

Agata Chudzicka-Czupala<sup>1</sup>  
*University of Silesia*

## Psychological and moral determinants in accepting cheating and plagiarism among university students in Poland

### **Abstract:**

The study investigates the psychological and moral acceptance of cheating and plagiarism among university students in Poland. A sample of 285 students participated. Results demonstrate that the locus of control, justice sensitivity, and some individual ethical philosophical dimensions are significant predictors for accepting dishonest behaviour. My research results support the basic theoretical arguments that point out the role of acceptable individual conditions for cheating and plagiarism. The research offers implications for the practice of moral awareness and for some possible training for university students.

### **Keywords:**

academic dishonesty, unethical behaviour, justice sensitivity, moral philosophy, locus of control

### **Streszczenie:**

W artykule ukazano wyniki badań poświęconych uwarunkowaniom akceptacji ściągania i plagiowania, przeprowadzonych wśród 285 studentów uczelni wyższych w Polsce. Rezultaty dowodzą znaczenia indywidualnych cech i przekonań, takich jak wrażliwość na sprawiedliwość z perspektywy ofiary i nieuprawnionego beneficjenta oraz wybranych przekonań moralnych, które okazały się być istotnymi predyktorami akceptacji nieuczciwości akademickiej. Wyniki ukazują też na znaczącą rolę umiejscowienia kontroli wzmocnień i niosą ze sobą istotne implikacje praktyczne.

### **Słowa kluczowe:**

nieuczciwość akademicka, zachowanie nieetyczne, wrażliwość na sprawiedliwość, filozofia moralna, umiejscowienie kontroli

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<sup>1</sup> Agata Chudzicka-Czupala, Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology, Institute of Psychology, University of Silesia, Grażyńskiego 53, 40-126 Katowice; e-mail: [agata.chudzicka-czupala@us.edu.pl](mailto:agata.chudzicka-czupala@us.edu.pl).

## **Introduction**

In recent years, the problem of academic dishonesty has been growing in the whole world (Williams et al., 2010). It concerns students who are often too lenient towards cheating on examinations or plagiarised theses. The issue of academic dishonesty comprises a series of different phenomena. Research focuses mainly on various forms of cheating and on the determinants of that phenomenon (Whitley, 1998). Cheating is understood as “using, during examinations, results obtained by other students or materials prepared earlier” (Tyszko & Hrychorowicz, 2010, p. 3). Another form of dishonesty is unauthorised access to information during a test or to information about an examination before sitting it, without the teacher’s consent and knowledge (Alleyne & Phillips, 2011). There are also other forms of dishonesty, discussed less often, such as plagiarism and data falsification (Carroll, 2004) which may be defined as consciously misleading others about the originality of the specific work, about the data and their author (Decoo, 2002). Many studies show, however, that the problem of plagiarism appears at universities as often as or even more often than the problem of cheating as such (Roig & Caso, 2005). One factor which undoubtedly contributes to this phenomenon becoming more intense, especially with regard to plagiarism, is the increasingly widespread and easier Internet access (Ma, Wan & Lu, 2008).

The forms of academic dishonesty mentioned above whose acceptance is discussed in the study may be defined as unethical behaviour, fraud or theft, since they involve violation of copyright, lying and obtaining information or providing it to others illegally. Remaining silent and passive when faced with cheating or handing in someone else’s work as one’s own is similarly dishonest, even though such behaviour differs significantly from active cheating and plagiarism. The psychological situation of a witness is different from that of the perpetrator, and the former’s conduct may be influenced by many different factors. This led to the decision to include the witness perspective in the study presented here.

According to the research conducted in Poland (Kaczmarczyk & Borkowski, 2012) students perceived cheating at school as rather positive and not fraudulent behaviour. Only 28% of those surveyed agreed with the assertion that cheating on Polish secondary school leaving examinations (*matura*) was appalling (Kobierski, 2006). Plagiarism is perceived in a similar way. The attitude towards this phenomenon is best illustrated by the words of one respondent in research by Gromkowska-Melosik (2007, p. 75): “If there are sources to copy from, then why not do it? If someone publishes their work online, they probably agree to people copying from that.” Both teachers and students are aware of the fact that cheating and plagiarism are widespread, but at the same time hardly anyone seeks to genuinely combat such phenomena.

