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MOTIVES OF CHEATING AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

Motives of Cheating among Secondary School Students:

The Role of Self Efficacy, Peer Attitudes and behavior

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Chapter 1 described the limitations of previous research on academic dishonesty that stimulated this research study. The purposes of study, research questions, definition of terms and significance of this study were all included in this chapter.

#### **Background**

Over the years, research on academic dishonesty has been dominated by attempts to examine two very practical aspects which are the characteristics of cheaters and the effectiveness of deterrents to academic dishonesty. In exploring these research areas, self-reported type of questionnaires were most frequently utilized to quantitatively assess factors associated with cheating. Taylor, Pogrebin and Dodge (2003, p. 403) commented that “the existing literature, however, lacks in-depth, qualitative studies on academic dishonesty”. Specifically, little has been conducted to qualitatively assess whether self-efficacy and peers affect the likelihood of students engaging in academic dishonesty.

The level of participants being studied was another major limitation of previous research. Most of the studies have focused on cheating found in tertiary education, often referred as higher education in terms of global perspective, while relatively few studies have examined this phenomenon in secondary education level. In addition, there is no doubt that most researches on academic dishonesty have been confined to American contexts which raised doubts whether findings were applicable and comparable to a local context. At the same time, Hong Kong Education sector seems to have made limited

attempts in addressing the increasingly widespread of academic dishonest. Apparently, the significance of academic integrity has not been properly acknowledged and thus, research on cheating in Hong Kong does not exist.

Taking into account that similar study is lacking, the present paper examines cheating in classroom-based assessment modes, frequently referred as examinations, in-class tests and homework, which are traditionally considered as fair forms of assessment in Hong Kong secondary schools.

#### Purpose of study

The purpose of study is threefold: firstly, to determine the effect of peer attitudes and behavior on the likelihood of cheating behavior; secondly, to establish the significance of self efficacy in promoting academic integrity; lastly, to ascertain the effective ways of deterring academic dishonesty.

#### Research Questions

The primary questions this research addresses are as follows:

1. How does peer influence affect the likelihood of cheating?
2. How does the level of self- efficacy affect the engagement in cheating behavior?

#### Definition of terms

The following definitions and pertinent terms are established for consistent reference and understanding throughout this research:



1. Academic dishonesty – “all forms of cheating on tests or other academic assignments and plagiarism” (Anderman and Murdock, 2007, p. 83).
2. Cheating - refers to “any action that violates the established rules governing the administration of a test or the completion of an assignment; any behavior that gives one student an unfair advantage over other students on a test or assignment; or any action that decreases the accuracy of the intended inferences arising from a student’s performance on a test or assignment” (Cizek, 2003, p. 3).
3. Self efficacy – a person’s expectation or judgment of how well or how poorly he or she will cope with a situation, given the skills one possesses and the circumstances one faces (Bandura, 1986).

### Overview of study

This study investigated the behavior and beliefs of local secondary school students with regard to academic dishonesty. Chapter 1 provided a background of the study by stating limitations of relevant past research, purpose of this study, research questions, pertinent definitions as well as significance, limitations and assumptions of this study.

A review of the related literature was provided in Chapter 2. The review was presented in two major sections that address peer influence and self efficacy with regard to cheating.

Chapter 3 described the methodology of the study, the study instrument, the research design, and the procedure for obtaining the research data.

Chapter 4 presented the results of the data analysis for the statistical tests that were conducted for each research question.

Chapter 5 included a summary of findings based on the data analysis, conclusions, and recommendations for others and for further research.

### Significance of study

#### *Prevalence of students' cheating*

The Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority revealed a recent case in which a student made use of mobile phone to surf the internet for an answer during a public examination (HKEAA, 2006). Though the cases revealed were not disturbing at all and the authority concluded that there was “no evidence of widespread cheating”. The students' attempt to cheat as disclosed might only be a tip of the iceberg which, therefore, called for educators' concern.

A recent survey (Sing Tao, 2008) conducted on more than 3,000 Primary Four to Form Seven students reaffirmed that the prevalence of cheating among secondary students is worth paying attention to given that more than one of five students admitted cheating on examinations. To make the matter worse, more than half of the participants would not report cheating even if they had witnessed it. Students' reluctance to report peer cheating indicated the possibility of underestimation of cheating rates among students.

These findings were consistent with the result from the survey conducted by the Hong Kong Women Teachers' Organization (2008). They brought further evidence that a

substantial portion of students had developed a habit of copying homework from their peers based on the data that thirty percent of students copied classmates' homework if they had forgotten to do it. The above all implied a need to explore the motives of cheating among secondary students.

### *Consequences of cheating*

The significance of conducting a research on the motives of cheating lies in the negative impact of academic dishonesty on certain aspects. From a pragmatic perspective, cheating undermines the use of assessment data as both indicator of student learning and sources of feedback to teachers for instructional planning (Anderman & Murdock, 2007). In terms of a social perspective, "the cheating learned or reinforced in school settings is related to a person's subsequent occupational or civic performance"; in short, it is "habit forming" (Cizek, 2003). The consequence of cheating on the whole of education system was suggested by Cizek (2003, p.36) as "erosion of the respect, trust, sense of community, and even student motivation for learning".

### *Concern from education sector in Hong Kong*

The magnitude of the problem of academic dishonesty raised public concern over this issue. As a response to the growing concern about ethics in education from parents and the general public, the newly implemented School Based Assessment was "designed in ways that students' work is to be done in class under direct teacher supervision" (Education Bureau, 2007). This approach indicates the awareness and determination of the education sector to combat cheating among secondary school students under the new curriculum system.

### Limitation of the study

The population of this study was limited to students who are from local band 2 school with Chinese as a medium of instruction. With such a limited sampling, the generalizability to the whole secondary school population was no doubt low.

### Assumptions

The following assumptions are made as foundational to the investigation into the problem:

1. The survey participants will respond honestly and thoughtfully about their behaviors and beliefs concerning academic dishonesty.
2. A reliable method for understanding the frequency and types of engagement in academic dishonesty of students themselves and their peers is through a self-reporting survey of students.
3. Collection and analysis of survey data are reliable methods for conducting qualitative research.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review included previous research findings and conclusions on the interplay among contextual and psychological variables and academic dishonesty.

#### Background

The growing recognition that academic dishonesty as a major cross cultural problem urged educators and researchers to research various aspects of academic dishonesty. The primary purpose of these studies has been to determine the prevalence and range of problem, institutional and student demographics characteristics associated with cheating, reasons students given for cheating which all constitute to how cheating can be prevented.

