

Socially Learned Cheating Behavior Through Faculty Deterrence: A Cross-Cultural Study of Students in the Bahamas and the U.S.

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Abstract. This study investigates the influence of faculty deterrence and social acceptance on cheating behavior, addressing the central research question: Does high faculty deterrence reduce students' perceptions of cheating as socially acceptable compared to low faculty deterrence? A sample of 190 Bahamian undergraduate students representing various academic majors were randomly assigned to two vignettes depicting testing environments with either high or low faculty deterrence. Participants were asked to estimate the percentage of students who would consider cheating socially acceptable under each scenario. The key findings indicate that high faculty deterrence significantly discourages perceptions of cheating, while low deterrence fosters a justification for unethical behavior. Notably, criminal justice majors from the School of Social Sciences were the only group to exhibit significantly different views between high and low deterrence conditions, while other academic majors, including business students, showed no significant differences. These findings align with Liebler's research on U.S. undergraduate business students, suggesting that faculty oversight plays a crucial role in shaping ethical perceptions. The results have important implications for business ethics education, emphasizing the need for solid faculty engagement to promote academic integrity. Additionally, the discipline-specific differences highlight the importance of incorporating tailored ethical training across various fields of study.

Keywords: academic dishonesty, cheating, cheating deterrence, social learning theory.

1. Introduction

Unethical workplace behavior is the best way to end up in a Bahamian newspaper. Even though social media is used widely in the Bahamas, newspapers are the best way to stay informed of cultural activities, death notices, and employee dismissals. It is commonplace for an organization to post a terminated employee's picture in the newspaper, notifying the public that the person is no longer conducting business on behalf of the company. The individual's crime or unprincipled action is never disclosed to the populace. However, the general community understands the meaning of the announcement; it is a public shaming.

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In this study, we compared how students responded to one of two vignettes: one with high faculty deterrence and the other with low faculty deterrence. The students with low deterrence felt justified in cheating. Whereas students with the higher deterrence vignette behaved in just the reverse. Only the criminal justice students treated both conditions without bias. This paper examines how faculty behaviors lead students to perceive cheating as socially acceptable and why it might differ across disciplines. This paper will address the difference between U.S. and Bahamian students' views of testing deterrence based on the social learning theory. It will also examine the differences between various majors regarding the social acceptance of cheating.

Next this article will discuss Bahamian culture and how the Social Learning Theory affects Bahamians. After which, the paper presents the methodology section which provides the comparison of the two groups. Finally, the paper ends with the results, discussion, conclusion and future research sections.

2. The Bahamas

2.1. Bahamian Culture

The Bahamas is a young nation that gained independence from Great Britain in 1973. Its newness has created challenges for the U.S. and other nations desiring to conduct business there. When examining Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions, it was found that despite the Bahamas' closeness to the United States, Bahamians are significantly more collectivist than individualist (Duncanson *et al.* 2016a). In addition, as examined by Namasivayam and Upneja (2007), certain employee motivational factors, fairness, distributive justice, and perceptions of control, were significant variables in the U.S. However, only the fairness variable was substantial in the Bahamas (Duncanson *et al.* 2016b).

The culture is a dynamic amalgamation of African, European, and indigenous influences molded by its colonial history and the tenacity of its populace. A strong sense of community and kinship, profoundly based on African traditions introduced by enslaved individuals, is central to Bahamian society. This communal attitude is evident in everyday life, where familial and social bonds are greatly esteemed. Festivals like Junkanoo, a traditional street parade featuring vibrant costumes and rhythmic music, commemorate this communal spirit and emphasize the island's African roots. Junkanoo, traditionally celebrated on Boxing Day and New Year's Day, has emerged as one of the nation's most prominent cultural manifestations, symbolizing Bahamian national pride (Saunders 2003).

The foundation of Bahamian culture rests on religion with Christianity being predominant. Churches serve as spiritual centers and social hubs where

community members convene for worship, education, and support. The robust Christian base fosters the island nation's conservative ideals, especially regarding family life, education, and moral conduct (Smith & Thompson 2017). Enriched by its history and environment, the Bahamas' cultural landscape continues evolving, blending the old with the new while maintaining a strong national identity.