Research concerning the above issues, especially psychological conditions of academic dishonesty, cheating and plagiarism, is definitely lacking in Poland. This study attempts to fill this research gap. It took into consideration the acceptance of obtaining information and materials for oneself, and the approach towards helping others cheat and obtain illegal information as well as the degree of the survey respondent's acceptance towards the passivity of a witness who knows about cheating and plagiarism (i.e. staying silent when one is aware of the offence being committed by others).

*Individual factors in acceptance of cheating and plagiarism.* Surveys concerning the determinants of academic dishonesty have so far examined the relationship between selected situational factors and the inclination to cheat (cf. Williams, Nathanson & Paulhus, 2010). Some authors ascribe key importance to situational factors, claiming that the external context plays a much bigger role than personal convictions or traits (Murdock & Stephens, 2007). Whitley and Keith-Spiegel (2002) emphasise that the most significant predictors of the inclination towards dishonest behaviour and cheating are the following: a disrespectful attitude towards learning and an inappropriate preparation for examinations, as well as the situational context – teachers' consent and the possibility of cheating. Using software to detect academic dishonesty and the frequency of punishment are two factors listed as significant in the reduction of the phenomenon of cheating and plagiarism (Haswell, Jubb, & Wearing, 1999). Additionally, some authors (cf. Whitley, 1998), challenge the usefulness in examining the role of an individual's selected personality and cognitive abilities dimensions as features determining the inclination to cheat on tests, emphasising that research should focus only on environmental characteristics which can be controlled and potentially changed, and that interest in them should be a priority.

It is difficult, however, to agree with that position. Individual moral convictions or sensitivity to unfair treatment should be modified, for example during specially planned training sessions. Studying moral convictions and personality traits which may prove key for explaining the acceptance of dishonest academic behaviour constitutes sufficient cognitive justification for research and analysis taking into account their role. This opinion is shared by Williams and others (2010) who challenge the pessimistic approach to the significance of personality-related factors. Punishment might perhaps be a good way to curb negative phenomena, but if the ultimate goal is to change the individual approach to cheating, it may prove essential to find out about individual traits, including moral convictions.

In a similar manner, many other authors point out that the individual's attitude towards the phenomenon of dishonesty is a significant predictor of the inclination to cheat (cf. Pino & Smith, 2003; Stone, Jahawar & Kisamore, 2009), which may depend

on individual traits. Storch and Storch (2003) insist that there is a strong positive correlation between one's predisposition towards unethical behaviour and the approval of such behaviour. Love and Simmons (1998) discovered a relationship between the inclination to cheat and attitudes towards ethical standards related to the profession students prepare to pursue during their studies, including attitudes towards academic dishonesty, namely cheating and plagiarism.

As McCabe, Trevino and Butterfield (1996) point out, the mere existence of "honor codes" at universities and the fact that students swear to observe them curb the inclination to behave dishonestly, also after graduation. There is a substantial amount of other research whose results emphasise the importance of individual traits, in particular moral convictions (Bampton & Cowton, 2009).

Direct inspiration for the research results reported in this paper was the willingness to find out whether – and to what extent – selected personality-related factors, justice sensitivity (Schmitt, Gollwitzer, Maes & Arbach, 2005), and locus of control as well as variables related to individual morality contribute to the acceptance of cheating and plagiarism. The research results show the significance of such factors. The innovative and different nature of the research described here results from the variable taken into account, namely justice sensitivity, whose relationship with the acceptance of cheating and plagiarism seems highly probable, but had never before been analysed. The inspiration for the research also came from the scarce number of empirical investigations on the subject in Poland.

### **The aim of the study, variables and hypotheses**

The purpose of my research was to find answers to questions concerning the possible connections between selected personality-related variables: justice sensitivity and locus of control and the attitude of students towards academic dishonesty-cheating and plagiarism. It was assumed that acceptance of said phenomena should unquestionably be connected with the individual's morality. In my study an attempt was also made to test the role of individual moral philosophy (in its selected dimensions).