#### Contextual Variables

##### *Peers' attitude towards academic dishonesty*

The relationship between students' beliefs about their peers' attitudes toward cheating and the likelihood of their engagement in dishonest behaviors was thoroughly explored by Anderman and Murdock (2007). They found students with a perceived belief that their peers condemned academic dishonesty were less likely to cheat. This result led to their (2007, p.111) conclusion that "peer disapproval is the most important determinant of changes in cheating behavior".

Despite the fact that peer disapproval might deter cheating, Jendrek (1992) found

students were rather reluctant to express their disapproval of cheating as evidenced from their unwillingness to report the incident to authority figure or stop the cheaters. The reluctance to report peer cheating was further elaborated in the next section. On one hand, expressing disapproval about academic dishonesty might deter it; on the other hand, the peer attitudes toward the acceptability of academic dishonesty were dependent upon the perceived peer “culture of academic dishonesty”. Given the interrelated nature between peers’ attitude and cheating behavior, Whitney and Spiegel (2002) believed that students have the capacity to help prevent academic dishonesty by expressing disapproval of it.

#### *Peer reporting*

A considerable amount of studies revealed students’ reluctance to report witnessed cheating behavior and the reasons behind it (Jendrek, 1992; McCabe et al., 1999). In Jendrek’s study, it was found that 61% of the sample reported having personally observed some form of cheating, but that 55% said they ignored it. Although an additional 39% said that they discussed the incident with students other than the cheater, only 5% said they told the cheater that they disapproved of the behavior. The majority of the respondents reported a “feeling of anger or disgust but nonetheless made no report”, while the rest expressed an indifferent emotional response towards the cheating incident. A variety of reasons were given for not reporting cheaters, ranges from response like “none of my business” to fear of making an enemy and even conflicting demands of loyalty posed by friendship if the cheater is a friend (McCabe et al., 1999).

An explanation was put forward by Trevino and Victor (1991) for understanding the phenomenon that students had no intention of confronting their peers about their

dishonesty and informing the authority figure about what was occurring. They proposed that “groups tend to create norms that support in- group loyalty”. These norms were significant in ensuring “group cohesiveness and fostering feelings of security”. Under these norms, peer reporting represented “a violation of group norms regarding loyalty which was likely for the peer reporters to face condemnation and even expulsion from the group” (p.56).

### *Peer cheating*

Here, peer cheating represented both perceived norm of cheating and actual cheating rates. In understanding the influence of peer behavior on cheating, Jordan (2001) conducted a research and findings from his studies suggested that cheaters believed that more students engaged in cheating behaviors than did non-cheaters. These findings were consistent with previous research on the importance of peer norms for understanding, and perhaps influencing, cheating behavior (Whitley, 1998).

A noticeable number of college students permitted other students to copy from them during an exam, which was regarded as a form of cheating. When researcher asked why they allowed this to happen, the top reasons given included: “they might let me cheat off them sometime, I wouldn’t want them to be mad at me, I know they needed to be good in order to pass the exam” (Cizek, 1999).

Several explanations for the apparent gap between cheaters and non- cheaters’ estimation of cheating rates have been suggested by researchers. First, the higher estimation by cheaters implied their attempts in preserving their self- image which is known as false consensus effect. The perceived cheating culture is a reflection that

students look to their peers for cues as to what behaviors are normative at their institutions (McCabe et al. 1999). This finding was explained by social comparison Theory, which proposed that people often look to others to validate their own attitudes and beliefs.

The more the cheaters believed the rest were cheaters, the more they believed cheating was acceptable which constituted the peer pressure to cheat. The explanation was consistent with McCabe et al.'s (2001) study which found peer behavior to be an important influence on academic dishonesty. As a result of being in a social context where norm of cheating is acceptable, cheaters are more likely to learn the behavior. Such relationship is supported by social learning theory (Bandura, 1986) which emphasized that much of the deviant behavior is learned through the influence of example.

### Psychological variable

#### *Self efficacy*

Several correlational studies have directly examined self-efficacy beliefs in relation to cheating behavior. For example, Murdock et al. (2001) reported an inverse relation between cheating and academic self-efficacy for middle school students, even after controlling personal goals, classroom goal structures, and other aspects of the classroom environment. Similar relations between self-efficacy and cheating have been reported in college samples (Finn & Frone, 2004). Other studies have linked cheating to various emotional arousals like fear of failure, test anxiety and worrying about one's performance (Anderman et al., 2007), all of which served as low efficacy cues.



The inverse relationship between academic efficacy and cheating was explained by Murdock et al. (2002) who proposed that “doubting one’s ability to bring about a desired result might lead to reliance on other strategies for success”, specifically, referring to cheating. According to Murdock, low efficacy breeds high avoidance whereas self- efficacious students undertake difficult and challenging tasks more readily. By avoiding the task, the cheaters succeed in guarding self against being in a situation that can potentially overwhelm, stress, confuse, frustrate and embarrass the self.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In this chapter, the researcher described how the research was designed and conducted. The description included details from the design of questionnaire and the study population to the data collection procedures and analysis.

#### Research design

This research project studied cheating behaviors in traditional classroom contexts employing examinations and homework as assessment instruments of students' ability as self-reported by secondary students. The above mentioned purpose fit into the category of explanatory studies which were designed 'to explain the forces causing the phenomenon in question and to identify plausible causal networks shaping the phenomenon' (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Thus, the explanatory nature of this particular study incorporated the use of surveys analysis other than direct observation which was fairly inaccurate in inferring cheating behavior. This study implemented qualitative methodology which provides for in-depth study of 'things in their natural settings' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) and was conducted using questionnaire methodology, which followed to the accepted practices in educational research and served to be the most common and effective tool for collecting sensitive data including cheating.

The questionnaire (Appendix A) was self-designed based upon previous similar studies (Lathrop & Foss, 2005; McCabe, 1992) and was designed to elicit responses to questions about demographics, involvement in academic dishonesty in take-home

assignment and examinations and elaborate answers on reasons for academic dishonesty.

### Questionnaire Design

A survey was generated to address the research questions. The components of the survey aimed at determining the demographic characteristics of the population, the extent of engagement in academic dishonesty, perception of influence of psychological and contextual factors on cheating, self efficacy and peer influence respectively. The session on demographic characteristics was followed immediately by a list of cheating behaviors which were selected based on definitions from relevant literature (McCabe & Trevino, 1993; McCabe, 2001). The dominant form of questions was open-ended which served to maximize participants' elaboration on domains on self efficacy and peer influence including perceived difficulty of given task, level of confidence as well as peer attitudes and behaviors.

### Study population

The data for this research were derived from questionnaire responses of secondary school student who were representatives of local band 2 school students. One reason why the researcher chose this particular band 2 school was because it lacked a comprehensive detection of students' academic dishonest behavior. The research project was expected to determine strategies for detecting and preventing cheating based upon students' response.

