DISSERTATION

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS IN THE ONLINE LEARNING

ENVIRONMENT AS IT RELATES TO ACTS OF ACADEMIC

DISHONESTY: A WESTERN UNITED STATES

COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDY

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

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Academic dishonesty has been an issue in education for many years (McCabe, 2001). As online education becomes more prevalent, the belief among faculty is that more acts of academic dishonesty are occurring in online courses rather than in face to face or on campus courses (Burke, 1997). However, little is known about how students understand and discuss acts of academic dishonesty in the online learning environment.

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of students at a Western United States Community College as it relates to acts of academic dishonesty in the online learning environment. The research question that formed the basis of this study was: What are the lived experiences of community college students at a Western United States Community College as they relate to acts of academic dishonesty in an online course?

The research method for this study was interpretative phenomenological analysis, IPA. Seven participants were interviewed. Through the analysis of the interviews the following themes emerged addressing the research question:

1. Online Learning is Convenient Yet Less Beneficial
2. Diverse Experiences with Acts of Academic Dishonesty
3. Academic Dishonesty Means Cheating
4. Heard About Academic Dishonesty in High School

5. Reasons Given for Committing Acts of Academic Dishonesty
6. Student Engagement Determined Acts of Academic Dishonesty

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Chapter One: Introduction

Overview

As online courses increasingly are an integral part of the course offerings in higher education, the focus on academic integrity in online courses increases (Lytle, 2011). Much research has been done regarding faculty and their experiences or perceptions of academic dishonesty in the online environment (Baron & Crooks, 2005; Burke, 1997; Krask, 2007; Patnaude, 2008). Research is very limited, however, in the area of students' lived experiences of learning through online courses and how students perceive acts of academic dishonesty occurring in an online learning environment (Grijalva, Kerkvliet, & Nowell, 2002; Higgins, 2010).

Purpose Statement

This study was needed in order to gain a deeper understanding of student experiences in the online learning environment as those experiences relate to acts of academic dishonesty. Further, in order for faculty and administrators to understand why a student might choose to engage in an act of academic dishonesty, this study examined the lived experience of the online student, and on what experiences shaped their decision making regarding engaging, or not engaging, in acts of academic dishonesty. Lastly, this study examined, based on the students' lived experiences, what types of academic dishonesty may be occurring online.

The purpose of this study was to help educators understand online academic dishonesty from the perspective of the students rather than faculty and administrators. More research is needed in order to develop a broader and more balanced understanding of academic dishonesty,

students' perceptions of academic dishonesty, and their lived experiences of academic dishonesty in an online learning environment.

A review of the literature indicated that most studies were focused on academic dishonesty, but not academic dishonesty in the online learning environment. Further, the studies reviewed used a quantitative or mixed methods approach to investigate students' perception of academic dishonesty.

Research Question

Qualitative studies focus on the individual and the thoughts and experiences gained from each participant (Creswell J. W., 2009). For this study, the focus was on the participants' experience of acts of academic dishonesty in the online learning environment. The following research question was proposed: What are the lived experiences of community college students at a Western United States Community College as they relate to acts of academic dishonesty in an online course?

Significance of Study

If online learning continues to grow at its current rate, faculty will be faced with having more students in online classes than in traditional, on-campus courses (Young, 2012). Faced with this scenario, research on the lived experiences of students in an online course as it relates to academic dishonesty is timely. Higgins (2010) observed, "I strongly believe that the perceptions of responsibility to the integrity of the community deserve our most intense focus for future research" (p. 128). The Higgins study is the only recent work that has examined student *perceptions* of academic dishonesty. While other studies examined academic integrity and dishonesty, including both frequency and types of academic dishonesty, none of them directly explored student experiences of academic dishonesty in the online learning environment (Baron

& Crooks, 2005; Bisping, Patron, & Roskelley, 2008; Burke, 1997; Chisel, 2007; Genereux &

McLeod, 1995; Grijalva et al., 2002; Krask, 2007).

While studies that focus strictly on academic dishonesty in higher education are limited, a

comprehensive 1996 "Who's Who of American High School Students" study found that a

number of students not only thought cheating was common at their school, but that most had

participated in an act of academic dishonesty. Of the students surveyed, nearly 90% said that

cheating was "common at their school"; 76% stated that they had cheated on a test, and 58% said

that it would be easy to get test questions or answers from other students (Educational

Communications Inc., 1996). The Center for Academic Integrity (CFAI) noted in a 2004

resolution that:

> The world is witness to a crisis of integrity today that encompasses corruption and fraud
> in the corporate world, betrayals of trust in government and religious institutions, and
> rising rates of cheating and plagiarism among high school and university students. (The
> Center for Acadmic Integrity, 2010, p. 2)

While many studies have indirectly addressed academic dishonesty and student

perceptions of academic dishonesty, none have centered directly on the student's perception of

academic dishonesty in the online learning environment. This study addresses this gap in the

literature.

Researcher's Perspective

As a faculty member at a community college for the past four years, I have great interest

in the area of academic dishonesty in online education. My interest stems from my broader

passion for ethics in education. Having developed multiple ethics-related courses in both the

business and accounting disciplines, I was curious to see if my experiences with student acts of

academic dishonesty as an instructor were similar to the experiences of online students.

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Having taught both online and in the classroom, I have noticed distinct differences in the types of academic dishonesty encountered in a live on-campus class and those encountered in an online course. For instance, I have encountered more acts of plagiarism on both papers and written assignments in my online courses than in my traditional, classroom-based courses. I also encountered more instances of cheating on tests and copying answers in my online courses than in my traditionally, classroom-based courses.

Finally, however, as a faculty member at a community college I brought certain biases to this research project. For example, having caught students in acts of academic dishonesty and hearing excuses related to the student not knowing or understanding what academic dishonesty meant affected my perception the results of this research might have been. In addition, having dealt with acts of academic dishonesty from only one lens, a faculty member, put me in a position to only understand my view of what students are thinking about. It was of critical importance that I did not let any of my personal experiences infiltrate the research for this project.

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Delimitations and Limitations

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Delimitations

Delimitations represent the restrictions that I imposed prior to the inception of the study. The primary delimitations for this study were (a) the study focused only on students at one community college in the western United States, and (b) the study focused on a purposeful sample of volunteer student participants at that community college. The main reason for using only one college was access to a population that was suitable for this project.

The students involved in the study did not represent a specific academic area. This study did not focus on a specific academic division from within the college.

Another delimitation was that the study findings reflected the lens that I used, on what I determined to be contextually important. For example, the fact that I included only portions of the interview transcripts in the final project. I depended on my understanding of what was meant by each student, given the fact that I was not be able to ask follow-up questions once the interviews were completed. It is possible that my understanding may have been limited based on the fact that I only spoke to each student twice (during the actual interview and the follow-up interview).

Delimitation was my chosen research paradigm. I used Interpretive Phenomenology Approach (IPA) to extract rich, personal data from each of the interview subjects (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). By choosing this form of research, I limited the study and results to those gathered through the lens of IPA; other forms of research may also yield useful data. The intent was to learn from an individual, student-by-student perspective, the students' shared experience of academic dishonesty in the online learning environment.

A final delimitation for this study was the timeframe during which the research was conducted. I conducted my research during the fall semester (2013). Conducting research over differing semesters would have potentially opened up more of an audience and thus could have affected the results of this study.

Limitations

There were two major limitations that developed during the research project. Limitations are those things that are out of a researcher's control, but that could have an impact on the results of the study. These limitations are discussed below.

The first limitation was who responded to participate or volunteer for the study. As indicated in the methods section, an e-mail went out through the community college inviting

both current and former community college students to participate. Two graduates of the community college (who were now attending a university) responded and asked to participate. Because they fit the criteria of having experience with academic dishonesty, I included them in the study.

The second limitation was related to how participants understood the "direct experience with an act of academic dishonesty." Of the seven participants, three had not committed an act of academic dishonesty; rather, they were victims (their work was used by other students) in acts of academic dishonesty. The other four participants had committed acts of academic dishonesty and spoke of their experience through that lens.

Definitions

The following terms are defined for the purposes of this study.

Online Learning: Online learning is a structured learning activity that utilizes technology with intranet/internet-based tools and resources as the delivery method for instruction, research, assessment, and communication (Michigan Department of Education, 2006).

Academic Integrity: Academic integrity is defined as, "Honesty and responsibility in scholarship … which means that all academic work should result from an individual's own efforts. Intellectual contributions from others must be consistently and responsibly acknowledged" (University of Illinois, 2012, p. 1)

Academic Dishonesty: "Any deliberate attempt to falsify, fabricate, or otherwise tamper with data, information, records, or any other material that is relevant to the student's participation in any course, laboratory, or other academic exercise or function" (Delta College, 2012, p. 1).

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Introduction

As online learning continues to become an integral part of the course offerings in higher education, it is important to ensure that academic integrity is valued as highly in the online environment as it is in the traditional, on-campus courses. Since the inception of online courses, many researchers have found that because students are not face-to-face with an instructor, incidences of academic dishonesty could be higher in online learning compared to its traditional counterpart (Baron & Crooks, 2005). The focus of the literature review was to show the foundational underpinnings of academic dishonesty as it relates to both traditional on-campus classes and that of online or distance education.

Definitions of Academic Dishonesty as Understood by Faculty and Students

One of the challenges in this area of the literature was the wide array of definitions that both faculty and institutions used to define acts of academic dishonesty. Finding a singular definition of what constituted academic dishonesty in higher education was difficult. For example, a review of policies of seven community colleges in a western state provided seven different definitions, and while each had some similar characteristics, all were unique and specific to the culture of the institution. In addition to different definitions between institutions, Higgins (2010) found that faculty and student definitions of what constitutes an act of academic dishonesty varied widely. Higgins focused on whether recent increases in instances of academic dishonesty resulted from students cheating more, or from faculty identifying and acting on more instances of academic dishonesty than they had in the past due to more specific definitions. The study used a mixed-methods approach, but focused mainly on a survey instrument sent to faculty

and students at two major Midwestern universities. The surveys were sent to all colleges across each of the two university campuses (Higgins, 2010). In all, 1,462 students and 297 faculty completed the surveys.

The Higgins (2010) study found inconsistencies among institutions across the U.S. when it came to describing what is and is not academic integrity. While many institutions have honor codes and policies in place to combat acts of academic dishonesty, finding a correlation between academic dishonesty and academic integrity has been much more difficult. Further, the study noted that defining academic dishonesty as to what it is not, rather than what it is, caused confusion for students. For instance, if a college or university gives an exhaustive list of what constitutes an act of academic dishonesty; can a student assume that anything not on the list is acceptable? According to Higgins (2010) there was a struggle within higher education to find an acceptable and all-encompassing definition for academic dishonesty.

History of Academic Dishonesty

Bowers (1964) completed one of the first comprehensive studies on cheating and found that "Academic dishonesty or cheating is a ubiquitous phenomenon in higher education" (p.4 #). The study found that college administrators and faculty grossly underestimated the magnitude of the problem of academic dishonesty and found that at least half of the 5,000 students who responded to a survey admitted to engaging in some form of academic dishonesty. The study of cheating incidences also surveyed more than 600 deans and 500 student body presidents. The findings from this study have fueled much of the research on the topic of academic dishonesty (Bowers, 1964).

Subsequent studies have examined the frequency of cheating. Schab (1991) found that the number of students who admitted to using a cheat sheet on a test doubled (34% to 68%) from

1969 to 1989. In that same time frame, students who admitted to helping other students cheat by way of copying their work increased from 58% to 98%. Further, students who admitted to copying directly from a book rose from 67% to 76% (Schab, 1991). Schab administered a survey to 1,629 high school students in 1969, 1,100 students in 1979, and 1,291 students in 1989. Students were asked to respond to items regarding the following: (a) the amount of cheating they believed to be going on, (b) who was most guilty, (c) reasons given for cheating, (d) the courses in which most cheating occurred, (e) how to punish cheaters and by whom, (f) beliefs regarding dishonesty in society, and (g) confessions of their own dishonest behaviors in school.

In another comprehensive study of cheating, McCabe (1992) surveyed more than 50,000 enrolled students and 60 institutions and found that up to 70% of students admitted to some form of academic dishonesty during their undergraduate careers. For example, 25% of students admitted to cheating on a test or exam. Another, finding was that students did not perceive cutting and pasting material from a website to be a serious form of academic dishonesty (McCabe, 1992).

The New Generation of Students and Academic Dishonesty

Much research has been done on the generation of post-secondary learners born after 1980. This generation, often referred to as "Millennials," has been characterized as a somewhat lazy, free-loading, and sheltered group of students (Wilson, 2004). In light of these characterizations, Wilson has pointed to this generation as having the increased potential to need or want to engage in acts of academic dishonesty. The Millennial is no stranger to computer-based products or learning. Oblinger and Oblinger (2005) noted that 20% of the Millennial generation used a computer between the ages of five and eight, and virtually all of them had used a computer at some point in their lives between the ages of 16 and 18. Further, the report

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explained that as this new "net" generation entered their teenage years (ages 13 to 15), the vast majority, 94%, were using the internet for school-related work and research (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005).

Other studies (Howe & Strauss, 2000; McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield 2001) found that many of the Millennial students had differing definitions of what academic dishonesty meant and how they attributed it to their lives.

McCabe et al. (2001) reported that Millennials found it was easy for them to cheat or plagiarize papers in high school and assumed those opportunities would carry over into college. Also adding to the problem was the fact that many of the younger generation of students tended to think that academic dishonesty only mattered when a student was caught. Cheating and not being caught leads to a snowball effect and can give a student the sense of invincibility (McCabe et al., 2001).

Further, a 2010 study by the Josephson Institute on Ethics surveyed over 43,000 American high school students. The results showed that 59% of those who participated in the survey admitted to cheating on a test during the past year, while 39% admitted to cheating more than once in the past year (Jarc, 2010).

Wotring and Bol (2011) examined how student characteristics, including "generation," contributed to propensity to cheat. The researchers surveyed 650 community college students representing the millennial generation (71.6%), Generation X (23.6%, and the Baby Boomer generation (4.6%). Significant differences between the generations were found when it came to specific types of cheating behaviors. For instance, the millennial generation showed a group of core traits that demonstrated the types of cheating they said were either justifiable or not a "big deal." Those traits included group work (working together without instructor permission),

watching a related movie as opposed to reading the assigned book, and delaying turning in a

paper because of an untrue or made up excuse (Wotring & Bol, 2011).   The study looked at

whether or not a specific program or college experience led to more acts of cheating. The results

found no discernable different between programs or experiences that led to more acts of

cheating. Lastly, the study looked at whether or not there were gender differences in the

evaluation of cheating activities among community college students. The study found that

differences existed among genders in terms what types of academic dishonesty were used, but

not in terms of one gender committing more acts than the other (Wotring & Bol, 2011).