*Justice sensitivity.* Some social psychologists point out in their work that individuals differ not only in terms of their tolerance or sensitivity to physical stimuli, pain, uncertainty or frustration, but that their tolerance or sensitivity to the violation of moral standards or to injustice may also be diverse (Huseman, Hatfield & Miles, 1987; Lovas & Wolt, 2002; Schmitt et al., 2005). Schmitt, Neumann and Montada (1995) made a first step towards building a tool to measure *justice sensitivity*. The authors systematised existing knowledge about the trait, suggesting four indicators, namely the frequency of

experienced injustice, intensity of anger after injustice, mental intrusiveness of injustice and punitive orientation toward the perpetrator. Schmitt et al. (1995) also examined the relationship between that trait and other related characteristics, such as tolerance of frustration, inclination to react angrily towards others and oneself, trust in people, the need for control and satisfaction with life. Mohiyeddini and Schmitt (1997) discovered that students with a high level of justice sensitivity who were treated unjustly during the experiment reacted much more strongly in that situation and felt much more deprived. Schmitt and Dörfel (1999) also point out that justice sensitivity modifies to a large extent an individual's reaction to unjust treatment, impacting one's satisfaction derived from work and psychophysical well-being. This variable seems to be a factor that may be connected with the survey respondents' attitude towards cheating and plagiarism and constitutes an important predictor of internal acceptance of dishonest behaviour and the inclination towards it, since such phenomena are linked with the sense of being disadvantaged and experiencing injustice.

Schmitt et al. (2005) called for the study of three justice sensitivity types: victim sensitivity, that is, of the person feeling disadvantaged when others obtain something s/he thinks s/he deserves; observer sensitivity, namely, when the witness sees others being rewarded undeservedly; and beneficiary sensitivity, namely, the viewpoint of someone obtaining rewards s/he thinks someone else should have obtained.

The following research hypotheses were formulated and then tested on the basis of literature:

*H1a: Justice sensitivity (from the victim, observer and beneficiary perspectives) is a predictor of accepting cheating and plagiarism for oneself,*

*H2a: Justice sensitivity (from the victim, observer and beneficiary perspectives) is a predictor of accepting cheating and plagiarism for others,*

*H3a: Justice sensitivity (from the victim, observer and beneficiary perspectives) is a predictor of a witness passively accepting cheating and plagiarism.*

*Locus of control.* Another variable taken into account in the research was locus of control. According to the definition stated by the theory's author (Rotter, 1966), locus of control is the subjective conviction about one's potential and impact on one's destiny. People with an internal locus of control consider rewards to result from their own behaviour and efforts. They believe that the effect of their actions depends on their behaviour or on relatively stable traits they have. People with an external locus of control, on the other hand, are convinced that what happens to them results from independent forces and various external factors (Paszkievicz, 1974; Drwal, 1995).

Thus an internal locus of control is connected with a clear lack of inclination towards conformist actions and with resistance to stress. Persons with an internal locus of

control are more willing to change their surroundings than adapt to them or succumb to them (Szmigielska, 1980; Tuszer, 1981). People focused on subjective actions live and behave in accordance with the principle that every everyone is the master of their own destiny and that what they achieve depends exclusively on themselves. Inner-directed individuals feel responsible for their actions and learn from earlier experiences. People with an internal locus of control constantly strive to ensure that their independent work and efforts are rewarded with success (Gliszczyńska, 1983), whereas those with an external locus of control, as suggested by what Rotter and Mulry (1965, p. 599), believe in “luck”, which they regard “as a personal although unstable attribute”.

Research by Burdzicka-Wołowik (2008) confirms the existence of a relationship between locus of control and morality – the more internal the locus of control of survey respondents is, the higher the position of morality in their hierarchy of values was, hence considered as behaving in line with rules or principles they accepted. This contradicts the results of research showing the existence of a relationship between an internal locus of control and the inclination to cheat on examinations, obtained by Lefcourt (1991). Although these research results are not utterly unambiguous, they make it possible to assume that locus of control may be connected with the acceptance of cheating and plagiarism and with the inclination towards such behaviour. Considering this trait in research will make it possible to look more closely at its significance and role. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H1b: Locus of control is a predictor of accepting cheating and plagiarism for oneself,*

*H2b: Locus of control is a predictor of accepting cheating and plagiarism for others,*

*H3b: Locus of control is a predictor of a witness passively accepting cheating and plagiarism.*

*Individual moral philosophy.* Individual moral philosophy is a further variable considered in my research. Phenomena such as cheating or plagiarism may be described as theft, since they involve the violation of copyright, dishonesty and fraud. The issue becomes particularly important, however, when one thinks of education aimed at training people for jobs in which ethical behaviour is particularly valuable due to the specific nature and importance of the role played by graduates of certain universities in contemporary society. This certainly concerns such fields as economics, accounting, banking, medicine, education, psychology, pedagogy, and sociology. Preparation for such professions without an emphasis on ethical conduct may lead to particular consequences. It is important, however, to obtain knowledge in an honest way at every university, since the appearance of unprofessional graduates on the labour market can always lead to serious and adverse effects. The results of numerous studies show that people who accept dishonest behaviour at university engage much more frequently in such behaviour as post-graduate

students (Harding, Mayhew, Finelli & Carpenter, 2007; Stone et al., 2009) as well as in the workplace after graduating (Alleyne & Phillips, 2011).