Participants were of both junior and senior grade and considered to be in the top 20% in terms of academic achievement within their respective forms. The sample of 100 students was selected based on the suitability of population for qualitative research in

which only a small number of participants are recruited to contribute to a study. Using a small sample enables researcher to study each person's words and its meanings in greater details in order to produce conclusion which are rich with thick description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All student participants were contacted as a group in order to inform them of the purpose of the study, request their participation, assure them confidentiality and obtain informed consent.

The participants included 92 students of whom female and male are coincidentally in balanced ratio of which each took up 50%. Out of a sample of 92 students chosen, junior students make up 42% while 58% were senior. Though this was a moderately low response rate, it resembled the response rates obtained by McCabe (2001) on related research, and the sample was fairly representative of the secondary school population in terms of studies, gender and subjects taken.

#### Survey administration and Data collection procedures

The procedure for administration of the survey and collection of the data was submitted to the principal and the home-room teachers of the corresponding classes for approval and coordination (Appendix B). Upon approval of the research project, the questionnaire instrument was distributed to participants in person during an English lesson. A verbal and written notification regarding the administration of the survey, the collection and analysis of the data, possible uses of the data and most important of all, the consent form (Appendix C) for assuring of anonymity was given to them prior to the completion of the questionnaire. Direct translation of questionnaire items was delivered

upon request of respondents. The submission of questionnaire requires students to hand in directly to the teacher-in-charge to avoid any unnecessary disclosure or loss of data.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis was based on the transcribed typed version of participants' responses on questionnaire. By employing grounded theory proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in data analysis of qualitative methodology, the transcribed data was first categorized and labeled, known as the process of open coding, which was for further generation of concepts and identification of relationship among components in axial coding stage. Finally, the data were categorized into conceptual domains of self efficacy and peer influence including perceived level of difficulty, level of confidence, peer attitudes and behaviors. The processes of open and axial coding were emerged with a need to "discover theory from data" as "grounded theory focus on theory confirmation, a process of testing hypotheses developed from previous theories, rather than on theory generation" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Finally, the results of this study were reported in narrative statements which encapsulated the group's construction of academic dishonesty. These statements included rich descriptions of the categories that evolved from the data analysis, a compilation of detailed information about participants' meaning-making, and quotes as supportive evidence.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS**

The results of data analysis from the respondents to the survey on academic dishonesty were presented in this chapter. A description of response rate and respondent demographics were followed by the results addressing each research question and related domains of self- efficacy and peer influence.

#### **Response rate**

The questionnaire was made available to students of different grades partially and randomly selected during the second semester from March 9 through March 28. During the collection period, 100 submissions of questionnaire were recorded. Each submission was then carefully examined by the researcher and questionnaires that were all blank and with apparent standardized answers were considered as invalid cases. In this research, standardized answers made up of 4% of the total questionnaire responses. The response rate based on the total questionnaire distributed was 92% while the remaining was regarded as invalid cases.

#### **Reported Academic Dishonesty Rates**

The data analysis was based on the responses to different forms of academic dishonesty that have been identified in the literature. Students responded by putting a tick next to the cheating behavior they had engaged. The types of cheating behaviors listed in questionnaire were further subdivided into academic dishonesty in test, academic dishonesty in out-of-class assignments and academic dishonesty in high- stake

examinations, all of which reflected a continuum of behaviors that ranged from less severe to more severe.

As hypothesized, the responses represented the general population of secondary school students, the overall statistics sufficiently revealed the prevalence and extensiveness of academic dishonesty in secondary schools. 6% of the students reported that they had never engaged in any of the 9 listed cheating behaviors, whereas, over 90% admitted to at least one incident of cheating. The extent to which academic dishonesty occurred might be a shock but, by no means, to be overlooked by educators.

Of all the cheating behavior participants engaged, the highest rate of academic dishonesty was found in out-of- class assignments, cheating in test came next and the least reported cheating behavior was found in high- stake examinations. The significant gap between cheating in out- of- class assignments and examinations might be explained by the perception of the severity of assessment modes. Apparently, high- stake examination as a form of assessment was perceived to be an important and reliable tool for assessment, which fostered students to hold responsible for their behavior.

#### Perception of situational experiences

Participants' perception of situational experiences was assessed through eliciting their personal attitudes and views towards specific situational experiences, in these cases, high- stake examinations, tests and assignments. From the data collected on question items 7 and 8, perspectives on situational experiences were largely subdivided into three emotional extremes: like, neutral and dislike.

Only 10% of the respondents, as illustrated in chart 2 in Appendix D, did not

consider taking examination as stressful and even showed a positive attitude. One senior student, who reported rare engagement in academic dishonesty, described examination as follows:

“Examination reinforces acquired knowledge and it provides an opportunity for us to revise which I enjoy a lot”.

A male student also described examination similarly as a constructive experience:

“Examination is a way to increase knowledge and to me, the stress serves as a source of motivation”.

Among the 80% of respondents, from chart 2 in Appendix D, considering taking examination as stressful, most of them related the source of pressure with three primary groups: parental, self and peers. One senior student highlighted how parental pressure particularly reinforced his cheating behavior:

“I experience immense parental pressure on the need to be academically successful to an extent that I always don’t have enough time to sleep and this leads to poor quality of sleeping”.

Another female student explained how she perceived peers as a cause of pressure to succeed:

“Even though I put effort in revising, I still could not perform academically better than my peers and I often feel lag behind”.

Remarks in questionnaire items 7 and 8, as shown in chart.4 and 5 in appendix D, reflected that 57% of respondents displayed negative view regarding homework, similar to that of 49% of respondents disliked examinations. A senior student, whose responses



represented the comments from both “dislike” group, viewed both homework and high-stake examination as necessary and constructive experiences:

“The more we work hard on homework, the more it is useful for us to acquire knowledge; simultaneously examination is a chance for us to assess our acquired knowledge on different domains”.

A minority group of 28% students held an indifferent attitude towards the high-stake examinations. One student noted that:

“These assessments come with our responsibility as students and therefore, are unavoidable”.

However, a significant proportion of 49% participants indicated a dislike feeling towards high-stake examination by describing it as worthless and time-consuming. One student gave a seemingly sensible argument for the distressing nature of assessment:

“The examination itself is ridiculous and is even a torture to us, given that all matter is marks and grading. The result exerts only a labeling effect on students, which in turn become a source of pressure”.