Peer and Gender Influence

Studying peer influence on students' academic dishonesty behaviors has been the focus

of several studies. Lester and Diekhoff (2002) found that there was a strong connection between

students engaging in academically dishonest acts or behaviors and how they thought their peers

would feel about it. In addition, further studies (McCabe, 2005; McCabe et al., 2001) concluded

that this peer influence seemed to dissipate as learners move online.

Lester and Diekhoff (2002) found both gender and attitude differences when it came to

students cheating in on-campus courses as compared to students cheating in an online course.

The study found that more traditional modes of academic dishonesty (cheating on an exam,

copying another student's homework) took place with females on campus. Males were more

likely to engage in online or internet-based academic dishonesty. Regarding attitudes toward

cheating, female students were less likely than their male counterparts to resent academic

dishonesty by their fellow classmates. Lastly, a key finding was that a student who cheats in a

classroom was much less likely to justify or excuse the academic dishonesty than a student who

cheats on the internet (Lester & Diekhoff, 2002).

Lester and Diekhoff (2002) also suggested a potential connection between downloading "pirated" music and academic dishonesty. The researchers compared their findings to those in the Business Software Alliance (2013) study, which found that 69% of students downloaded music at some point during their college careers and only 2% admitted to paying for the music (Business Software Alliance, 2013). Lester and Diekhoff did not attempt to find a direct connection between the two activities, pirating music and engaging in acts of academic dishonesty, but said that there was likely some sort of relationship between piracy and plagiarism (Lester & Diekhoff, 2002).

McCabe (2001) noted that many students who participated in his survey on cheating were more concerned with what their peers were doing than repercussions they faced or faculty perceptions. McCabe surveyed 2,294 high school juniors at 25 schools across the country, including 14 public schools and 11 private schools. McCabe (2011) found that students knew cheating was wrong and were not proud of their behavior. He found that many students were not told that being an adult in higher education meant respecting the learning process and not engaging in acts of academic dishonesty. The study found that when these types of comments were absent, students were more likely to look to their peers for how to act, and in many cases engaged in acts of academic dishonesty as a way to stay competitive with their peers (McCabe, 2001).

As noted previously, Wotring and Bol (2011) examined whether or not gender or demographic differences made any difference in the kinds of cheating activities students were engaging in. The study found no significant difference among the three generations (Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennial) when it came to gender, program of study, or the student's individual belief system. The study found that cheating and gender differences did not

vary by generation and that "any attitudinal difference between men and women towards cheating have diminished" (Wotring & Bol, 2011, p. #).

As the studies cited indicate, there were differences in behaviors among the genders. Also, peer influence played a big role in whether or not students chose to participate in acts of academic dishonesty. Lastly, there was no significant difference among generations in terms of whether one was more likely to engage in an act of academic dishonesty.

Why Students Commit Academic Dishonesty

While research was minimal in the area of how much academic dishonesty occurs in an online learning environment, why students choose to cheat has been studied in detail. Underwood and Szabo (2003) studied an opportunity sample of 291 United Kingdom undergraduates and found that their reasons for academic dishonesty included fear of failure, inability to handle difficult material, tedium, and time management. Further, the study found that while only 6% of the students surveyed said that cheating was a way of life, less than 50% believed that cheating was wrong under any circumstance (Underwood & Szabo, 2003).

Young (2012) found that the overall ease of academic dishonesty was another reason students engaged in academic dishonesty (Young, 2012). For example, the millennial generation has grown up with computers and has found more high-tech ways to cheat. Cheating for these students is more of a game than an attempt to achieve a higher score on an assignment or exam. Millennial students have been known to open up tests online, print them out, and then quickly log-out. This sudden log-out causes the exam to become locked up, which requires an instructor override to allow the students back into the examination. From there, students distribute the tests to others in the class which results in the test material being comprised.

Numerous Josephson Institute of Ethics (1998, 2002, 2004, 2006) surveys confirmed that more students were engaged in academic dishonesty, and that many younger students (high school aged) did not see academic dishonesty as significant (Josephson Institute of Ethics, 1998, 2002, 2004, 2006). The 2006 study surveyed 36,000 high school students asking about their experiences with academic dishonesty. Students in the study noted time management, grade and scholarship pressure and peer pressure as the main reasons they would engage in an act of academic dishonesty.

Ma, Wan, and Young Lu (2008) found that students were engaging in academic dishonesty for various reasons. The study focused on middle school students and asked a series of questions as to why a student might choose to engage in an act of academic dishonesty. The responses included poor time management skills, stress induced cheating, and competing for the highest grade. Ma et al. found that many students did not consider plagiarism or cutting and pasting from an uncited source to be academic dishonesty. The authors also found that the problem of academic dishonesty was indeed getting worse, not better as more students were admitting to engaging in acts of academic dishonesty than ever before. (Ma, Wan, & Young Lu, 2008).

Additional research has uncovered that the lack of repercussions was at least partly responsible for a student engaging in academic dishonesty on a paper or test (Josephson Institute of Ethics, 2006). The Josephson Institute's 2006 study, which surveyed 36,000 students, reported that they would plagiarize a paper or cheat on a test, even though they knew it was wrong, because of the lack of repercussions they faced from their instructors. Another finding was the "just once" mentality of many of the respondents, which seemed to serve as a comfort answer for students when asked why they cheated. Many students responded "I only did that

once" (56%) and that they would "not to do it anymore" (82%). These answers seem to justify, in the students' minds, their engaging in an act of academic dishonesty (Josephson Institute of Ethics, 2007).

The pressure to achieve good grades ranked high on the list of reasons for engaging in academic dishonesty (Josephson Institute of Ethics, 2007). The Josephson Institute of Ethics suggested that wanting to receive a higher score, not having enough time to prepare, or facing a looming deadline were additional reasons given for engaging in academic dishonesty. Students also responded that if they had already missed a deadline for one assignment or received a lower score, the likelihood of academic dishonesty on future assignments increased (Josephson Institute of Ethics, 2007).

Faculty Perception of Academic Dishonesty

Studies of faculty perception of academic dishonesty have been limited. Three studies (Burke 1997; Marcoux 2002; Pincus & Schmelkin 2003) highlighted differing faculty perspectives, perceptions, and definitions as they related to academic dishonesty. These studies also focused on the growing trend of academic dishonesty as a whole, both in the classroom and online.

Burke (1997) surveyed more than 500 faculty members at a college campus. This study found that while academic dishonesty was seen as a serious offense, it was not reported to be a problem by a majority (65%) of respondents. While perceptions differed between the full and part-time faculty, most respondents (82%) noted that acts of academic dishonesty were not a problem in their classes or for the college as a whole (Burke, 1997).

Marcoux (2002) found definitions of academic dishonesty varied widely among faculty. Marcoux asked 12 participating faculty to define the term "academic dishonesty" in three words

or less. The results yielded more than 25 words or phrases, all of them unique. The same group

was also asked what type of consequences could be expected in instances of academic

dishonesty, which generated more than 10 unique phrases or words to describe the consequences

(Marcoux, 2002).

Pincus and Schmelkin (2003) found that faculty rated the type and severity of cheating

before determining if a problem exists. The study was conducted at a private university in the

Northeast with 12,000 students. A pool of 1,000 faculty was used to randomly select 150 full-

time and 150 part-time faculty members to participate in the study.   Of the faculty who

responded, 89% said that forging documents, plagiarism, and cheating on exams were all

considered serious offenses; each offense was considered problematic and needed to be reported.

Other less serious forms of academic dishonesty, however, including not reporting a grading

error to a faculty member, not contributing equal work in a group project, or using a tutor in

instances when they were not allowed, were seen as less problematic and therefore may not be

reported (Pincus & Schmelkin, 2003).

A study by Higgins (2010) showed a disconnect between faculty and students on what

should be considered a punishable act of academic dishonesty. The study noted that both faculty

and student perceptions of cheating behaviors were complex. The study grouped faculty and

student perceptions of the reasons for engaging in acts of academic dishonesty into four

categories: category, category, category, and category. Each category dealt with a separate and

distinct area of academic dishonesty. In each case, the faculty rated acts or incidents of academic

dishonesty higher than that of the students. Further, the study revealed that student perceptions

of academic dishonesty varied across colleges and did not seem to indicate a common theme or

pattern (Higgins, 2010). The study also indicated confusion among the faculty as to who was responsible for upholding the academic integrity of the institution (Higgins, 2010).

The issue of whether faculty is willing to enforce higher standards on students has also come in to question. McCabe and Trevino (1993) found that faculty was not likely to follow through on honor codes set in place by a college or university. The survey involved 802 faculty members and found that 47% of those surveyed would go to little or very little effort to notify administration of an incident or violation (McCabe & Trevino, 1993).

Student Perception of Academic Dishonesty

McCabe (1991) noted in his comprehensive study of cheating that up to 70% of students admitted to some form of academic dishonesty during their undergraduate careers. The study, which surveyed more than 50,000 undergraduate college students at more than 60 institutions, also found that 25% of students admitted to cheating on a test or exam. Furthermore, students reported that cutting and pasting material from a website was not perceived to be a serious form of academic dishonesty (McCabe, 1992).

Gender differences seem to also play a role in student perception of academic dishonesty. Behaviors and attitudes were found to be shaped by gender and contributed to why students chose to participate in an act of academic dishonesty. Lester and Diekhoff (2002) found gender differences towards behavior and attitude when it came to students participating in acts of academic dishonesty. The study found that men perceive acts of academic dishonesty to be less of an issue than women but that both genders are participating in types of academic dishonesty (Lester & Diekhoff, 2002).

Molnar and Kletke (2012) found that there was a difference in student perceptions of academic dishonesty depending on which type of cheating students were engaging in. While most students said that cheating on a test or paper was a grievous violation of academic integrity, many did not see a problem with so-called non-gradable offenses. Non-gradable offenses included downloading illegal or copyrighted material via the college's internet system, and making copies from copyright protected books. Each of the above offenses was found to be in violation of the school's academic integrity code (Molnar & Kletke, 2012).

The research indicates that while students are committing acts of academic dishonesty at high rates (McCabe, 1992); their perceptions about the problem of academic dishonesty are mixed. Gender differences (Lester & Diekhoff, 2002) and types of cheating (Molnar & Kletke, 2012) also played a role in the student perceptions of academic dishonesty in the online learning environment.

Grades and Student Performance Online

Many studies (Baron & Crooks 2005; Black, Greaser, & Dawson, 2008; Krask, 2007) have argued that students can and will earn better grades online because of little to no supervision, however there is no way to determine if the student who registered for the course is actually doing the work or having someone else complete it for him or her. The overall perception from these studies is such that both students and faculty view online courses as more susceptible to students engaging in academic dishonesty than that of the traditional classroom. However, some of the limited research in the field refutes those perceptions.

Grijalva et al. (2002) found that academic dishonesty was no more likely in an online environment than that of a traditional classroom. The study focused on a public university and provided both faculty and students the opportunity to respond to a questionnaire about their

online course experiences. During the spring semester of 2001, a total of 1,940 students and

faculty were invited to participate in the survey with a total of 646 faculty and students

responding. A randomized response (RR) was used to assure students that their responses to

questions about engaging in an act of academic dishonesty would be unidentifiable. The results

showed a statistically significant likelihood ratio test of 12.72 and 10.08 that students were no

more likely to participant in acts of academic dishonesty online versus in the classroom. The

authors of the survey attributed the results to a number of issues, including the design of online

courses and a reduction in "panic" cheating. Panic cheating occurs when students find

themselves with too little time to study the material and turn to cheating to achieve a passing

score (Grijalva et al., 2002, p. 2).

Ridley and Husband (1998) studied the rationale behind the argument that students

perform better online. Ridley and Husband studied enrollments from an online course at a wholly

online university randomly drawn from a period of the fall semester of 1994 through the fall

semester of 1996. The survey found the following:

> Students who enroll in both online and traditional online courses did not earn higher
> scores in online courses; students who enroll in online courses through two or more
> semesters did not improve their grades over time; if students and spouses or significant
> others have taken the same online course, their grades in these courses were not more
> similar than their grades in other courses. (Ridley & Husband, 1998, p. 186)

Patnaude (2008) found that faculty members' general perception of online courses are

that they are less rigorous and more amenable to academic integrity violations because of the

lack of control in an online environment (Patnaude, 2008). The purpose of Patnaude's study was

to design and implement an instrument to measure faculty perceptions regarding the extent to

which the online course environment affects academic honesty. The instrument was administered

to a convenience sample of faculty members who taught online courses at the four campuses of

the University of Houston (UH) System; 172 usable responses were collected. The study found that the coursework in an offline or classroom environment had a .3% better grade point average than that of its online counterparts. Further, more failing grades were given via an online platform than that of an on-campus course the study also addressed the perception of which platform (offline or online) offered an easier or more conducive environment within which to cheat. Surveys of faculty (64%) and students (57%) showed a strong majority said that an online environment was easier and more conducive to acts of academic dishonesty (Patnaude, 2008)

Acting Differently Online Versus On Campus

Lester (2002) studied 453 students in an introduction to psychology course at a 4-year university in the Southwest to see if students acted differently on-campus as compared to online regarding academically dishonest behavior. All students surveyed were, at some time in the collegiate careers, enrolled in both online and on-campus courses. Students were asked if they had ever participated in cheating by traditional methods (crib notes, copying another student on a test or homework assignment), and whether or not they had ever used the internet as a source for cheating. The results showed that 307 of the 449 students (68.4%) who participated in the survey admitted to engaging in a cheating activity either online or on-campus. Of the 307 students who admitted cheating, 270 (87.9%) said they were guilty of cheating using non-internet related materials, while 37 students (12.1%) admitted to using the internet. Only four students (1.7%) said that their cheating was exclusively internet based (Lester, 2002).

Lester (2002) did not find any evidence that students who cheated by using the internet and students who cheated using non-internet means differed on the basis of "age, marital status, year in college, percentages in fraterntities or sororities, grade-point average, percentages who

reported using savings to finance their own education, or percentages who reported that they would be likely to report the cheating of others" (Lester, 2002, p. 908).