Many researchers studying ethical decision-making processes assert that it is important to diagnose individual moral philosophy in order to understand moral judgments and behaviour in situations when the individual is faced with the need to make ethical decisions (Bass, Barnett & Brown, 1999; Stead, Worrell & Stead, 1990). Results of studies focusing on an individual's ethical view of the world show that moral values people follow determine their attitude towards various social phenomena and moral issues, determine their judgment of other people's behaviour, and influence responsibility for the effects of negative conduct. Moral principles also determine the judgment of one's own behaviour and predisposition, explain people's reaction to their own mistakes and ethical errors, as well as determine individual resistance to temptation in ethically ambiguous situations (Forsyth, 1992). This is why I focused attention on variables like individual moral convictions.

The theory of individual moral philosophy was derived from normative philosophical theories. Much of the research covered only one selected ideology. Reidenbach and Robin (1990) used a multi-dimensional scale to investigate ethical values (principles), and subsequently various versions of the same scale were used in many studies of ethical behaviour (Cohen, Pant & Sharp, 1993; Cruz, Shafer & Strawser, 2000; Hudson & Miller, 2005; McMahon & Harvey, 2007).

*Moral idealism* and *moral relativism* are two of the most significant moral philosophy dimensions taken into account most often in research concerning the determinants of ethical decision-making. According to Forsyth (1980) there is primarily one continuum that exists among the many possible and available moral philosophies, namely that of idealism – relativism, which can be used to classify most people. Idealists believe in the existence of universal standards, take into account the good of others and are concerned about it, while relativists seem to be less inclined to identify the unethical aspects of various situations.

Other moral dimensions of the “individual moral philosophy” construct subscribed to by an individual were also taken into account, such as *Machiavellianism*, *narcissism/egoism*, *the Golden Rule*, *utilitarianism*, *cost-benefit analysis* and *altruism* (cf. Chudzicka-Czupala, 2012, 2013a, 2013b).

Machiavellianism has been proven to have an impact on ethical decision making (Bass, Barnett, and Brown 1999). Machiavellianists tend to treat relationships with others instrumentally and to use other people for their hidden aims (Pilch, 2008). The researchers also underline the relationship between narcissistic inclinations and the manner of ethical decision-making. They show that narcissistic people are more likely to

behave unethically (Brown, Sautter, and Littvay, 2010). Williams et al. (2010) demonstrated the relationship between Machiavellianism and narcissism and the inclination to cheat. Both traits characterise individuals focused on themselves, and convinced of their own greatness are cynical and amoral in their behaviour. In the research reported in this paper, they do not appear as permanent personality traits, but more as moral convictions distinguished, together with others, on the basis of the subject literature and given attention (cf. Burton & Goldsby, 2005; Luthy, Padget & Toner, 2009).

The Golden Rule is one of the most universal ethical principles in the world. The rule, which states “do unto others as you would want done to you”, has appeared among the moral imperatives of most world religions. As Burton and Goldsby (2005) emphasize: “Its universality... lies in the understanding of cultures and traditions throughout the world that consistency, the willingness to abide by rules we apply to others, is a vital component of moral thinking” (p. 382). The Golden Rule is a significant principle, taken into account many times in research related to ethics (Cunningham, 1998).

The utilitarian principle of moral philosophy suggests that individuals make ethical decisions by considering the negative or positive consequences of actions on others. In accordance with utilitarian ethics, every behaviour is morally legitimated if it brings advantages to others or contributes to the common good. Research confirms that utilitarian grounds are the most important criteria taken into account by people during the process of making ethical decisions (Erondu, Sharland, and Okpara, 2004). Altruism, which may be defined as “behaviour that promotes the welfare of others without conscious regard or one’s own self-interest” (Davis, Andersen, and Curtis, 2001, p. 39), may be another important factor which influences acceptance of unethical behaviours such as cheating and plagiarism. Weber, Ames, and Blais (2005) underline that people use calculation-based decision making. It involves evaluating benefit components, decomposing choice alternatives and integrating those components to determine the best value. Calculation-based decision making, cost-benefit analysis, may include the use of mental shortcuts that help to simplify the task and to make a quick decision, which is not always ethical (Shah, and Oppenheimer, 2008).

