths and Limitations

We feel this study has several strengths, mainly due to its design. The study participants were business students located at two regionally and socially diverse institutions. While the measures for awareness and enforcement of the honor code were self-reported, the presence of an honor code was verified through a separate confirmation by the main authors using the institutions' websites and catalogs. The study used not just a single measure of the presence of an honor code, but rather the students' awareness of the code and its enforcement. Therefore, the study captures not simply the existence of an honor code, but rather the students' perceptions of that honor code as it impacts their institution and activities, like cheating. This supports the finding of the institutions honor code having an impact not just on some anonymous measure of cheating, but rather on the student's perception about the acceptability of specific cheating behavior.

The use of the Bloodgood, et al. (2010) cheating measure also provided us with a richer measure of cheating for our study. The measure is broader and richer than just a single item or comment. The combination of both active and passive cheating within the scale allowed us to consider cheating in a more holistic sense. Acceptability of cheating is not a single event construct nor a purely academic experience measure and therefore measures must be robust and attempt to capture this more amorphous construct. The inclusion of non-academic cheating, or passive cheating, within the construct provides a fuller understanding of the behaviors and perceptions that could be impacted by our constructs.

One limitation of this study was the use of students. It is suggested that students are the primary focus of the research and are thus an appropriate sample. Cheating, honor codes, and religious institutional influences are also strongly tied to the world of experiences and activities lived by students. Students therefore are a natural subject to study the practical application, effect, and awareness of an institution's honor code. Future research should examine the generalizability of the findings to a non-student sample.

## CONCLUSION

Understanding the contextual dimensions and characteristics that affect why students perceive cheating as acceptable within institutions allows for the consideration of means and methods to help organizations develop more sophisticated and preferred types of ethic education and cheating prevention. Specifically this study provides a better understanding of the relationship between academic honor codes, religious affiliations, religiosity and students' perceptions about cheating, which helps clarify how policies, institutional cultures, and enforcement can shape and influence cheating within academic institutions.

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