Black et al. (2008) studied the so-called "Media Equation" whereby people responded similarly to situations in a computer-based environment to that of a real-world situation. Black et al. (2008) hypothesized that if this were the case in brick and mortar classrooms, online classrooms would experience similar statistics related to academic dishonesty. The researchers surveyed 1,068 undergraduate students to assess academic dishonesty in online courses versus that of the standard classroom. Students were asked their perceptions of where and why the academic dishonesty occurred. Other variables examined included the "number of credits taken during the semester; the number of hours spent weekly on the course; the perceived learning as a result of the course; and the perceived amount of interaction with the instructor" (Black et al., 2008, p. 24).

Black et al. (2008) found that acts of academic dishonesty in an online environment were seen by students to be less likely to occur than acts of academic dishonesty in traditional brick and mortar classrooms. Further, students reported that while there was less interaction with an instructor or teaching assistant in the online environment, this did not enhance the incidence of academic dishonesty. In all, 81% of the students reported that online academic dishonesty was no more pervasive than academic dishonesty in the traditional classroom. The authors noted that this study could be strengthened by comparing the perceptions of online students regarding their classroom counterpart's engagement in academic dishonesty behaviors.

Much of the literature in this area points to students not acting any differently online versus in the classroom and that acts of academic dishonesty were no more prevalent online than in the classroom (Black, Greaser, & Dawson, 2008). Lastly, while students reported that their

activities were no different online versus in the classroom, Lester and Diekoff (2002) found that acts of academic dishonesty were still happening in both areas of delivery.

Types of Academic Dishonesty

There are numerous academically dishonest behaviors that students can choose to engage in. This section of the literature review focuses on the most common academically dishonest behaviors related to today's students. It should be noted that as technology becomes more sophisticated, the norms of student behavior today may well be the past, perhaps in a few short years (Burke, 1997).

Plagiarism

Increased use of the internet by students and faculty has given rise to incidents of plagiarism involving the internet (iParadigms, 2011). The most common form of internet plagiarism involves the cutting and pasting of a digital article and passing it off as original work. Prior to the proliferation of the internet, plagiarism was much harder for students due to the unavailability of many of the documents online today, thus, much more impractical. According to a recent study from Turnitin.com and iParadigms, the incidence of plagiarism has increased more than 55% from 2008-2011. The study asked 1,055 presidents of two and four-year colleges and universities whether the problem of plagiarism had increased, decreased, or stayed the same over the past 10 years (iParadigms, 2011). The report from iParadigms also noted that a 2011 Pew Center survey indicated that a majority (55%) of college presidents in the United States believed plagiarism to be a growing problem. The report indicated that while plagiarism was a problem in both K-12 and higher education, the majority of the problem was housed within the confines of the higher education system. Incidents of plagiarism in higher education were more than three times that of K-12 (iParadigms, 2011).

The iParadigms report (2011) summarized the following conclusions in relation to higher education: (a) higher education students relied more on paper mills and cheat sites; (b) 8 of the top 10 sites used were the same for both K-12 and higher education; and (c) educators should develop specific strategies to address plagiarism (iParadigms, 2011).

Test/Exam Cheating

Perhaps one of the oldest forms of academic dishonesty is that of test/exam cheating (McCabe, 2001). From copying another student's answers on a test to using a cheat sheet or stolen key, academic dishonesty on tests has been prevalent far longer than most any other form of academic dishonesty (McCabe, 2001). Bisping et al. (2008) found that more than 35% of students admitted to copying from another student during a test and admitted that it was wrong. The survey asked two questions of the students: (a) if he/she had committed an academically dishonest act and had known that it was wrong, and (b) whether or not he/she had committed an act of academic dishonesty. More than 13% of survey respondents admitted to using a cheat sheet during a test. In addition, 12% of survey respondents admitted to having another student prepare work for them and presenting it as an original product. The majority of respondents (53%) said they had committed violations, but did not know that partaking in the act could be or was considered academically dishonest. The study findings showed that while students were actively committing acts of academic dishonesty, they may not have completely understood the difference between cheating and not cheating (Bisping et al., 2008).

Helping Others Cheat

The influence and peer support of other students played a significant role in whether or not students chose to cheat. Genereux and McLeod (1995) asked students to answer questions about helping another student cheat. The student responses shed some light on how many

students were engaging in this type of academic dishonesty, as well as the differences between how males and females viewed this type of academic dishonesty. The survey of 365 students found that 58% of the students admitted to giving examination answers to students who had yet to take the test. Of that percentage, 63% of males and 53% of females committed the violation. Twenty-eight percent of students responding indicated they had allowed another student to copy their answers while they were taking the tests. Of that 28%, 35% of males reported allowing the behavior while 20% of females said they allowed it.

Conversely, only 20% of the students in the survey admitted to cheating from another student; of that 20%, 25% of males and 15% of females admitted to acting in this fashion. One of the biggest disparities in the study was the difference between males and females on the instance of allowing another student to turn in work they had created. Sixteen percent of the students admitted to engaging in this activity; 22% of males answered they had allowed this form of academic dishonesty to occur while only 9% of females reported it. One of the more interesting findings of the report was the relatively small percentage of students who reported having bought a paper from a website; only 2% of the respondents admitted to engaging in this form of academic dishonesty. One possible reason for these low numbers could have been that the internet was still in its infancy at the time the report was written (Genereux & McLeod, 1995).

High Tech Cheating

Many students get a thrill from finding new ways to cheat (Young, 2012). Young (2012) interviewed one student in particular and found that the student was "proud" to cheat. The student claimed to have only spent 25-30 minutes per week in an online course, the time it took to take the a quiz, and managed to receive an A in the course. The student's method was

developed with four friends and involved using a popular and respected free site for file sharing, Google Docs. The scheme involved each of the friends cutting and pasting portions of the test into the shareable site and then using the site while taking the test. The instructor in the course had tried to prevent this type of act by using a randomly generated test bank. However, these students had figured out that the test bank was not very large and that if each of them went through the exam, and copied and pasted it to Google Docs, they were sure to get most of the questions, along with correct answers. Each student was allowed to take each exam twice, and grades were based on an average of the two attempts. The students would take turns taking the exam first, and then copying and pasting the information for each of their friends to use. This method allowed each of them to keep their grades high enough to ensure a final course grade of an A (Young, 2012).

Young (2012) examined why this student, along with his four friends, decided to act the way they did. The student readily admitted that what was occurring was a clear violation of academic integrity. The student maintained that because the university put so little effort into online security measures, it was essentially demonstrating that the institution did not care whether or not any type of learning was taking place. Others interviewed for the study said that this was not a random act by five rogue students; rather, this type of behavior was commonplace in introductory courses and that students said that it did not matter what, if anything, they learned from the course, so long as they earned an A (Young, 2012).

Jones (2011) conducted a study of 48 business communications students in an online section in the fall of 2010. The study found that 50% of the students admitted to engaging in some act of academic dishonesty in the online learning environment. Further, the study found that 92% of the students admitted to committing some form of academic dishonesty using a

technological device (computer, tablet, cell phone). The ease of committing an act of academic dishonesty online was found to be one of the biggest reasons the students in the study chose to cheat. Having term papers, journal articles, and other sources available with the click of mouse led many students to engage in acts of academic dishonesty (Jones, 2011).

Conclusion

A review of the available literature has identified the numerous issues related to academic dishonesty and online education, although research findings conflict as to what those issues are. While one report or survey finds more academic dishonesty occurs online than in the traditional classroom, another finds that there is little to no difference in the incidences of academic dishonesty in an online environment versus a traditional classroom.

Second, student perceptions of academic dishonesty have not been studied enough to gain a clear understanding of what students perceive are the issues regarding academic dishonesty in the online learning environment. Most studies researched for this dissertation focused only on survey results of faculty perception. The one study (Higgins, 2010) that attempted to find student perceptions did so only in a mixed method approach and did not distinguish between online and on-campus learning.

Third, the literature reviewed for this project showed a strong disconnect between faculty and student perceptions as it relates to acts of academic dishonesty. Faculty believe that acts of academic dishonesty are on the rise, while many students do not see it as a major issue

One issue is the need for faculty to develop a clearer understanding of the student perspective of academic dishonesty. Most of the research in the review found a major issue to be one of educating both students and faculty as to what is and is not academic dishonesty. Higher education institutions need to educate both students and faculty as to what is considered

academic dishonesty, and to clearly express their unwillingness to accept acts of academic

dishonesty in the classroom, online or otherwise.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the methodology for this study. The sections include the research question, proposed sampling, selection of participants, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness. The methodology section addresses the study logistics and the protocols that were followed to ensure participant confidentiality. The last section of the chapter addresses the interview questions that each participant was asked (See Appendix A).

Research Question

The following research question was proposed: What are the lived experiences of community college students at a Western United States community college as they relate to acts of academic dishonesty in an online course?

Qualitative Research Approach: Interpretative Phenomenology

The research question for this study lent itself to a qualitative study. Qualitative research is interested in non-numeric data in the form of words and open-ended interviews (Schwandt, 2007). Merriam (2009) outlined the basic principles of qualitative research, which include how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to those experiences. More specifically, an Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA) was employed. By its nature, IPA is idiographic, or an explication of individual cases, and is focused on unique individual experiences rather than looking at information from a broad perspective and generalizing the findings (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

The aims set by the researcher using IPA usually focus on experiences and or understandings of each participant as they relate to particular phenomena (Smith et al., 2009). In this research, I was interested in the experiences or understandings of each participant as they related to acts of academic dishonesty in the online learning environment (Smith et al., 2009).

IPA concentrates on detailed examinations of human lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009). For example, students who have been through at least one online course have experienced what is like to be an online learner and had an experience, either personally or otherwise, with acts of academic dishonesty in the online learning environment. Further, IPA allows participants to discuss their experiences in their own terms without having to use a predefined category or system (Smith et al., 2009). IPA also focuses on offering detailed, nuanced analyses of particular instances of a lived experience (Smith et al., 2009). It was that type of lived experience that this project was in search of and as such, why IPA was well suited for a project of this type.

Two related aspects of each participant's accounts are often used in research: a participant's object of concern of the area being studied, in this case, the lived experience of academic dishonesty in the online learning environment, and the experiential claims made by each participant through which they developed their phenomenological account (Smith et al., 2009). It was assumed that participants would permit me (the researcher) to collect data about them in a reasonably rich and reflective personal account, which for the purposes of this project took place through the interview process. As part of the participant screening process, participants were asked if they had some knowledge about student involvement (either their or other's) in acts of academic dishonesty in the online learning environment. If students did not

have any direct knowledge about acts of academic dishonesty, they were disqualified from consideration in the study.

Sample and Participants

This study used purposeful sampling as a means of selecting participants to take part in the study. Creswell (2007) indicated that purposeful sampling gives the researcher the ability to "Select individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (p. 125). Purposeful sampling is frequently associated with Interpretative Phenomenological research (Smith et al., 2009).

Four primary participant characteristics were sought and guided the sample decisions. First, participants were either community college students from a western United States community college or graduates of that college. Second, these students had completed at least one online course and one face-to-face course. Third, students had an understanding of acts of academic dishonesty that have occurred in the online learning environment (either directly or from peers). Lastly, each student demonstrated a willingness to participate in the survey by responding to the invitation to participate in the research.

Maxwell (2005) stated three major goals for researchers using purposeful sampling. Those goals as well as how they fit into this study are: (a) the sample needs to be representative of the settings, individuals, or activities under study; (b) the sample allows for the deliberate examination of questions presented at the beginning of the study and any additional questions that may evolve; and (c) the sample allows for comparisons that will show differences and similarities among the participants. This study took place in a community college in the western United States; it focused on students in the community college and thus, the setting was representative of the population sampled. This study followed the interview questions included

in Appendix A. Follow up questions, were asked, when appropriate, to clarify participants' answers. In the follow up questions, I was careful only to check for understanding rather than trying to impose my thoughts or feelings on each participant

Students and graduates from a western region community college were invited to participate in individual, 20-40-minute interviews during the fall 2013 semester. Each of the interviews was conducted asking the same questions.

The primary concern of IPA is to gather detailed accounts of an individual experience; the issue is quality rather than quantity (Smith et al., 2009). I focused on the quality of each interview due to the complexity of the proposed research topic. Using Smith et al. (2009) as a guideline, I determined that three to seven participants were the optimum number of participants for the goals, objectives, and purposes of this study. The number of participants in this study gave me a sufficient number of cases for the development of meaningful points of similarities and differences between each participant. It also lessened the likelihood that I could have been overwhelmed by the amount of data that may come from a larger study (Smith et al., 2009).

A population representative of gender and socioeconomic status was achieved in this study. Participants were recruited through student announcement boards throughout the college as well as in-class invitations. My contact information, both email and cell phone was listed on the announcement. Interested students were directed to email or call me as a means of volunteering to be included in the project.

Each student who volunteered to be a part of the project was asked six basic screening questions to determine their eligibility to participate. Students were asked their age, gender, whether they had ever participated in both online and face-to-face courses, whether they were current students or graduates of the college where the research was taking place, what year of

study they were, their academic major, and if they had an understanding, either directly or through peer knowledge, of acts of academic dishonesty in the online learning environment. Participants were given monetary compensation in the form of a $25 iTunes gift card for participating in this study at the conclusion of the follow up meeting.

Procedure and Data Collection

Each interview was guided by the research question. Qualitative thematic analysis was used to code the data from each transcribed interview. Thematic analysis was chosen for this project over other forms to find common areas of belief among each of the participants interviewed for this project (Schwandt, 2007). I was much more interested in individual perspectives than that of any specific population.

Students who accept the invitation to participate in the study were notified of the time and date of their interview. Each student was given a CSU-IRB informed consent sheet prior to agreeing to participate, which identified who was completing the study and why the study was being undertaken. Participants signed the informed consent sheet prior to the first interview. A mutually agreed upon setting served as the space for each interview. Each interview lasted from 20-35 minutes; all of the interviews followed the same question and answer format. Follow-up questions were asked to participants if I felt that I needed clarification.

Confidentiality was maintained by addressing each participant by a pseudonym of their choosing. Each participant was given the opportunity to review the finished interview transcript during the follow-up meeting and each student was given the ability to opt-out of the study after the review. This process took place in the form of a second, follow up meeting. Each participant was given the opportunity to receive a free copy of the finished study.

Data Analysis

Due to the nature of the data, thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Thematic analysis "refers to the process of analyzing data according to commonalities, relationships, and differences across a data set" (Gibson & Brown, 2009, p. 127). Gibson and Brown (2009) noted that researchers must use caution while analyzing data with thematic analysis to avoid over-generalizing and thus potentially hiding the true details of the data gathered (Gibson & Brown, 2009). To ensure that the data for this study was not over generalized, I chose to distill each theme into specific areas. By using both emergent themes and the stories themselves, there was less of a chance of diluting the data into one or two large generalizable themes.