Idealism, relativism, utilitarianism, altruism, the Golden Rule and cost-benefit analysis are frequently discussed in ethics manuals (De George, 1999, Velasquez, 1998). Based on the review, specific hypotheses are proposed:

*H1c: Individual moral philosophy is a predictor of accepting cheating and plagiarism for oneself,*

*H2c: Individual moral philosophy is a predictor of accepting cheating and plagiarism for others,*

*H3c: Individual moral philosophy is a predictor of a passive witness accepting cheating and plagiarism.*

## Research methods

Methods based on self-description are used most often to study people's attitudes towards cheating and plagiarism: They are asked directly whether they have ever behaved in a given way. Studying the inclination towards cheating or plagiarism is not the simplest of tasks. People are reluctant to admit that they cheat or have cheated for various reasons, mainly in order to show themselves in the best possible light.

Asking survey respondents to judge unethical behaviour is more objective and brings the researcher closer to reality to a much greater extent than merely asking the respondents whether they behave in such a way themselves. Asking respondents about their acceptance of specific behaviour instead of asking them directly whether they behave in such a way "minimises the perceived hazard related to... idealising oneself in order to meet social expectations" (Vardi, 2001, p. 319) and mitigates potential fear of revealing intimate truths about oneself to others. Andreoli & Lefkowitz (2008) emphasise the need to study unethical conduct without asking the respondent to report his or her own behaviour.

Some authors additionally emphasise the existence of a positive relationship between the attitude towards cheating and acting in such a manner (Stone et al., 2009). This is why methods were chosen that investigated the individual's attitude towards specific forms of behaviour, that is, towards various methods of cheating and plagiarising, instead of tools consisting in asking people directly whether they behave in that way. Said methods are described below.

*Acceptance of academic dishonesty (cheating and plagiarism).* For investigating the acceptance of academic dishonesty, cheating and plagiarism for oneself and for others, I adapted for research the Polish version of the Acceptance of Academic Cheating and Plagiarism Scale by J. Bloodgood, W. H. Turnley and P. E. Mudrack (2010). The Polish version of the scale was developed using a back-translation (Brislin, 1986) in accordance with a standard procedure involving two translators of the English language and an academic lecturer proficient in English. Reliability of the scale (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) in said research was 0.91 for the entire scale, 0.84 for the Scale of Acceptance of Cheating and Plagiarism for Oneself, and 0.77 for the Scale of Acceptance of Cheating and Plagiarism for Others. Examination of the estimates indicated that reliabilities were acceptable. More specifically, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values obtained in this manner were higher than 0.70, often cited as indicative of a reasonable level of reliability (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

*Acceptance of cheating and plagiarism by a passive witness.* The individual attitude towards a silent and passive approach of witnesses to situations where others cheat and teachers reward plagiarised work was investigated using the Scale of Acceptance of the Passivity of a Witness of Cheating and Plagiarism. It was developed for my research,

similarly to the Scale of Acceptance of Cheating and Plagiarism by Bloodgood et al. (2010), in accordance with the applicable procedure. The items were: (1) being silent when you see that somebody is copying another classmate's paper during an exam, (2) being silent when you witness using unauthorized notes (a "cheat sheet") during an exam, (3) being silent when you know that your teacher has given your classmate a very good mark for plagiarized work. The scale ranged from (1) Strongly Believe That It Is Not Wrong to (5) Strongly Believe That It Is Wrong. The measure was reverse-scored in order to have higher scores equate to greater acceptance of a witness's passivity of cheating and plagiarism. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the scale is 0.85.

*Justice sensitivity.* The Polish version of the Justice Sensitivity Scales by M. Schmitt, M. Gollwitzer, J. Maes and D. Arbach (2005) was used to diagnose justice sensitivity. The scales are used to diagnose three types of justice sensitivity: from the victim, observer and beneficiary perspectives.