2.2. The Bahamas Compared to other Caribbean Nations

Bahamian corporate ethics, although resembling those of other Caribbean nations due to shared colonial histories and economic difficulties, also display unique traits influenced by socio-political context and historical evolution. In the Bahamas, business ethics are significantly shaped by the country's dependence on tourism and financial services, resulting in an increased focus on openness, regulatory adherence, and customer interactions (Saunders 2016). Consequently, ethical challenges in Bahamian commerce frequently focus on money laundering, corruption, and adherence to international financial standards. The Bahamian government has actively responded to these issues, especially in light of external expectations from international organizations like the OECD and FATF to comply with global financial transparency norms (Bethel 2020). The emphasis on regulatory compliance in financial sectors is less common in numerous other Caribbean nations, where agriculture and manufacturing assume more pivotal economic positions.

Corruption, transparency, and governance are prevalent challenges throughout the Caribbean. However, they emerge uniquely based on the local context. The Bahamas, serving as a center for offshore banking, encounters significant examination from global regulators, compelling it to adopt more stringent ethical standards in the financial industry (Saunders 2016). The fundamental concepts of corporate ethics—fairness, openness, and accountability—are universally acknowledged throughout the Caribbean; nevertheless, the distinct ethical difficulties and corresponding remedies differ based on each nation's economic framework, political climate, and international affiliations.

2.3. The Bahamas and Social Learning Theory

Examining Social Learning Theory in The Bahamas is crucial because of the country's distinctive cultural and social dynamics, where community, family, and media profoundly impact behavior. Currently, no studies exist that cover the Bahamas and Social Learning Theory. In a compact, interconnected community in the Bahamas, observational learning—fundamental to Social Learning

Theory—significantly influences the formation of social norms, values, and behaviors. Bahamian youth may emulate behaviors observed in peers, family, and media portrayals, significantly impacting their development (Schunk 2012). Furthermore, it is essential to comprehend how vicarious reinforcement and imitation from international cultural content influence the actions and attitudes of Bahamian youth, given the rising exposure to global media. Insights derived from Social Learning Theory can guide educational strategies, social interventions, and public policy to tackle juvenile violence and foster pro-social behaviors in The Bahamas (Bandura 2001). This research is essential for fostering resilient communities, as positive role models and media portrayals can yield advantageous social effects.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Theories on Cheating

There are numerous theories centered around why individuals cheat. One of which is the strain theory which emphasizes receiving unfavorable treatment from others while stressing the significance of unpleasant emotions of offending. According to Durkheim (1915), humans are morally upright by nature, and only unfavorable circumstances drive them to commit crimes. Merton's (1938) research focused on the sociological concept of deviance and concluded that economic inequality is normal and inevitable. He found that people turn to deviant behaviors to accomplish their goals if they cannot do so through legal means. Additional studies examine how stress can cause negative emotions to justify dishonest behavior and increase a person's perception of the benefit gained by deceptive behavior (e.g., Agnew 1992; Agnew & White 1992; Carmichael & Piquero 2004). Lastly, regarding academic misbehavior, Wenzel and Reinhard (2020) noted that stress from challenging exams could indirectly trigger cheating behavior.

Another theory in the literature focuses on cheating behavior from an economic perspective, the rational choice theory (e.g., Akers 1990; Beck 1968). Smith (2002), a political philosopher and economist, has been credited with the concept. This theory suggests that individuals will evaluate their circumstances from an economic standpoint and decide whether to engage in cheating behavior. Becker's (1968) research analyzed the expected utility based on a cost/benefit calculation. His measurements focused on how much punishment it takes to enforce different laws. He concluded that optimal policies when applied, could combat illegal behavior in conjunction with generous funding allocations.

Bloodgood *et al.* (2008) focused on the influence of religiosity, ethics instruction, and intelligence on cheating behavior. They found that students who attended worship services regularly were unlikely to cheat whether they took an