As I engaged in coding the date from each interview, I focused on two central types of coding. The first were apriori codes, which are defined prior to the examination of the data. The second were empirical codes, which are generated through examination of the data itself (Gibson & Brown 2009). Through the use of both apriori and empirical codes, I examined commonalities, differences, and relationships of the themes that emerged. I carefully analyzed the information contained in the interview transcripts. Through the thematic analysis of these interview transcripts, the essence of experience-based student perceptions of academic dishonesty in the online learning environment from students at a Western United Stated community college were found.

As I looked for emergent themes in the data, I ensured that as the volume of detail was reduced, the complexity of the interrelationships, connections, and patterns between each individual case was kept intact. Focusing only on specific sections of each transcribed interview, I completed the process of both identifying emergent themes and grouping them appropriately.

After this point, I developed a map of how each emergent theme fit (or did not fit) together

(Smith et al., 2009).

Ethical and Legal Considerations

The use of human subjects in this study mandated that every effort be made to ensure free

and informed choice on behalf of all participants. Through the use of an informed consent form

(Appendix B), participants were informed of the general nature of the study and within

reasonable limits, of their role in terms of time and effort. Participants were informed of my

intent to use a pseudonym in order to keep all names and identities anonymous. Names of the

participants were not collected nor were any records of names kept after the completion of each

interview, other than where required by the University. Participants were asked to sign the

informed consent document affirming that they had reasonable consideration, including the right

to ask questions, and were informed of the nature of this project. Per CSU-IRB policy, all data

collected for this project will be kept on file for three years from the date of the original

interview. Lastly, participants had the chance to review and receive the results of the study at no

charge (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2007).

Trustworthiness, Authenticity, and Researcher Credibility

I followed Creswell (2009) to ensure that the data analysis process was trustworthy,

authentic, and credible. As suggested by Creswell (2009), the transcripts were reviewed by each

participant prior to publication to confirm that no obvious mistakes were made during the

transcription.

An outside individual with experience in coding, not involved in this research project,

was utilized for the coding of relevant data to assure a constancy of information (Creswell,

2009). The outside professional was involved with cross checking the agreement of codes from

the thematic analysis of each transcribed interview completed by me. The outside professional also provided relevant comments as to the completeness of the coding and the findings of this project.

Creswell (2009) suggested the use of "rich, thick descriptions to convey the findings" to ensure trustworthiness of the research project. (Creswell, 2009, p. 191). Through the use of open-ended questions, participants were able to fully express their perceptions without fear that I would intervene or attempt to somehow influence each answer. This allowed perceptions to be provided concerning any one theme, in the hopes of collecting richer and more realistic descriptions (Creswell, 2009). Allowing participants to share their meaning and their own descriptions served to enhance the data collected for this project and provided results that were more meaningful. The final approach to ensuring the trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility of this research project was peer review, which was conducted by the same outside professional that collaborated on the coding section of this project (Creswell 2009).

Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

Many research projects (Baron & Crooks, 2005; Bisping et al., 2008; Burke, 1997; Chisel, 2007; Genereux & McLeod, 1995; Grijalva et al., 2002; Krask, 2007) have studied faculty perceptions of academic dishonesty in the online learning environment. Few have studied what the student perceptions of academic dishonesty involve and none, prior to this research, have studied the lived experiences of students as it relates to acts of academic dishonesty in the online learning environment.

This study was focused on the lived experiences of current and former community college students as they related to acts of academic dishonesty in the online learning environment. The research question that guided this study was: What are the lived experiences of community college students at a Western United States community college as they relate to acts of academic dishonesty in an online course?

Seven students participated in this study. Five of the participants were current community college students and two were former community college students who transferred to a four-year institution. Because the research question asked about the lived experience of academic dishonesty, four groups or types of students participated in the study. The first group was those who had committed acts of academic dishonesty and were caught. The second group was those who had committed acts of academic dishonesty but were not caught. The third group were those who had acts of academic dishonesty committed against them. The fourth group had witnessed an act or acts of academic dishonesty. The data collection for this study took place during the fall semester of 2013.

The Participants

The participants of this project were either current of former community college students. Five of the seven participants were current students of the college while two were recent graduates. Both of the recent graduates subsequently enrolled at a university. Due to the nature of the topic, acts of academic dishonesty, each student chose a pseudonym to be identified by in order to maintain confidentiality. Participants are identified only by their pseudonym for the purposes of discussing the findings of this research. Table one identifies the participants with their chosen pseudonyms, gender, class rank, and group.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Name (Pseudonym)	Gender	Class Rank	Group Type
John	M	Sophomore	Committed act of academic Dishonesty (not caught), Witnessed Act of Academic Dishonesty
Beth	F	Sophomore	Committed Act of Academic Dishonesty (Caught)
Jennifer	F	Sophomore	Witnessed Act of Academic Dishonesty
Aubrey	F	(Community College graduate)	Victim of Act of Academic Dishonesty
Marcus	M	Sophomore	Victim of Act of Academic Dishonesty
Elizabeth	F	Freshman	Victim of Act of Academic Dishonesty
Brian	M	(Community College graduate)	Witnessed act of Academic Dishonesty

The following paragraphs provide additional information about each of the participants. I asked each participant a series of informal, qualifier questions prior to starting into the main research questions. The responses from each student are found below.

John

John was a sophomore at the community college. According to John, he had previously committed acts of academic dishonesty, but had never been identified or caught by a faculty member. Much of his experience in the area of academic dishonesty was from either helping his peers or receiving help on assignments that were supposed to be completed individually. John stated that he did not feel that his conduct rose to the level of reportable academic dishonesty.

Beth

Beth was a sophomore at the community college. According to Beth, she had only one instance of academic dishonesty in her academic career and she was caught by two faculty members in the school and reported for that instance. Beth said that she was the one who had been made an example of and that it was common practice for students to behave in the way she did. Although Beth's offense was not seen by the faculty as rising to the level of expulsion, she was placed on academic probation for her offense.

Jennifer

Jennifer was a sophomore at the community college. According to Jennifer she had never dealt directly with academic dishonesty. Jennifer's wanted to participate in this research because she had witnessed a number of direct acts of academic dishonesty in a recently completed course. She did not feel as though faculty said that academic dishonesty was as big a problem as she perceived it to be. She hoped her participation would change that perception and would make faculty more diligent in checking for acts of academic dishonesty.

Aubrey

Aubrey was a recent graduate of the community college attending a university. According to Aubrey, she had one major experience dealing with academic dishonesty. Without her knowledge, other students used Aubrey to cheat. She did not report the acts to the faculty member and nothing was done to the students who participated in taking answers from her test.

Marcus

Marcus was a sophomore at the community college. According to Marcus he had been a "victim" of a direct act of academic dishonesty. Marcus had his answers stolen through an online assignment. None of the students who participated in the act were caught; however, Marcus did note that he reported the instance to the faculty member in that particular course.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth was a freshman at the community college. Elizabeth recounted a couple of direct experiences of acts of academic dishonesty whereby she was offered money in exchange for completing an online assignment for a fellow classmate. She noted that in her experiences, the students offering her money to complete the work were upper classman who chose not to complete the assignment. Elizabeth noted that she never agreed to take part in the acts of academic dishonesty and also did not report the students to the faculty member.

Brian

Brian was a graduate of the community college and a current university student. Brian's experience with academic dishonesty dealt with a major cheating scandal in a specific class that involved many students who were stealing answers from other students. Brian was one of the students who had answers stolen from him. None of the students who participated in the act of

academic dishonest were caught. Brian did not attempt to inform the faculty member of the acts of academic dishonesty that occurred in the course.

Emergent Themes

The research question for this study was: What are the lived experiences of community college students at a Western United States community college as they relate to acts of academic dishonesty in an online course? As discussed in chapter three, the approach used to analyze this data was an interpretative phenomenological approach or IPA. By its nature, IPA is idiographic, or an explication of individual cases, and is focused on unique individual experiences rather than looking at information from a broad perspective and generalizing the findings (Smith et al., 2009). IPA concentrates on detailed examinations of human lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Further, IPA allows participants to discuss their experiences in their own terms without having to use a predefined category or system (Smith et al., 2009). IPA also focuses on offering detailed, nuanced analyses of particular instances of a lived experience (Smith et al., 2009).

In analyzing the data, six themes and four additional findings emerged from the interviews. The process of identifying the themes took multiple steps. First, I read each of the interviews in full. Next, I read each interview again looking for emergent themes from each interview. During the second review of the transcribed interviews, I coded the interviews in areas where I noticed emerging themes. Lastly, the codes were studied to find both unique and common characteristics. Each of these themes is listed and summarized below along with excerpts from each interview.

Themes

1. Online Learning is Convenient Yet Less Beneficial
2. Diverse Experiences with Acts of Academic Dishonesty
    a. Committed and Act of Academic Dishonesty, not caught
    b. Committed an Act of Academic Dishonesty, caught

      c.   Victim of Academic Dishonesty
      d.   Witnessed an Act of Academic Dishonesty
3. Academic Dishonesty Means Cheating
4. Heard About Academic Dishonesty in High School
5. Reasons Given for Committing Acts of Academic Dishonesty
6. Student Engagement Determined Acts of Academic Dishonesty

Additional Findings

1. Less Knowledge is learned online
2. Face to Face Courses Preferred over Online
3. More Acts of Academic Dishonesty Online
4. Faculty Educating Students on What is and What is Not Academic Dishonesty

Theme One: Online Learning is Convenient yet less Beneficial

The participants each stated the main reason for enrolling in an online course was convenience. All of the participants said that online learning was by far the most convenient way to take a class. John commented, "I don't think I'll ever take an online class if it's offered … on campus. I don't think I'd ever take a Micro class online because you need to be in the class, you need to be learning those techniques." John said that interacting with the professor was much more beneficial to his learning than having to try and figure out it on his own in an online course. Beth noted, "I'm more of a hands-on person, I like to have somebody there to ask questions." Beth understood the convenience factor of online courses and even admitted that they worked well for her as a single mother. Still, she preferred the on-campus courses with more human interaction. The participants were comfortable with the technology, but also said that the technology made it harder to grasp certain concepts that are more easily explained in a live classroom setting. A subtheme was also identified, which was that the while participants said online learning was convenient, each said that the learning was not as great as what was found in an on-campus course.

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Beth commented, "When you work full time, go to school full time, and have a family at home, it's very nice to be able to put your family to bed, stay up later, and do that instead of having to commit to being here at the college." John agreed that taking an online course was probably better when a student's schedule is complicated. "I mean, it's—there are students that take it online because they have conflicts with either a child at home or they have a job, so—I mean that's their choice to take it" (the online course). Marcus concurred, "Online is more preferable and the online class is great for those that work full-time and they got a thousand kids and just life…"

Participants said that online learning was more of a convenience than anything else. While all of the participants had taken online courses prior to this study, none of them preferred this method of class delivery. Jennifer noted that taking multiple classes online was too much for her. "I took three online classes in the spring semester and hated it because the teacher wasn't there to teach you. You had to learn it yourself and it was hard to know what was gonna be on the exams." Jennifer said that she spent more time studying concepts in an online course because she did not fully understand the material and had no way of asking an instructor and receiving an immediate answer. Aubrey noted the convenience factor as well. "When you do (take an online course) it's convenient. One psychology course I took online went really well, but then some others I took I didn't learn a thing after I finished. I would rather be in the classroom." Aubrey's need for immediate reassurance or question answering played into her answer. She said that instructors also took better care of her when she had to see them in class every day rather than only see them as an online student.

Theme Two: Diverse Experiences with Acts of Academic Dishonesty

Each student shared with me their experience or experiences related to academic

dishonesty. Through analyzing their experience or experiences, four groups or types of

experiences emerged. The first group shared direct instances where they had been caught. The

second group committed acts of academic dishonesty, but was not caught; or that was not caught,

but had come to realize that what they did was probably academically dishonest. The third group

were participants who had an act of academic dishonesty committed against them. The fourth

group of participants witnessed acts of academic dishonesty. The participants who fell into this

last group shared both on-campus and online experiences where they were certain that acts of

academic dishonesty were occurring but they may or may not have been dealt with.

Group One: Participant who committed academic dishonesty and was caught

Only one participant in this study committed an act of academic dishonesty and was

caught but the faculty member in that course.

> *Beth.* Beth had one major experience with academic dishonesty.
>
> We had learning activities that are due online, we had a Facebook page—our program
> had a Facebook page. Every week on their people would get on and say answer one's on
> page 555, or whatnot. And it was okay with the instructors that we discussed—that we
> even do them together.

Prior to this experience, Beth had never thought about whether or not doing the assignments

together could be deemed an act of academic dishonesty. The act of working together was seen

as acceptable, not necessarily by consent of the faculty in the program, but because of omission

by the faculty in the course. Beth's experience derived from a tough assignment that seemed to

have all of her classmates stumped.

> So we had one horrible learning activity and I think it was like 80 questions long. We
> were arguing back and forth and we couldn't find the answers in the book. I said you
> know what, I'm going to submit it; I submitted it, got the answers and posted it online.

Beth then began to have second thoughts about what had just taken place. She shared in the interview how she wondered if what she had done was within the guidelines of the course. "Well, when I hit submit online there was like oh, should I be doing this? Because—is this right? Is this pushing the limits a little bit too far?" Beth's second thoughts were reinforced when she was approached by a faculty member in the program about what had happened in the previous assignment. Beth explained that while this was not something that had not been done before, she soon realized that she was the one who would be made an example of. "We did this all the time. But I happened to be the one that got caught doing it."

Group Two: Participant who committed academic dishonesty but was not caught

One of the participants in the study mentioned that he had probably committed an act of academic dishonesty but had not been caught.

John. John was one of the participants who gave multiple examples of direct acts of academic dishonesty. He started by talking about a course where he received help from another student.

> With the course that was probably direct because I was actually getting someone else's help that was in the class. The teacher that administered the test, she would set up different types of tests, so even if you got together with that student, your tests wouldn't be alike. So—but there would alike questions on there, so I'd be, "Hey, did you get this question?" They'd be like, yeah. I was like, "So did you get it right or wrong?" And I could get it right from there. But that would probably be the direct way of academic dishonesty.

John did not seem bothered that what he was describing was an act of academic dishonesty. John's reaction was one that I thought I would hear more of during this study, however; he was the only student to show a lackadaisical attitude towards committing an act of

academic dishonesty. John said that he was doing what he needed to do in order to get through a class he was not really interested in.

Group three: Participants who had an act of academic dishonesty committed against them

Participants who were part of this group had acts of academic dishonesty committed against them. The experiences ranged from being asked to take a homework assignment or exam for another student to seeing other students actively participating in acts of academic dishonesty.