A back-translation (Brislin, 1986) was used to develop the Polish language version involving a translator of the German language and two university lecturers proficient in German. Reliability of the scales (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) in my research is 0.86 for the victim scale, 0.86 for the observer scale and 0.88 for the unjustified beneficiary scale. All Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values obtained are higher than 0.70.

*Locus of control.* The locus of control variable was measured using the Delta Questionnaire for Locus of Control Measurement by R. Ł. Drwal (1995), developed on the basis of B. Rotter's I-E-J Scale (1966, 1975; Kmiecik, 1983, p. 43-45). The Delta Questionnaire is composed of 24 assertions, 14 of which indicate internalised and externalised loci of control (LOC), and the remaining 10 questions form a lie scale. Reliability of the scales calculated by means of Cronbach's alpha factor was 0.73 for the LOC scale.

*Individual moral philosophy.* The Ethical Ideology Scales (EIS) (Polish acronym SIFM) were developed by the author and were applied in the investigation of moral convictions (Chudzicka-Czupala, 2012; 2013a, 2013b). The tool included eight assertions. Each assertion is related to a different moral principle: *moral relativism, moral idealism, Machiavellianism, narcissism/egoism, the Golden Rule, utilitarianism, cost-benefit analysis and altruism*. Initial versions of the scales used were reviewed by professionals for technical accuracy and ethical complexity. The survey respondent is asked to evaluate, on a 5-step Likert scale, to what extent they agree with each of the assertions, providing a rating of 1 ("not at all") to 5 ("definitely").

## Sample

The research was conducted in Poland, in the region of Upper Silesia, in 2012. Two hundred and eighty-five students from local universities were surveyed. The survey respondents were aged 19 to 57 (24 on average), and included 190 women (65.5%) and 95 men (34.5%). They included 210 public university students (73.5%), and 75 non-public university students (26.5%), with 144 full-time students (50.5%), and 141 extramural students (49.5%). The survey participants were mostly first-year students of uniform graduate studies (for an MA degree) and undergraduate students (for a BA or BSc degree).

The majority, or 173 respondents (60.5%), were students of arts & humanities (social sciences), there were 53 students of technology (18.8%), and 59 (20.7%) other students (of economics, medicine, nature studies, physical education).

## Results

*General description of the studied variables, intercorrelations and additional preliminary analyses.* Table 1 presents a description of the research variables (mean values obtained, standard deviations) and correlations between the variables.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations, N=285

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1 Acceptance of cheating and plagiarism for oneself	17.78	5.94	--													
2 Acceptance of cheating and plagiarism for others	11.61	3.59	<b>0.71</b>	--												
3 Acceptance of the passivity of a witness of cheating and plagiarism	9.98	2.80	<b>0.56</b>	<b>0.57</b>	--											
4 Moral relativism	3.07	1.24	<b>0.27</b>	<b>0.18</b>	0.12	--										
5 Moral idealism	3.48	1.09	-0.10	-0.09	-0.06	<b>-0.36</b>	--									
6 Machiavellianism	2.29	1.29	<b>0.22</b>	0.11	0.12	<b>0.31</b>	<b>-0.19</b>	--								
7 Narcissism/egoism	2.25	1.22	0.15	0.04	0.01	<b>0.19</b>	<b>-0.18</b>	<b>0.32</b>	--							
8 Golden Rule	4.53	0.78	<b>-0.20</b>	-0.04	-0.00	-0.04	0.06	<b>-0.25</b>	<b>-0.18</b>	--						
9 Utilitarianism	3.78	1.04	<b>-0.16</b>	-0.12	<b>-0.23</b>	-0.03	0.05	-0.03	-0.12	<b>0.34</b>	--					
10 Cost-benefit analysis	3.71	1.12	<b>0.23</b>	0.15	0.05	<b>0.25</b>	0.03	<b>0.35</b>	0.13	-0.01	0.06	--				
11 Altruism	3.30	1.00	<b>-0.21</b>	<b>-0.15</b>	-0.12	<b>-0.21</b>	0.12	0.04	-0.14	0.13	<b>0.31</b>	-0.05	--			
12 Locus of control	5.55	2.76	0.12	<b>0.16</b>	0.02	<b>0.16</b>	-0.06	<b>0.21</b>	<b>0.21</b>	-0.04	0.10	0.13	0.10	--		
13 Justice sensitivity (victim perspective)	30.29	7.77	<b>0.18</b>	0.02	0.07	0.08	0.04	<b>0.15</b>	0.06	-0.03	-0.01	<b>0.17</b>	-0.10	<b>0.19</b>	--	
14 Justice sensitivity (observer perspective)	28.72	7.70	-0.01	-0.04	<b>-0.16</b>	0.04	0.07	0.00	0.06	<b>0.15</b>	<b>0.23</b>	0.07	0.09	<b>0.19</b>	<b>0.51</b>	--
15 Justice sensitivity (beneficiary perspective)	26.85	8.38	<b>-0.22</b>	<b>-0.16</b>	<b>-0.24</b>	-0.12	0.10	<b>-0.24</b>	-0.11	<b>0.27</b>	<b>0.29</b>	<b>-0.19</b>	<b>0.18</b>	0.01	<b>0.18</b>	<b>0.58</b>