### Self- efficacy

The level of self- efficacy was determined by having students to judge their overall academic performance and their level of confidence towards a specific task. Consistent with the past research on the role of self- efficacy in the promotion of cheating (Murdock et al, 2001; Cizek 1999), we found a significant inverse relationship between academic self- efficacy and cheating that was further supported by Finn & Frone’s (2004)

conclusion that cheating was higher for students with lower levels of self- efficacy regardless of performance level. This inverse relationship was evident in 95% of the participants, referred in chart 3. When asked whether they would cheat in cases where they had more confidence in succeeding, a considerable amount of students responded “No” to the question. One student gave a thorough explanation behind her choice. She said:

“Having more confidence means I have the knowledge required and cheating in this case is not necessary. Moreover, the others might have inaccurate answers, so in this case, cheating is not a reliable means”.

Among the participants responding with “No” to the question, 5% displayed a consistent honest personality regardless of the contextual or psychological factors, viewing cheating as follows:

“Cheating is an unfair means that exploits the rights of the rest while for those cheaters; satisfaction is not likely to arise because they are not using their own strengths”.

For the rest of the respondents indicating “yes” to questionnaire item 6, cheating seemed to be an effective way to ensure a pass or even a good grade. The pressure to succeed academically might be so overwhelming that they chose to cheat despite of the confidence. The way an efficacious participant related her motive to cheat with the role of examination system was noteworthy:

“The school values merely the results but not the learning process. So, I don’t care how I achieve the desired result even if I cheat. To me, only the outcome itself

matters”.

### Peer reporting

Not surprisingly, 94% of respondents witnessed peer cheating in class as observed from chart 6. Yet, despite the pervasiveness of academic dishonesty, 79% of participants made no attempts to prevent it. When asked how they responded to peer cheating, the norm of not disclosing those who cheat took over, with over half of the respondents decided to keep silence. A senior student discussed the possible undesirable consequences of revealing the case to teachers or confronting with the cheaters:

“Informing the authority about who cheat or is likely to be hated by close friends and make enemy, this act interferes with my interpersonal relationship”.

To those who viewed commitment as the prime criteria of being a member of the peer group, anyone who reported cheating were being regarded as ‘squealers’. To make matter worse, commitment as friends served as an excuse for 14% of participants to comply with cheaters:

“Report of peer cheating is likely to result in being despised or disliked by friends and being regarded as squealers. Usually, I follow what the cheaters do in order to befriend with them”.

Some reporters of peer cheating, comprising of 3% of the total respondents, touched upon the commitment criteria when they disclosed cheaters’ dishonest act. Only in cases where they regarded cheaters as enemies that commitment as friends was not applicable. Therefore, report of academic dishonesty was evident in those who viewed cheaters as

enemies. For the rest of the respondents among those who had witnessed peer cheating, unlike those who viewed cheaters as enemies, they showed genuine signs of justice and academic integrity by requesting the cheaters to stop. A female student explained what motivated her to discourage cheaters from cheating:

“When I see others cheat, it frustrates me and those who spend time in revising. I will definitely stop them in order to be fair to those who use their own efforts”.

#### Observation of peer cheating

Another issue that surfaced was the influence of observational peer cheating. Please refer to chart.7 and 8 (Appendix D) for the results below. From this research, one half of the respondents claimed that they wouldn't cheat even if they knew some of their classmates cheat. Reasons ranged from the honest and confident attitude to unwillingness to be part of the cheater group. A senior student exhibited a mature and sensible rationale for maintaining academically honest:

“Following blindly what the cheaters did cause a feeling of guilt; I don't think I will have a sense of satisfaction even if I succeed with cheating.

Whereas, a minor proportion of 30% students claimed that they would follow the norm of cheating in view that the assessment was no longer a fair instrument.

“Observing peer cheating reinforces the motives to cheat because accompany of peers seems to me that it is less risky to be punished and most importantly, the assessment system is not fair already”.

Under the influence of peer cheating, the motives to cheat depended on personal factor

like level of familiarity towards examination and external factors like the importance of assessment modes and the likelihood of being caught cheating.

Given a hypothetical situation that no one cheated in class, 92% of participants undoubtedly chose not to cheat, considering a number of factors like fear of authority, lack of a “leader”, being fair to others and preserving the group image as a whole. One student explained her choice in terms of group normative behavior and observational learning.

“If none of your friends cheat, the only way to be part of the group is by following the norm of honesty so that a positive image as a group can be maintained. When no one cheats, it simply signifies that it is risky to cheat”.

#### Peer disapproval

To account for how peer exerted influence on cheating and how peers can deter cheating, the perception on those who cheat and who do not cheat were worth considering. Extreme and contradictory views towards non- cheaters were revealed in questionnaire item 13 and chart.10 (Appendix D). 76% of the participants described non-cheaters as smart, confident and responsible students, on the contrary, 12% expressed a completely conflicting perception, seeing the non- cheaters as hypocrites and inflexible.

Views toward cheaters were inquired in questionnaire item 15 and chart.12 (Appendix D). To our surprise, merely 29% of respondents held a negative attitude towards cheaters who were being portrayed as lazy and hateful. For the rest of the respondents, 41% held a neutral attitude, reflected by the responses of the following

participant:

“I don’t care about whether and why they cheat as long as their behaviors do not affect me”.

Interestingly, a small proportion of 30% of respondents displayed a liking feeling towards cheaters and regarded them as smart and brave, most importantly, the role of the cheater as a significant member of the group was particularly highlighted by a respondent.

“I feel proud of the cheaters and I consider them as significant members of ours”.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Chapter Five included an extensive elaboration on the data by describing how the findings reflected in Chapter Four were interconnected to inform the research questions. This chapter also justified the research findings with reference to literature review.

#### Self efficacy

To determine the role of self –efficacy in the promotion of academic dishonesty, the measurement and implications of level of self – efficacy and the generality of self- efficacy have to be taken into account. With regard to the level of self- efficacy, the researcher turned to Murdock, Hale and Weber’s (2001) assertion of low self- efficacy. According to them (2001, p.108), low self-efficacy beliefs signified “a lack of belief in being able to personally carry out the tasks necessary for high performance”. The lack of self- efficacy beliefs, consequently, brought about a variety of negative motivational outcomes, including avoidance of overwhelming activities, low persistence, and high level of anxiety while on task (Schunk, 1991).

Since level of self- efficacy depended on the difficulty of a particular task, participants were asked to judge the nature of high- stake examinations and homework in questionnaire items 7 and 8 in order to find out their levels of self- efficacy. From the responses indicated on questionnaire items 7 and 8, about 50% of participants perceived both of the given tasks as challenging which led to the implication that they had lower self- efficacy. This belief was directly predictive of the choice of activities undertaken.

This study revealed that inefficacious students undertook challenging tasks less readily than did efficacious students. In terms of engagement in academic dishonesty, the 50% of inefficacious respondents were more prone to cheating.