Aubrey. Aubrey described her direct experience with academic dishonesty as one of frustration and fairness of those involved. Aubrey's class was a hybrid whereby some of the work was done online, mainly the testing, and the homework and classroom assignments were completed in class. Her experience dealt with being in a class and witnessing cheating as it was occurring, while nothing happened to the individuals involved in the cheating.

> Yeah, I was in a class and a whole bunch of students were talking a whole bunch. One student was telling me how he just sat right in front of a really smart guy because he would let him see all of his answers and he didn't study at all for tests that I'd spend a lot of hours studying for. It was pretty infuriating. It's just so unfair because you know that they didn't put the work in. It messes with the curves. I guess it's mostly the fact that it's not fair and they didn't get a grade that was worthy of their work. Yeah, that's basically it.

Aubrey said that not enough was being done by the faculty member to monitor the students in this class. She said that fairness was the biggest issue involved with this particular case of academic dishonesty. Having spent numerous hours poring over the material in the text so that she could achieve a passing score, Aubrey said that others simply cheating off each other was not only wrong, but needed to be addressed by the faculty member.

Marcus. Marcus had dealt with academic dishonesty a few times in his academic career. He also noted that he thought if students said they had never seen or participated in an act of

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academic dishonesty, they were fooling themselves. He believed academic dishonesty to be a

rampant problem in higher education.

> Okay. I think it would be dishonest for anyone to say that they—have not ever had any interaction with the students. Unfortunately, in this day and age to say that they've never seen it just because it does happen to one degree or another.

Marcus noted a time where he had witnessed students in his math class cheating off of each

other.

> With me directly, yes, I've seen it and yes, I've seen the effects of it as well. There's people that will sit there and they'll do their online math homework and come Calculus exam two time, they have no idea what's going on because they do not have internet as a crutch and not saying that the internet is a bad thing to use on homework or anything but they're kind of doing the whole copy and paste type of thing.

Marcus thought that the students who committed these acts were not really hurting him,

but really just hurting themselves. He noted that when it came time for the students to prove that

they knew the material, they would fail.

> Well because you're cheating yourself. It's not really—the main thing is you're just cheating yourself out of knowledge essentially. Like in my example earlier with the guy that just sits there and just kind of finds little patterns and doesn't try to learn it, he just tries to get the right answer I guess and I honestly—it doesn't affect me at all. I'm just— good luck on the test buddy kind of a thing.

Marcus provided insight that while he did not think the acts of academic dishonesty he

spoke of affected him directly, they may have an indirect effect on him. He talked about the

fairness issue of students not studying or doing the necessary homework and still earning the

same, or in some cases, a better grade than his. He said that while that is certainly not fair, those

students would pay for their acts of academic dishonesty down the line.

> *Elizabeth.* Elizabeth, of the seven participants, had the only experience of being asked to

cheat for others. She said that she had both direct and indirect experiences in relation to acts of

academic dishonesty.

I have both direct and indirect. For the direct I would actually—people would offer or they would try to offer me money or bribe me to do their homework. In a lot of cases they were upper classmen to me that were like we have this that has to get done but we have other things that have to get done. We know you understand this; we'll pay you to do this.

Even though she was offered money and or other goods for her services, Elizabeth said she had never accepted. She said that she would be just as guilty as the person she was doing the work for if she was caught. She was not sure that she could live with her conscience, even if she was never caught.

Elizabeth also spoke of an instance where she knew of a friend cheating through an online course.

A friend and I were taking an online class and based on both of our scores in our class I was pushed back in the class and I was able to get a B in the class because I struggled through it. She one day decided to do all the work and got an A so I am guessing within that class she had to have used some outside source because know if I ask her any of the stuff that I learned in the class she has absolutely no idea what it is.

Elizabeth knew that her friend had simply crammed all of the information together in a day and had no way of ever retaining that knowledge.

She noted that it made her feel bad for the teacher as well.

It made me also feel bad that the teacher had taken the time to set the lessons aside for us and actually work with us and try get us to it and then she just decided to, "well I don't really care." And the rest of the students in the class we worked on it, we tried and then that person just decided, "I don't really care."

Elizabeth made the connection that not only was the faculty member trying to help the students in the course, but that to build the course and assignments involved a lot of time and effort on the faculty member's part. She was just as concerned about the faculty member wasting effort as she was about herself.

Group four: Participants who witnessed others participate in acts of academic dishonesty

Participants who were part of this group dealt with a number of differing instances. The experiences ranged from seeing others copy from someone else's work to seeing friends engage in acts of academic dishonesty.

Brian. Brian talked about his experience with an indirect case of academic dishonesty.

Well, indirectly I have seen people do kind of my initial definition of academic dishonest and just look off of one person or friend that was really smart, and those particular students succeeding in the course. It really made me upset just because I had understood the type of work that I had put in to get the grade that I ended up getting, and to see the type of work that they put in to get a better grade than me really made me mad. And I don't know. It just—it doesn't feel right; but at the same time, it's hard to say what you would say in the situation if it presented itself to you.

Brian shared his insight into what he might do if we were ever approached with a direct case of academic dishonesty. Having only dealt with minor and indirect cases, he thought that, depending on the circumstance, it could be very hard for him to turn away from committing an act of academic dishonesty. As he explained later in his interview, the pressures that surround acts of academic dishonesty, peer pressure, grade pressure, and others, could be very hard to turn away from if he was ever presented with them.

Jennifer. Some of Jennifer's friends participated in acts of academic dishonesty, which was close enough for her to feel that she had been directly involved with a specific act.

I haven't had anyone talk to me about it because, all the classes that I've been taking, none of my friends are taking. So, it's hard. And, all the online classes, I don't know who's taking the same ones as I took. So, it was pretty easy for me not to get involved because I didn't have – know anyone that was doing it, but I know some friends that took online classes together, and they worked on it together, and they would sit together on the exams, and, "Okay, you do the first 25 and I'll do the next 25." And so, that's about all that I can say that I've had any encounters with.

Jennifer said that so long as the acts of academic dishonesty did not affect her or her grade, she was not really all that concerned with it. She mentioned the examples of her friends talking

about instances that they had cheated or worked together on assignments, but she did not seem to mind that it was happening, or that her friends were participating in those acts. Her main focus was on herself and her studies.

John. John also dealt with indirect acts of academic dishonesty where he witnessed other students participating on work together.

> Oh yeah, you see people all the time being academic (sic) dishonest, but I try to stay away from there because I don't know if they have the correct answers. And it's my grade, it's my test score on the line so I'm gonna try to do my own work so I don't have to depend on someone else.

John also noted that he was aware of other students using his work to cheat and that it didn't bother him.

> I don't care—I could care less if someone cheats off me because I don't even know if I have the right answer or not. And they can cheat off me, but I don't think I'm gonna cheat off any other people because I'm in of those upper level classes where you have to think for yourself and if—I don't know if you can depend on another person to get the right answer.

Summary

The participants also varied on their ideas of what constituted an act of academic dishonesty. In addition, the participants differed on whether or not acts of academic dishonesty affected them negatively or at all. Some of the participants had vastly different and numerous experiences while others had never actually dealt with a direct case of academic dishonesty. Lastly, although the experiences of each participant were diverse in nature, the ways in which the acts of academic dishonesty were carried out were not nearly as diverse.

Theme Three: Academic Dishonesty Means Cheating

Each of the seven participants mentioned that their own personal understanding of academic dishonesty meant cheating, although some participants went more in-depth than others to explain why and how they came to that understanding. The two graduates of the community

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college who participated noted that they said the act is even more magnified at the university level.

John said, "I think the initial reaction is just cheating, on like an assignment or cheating on a test. There's sometimes, I don't know if it's labeled as academic dishonesty, but you're pretty much like playing the game. That's the way I think of it." Beth concurred with that rationale in her interview, stating, "It means pretty much cheating. Like if you were taking a test and looking over somebody's shoulder and taking the answers from somebody else." Aubrey added another element as she talked about cheating as being not only wrong, but against what was expected of students in the syllabus for the course. "That means cheating to me, and doing something that's against what your syllabus says. If the teacher says you're not allowed to share work with students and you do … that is academic dishonesty".

In addition to each student labeling academic dishonesty as cheating, a couple of the participants interviewed also brought up the negative connotation that comes with the words "academic dishonesty." Marcus noted, "Well, as it should, it definitely has a negative connotation. It's definitely—for me, personally, it doesn't—it helps temporarily but in the long term it doesn't." Marcus also noted that in his area of study, acts of academic dishonesty are not worth the risk. "I'm definitely going to have to be the one to learn the material and being dishonesty academically, you tend not to—you get the good grade then, but you suffer later on in a much larger scale."

Each of the participants said that students should take just as much responsibility as a faculty member in making sure that they are not engaging in an act of academic dishonesty. The fact that each participant mentioned the term cheating when asked what they thought academic dishonesty meant shows that, at least for this study, participants were aware of the term and the

meaning behind it. Some of the participants also noted that they were not interested in engaging in an act of academic dishonesty because it would catch up with them sooner or later. The participants in this study were well aware that, in the long run, it was best for them to complete the work on their own—no matter how easy it may be to engage in an act of academic dishonesty.

Theme Four: Heard About Academic Dishonesty in High School

The term academic dishonesty was not a new one for the participants. All of the participants mentioned that they first heard the term in high school (grades 9-12). Some of the participants said that acts of academic dishonesty were overlooked in high school and were surprised at how seriously it was taken at the collegiate level. John mentioned, "I think I first heard it in high school. I mean, students are always cheating in high school, so they're saying, hey, academic dishonesty is using another person or using outside sources to help you out." John also pointed out that while academic dishonesty was talked about in high school, the term seemed to have increased significance when he got to college. "So they always stress it in high school, and then they stress it even more in college because you don't want an 'F" on your transcript.'" Aubrey noted that acts of academic dishonesty were taken more serious in college as well.

> It kind of starts off pretty early (hearing the definition of academic dishonesty) but it gets more serious in college because your grades matter more and it's a lot more competitive…I guess it just becomes a lot more serious the older you get or the further in school you get.

The participants noted a few instances where they believed that academic dishonesty was taken less seriously at the high school level. They said that grades seemed to matter less in high school than they do in college. Some of the participants wondered why more emphasis was not

placed on educating students as to what constituted an act of academic dishonesty earlier in their educational journey.

The participants for this study seemed to disagree about whether or not acts of academic dishonesty were identified and punished at the high school level in the same way they were at the college level. Participants cited the fact that high schools are much more worried about federal testing standards than they are with catching students who choose to cheat as one of the reasons for the lack of enforcement. Colleges have far less scrutiny on them in that way and may have more resources at their disposal to catch those engaging in acts of academic dishonesty.

Theme Five: Reasons Given for Committing Acts of Academic Dishonesty

The participants cited many different reasons as to why they or others have engaged in acts of academic dishonesty. One of the more frequently cited reasons centered on a lack of time management skills. Poor time management seemed to be amplified in the online learning environment because of the lack of direction; direction that is present in an on-campus course. Some participants cited general laziness or lack of interest in a certain course. John's experiences were shaped from both personal and peer contact.

> Well, I think #1 is just to get an "A" in the class and to be top of your class. I mean, you don't wanna get a "B" in online music because—I don't know, it just kinda shows that you're lazy, or you just want to strive for that "A". So that's probably one reason why someone cheats, is just so they can get an "A" in the class. Probably another reason is financial aid. I mean, the higher scores you get, the better ACT score you get, the more money you get. So I think people cheat just to get more money so they're well-off on down the road.

Jennifer also identified time management as one reason for students participating in acts of academic dishonesty.

> I would say they just don't have time. Especially if you're taking a lot of classes and doing extracurricular activities, sometimes, school – even though it shouldn't get pushed to the side – sometimes, it does. Then, you're up to the deadline, and you didn't learn it, and you're on your exam, and you're kinda lost. And so, you try to get on the Internet, and figure out what's going on, and so, yeah.

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Each of the participants, while citing time management as a reason for acts of academic dishonesty, believed that it was simply another excuse that students used. Some participants loathed the fact that students were using lack of time as an excuse because it implied that they (the other students) had more important things to do than their schoolwork,

Peer pressure was another reason students engaged in acts of academic dishonesty. Some of the participants cited direct experiences of their peers urging them to help their friends or classmates to make sure everyone got a good grade. John talked about the peer pressure aspect of academic dishonesty.

> Well you get it all the time. Someone is just like, "Hey, what's this answer?" so you can give it. Because we have online homework in all of our classes, and they'll just be like, "Hey, what did you get on this answer?" so I get it right and move on. And so, I mean you don't wanna sit down with them and waste all of your time trying to describe how to do the problem instead of just giving them the right answer. So sometimes you just give them the right answer so you can both just move on and get the assignment done. I actually had that happen to me last year when I was taking that online music class. You spend 40, 50 hours on just all these quizzes and all the reading and stuff, and then you have one person that decides to go out like party, or they'll go out and do something else instead of do their work. And you kinda hesitate to give them all the answers, and to even give them the material or all that, just—I don't know, I ended up not giving it to her. I just kinda blew it off because I was like, "I spent all this time, and you decided to lay back and not do it, so you can figure it out."

John admitted that rather than arguing with another student over giving up his answers, he decided to simply give them up. His actions are probably more of the norm for today's college students. The research from this project shows that avoiding confrontation from peers continues to be a very strong determiner in all areas of life, especially for a traditional aged student such as John.

Beth dealt with a situation that led her to engage in an act of academic dishonesty because of peer pressure. She also said that her situation may have been different than the norm.

> I don't think my situation is – I actually think it's a lot different than most academic dishonesty. People usually cheat to better themselves than cheat to try to help your

buddy out over there. But I – like in our situation, the learning activities – there are no longer learning activities this semester.

Beth was conflicted about her situation because she was simply following the crowd of students before her. It was common practice for a student to complete the assignment and share the answers after receiving the grade. Beth also seemed to feel good about the fact that she was able to help her fellow students.

Jennifer's experience and perception as to why students were engaging acts of academic dishonesty was very straightforward. "Probably the No. 1 is they're just lazy; they don't wanna take the time to go over and learn each concept or, in math, they don't wanna learn how to do this kinda a problem, or things like that. Probably lazy is first." Jennifer had no issues with calling out her fellow students for simply refusing to complete the work. Laziness seemed to really bother Jennifer, in part because of how much work she had put into each of her classes in order to achieve a high grade. She said that students who were lazy were simply trying to game the system and she said they should be punished accordingly.

Grade pressure, GPA pressure, and a fear of losing financial aid due to lower grades were additional reasons given for students engaging in acts of academic dishonesty. Aubrey cited two reasons she believed students were cheating. She said that both peer pressure and grade pressure were primary factors that led students to engage in acts of academic dishonesty.

> Oh, yeah, I think that plays a huge role. Typically, if someone is letting someone cheat off their paper, then there's like something going on behind that. I definitely think it's a peer pressure thing when you're thinking about turning someone in because you don't want that person to hate you for turning them in.

Aubrey also mentioned the grade pressure issue in her interview. "They don't want to get a bad grade. They'd just be like oh, I didn't study for this so I'm just going to read off his paper. Usually it's always just driven by the fact that they don't want a bad grade."

Marcus took a more personal approach as he talked about why students chose to engage in acts of academic dishonesty. He noted that intense peer pressure can make even the most strict student question if they should not be cheating.

> Honestly, there's two different forces I feel like that are acting here because your peers and your classmates are saying it's the norm to be dishonest and it's definitely "uncool" to snitch essentially or tell the teacher or tell somebody that hey, they're not doing the right thing kind of thing. You definitely don't want to do that because there's so much of that peer pressure there that if you do, then you become lowest of the low on the totem pole.

Marcus mentioned his upbringing as his source of strength to keep his studies "on the up and up." "At the same time, I have great parents and they're the ones that were—and my siblings that are telling me, like, hey, this is dishonest."

Elizabeth drew from her own experiences as she talked about peers and why they chose to engage in acts of academic dishonesty. She, like other participants, mentioned time management and personal priorities as possible reasons why students cheat.

> I believe a lot of it is a choice of priorities. You are doing stuff and then all of a sudden it's 10 p.m. and you have a test that's due at midnight. And to make sure that you can get that in, you haven't studied so you have to reach out to something else because you haven't been preparing. You have been putting other things in front of it. And just online courses seem to find their way to bottom of people's priorities. They end up, well it's the end of the day, 8 p.m., I have a few hours. I can go party with my friends and come back and work on it. Oh look it's 10 p.m. and I still haven't finished this test. So I think that's part of the reason that people start reaching out to that because they find they don't have any other option and they don't want to ask their instructor, hey I did this I really need help.

Elizabeth found herself dealing with this problem many times during her community college career. She said that high school did very little to prepare her for the time demands she would be subjected to in college.

Brian's perceptions mirrored some of the other participants, but in his experience he had never considered the peer pressure to be so extreme that it would cause him to want to cheat.

I definitely think there are forms of peer pressure just with—if a friend was really struggling and was really pressuring you to let them cheat off you in order to do well on a test—because obviously, if it's someone in your group or something, you obviously care what happens to them. But I don't know. Especially at a U—at my current university, I would never even think about going out on a limb to save someone else's neck just because the preparation is before the test. And usually, people who are giving you peer pressure to cheat are the ones who have been slacking off, and you usually don't have as much sympathy for.

Students who are on any type of financial aid have to keep their GPA within a certain minimum guideline in order to qualify for future funding. Brian shared his perceptions of how the potential loss of financial aid might drive a student to cheat.

Yeah, I think the financial aid that requires a certain GPA to maintain will, no matter what, because a sense of desperation for the people that are boarding two to three points above or below what they need for that semester. And I think the financial aid being grade dependent can drive people to cheat if it means they can keep the money.

Aubrey also mentioned the grade pressure issue in her interview. "They don't want to get a bad grade. They'd just be like oh, I didn't study for this so I'm just going to find someone to cheat off of." The participants mentioned that students feel they are justified to do whatever is necessary to keep their grades in an acceptable range. Some of the participants said that grade pressure was the single most reason why students would turn to academic dishonesty as a means to keep their financial aid.

 Peer pressure and GPA were the single most important factors for many of the participants in regards to why students choose to engage in academic dishonesty. Each of the participants mentioned either peer pressure or grade pressure when asked why they thought students engaged in academic dishonesty. This theme also showed that the participants were keenly aware as to why either they or their peers where engaging in acts of academic dishonesty. The results of this study show that students are not only aware that acts of academic dishonesty are occurring but that students have a good idea as to why they are occurring.

Theme Six: Student Level of Effort Determined Acts of Academic Dishonesty

Many of the participants chose to share experiences where they had seen, or been a part

of, a group of students engaging in an act of academic dishonesty simply to get through a general

education course. The participants offered insight into why other students might cheat in classes

that do not matter or are not related to the degree path they have chosen. The participants who

shared this experience noted that this type of situation is very common among their peers.

John said that general education courses would have more acts of academic dishonesty

because students are not as interested in those courses as they are in major-specific courses.

> It's, it kinda depends on what class you're taking. There's gonna be more academically
> dishonest people with your general classes than there are with the more serious classes. I
> mean, if you're taking a psychology class just to get through your major or whatever,
> you're gonna find a way to get groups of people to study with, and cheat off their tests or
> something. It's—I don't look at it as cheating.

John justified studying in groups or completing work in groups because the class just did not

matter to him. John said that what he was doing was using the resources he had available.

> I just see it as using your resources to get through that test. I mean, you can learn a lot
> better if you're studying in a group than with yourself because you have other people's
> insight on things. But there's more so-and-so "cheating" going on with the general
> classes than there is with like the Micro class online.

Other participants, while not implicating themselves, also mentioned that student effort often

went hand in hand with whether or not the course was degree required or general education

required.

Elizabeth said that online courses in general, and more specifically those courses where

students can jump out to Google and look for an answer, were ripe for more acts of academic

dishonesty.

> I think in certain courses it will probably always be highly prevalent especially, as I said,
> foreign language courses. An example, like the Spanish course they offer here at the
> college because it's that idea that you actually have to learn the language and if you don't
> know a word in the middle of a test instead of really trying to think about it and think

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about that, just jumping into that Google Search, Google Translate. And I think it would be more prevalent with more classes going online because universities are trying to reach towards those online classes as the web is expanding and the availability and ease of access to information online. So you can just look up all the answers, get a good grade, and not actually have to do anything about it.

This theme highlighted reasons why students are engaging in acts of academic dishonesty. Participants said that students in general education courses feel that the course are a waste of time and energy and will simply do what they have to do to finish the course—even it means engaging in academic dishonesty. It seemed that the participants believed that if students are not interested in the course, they would be more likely to cheat. The research from this study in the area of academic dishonesty is showing that students are choosing to engage in acts of academic dishonesty because they simply are not interested in the material.

Summary of Emergent Themes

The research for this project yielded six emergent themes. The themes developed included that participants said that online learning is convenient yet less beneficial. While the participants admitted that many aspects of online learning can help students, for those who participated in this project it was found to be less beneficial than a face to face class.

Students had varied and diverse experiences with acts of academic dishonesty. One student committed an act of academic dishonesty and was caught; one student had committed multiple acts and had not been caught. A few participants were victims of an act of academic dishonesty or had an act committed against them. Lastly, some of the participants had direct knowledge of acts of academic dishonesty by either witnessing an act or being asked to participate in an act of academic dishonesty.

Participants in this project said that the term academic dishonesty meant cheating. There was little debate among the participants as to the meaning of the word and what acts would be

constituted as such. The participants noted that they started hearing the term academic

dishonesty in high school.

Numerous reasons were given as to why students may choose to participate in an act of

dishonesty. Peer pressure, grade pressure, and a lack of interest in the course were reported to be

the main reasons for students choosing to cheat. Participants in this project also said that the

level of student interest in a given course may determine if a student would choose to cheat.

Four additional findings emerged from the research:

- Less Knowledge is Gained Online
- Face-to-Face Courses Preferred
- More Acts of Academic Dishonesty Occur with Online Courses
- Faculty Educating Students on What is and What is Not Academic Dishonesty.

Additional Finding One: Less Knowledge is Gained Online

Each of the participants in this project if given the option preferred to take a class on-campus as opposed to online. Aubrey mentioned that while online learning is convenient, it does not seem to help her retain as much knowledge as an on-campus course.

> When you do it (take an online course) it's convenient. I think that you don't learn as much as you do in an in-class setting. I guess that's the variant over the courses I've taken. One psychology class I took online went really well and I learn a lot but then some other one I took I didn't learn a thing after I finished.

Brian said that online classes were less rigorous and therefore easier.

> As far as I have known and other people around me have known, online classes tend to be easier. And not as much information is retained through online. I don't ever take important classes through online, just ones that I have to get out of the way.

Elizabeth noted that she has taken online courses that were harder than some on-campus courses, "But the rest of the classes, especially the one that I'm taking right now have been actually easier…"

Jennifer found that in her experience the convenience was not worth the extra time she had to put in to an online course. "The first ones I took because I wanted to see what it was like and I thought it would free up a little bit more time in my schedule so I could work as well, and that didn't really help because I was doing more time studying than in class."

Many of the participants cited specific examples of instructors not being as timely in the online learning environment as they were when in the classroom. Some participants mentioned

that they felt isolated or alone without anyone to help them through questions or difficult

material. The last issue that the participants in this project raised was the fact that taking and

passing a course online often did not translate into future success in on-campus courses.

Participants in this study found that while online learning is convenient, overall, less knowledge

was attained than in on-campus courses.

Additional Finding Two: Face-to-Face Course Preferred

Participants were unanimous in that, if given a choice, they preferred to take a class on-

campus rather than online. John was adamant that, if given the choice, he would never take

another course online.

> I don't think I'll ever take an online class if it's offered (on-campus). Like, my major is
> Biology right now, and I don't think that I'd never take Micro online because you need to
> be in the class, you need to be learning all these techniques…I'd rather sit in the class and
> interact with the professor.

Elizabeth said that she needed on-campus classes to keep her on task with her assignments.

> I actually have a preference to on campus courses to online ones just because by doing
> the online classes I find that I will put working for my parents company ahead of actually
> doing my school work and that pushes me behind a lot further than when I'm in the
> classroom and I actually have that reminder that I had this or that to do.

Marcus craved the human interaction with both his peers and professors.

> I feel like having human interaction is definitely more preferable and the online is great
> and convenient for those that work full-time and they got a thousand kids and just life,
> but for me, being younger, I have the time, I don't work full-time, you know, I'd rather
> be in the classroom.

Participants' preference for face-to-face courses was related to their perception that

students learn less online. The participants said that they learned more in a face-to-face class and

preferred to have physical interaction with their instructors. Many reasons were given as to why

the participants preferred on-campus classes, such as having a teacher in the classroom that could

answer questions or simply be available to them.

Additional Finding Three: More Acts of Academic Dishonesty Occur with Online Courses

Participants agreed that more acts of academic dishonesty happened during online classes as opposed to on-campus courses. Participants also noted that many of the activities in the online learning environment are impossible for faculty to monitor; making it is also easier for the students to engage in cheating online.

John said that the reason more acts of academic dishonesty occurred online was because it was easier to cheat online than on-campus.

> The difference between academic dishonesty online? It's a lot easier. It means you can get with, you can get study groups, you can email a person and they'll email you back. I mean, it's a lot easier to cheat with online classes.

Jennifer believed that more students cheat online because of the lack of oversight.

> I think there's a lot more online because no one is there to watch them. If you go and take a test in a (sic) on-campus class, they're watching you and proctoring the test. Well, if you go home and take your online test, you can just sit on Google, and type in all the questions and it'll give you answers. And they can't see what you're doing on your computer, so I think it happens a lot more online.
> Initially, Marcus responded that more acts of academic dishonesty happen online,

although he was not sure if it was a lot more or if it was just different kinds of academic dishonesty.

> So I mean, the teacher can be pretty observant and pretty close to the students (on campus) so if there's any whispering or wavering eyes and just things like that. It's not hard and these teachers are here for a reason. They're (the faculty) not stupid.

For the most part, it seemed the participants were resigned to the fact that until the technology improves; a significant number of acts of academic dishonesty will continue to occur in the online learning environment. Some participants noted that they had either participated, or had known classmates who had participated, in taking tests and quizzes together on different computers. This additional finding also tied in with the theme of student engagement in relation

to students not being interested in the material they were taking which could lead them to cheat or the fact that it is much harder to get caught cheating online than it is in the classroom.

Additional Finding Four: Faculty Educating Students on What is and What is Not Academic Dishonesty

Most of the participants said that faculty was doing a good job of educating their students as to what constituted an act of academic dishonesty. Beth, who was found to have committed an act of academic dishonesty, said that the need to clearly define academic dishonesty was still overlooked. Many of the participants said that so long as their instructors either mentioned in their syllabus or directed students to the student handbook, their job was mostly done. The general feeling from the research was that faculty can always do a better job educating students on academic dishonesty, but that it was probably not a faculty member's failure to relay what constitutes an act of academic dishonesty that led to students choosing to engage in acts of academic dishonesty.

John said that students should know better, even though a faculty member covers what constitutes an act of academic dishonesty.

> Well I think they cover it. That's probably one section that they always cover. I mean, you'll have the whole handbook of no smoking or no chewing online – or on campus and stuff. But they'll make sure to say, "These are the class hours," "These are the professor's hours," then they'll skip down to academic dishonesty. So they'll always cover that, so when they do find you cheating they can get you for it right away.

Jennifer said that the faculty is responsible for educating students on exactly what is and is not acceptable for each course.

> I think, if it's not brought up, then it gives them a lot of room because they—if you don't know what the expectations of the class are, you can just kinda do whatever, especially if you're not sure. And I think they do need to improve that and they need to start telling you, "Okay, so, we're not gonna allow you to do this, and you shouldn't be looking at

this or this unless—and, if you need help, come talk to us." I think if they said that at the beginning of the year, that would help out a lot.

Jennifer said that both students and faculty could shoulder the blame for the differing amounts of academic dishonesty between courses. She said that if neither the student nor the faculty member cared about the course, more academic dishonesty would be prevalent.

> Students, the faculty, kinda anyone. I mean, if the faculty doesn't care that they're cheating and passing the class—if they're fine with that, then I mean, obviously, there's not a problem to them. Or the same with the students—if they just wanna go through college just to get a degree and not apply it anywhere, or—sometimes, when a student takes a class that they don't think they're gonna use, that's when it happens the most—a lot. And they don't care about that class, so they're not gonna—it's not a big deal to them if they cheat through it because they're not gonna use it later.

Beth said that educating students about acts of academic dishonesty has not been a priority for the faculty she has interacted with.

> I think it's overlooked. I really do. Because they did talk about academic dishonesty the first day, vaguely, if I remember. But again, I always thought it was you looking to the next one's computer like during a test, and like you cheating for your own benefit I guess. That's what I felt academic dishonesty was. And I was not cheating for my own benefit; I was cheating for others' benefits. So I don't think that they covered the cheating for others' benefits really well because most people do that I guess.