Another important property of self- efficacy was generality which was defined as “the transferability of self- efficacy beliefs across activities” (Zimmerman 2000). According to self efficacy theorists, low generality signified that self- efficacy belief was highly task specific. In other words, the belief was solely dependent on the given situational circumstances. The more a student experienced a fragile self- efficacy when completing a specific task, the more likely was the engagement in cheating. Therefore, this study grounded the measurement of self- efficacy on specific assessment instruments. Given a consistent response on the nature of assessment evident in this research, students’ intention of avoiding to engage directly with the potentially stressful and unpredictable performance by resorting to cheating was understandable.

Bandura (1997) further proposed that low levels of self- efficacy within a particular domain may yield a greater long- term likelihood of the occurrence of cheating within that domain. To put in simple, inefficacious students were likely to involve in the vicious cycle of cheating in the specific assessment modes.

Bandura’s (1986) social learning theory provided some insights into why students with low self- efficacy irrespective of academic performance may be motivated to cheat. Indeed, inefficacious students doubted their intrinsic ability to cope with the task before them, so their desire of either to raise the grades or to maintain their grades might lead to reliance on other strategies for success as an alternative for avoidance of performance



situation. Thus, an implication on deterrent of cheating was drawn from the above explanation: 'high academic self- efficacy represented a protective factor that interacted with high performance to reduce the likelihood of cheating'.

### Peer reporting

It was obvious from the respondents who participated in this research that cheating was widespread in classroom. Even though the prevalent rate of cheating was as alarming as 90%, it was hardly in line with the participants' reporting rate which was only 3%. Trevino and Victor (1991, p.54) offered a meaningful explanation for why resistance of peer reporting exists:

“Peer reporting is generally discouraged within groups, because groups tend to create norm that support in- group loyalty. These norms can be highly adaptive, ensuring group cohesiveness and fostering feelings of security”.

When any group members engaged in misconduct, other group members preferred handling the situation within the group and often reacted negatively when members venture outside the group to report the misconduct (Trevino & Victor, 1991). The results from data analysis showed uniformity with their elaboration on norms discouraging peer reporting. The majority of respondents chose either to persuade the cheater to stop or ignore the cheating behavior despite revealing intense negative emotion towards the dishonest act. Obviously, under the influence of norms discouraging peer reporting, the negative attitudes and emotion experienced by potential peer reporters did not appear to play a role in deterring the cheaters from further misconduct.

Given the reluctance of peer reporting, McCabe, Trevino and Butterfield (2001) proposed creating normative counter- pressures which promote peer- reporting of cheating behavior. Building upon role responsibility, it stated that “peer reporting is likely to occur where peer reporting is expected as part of one’s role responsibility”. Simply speaking, the greater the role responsibility a student perceived to have, the higher the inclination to report cheating behavior among peers. In addition, the clear definition of peer reporting as part of one’s role guaranteed students’ acknowledgment of the explicit guidance regarding the expected and appropriate behavior.

With the existence of role responsibility, the practice of peer reporting was anticipated to override the practice of code of silence. Therefore, in deterring academic dishonesty, educators must foster a sense of responsibility among students by encouraging the report of any violation of rules. This will serve as a counter- pressure to the strong norms supporting in group loyalty.

#### Peer behavior

The role of peer behavior on promotion of cheating was still undetermined as a balanced ratio was observed between those who followed suit the norm of cheating and those who remained academically honest regardless of peer behavior. The results reflected a certain extent of compatibility with social learning theory and differential association theory. These theories emphasized that much of human behavior is learned through the influence of example (Bandura, 1986) and that deviant behavior is influenced by close association with others involved in deviance respectively. In other words,

dishonesty is learned rather than innate.

From data analysis on influence of peer behavior as reflected in questionnaire items 10 and 11, two distinctive behaviors were observed among respondents when witnessing peer cheating. This distinction was comprehensible with regard to the intimacy of relationship between the witnesses and cheaters. As exemplified by differential association theory, witnesses' acquisition of deviant behavior was dependent upon the association with cheaters. Therefore, in this research study, respondents who indicated the decision of following the norm of cheating were likely to have close association with cheaters than do those who decided not to cheat.

An alternative justification for the above distinction was put forward by McCabe and Trevino (1993) who proposed incorporating rewards of cheating as an essential element preceding the learning of cheating. They (1993, p. 533) claimed that peer behavior was not simply an important influence on academic dishonesty, but specifically a risk factor for learning to cheat. Hence, merely witnessing cheating was not enough to cause witnessing respondents to cheat. In this study, 58% of participants refused to cheat even while observing peer cheating for the reason of lacking rewards. These 'witnesses' might not yet be aware of the 'reward' of cheating, which was represented by cheaters succeeded in cheating without being disclosed. Therefore, they would rather make a decision not to take risk of being reported as cheaters.

Coincidentally, the rationales given by those who modeled the cheating behavior from their peers showed consistency with the above theoretical explanation. As shown in this study, respondents contributed their peer modeling of cheating to the successes

brought about by cheating, such as: getting a good grade, escaping unnoticed. As a conclusion, seeing one's cheat successfully increased the tendency of the observers to behave in similar ways. The above theories regarding association between peer behavior and cheating implied that having immediate negative consequences on cheating is of utmost importance in creating a culture of academic integrity.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

Chapter 6 provided a summary of findings and implications evolved out of chapter 5. The recommendations for further research were presented in this chapter as well.

#### Summary of findings

This purpose of the study was to determine the role of self- efficacy on the behavior of cheating. Findings suggested that self- efficacy was inversely correlated with academic dishonesty. These findings reminded educators of their responsibilities in employing self- efficacy raising strategies, such as setting reasonable levels of acceptable performance and rewarding students at all achievement levels for hard work and learning (Finn & Frone, 2001). These strategies were believed to reduce cheating among students who perceived themselves as at risk for failure.

Another purpose of this research was to determine how peer exerted influence on cheating behavior. Data reflected that peers were clearly at a position to detect academic dishonesty in traditional classroom context. Thereby, educators should create norms encouraging peer reporting by adopting an official code of reporting, often referred globally as honor codes environment (McCabe et al., 2001). Under these honor codes environments, role responsibility for peer reporting was higher and the culture of academic integrity was stronger. In honor code environments, we would expect greater commitment to and involvement in the academic environment and greater acceptance of

moral validity in norms against cheating.