Beth said that faculty could do a better job, more than simply pointing to a syllabus, especially when they suspect that acts of academic dishonesty might be occurring. In her case, Beth said that faculty knew what was going on but did not mention or reinforce their expectations of the students until they caught her.

Much of the research on this topic has found students are claiming that they were not told what constituted an act of academic dishonesty. The participants in this project disagreed; they said that faculty have very little responsibility when it comes to educating students as to what is and what is not an act of academic dishonesty. While some participants said that faculty could to a better job of reinforcing for students what acts of academic dishonesty are, especially at

different points throughout the semester, all of the participants said that faculty covered the topic, even if it was simply a cursory note at the beginning of the class.

Summary of Additional Findings

This project also revealed four additional findings that were not directly tied to the research question. Participants in this study said that less knowledge is gained in an online course as compared to a similar face to face course. Many reasons were cited with the main reason being that students were more likely to be engaged by having to go to class each day and interact with a teacher in person.

Participants in this project said that they preferred face to face courses over online courses. The participants said that they learned more by having to attend courses on a regular basis and said that being able to ask questions and receive an immediate response helped them to learn better.

The participants in this study believed that more acts of academic dishonesty were occurring in the online learning environment than in the classroom. Participants noted the relative anonymity of online courses and the resources of the internet as being the basis for their perceptions in this regard.

Lastly, participants in this study had mixed opinions as to whether faculty were doing enough to educate students as to what constituted an act of academic dishonesty. Some of the participants said that the onus fell on students to ensure that what they were doing was allowed. Others said that faculty could do a better job in helping students to understand what is and what is not an act of academic dishonesty.

Conclusion

Six themes and four additional findings were found as the data were interpreted. The six themes followed the research question. Participants said that online learning was convenient. Participants had diverse experiences with academic dishonesty. Participants defined academic dishonesty as cheating. Participants had first heard about academic dishonesty in high school. Participants identified many reasons as to why students engaged in academic dishonesty. Lastly, participants said that students' interest in a particular course factored into whether or not students would cheat.

The four additional findings emerged as participants addressed other concerns or observations about academic dishonesty with online courses. These findings were: Participants said that less knowledge was gained online. Participants preferred face–to-face courses over online courses. Participants said that more acts of academic dishonesty were occurring online than on-campus. Finally, participants said that faculty was in fact educating their students to some degree about what constituted an act of academic dishonesty.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Introduction

The focus of this study was on the lived experiences of current and former community college students as they related to acts of academic dishonesty in the online learning environment. The research question that guided this study was: What are the lived experiences of community college students at a western United States community college as they relate to acts of academic dishonesty in an online course?

This chapter compares and contrasts the results of this study with the current literature (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Each of the emergent themes from the research as well as the additional findings will be covered as they relate to the literature. Lastly, I address ideas for future research.

Online Learning is Convenient

Participants in this study said that online learning was a convenient form of higher education. The participants noted many reasons that supported the finding including: not having to attend class in person; the ability to do coursework, homework assignments, end of chapter activities, or tests at any time; and the freedom to hold a job while still going to college. These findings are also supported in the literature. Oblinger and Oblinger (2005) note that 20% of Millennials used a computer between the ages of five and eight and virtually all of them had used a computer at some point in their lives between the ages of 16 and 18. Further, OnlinVery ;lFthe authors explained that as this new "net" generation enters their teenage years (ages 13 to 15), the vast majority (94%) would be using the internet for school-related work and research (Oblinger

& Oblinger, 2005). The ease of use of both computers and the internet made online classes a convenient option for the participants in this study.

Diverse Experiences with Acts of Academic Dishonesty

The participants in this study had a wide range of experiences pertaining to acts of academic dishonesty in the online learning environment. Some of the participants had participated in an act of academic dishonesty and were caught. Others were affected by an act of academic dishonesty or were asked to help another student commit an act of academic dishonesty, although only one of the participants was disciplined after being found to have violated an academic dishonesty policy.

These findings are supported by the literature reviewed. In a comprehensive study on cheating, McCabe (1992) surveyed more than 50,000 students attending 60 institutions and found that up to 70% of students admitted to some form of academic dishonesty during their undergraduate careers. Specifically, the study found that 25% of students admitted to cheating on a test or exam. Students believed that cutting and pasting material from a website was not a serious form of academic dishonesty (McCabe, 2001). Further studies revealed that students admitted to cheating at least once on an exam (Chisel, 2007). The participants specifically mentioned that test cheating was prevalent in the online learning environment due to the lack of oversight in the online environment. Further, the participants reported that plagiarism, or cutting and pasting items from an internet or other source, has become more difficult because of the online tools available to faculty to identify "borrowed" material, such as Turnitin.com. The participants said that most, if not all, students understood that the acts of academic dishonesty they engaged in were indeed violations of an academic dishonesty policy; there was very little gray area about what constituted an act of dishonesty.

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Additionally, recent studies have shown varying levels of students, between 30% and 70%, have participated in some form of academic dishonesty (Chisel, 2007). In fact, the Josephson Institute of Ethics (2006) surveys confirmed that more students were engaged in academic dishonesty, and that many younger (high school aged) students did not see academic dishonesty as significant (Josephson Institute of Ethics, 1998, 2002, 2004, 2006). The study also cited the Center for Academic Integrity (2005) findings showing 70% of the students participating in the survey admitted to engaging in some form of academic dishonesty during the span of their college career (Center For Academic Integrity, 2005). Many students did not consider plagiarism or cutting and pasting from an un-cited source to be academic dishonesty (Ma et al., 2008).

All of the participants in this study had either committed an act of academic dishonesty or had an act committed against them. With one exception, the participants who had committed an act of academic dishonesty had not been caught while doing so. Further, two of the participants said that the act they committed, getting help from others on online homework assignments, did not constitute a significant enough violation to be punished. The participant who was caught and punished for an act of academic dishonesty did not deny that the act was against the code of conduct; however, she noted that almost every other student in her class had done the same thing and not been caught.

All participants understood academic dishonesty to mean cheating

Participants began hearing about academic dishonesty as far back as high school

Each of the participants in this study said that they understood what the term academic dishonesty meant. Participants frequently used terms such as "cheating" or "using someone else's work" to explain their understanding of academic dishonesty. Each of the participants also

said that they could remember hearing the term "academic dishonesty" as far back as when they were in high school.

Conversely, some of the findings of this study conflicted with the literature. Much of the literature reviewed suggests that students were either unwilling to admit that they knew what acts of academic dishonesty were, or they were truly ignorant of what the term meant. Wilson (2004) found that many of Millennials had differing definitions of what academic dishonesty meant and how they attributed it to their lives. Another study (Wotring & Bol, 2011) found that students did not consider their acts to be academically dishonest. The study focused on the Millennial generation and indicated that students saw group work (working together without instructor permission), watching a related movie as opposed to reading the assigned book, or a false delay in turning in a paper as justifiable, or not a "big deal" (Wotring & Bol, 2011). Further, the study found that while only 6% of the students surveyed said that cheating was a way of life, more 50% believed that cheating was wrong under any circumstance (Underwood & Szabo, 2003). The findings of this study reflected that participants who admitted to engaging in an act of academic dishonesty said the act they committed was not one that would rise to the level of punishment. The participants also reported that most, if not all, of their peers were engaging in the same type of activities and that the faculty member should have known what was going on. The fact that the faculty member did not address the issue made it acceptable to those participants who chose to engage in an act of academic dishonesty.

Reasons Given for Committing Acts of Academic Dishonesty

Study participants gave many reasons as to why students might choose to partake in an act of academic dishonesty. Their reasons for committing academic dishonesty included poor time management, lack of interest in the course, grade and scholarship pressure, and laziness.

Some of the participants noted that the overall ease of committing an act of academic dishonesty in the online environment would cause some students to cheat. The findings of this current study are supported in the literature. Underwood and Szabo (2003) sampled 291 undergraduates in the United Kingdom and found that students' reasons for academic dishonesty varied, but included fear of failure, inability to handle difficult material, tedium, and time management.

The overall ease by which students could commit acts of academic dishonesty was found to be another reason students chose to cheat (Young, 2012). The newer generation of students has grown up with computers and has found more high-tech ways to cheat, making it more of a game than an attempt to achieve a higher score on an assignment or exam. Studies have shown that students have figured out how to "game" the system to gain access to online exams (Krask, 20070. Many of the participants in this study noted that all they had to do was ask, often without giving a reason, and the faculty member would reset an exam or homework assignment. One of the participants noted that many students in a particular class had done this numerous times throughout the semester without being questioned by the faculty member.

Ma et al. (2008) found that more students were engaging in academic dishonesty for various reasons—including poor time management skills, stress induced cheating, and competing for the highest grade—and that the problem was indeed getting worse. Students also said that the pressure to achieve a high grade point average or test score would lead to cheating (Josephson Institute of Ethics, 2007). Many students also mentioned that if they had fallen behind on recent assignments or exams, the likelihood that they would cheat to catch up increased (Josephson Institute of Ethics, 2007).

McCabe (2005) noted that many students participating in his survey on cheating were more concerned with what their peers were doing than repercussions they faced or faculty

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perceptions (McCabe, 2005). This study affirmed those findings. All of the participants noted that peer pressure was one of the top reasons that either they or others had engaged in acts of academic dishonesty. The participants noted that feeling pressured by a friend who had not completed an assignment or studied for a test led them to help the friend with either answers or a copy of the test. The only participant to be caught and punished for an act of academic dishonesty believed she was a victim of peer pressure. She was found to have completed a test first and shared the answers with others on a social media site in an effort to help them do better than she did. Further, study participants said that they were uncomfortable turning down a close friend if the friend had asked for help on an assignment or test that was intended to be completed alone. Peer pressure was one of the strongest reasons why the participants in this study chose to engage in act of academic dishonest.

Student Engagement Determined Acts of Academic Dishonesty

One of the findings of this study was that students might be more likely to choose to engage in academic dishonesty if the course was not in their major or area of emphasis. Not all participants identified this as a motivation to cheat, however three of the participants specifically mentioned the notion of students not being engaged in a general education or "gen ed" course, which could lead to an act of academic dishonesty. The participants in this study each said that students in courses that had little to nothing to do with their field of study were more likely to engage in acts of cheating. They mentioned many reasons why this happens, include a lack of interest in a non-major course, feeling that the course was a waste of time because it did not apply to their major, and spending very little time actually completing the work in a non-major course as compared to the other classes they were enrolled in.

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There is very little direct literature about this type of cheating although past studies have "touched on" this topic. As of the finalization of this project, no studies to determine if students cheat more in a general education course than a major required course had been identified.

Less Knowledge is Learned Online

The participants in this study said that while students may prefer to take an online course because of convenience or other scheduling issues, less learning is occurring online. Each of the participants for this study had taken at least two online courses and many of them had taken at least five. Each participant mentioned that they did not feel that they had learned as much online as they had in the classes they took in the classroom. There were many reasons mentioned including the lack of an instructor to ask questions of and receive immediate feedback from, the inability to devote the needed amount of time for homework and testing, the lack of other students to collaborate with, and difficulty understanding from the text which topic areas were important and which could be left out.

This additional finding was not found in the literature originally reviewed for this study. However, a subsequent review found an article with similar findings. Bristow, Shepherd, Humphreys, and Ziebell (2011) conducted a voluntary study at a large business university in the Midwestern United States. The study included 801 participants and asked questions of whether or not students believed more or less learning was happening in an online courses. Only 36% of the respondents said the course they took online was either extremely or somewhat more difficult than a traditional classroom-based course. The majority (64%) said that the courses were either easier or they had a neutral opinion on the matter.

Face to Face Courses Preferred Over Online

Participants in this study preferred the experience of a face-to-face course over an online course. Many reasons were given including personal contact with an instructor, being able to have questions answered immediately while in-class, peer to peer contact, and availability of clarification on homework and assignments. A couple of the participants mentioned that while they would prefer to take a face-to-face course, they said that online classes were easier, due to instructors assigning less homework or only grading on exams and quizzes.

The initial literature review revealed little on this finding. Some studies (Baron & Crooks 2005; Black et al., 2008; Krask, 2007) proposed that students can and will earn better grades online because of little to no supervision; however, it was acknowledged that there is no way to determine if the student who registered for the course is actually doing the work or having someone else complete it for him or her. The overall perception of the participants in this study was such that, if given a choice, they would prefer to take a class in the classroom as opposed to online.

More Acts of Academic Dishonesty Online

Each of the participants in this study said that they thought more acts of academic dishonesty occurred in the online environment than in the traditional classroom. Many reasons were given including no faculty oversight, the availability of the internet as an immediate aid, laziness, and disinterest in the subject area. Each of the participants said that because it was easier to commit an act of academic dishonesty online, more students were in fact engaging in cheating.

This finding was supported in the literature reviewed for this project. Young (2012) found that the overall ease of academic dishonesty was found to be a reason students chose to

cheat (Young, 2012). Krask (2007) found that students not only engaged in more acts of academic dishonesty online, but that many said it was a game to try and not get caught. For example, Krask found that students had an easier time convincing instructors that they were having technical problems in order to get multiple attempts at exams and homework assignments.

Additional research has uncovered that the lack of repercussions was at least partly responsible for a student engaging in academic dishonesty on a paper or test (Josephson Institute of Ethics, 2007). Students in the report said the lack clear and consistent enforcement on behalf of the faculty member was one of the bigger reasons students would attempt to cheat. Others mentioned that they thought only committing one act of academic dishonesty was somehow less of an offense than those who constantly cheated (Josephson Institute of Ethics, 2007).

Baron and Crooks (2005) Black et al., (2008) and Krask (2007) argued that students can and will earn better grades online because of little to no supervision which could lead to more acts of academic dishonesty. Further, there has yet to be a solid system implemented to prove whether the student who registered for the course is actually completing the material or having someone else complete the work for them. The overall perception is such that both students and faculty view online courses as more susceptible to students engaging in academic dishonesty than that of the traditional classroom.

Faculty Educating Students on What is and What is Not Academic Dishonesty

Some of the participants reported that faculty is doing a good job or that they are doing enough to ensure that students understand what constitutes an act of academic dishonesty. One of the participants said that faculty could still do much better in helping students to understand

some of the "gray areas." All participants said that the responsibility of knowing what constitutes an act of academic dishonesty fell on the student, not the faculty member.

Three studies (Burke 1997; Marcoux 2002; Pincus & Schmelkin 2003) highlighted differing perspectives of faculty perceptions and definitions as they relate to academic dishonesty. None of the studies found solely examined online education; rather, most focused on the growing trend of academic dishonesty as a whole, both in the classroom and online.

Some of the participants noted that faculty knew that academic dishonesty was occurring, but did nothing about it. A few of the participants mentioned they had specific knowledge of a faculty member knowing that acts of academic dishonesty were occurring in the class and doing nothing about it. The participants said it was common knowledge that others in the class could cheat and not get caught. Burke (1997) surveyed more than 500 faculty members at a college campus and asked how often faculty enforced their academic dishonesty policy. The study findings showed that while academic dishonesty was seen as a serious offense, it was not reported to be a problem by the majority of respondents.

A study by Higgins (2010) also showed disparity between what faculty and students considered a punishable act of academic dishonesty. Higgins noted that both faculty and student perceptions of cheating behaviors were complex. Many of the participants in this study said that while they understood what academic dishonesty meant, their instructors simply pointed to the policy in a handbook when addressing the class about this issue. Giving more real world examples would have benefited the participants of this study more than simply mentioned the definition of academic dishonesty from the school handbook. Some of the participants also said that after the first day of class, the issue of academic dishonesty was not even mentioned again.

Author's Reflections

Of the six major themes and four additional findings that developed from the research, three were a surprise to me: more acts of academic dishonesty occur online than on campus, the prevalence of acts of academic dishonesty happening in the online learning environment, and the participants' perception of how their instructors were informing them of what constituted an act of academic dishonesty.

The first theme I was surprised to hear was that each of the participants said more acts of academic dishonesty were occurring online than in the classroom. This was one of the first interview questions and dealt with each student's overall perception of online learning. I was surprised to learn that the participants concurred with many faculty in believing that more acts of academic dishonesty happen online versus on campus. Participants said that because of the anonymity of an online course, more students were engaging in acts of academic dishonesty online than in the classroom. Participants also noted the lack of oversight from faculty as a reason for this answer. The participants said that in some of the courses they took, they rarely, if ever, dealt directly with the faculty member in that course.

The second finding that was a surprise was how each participant viewed the prevalence of acts of academic dishonesty in the online learning environment. Most of the participants said that not only are acts of academic dishonesty happening online, they happen quite frequently. Each student had differing reasons as to why they believed this to be true. Many shared specific examples of friends asking other friends to help them through or give them the answers to homework and test questions. Some of the participants said that it was common knowledge among their peer group that it was very easy to engage in acts of academic dishonesty in certain online courses.

I was also surprised by participants' perception of how their instructors were informing them of what constituted an act of academic dishonesty. I had thought that many students believed that faculty did not care or had not taken the time to educate their students on what constituted an act of academic dishonesty. The results of this research were quite the opposite. Most of the participants in this research project said that faculty did a good job of educating their classes on what was and was not acceptable. A few of the participants said that faculty could do more to enhance a student's understanding; however, even those participants said that the responsibility for being informed about what constituted an act of academic dishonesty fell on the student.

Limitation and Delimitation

One limitation and one delimitation developed during the research project. Limitations are those conditions out of a researcher's control, but have an impact on the results of the study (University of Southern California , 2014). Delimitations are those choices made by the researcher that may affect the research and that should be mentioned to the reader (Baltimore County Public Schools, 2014). The limitation and delimitation are listed below in an effort to be clear and transparent with regards to the research process that was followed for this study.

The major limitation that developed during the research was that students were allowed to self-select into this study using their definition of direct experience with an act of academic dishonesty. If a student said they had a direct experience with an act of academic dishonesty, they were allowed to participate. Due to this limitation, three of the students who volunteered to participate did not actually commit an act of academic dishonesty; rather, they were victims of separate acts of academic dishonesty. For each of those participants, having been a victim of

academic dishonesty fit their personal definition of a direct act, even though they did not commit the act themselves.

The major delimitation that developed during this study was that in addition to current community college students, two recent community college graduates were included in the study. The two former students of the community college were invited via a college e-mail address and responded asking if they could be included in the project. These graduates were included in the study.

The limitation and delimitation listed above were the only two identified as being different from the dissertation proposal. One was outside of my control, the limitation, while the delimitation was within my control and allowed in to the project. The remaining research was conducted as prescribed in the proposal.

Recommendations for Future Research

While this study was small in scale, it provided insight into an area that has received very little attention in the past, that is, the students' perceptions and experiences of academic dishonesty in online learning. Further studies could focus on both qualitative and quantitative types of research. I would recommend that more qualitative studies be completed at either a larger scale or across a broader range of colleges and universities. This study focused on the lived experiences of the participants who were interviewed for this project and future studies could follow this template.

Another study could focus on whether students are choosing to engage in acts of academic dishonesty in general education courses more so than in program specific courses. One of the findings from this project was that students who were uninterested in the material of a general education course were more likely to cheat in those courses than in courses that were

program specific. A study in this area would be beneficial for both faculty and administrators as a means to develop better strategies to deal with academic dishonesty.

I would recommend that any future study continue to gather data from students so that faculty can begin to develop a better understanding of why students believe or act the way they do. Investigating why students engage in acts of academic dishonesty, or what makes a student prone to engage in such acts could be very beneficial. More studies involving more institutions and more students would serve to strengthen the understanding from a student perspective and would enhance the learning environment in many positive ways.

A quantitative study or studies could be conducted on this topic as well. In order to form a more generalized understanding and capture a broader range of participants, certain types of quantitative studies could be beneficial. Asking more students specifically and anonymously about if they have committed an act of academic dishonesty, and if so, what led them to commit the act would be very beneficial. It should be noted, however, that a better understanding may only come from a non-generalizable, qualitative, interview-based study. Simply gathering survey answers may not provide the kind of depth needed to find the true cause of the issues surrounding academic dishonesty.

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

Academic dishonesty is not a new phenomenon. Students have tried to engage in acts of cheating in an effort to pass a class or test since the early stages of education. Many studies have looked at the statistical comparisons for the past 50 to 60 years and concluded that academic dishonesty is a growing problem in both secondary and higher education.

This study attempted to examine current and former community college students' lived experiences of acts of academic dishonesty in the online learning environment. The research

question that guided this study was: What are the lived experiences of community college students at a western United States community college as they relate to acts of academic dishonesty in an online course?

Six themes and four additional findings emerged from the date. These themes and findings reflected that the participants in this study believe academic dishonesty is in fact a problem, especially in the online learning environment. Participants believed that while online learning is convenient, less knowledge is retained online. The participants in this study have had diverse experiences with academic dishonesty. All of the participants had, at some point or another, an experience with an act of academic dishonesty. The participants believed that more acts of academic dishonesty are occurring online than in the classroom and that student engagement played a role in whether or not a student might choose to engage in an act of academic dishonesty. Participants in this study had mixed feelings as to whether or not faculty were doing a good job of educating students as to what constituted an act of academic dishonesty.

Most of the themes and findings that emerged from the research data were supported by the existing literature. In some cases, however, there was either a disagreement with the literature or no current literature on the topic existed.

Implications of Findings

The findings of the project highlight four implications for current faculty, administrators, and higher education in general. The first implication of this study deals with faculty and how they are educating students on what constitutes an act of academic dishonesty. The participants in this research gave mixed views on who is responsible to ensure students truly understand what constitutes an act of academic dishonesty. From the researcher's perspective, I believe the

responsibility lies with the faculty member. Faculty should take extra care to inform students about the policies and what is and is not acceptable. Constantly checking for understanding could ensure that students have a solid understanding on the concept. This proactive approach by faculty may encourage students to think twice prior to committing an act of academic dishonesty.

The second implication relates to administrators in higher education. The findings of this project suggest that it may time for academic administrators to have serious conversations about the problem of academic dishonesty and look to be engaged as part of the solution. Administrators should look to those institutions who have been leaders in addressing problems with academic dishonesty and follow their lead. This is hardly a new problem for administrators in higher education and there are workable solutions to be found and put to use. However, in order to do so, academic administrators must admit that there is a problem that merits a solution.

The third implication from this project is that acts of academic dishonesty are occurring in the online learning environment. The participants in this study said that more acts of academic dishonesty occur online than they do in the classroom. Further, the participants noted that it was easier to commit an act of academic dishonesty online versus in the classroom, with a teacher present in the room. This implication should hardly come as a surprise to most faculty and administrators and should only further the cause to find solutions to what appears to be a growing problem. Perhaps it is time for both faculty and administrators to look for ways to educate students about the pitfalls of academic dishonesty and find ways to deter students from choosing that path. As technology evolves, there continues to be more resources available to educate students and keep the temptation of academic dishonesty at a minimum, especially in the area of online learning.

The final implication of this project is perhaps the most interesting, at least to me. This implication deals with what could be a major reason for why students are choosing to engage in academic dishonesty. The participants in this project said that the level of student engagement or participation in a course contributes to whether or not a student may or may not engage in an act of academic dishonesty. The participants suggested that course work outside their discipline is of less interest and therefore one where more students decide to commit acts of academic dishonesty. The participants said that if students don't understand or see a tangible value from a course, especially those outside of their degree program, they are less likely to care about how they achieve a passing grade.

The four implications discussed in this section are related to the findings of this research. These implications are important to those currently in the field and what I would refer to as the call to action from this research project.

Closing Thoughts

After pouring over the more than 70 pages of transcribed interviews conducted for this research, one thing remains clear. More research is needed in this area of study. My own eyes were opened at many of the responses I received. There was certainly no way for me to understand these issues unless I asked the participants themselves. This was certainly an eye-opening project and it will hopefully be an area that becomes a greater focus of research for those with similar interests.

This research project has taken on many different forms of learning for me, the researcher. It would be impossible for someone like me, with a background in teaching, to not have preconceived notions about what the research could or would yield. Therein lays the

beauty of qualitative research, namely interpretative phenomenology. Asking participants open-ended questions about their lived experiences generated a large range of responses on all ends of the spectrum. I could have never imagined the responses that I received from the participants in this study and further, actually hearing about why and how their experiences shaped their perceptions was invaluable.

Students deserve to have a seat at the table with important issues such as acts of academic dishonesty. Discounting, or believing that we, the faculty, know better or have some sort of understanding as to what student's think of this issue is simply flawed logic. If we do not ask the questions of our students, how can we expect them to come forward with suggestions as to how the fix the issue of academic dishonesty? I hope this study serves as an eye-opener to faculty and spurs further research and develops additional understanding how our students perceive acts of academic dishonesty.

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APPENDIX A:

Appendix A: Proposed Interview Questions

1.   Please provide the following information:

    a. Your age

    b. Your gender

    c. Your class standing (freshman, sophomore)

    d. Are you a full or part-time student?

    e. Your academic major

    f. Your ethnicity

    g. Please also select a non-identifiable name you wish to use for the purposes of this research project.

2.   How many online classes have you participated in during your collegiate career?

3.   Tell me about your online learning experiences.

4.   What does academic dishonesty mean to you?

    a. Could you tell me about some direct or indirect experiences you've had with academic dishonesty.

5.   How did you come to that understanding?

6.   Identify what you think acts of academic dishonesty in the online learning environment look like.

    a. What are your perceptions of the amount of academic dishonesty in the online learning environment?

    b. How do you know that what you have described is considered academic dishonesty?

7.	Is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX B:

IRB Informed Consent Form

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Colorado State University

TITLE OF STUDY: Lived Experiences of Students in the Online Learning Environment as it Relates to Acts of

Academic Dishonesty:

A Western United States Community College Study

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr. Sharon Anderson

CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Eric A. Heiser, candidate for the degree of Ph.D. in Education and Higher

Education Leadership. 307-851-9109

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH? This study is interested in obtaining the

experiences of students at a Western United States Community College who have been either directly or indirectly

involved with acts of academic dishonesty in the online learning environment.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY? The researcher for this study is Eric A. Heiser, candidate for the degree of Ph.D. at

Colorado State University

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY? The Purpose of the study is to learn about the lived experiences of

students at a Western United States Community College as it relates to acts of academic dishonesty in the online

learning environment.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST? This study will take

place at a Western United States Community College. Participants will be asked to submit to an interview lasting

between 60-75 minutes and attend a follow-up interview for 10-15 minutes after the research has been gathered.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO? You will be asked to share your lived experiences about acts of academic dishonesty in the online learning environment. Interviews will be conducted with only the participant and the researcher in the room and pseudonyms (a chosen, fake name) will be used to protect your anonymity.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY? You must be a student at the community college where the research has taken place. Further, you must have been enrolled in an online course and a face to face course at some time during your collegiate career. Lastly, only students with direct or indirect knowledge of acts of academic dishonesty in the online learning environment will be able to take part in this study.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

There are no known risks to participating in this study

It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY? Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE? We will keep private all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law.

[Anonymous data collection]

This study is anonymous. For this study, we are not obtaining your name or other identifiable data from you, so nobody (not even the research team) will be able to identify you or your data. We may be asked to share the research files for audit purposes with the CSU Institutional Review Board ethics committee, if necessary. In addition, for funded studies, the CSU financial management team may also request an audit of research expenditures. For financial audits, only the fact that you participated would be shared, not any research data.

[If compensation will be given; please review the University policy at: http://busfin.colostate.edu/fpi.aspx and add this or a similar statement.]

Your identity/record of receiving compensation (NOT your data) may be made available to CSU officials for financial audits.

WILL I RECEIVE ANY COMPENSATION FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? *Participants will receive a $25 (USD) iTunes gift card at the completion of the follow up interview.*

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigator, Eric Heiser at 307-851-9109. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Barker, Human Research Administrator at 970-491-1655. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

This consent form was approved by the CSU Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects in research on (Approval Date).

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW? *After your initial interview, a follow-up interview will be held so that you can review the transcript of the interview and check for any errors or omissions. At the completion of the follow-up interview, you will be given a $25 (USD) iTunes gift card.*

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing pages.

_____   _____

Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study   Date

_____

Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

_____   _____

Name of person providing information to participant   Date

_____

Signature of Research Staff

ATTENTION STUDENTS!

Want to earn an easy $25 iTunes gift card?

Are you interested in participating in a study about academic dishonesty?

Do you have direct knowledge of acts of academic dishonesty occurring in an online class?

Would you be willing to talk about your experience in a non-confrontational, anonymous setting?

Are you a current student or recent graduate of Central Wyoming College?

Have you taken at least one online and one on-campus course?

If you answered yes to these questions, I want to talk to you!

My name is Eric Heiser and I am a Ph.D. candidate at Colorado State University. I am completing a research project for my doctoral dissertation and I need willing students to visit with me about their experiences with academic dishonesty in the online learning environment. I'm asking for 30-45 minutes of your time and you will receive a $25 iTunes gift card at the completion of the interview.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me at 307-851-9109.