### Recommendations for further research

This research aimed at drawing educators' attention to the possible ways of tackling the widespread of academic dishonesty and stimulating further in- depth research into the issue of academic dishonesty. As mentioned in the limitations of this study, the findings were limited to the population enrolled in that particular secondary school in determining the role of self efficacy and peer in promoting a culture of academic integrity . It would be advantageous for researchers to extend these findings by including randomly selected samples from various bandings of local secondary schools so as to better understand interplay between these domains and academic dishonesty and promoting a culture of academic dishonesty. Though research into the role of self- efficacy and peer has been widely pursued, comprehensive study which incorporates contextual variables such as, classroom settings and institutes' attitudes and policy toward cheating is still overlooked and thus, recommended for further research. Evidence from previous research suggested that quantitative research has taken precedence over qualitative study. Therefore, it is recommended that qualitative epistemology is conducted in order to gain a deeper understanding of the reasons behind student perceptions.

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## APPENDIX A

## STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE INSTRUMENT

**Motives of Cheating among Secondary School Students Questionnaire**

1. What is your current level of studies?
2. What is your gender?
3. Have you engaged in the following behavior which is being considered as cheating?
  - Copying from another student during a test
  - Cheating on a test in any other way
  - Copying material (i.e.: worksheets) and handing it in as your own work
  - Working together on a homework when the teacher asked for individual work
  - Handing in work done by others
  - Changing an answer after an exam was graded and reporting it as a scoring error
  - Giving exam/ quiz questions to students who take the exam/ quiz later
  - Allowing someone to copy during an exam
  - Intentionally looking at another student's answer and keeping your answer if it is the same
4. What is your general expectation of results in examinations?
5. Do you consider taking examinations as stressful and why?
6. If you have more confidence in getting good grade, will you cheat and why?
7. How do you like homework?
8. What do you think of examinations?

9. Have you observed someone cheating in your class? What will you do in this case and why?
  
10. If you know some of your classmates cheat, will you cheat and why?
  
11. If no one in your class cheat, will you cheat and why?
  
12. Will you report to the teacher if you see someone cheating? Why?
  
13. How will you view those who do not cheat?
  
14. Have your friend copied your homework? Why do you allow her to do so?
  
15. How do your friends feel about you if you cheat?
  
16. Is there anything that you would like to let us know?

**THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING OUR QUESTIONNAIRE!**

## APPENDIX B

## LETTER TO THE PRINCIPAL

**THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG**  
**Faculty of Education**9<sup>th</sup> February, 2009

## Motives of cheating among secondary school students

Dear Mr. Li,

As part of my B.Ed. degree I am required to conduct a small-scale study of my teaching. This will involve distributing questionnaires to junior form students during after class time. The questionnaire has about 15 questions about the motives of cheating and takes no more than 10 minutes to complete.

According to the university's policy on the ethical conduct of research I am writing to ask your consent for these procedures.

I will, make sure that the information students provide to me will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and anonymity. Further, students have the right not to be included in my analysis, and if I find out that a student does not wish to be included I will act according to that wish and not include the student. The information collected will only be used for the dissertation and will be destroyed or returned to the school after the dissertation grade has been approved.

If you agree to these procedures, please sign one copy of this letter and return it to me. If concerns arise about this aspect of my work, please feel free to contact me (tel. 9380-6954), or Dr. Kaili Zhang (tel. 2219-4195) or Dr Jan van Aalst, the Chairperson of the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee (tel. 2859-1956).

Yours sincerely,

Wong Lok Yan Nora  
English programme  
Faculty of Education  
The University of Hong Kong

I agree to the procedures set out above to facilitate Wong Lok Yan Nora to conduct the research project in my school.

Endorsed by:

Date:

Mr. Li Shing Sun  
Lingnan Dr. Chung Wing Kwong Memorial Secondary School

APPENDIX C  
CONSENT FORM

9<sup>th</sup> February, 2009

Dear Students,

I am an undergraduate from the Department of Education at the University of Hong Kong. I will conduct a research project on ‘Motives of cheating among secondary school students’ and would like to invite secondary school students to participate. The purpose of study is to explore why students cheat so that educators can determine ways in reducing cheating based on their response.

Students who participate in this research will complete a questionnaire with about ten questions about what factors will lead to cheating. To avoid embarrassment in disclosing the motives of cheating, the questionnaire will be filled in anonymously. Please fill out the form at the bottom of this letter to indicate if you wish your child to be in this study or not. The research is beneficial for educators to determine what can be done to prevent cheating in schools. Participation is entirely voluntary, and all information obtained will be used for research purposes only. If you have any questions about the research, please feel free to contact Miss Wong Lok Yan Nora (93806954). If you want to know more about the rights as a research participant, please contact the Human Research Ethics Committee for Non-Clinical Faculties, the University of Hong Kong (2241-5267).

Your help is very much appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Wong Lok Yan Nora  
Department of Education  
The University of Hong Kong

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**Return this portion to let us know if you wish to participate in this study or not**

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_ Class No.: \_\_\_\_\_

I \*will/ will not participate in the research.

\*Please circle the appropriate one.

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Student Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D

**Summary of Research Proposal**

**(Please summarise in layman terms the objectives of the project and methodology used, and attach a copy of your proposal including any questionnaire and informed consent form to be used).**

## Objectives of the proposal:

The proposal identifies the research topic area and the research question to be answered, and specifies the procedure that will be followed in obtaining an answer to these research questions.

## Research plan and methodology:

**1. INTRODUCTION****1.1 Statement of the research topic:**

Cheating: any intentional giving or receiving of external assistance relating to an examination, test, quiz, homework assignment, etc. without explicit permission of the teacher

**1.2 Significance of the research topic:**

Current relevant studies emphasize on the prevalence of cheating, the implementation of honor code in reducing cheating, factors in predicting cheating behavior. This research takes further steps in understanding students' motives behind cheating.

**1.3 Purpose of study:**

To explore the motives of cheating among secondary school students and to ascertain what educators can do to minimize or prevent academic dishonesty

**1.4 Research Questions:**

1. How does peer influence affect the likelihood of cheating?
2. How does the level of self- efficacy affect the engagement in cheating behavior?

**2. METHODOLOGY****2.1 Research Participants**

The research participants will be 100 randomly selected students from those attending form 1 to 6 in a local secondary school. There will be a balanced ratio between male and female.

**2.2 Procedures**

A questionnaire will be administered to the three schools for once only: the initial stage of the teaching practicum. The purpose of questionnaire will be explained thoroughly to students and parents. Students are required to complete them during the lesson. Completed questionnaires will be handed in directly either to the principal investigator or the designated staff member.

## RESEARCH PROPOSAL



## APPENDIX E

CHART 1

Questionnaire item 4: What is your general expectation of results in examination?

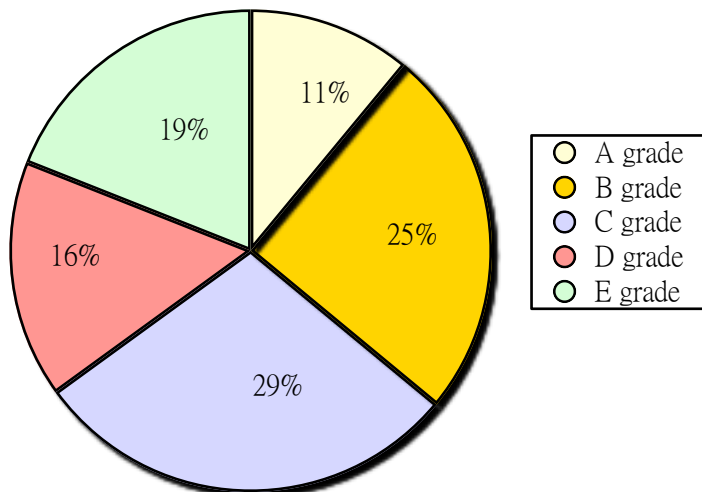


CHART 2

Questionnaire item 5: Do you consider taking examinations as stressful and why?

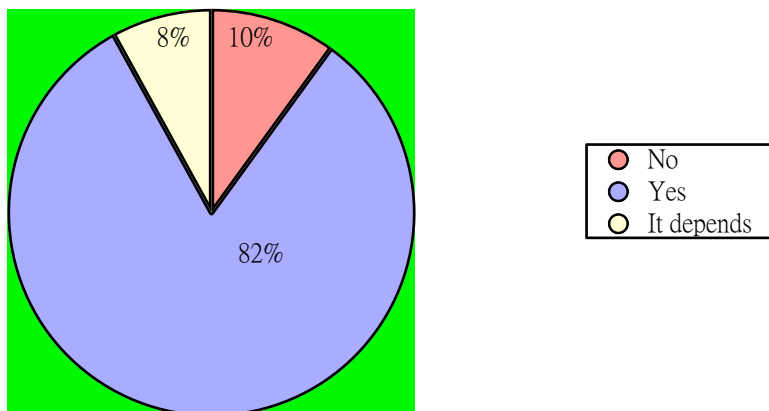


CHART 3

Questionnaire item 6: If you have more confidence in getting good grade, will you cheat and why?

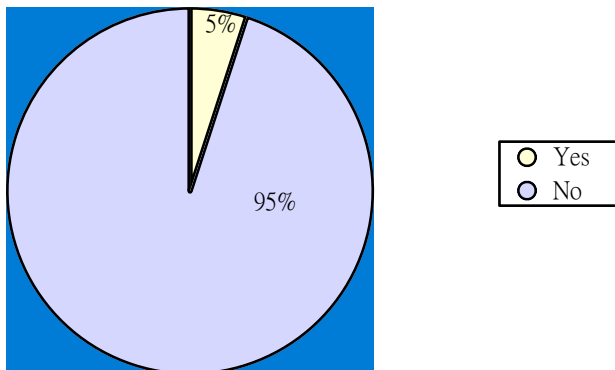


CHART 4

Questionnaire item 7: How do you like homework?

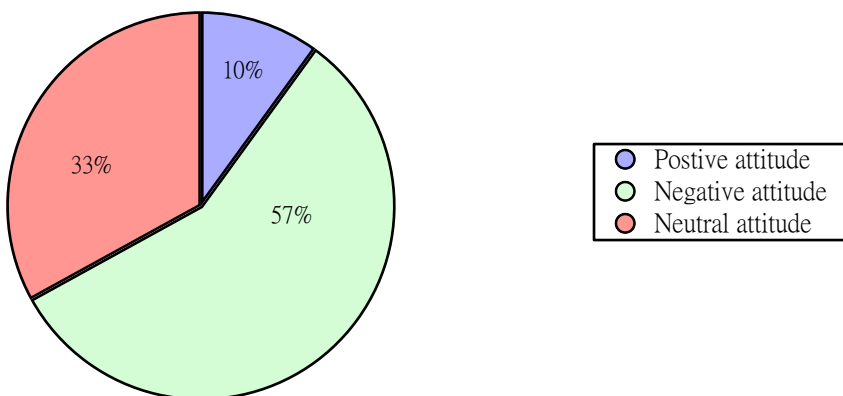


CHART 5

Questionnaire item 8: What do you think of examinations?

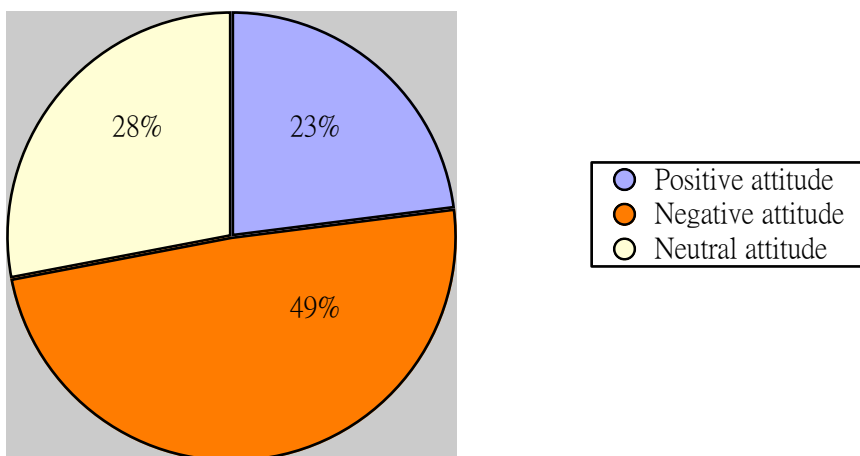


CHART 6

Questionnaire item 9: Have you observed someone cheating in your class? What will you do in this case and why?

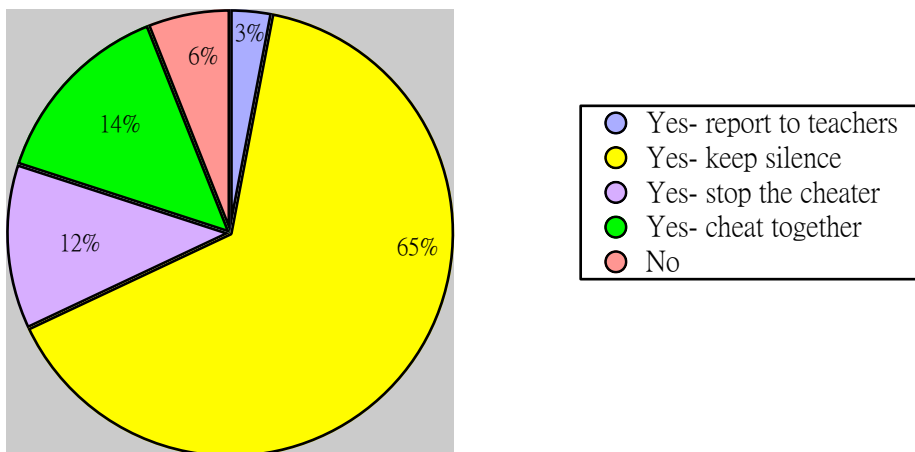


CHART 7

Questionnaire item 10: If you know some of your classmates cheat, will you cheat and why?

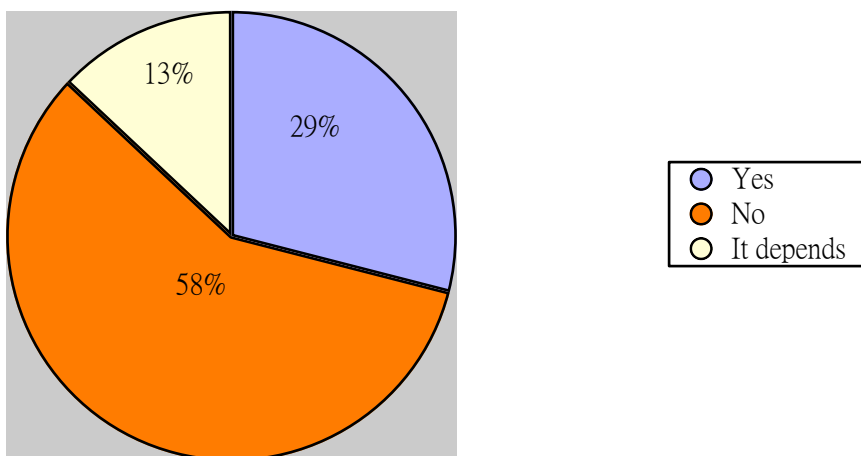


CHART 8

Questionnaire item 11: If no one in your class cheat, will you cheat and why?

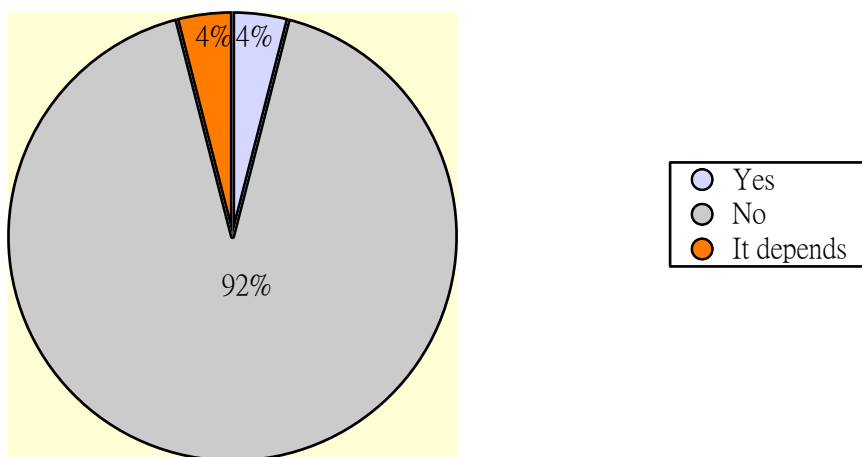


CHART 9

Questionnaire item 12: Will you report to teacher if you see someone cheating? Why?

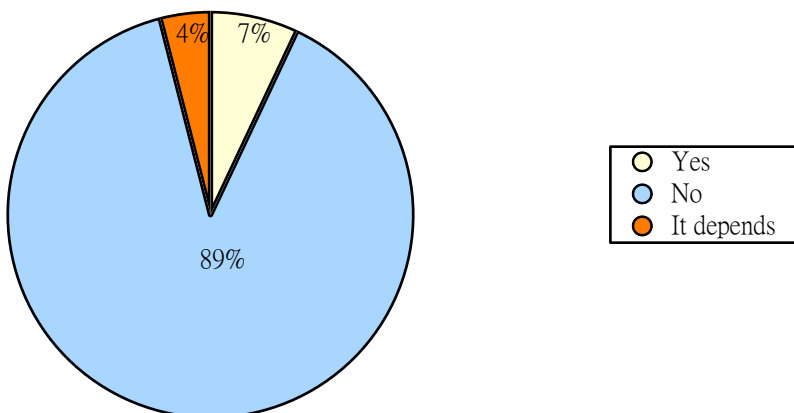


CHART 10

Questionnaire item 13: How will you view those who do not cheat?

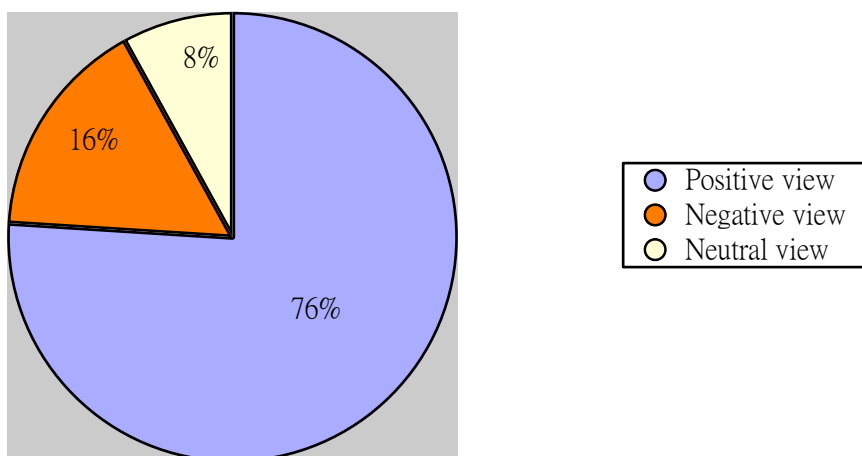


CHART 11

Questionnaire item 14: Have your friend copied your homework? Why do you allow her to do so?

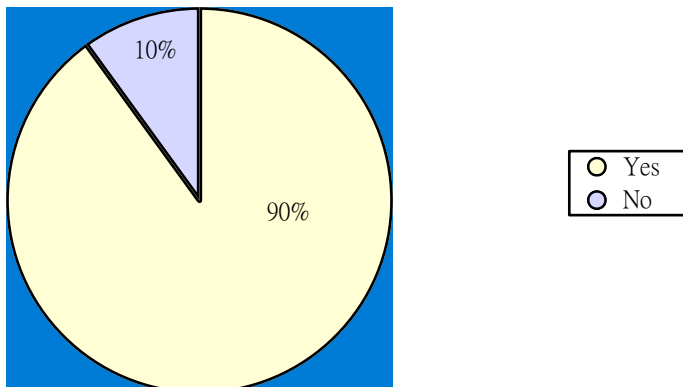


CHART 12

Questionnaire item 15: How do your friends feel about you if you cheat?