**p < 0,01**

Because the information was obtained simultaneously from respondents in a self-report format there was concern for mono-method bias. That is why additional preliminary analyses were done. A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted. It indicates that all the constructs (justice sensitivity, locus of control, moral philosophy, and the three acceptance of cheating dimensions) are independent ( $\chi^2/df=7.49$ , CFI=0.51, NFI=0.48).

Additionally, there was concern due to the personal nature of the survey questions, that respondents might have answered in “socially desirable” ways. To check if they might have distorted their answers to look good, results of the lie scale, a partial locus of control measure, were analysed. They show that the respondents’ inclination to lie was low (M=1.7, SD=1.43). In order to investigate if respondents might not have answered truthfully about themselves, the results of a lie scale were correlated with the results of each scale used in the study. Statistically significant correlations were not found between the results of most of the scales and the results of the lie scale. That allowed the author to exclude the low validity of these scales. Some scales, though, like victim justice sensitivity and acceptance of witness passivity, demonstrated a weak significant positive relationship with the results of the lie scale (p=0.05). Such results do not discredit the high validity of the scales mentioned. Quite the reverse, they may be explained in the light of existing theories about submissive and egoistic characteristics of these variables and the individuals’ vulnerability to show themselves in “socially desirable” ways to be under the influence of other people.

A multiple linear stepwise regression analysis was performed in order to verify the research hypotheses and to test the adopted research model.

**Table 2.** Multiple Linear Stepwise Regression Results.

Dependent Variables	Independent Variables Included into Model	Beta	T	P	Regression Summary
<b>Accepting cheating and plagiarism for oneself</b>	Moral relativism	0.16	2.84	0.00	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> =0.17 F=8.12 p<0.00
	Justice sensitivity (beneficiary perspective)	-0.13	-2.15	0.03	
	Justice sensitivity (victim perspective)	0.14	2.34	0.02	
	Golden Rule	-0.12	-2.01	0.05	
	Cost /benefit analysis	0.13	2.21	0.03	
<b>Accepting cheating and plagiarism for others</b>	Locus of control	0.15	2.55	0.01	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> =0.08 F=4.89 p<0.00
<b>Accepting passivity of a witness of cheating and plagiarism</b>	Utilitarianism	-0.20	-3.31	0.00	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> =0.11 F=6.18 p<0.00
	Golden Rule	0.15	2.41	0.02	
	Justice sensitivity (victim perspective)	0.15	2.25	0.02	

*Predictors for accepting cheating and plagiarism for oneself.* As results from Table 2 show, of all the studied factors, the one that is the most important predictor of the attitude towards cheating and plagiarism for oneself is accepting the following dimensions of individual moral philosophy: *moral relativism*, *the Golden Rule* (negative relationship) and *cost-benefit analysis*. Independent variables included in the model were also *justice sensitivity from the beneficiary perspective* (negative relationship) and *justice sensitivity from the victim perspective*.

The more one doubts the existence of universal moral principles, the more they believe that human beings should, in their actions, maximise their own benefits and minimise the costs, and the higher they rank on the justice sensitivity scale from the victim perspective (they feel bad when someone obtains something they think they deserved), the more they accept cheating and plagiarism. The stronger the respondent's conviction that others should be treated in the same way as one wishes to be treated (Golden Rule), and the higher they rank on the scale of justice sensitivity from the undeserved beneficiary perspective (they are concerned because they received something others deserved), the worse their judgment of cheating and plagiarism is for oneself. Hypotheses 1a and 1c were confirmed, hypothesis 1b should be rejected.

*Predictors for accepting cheating and plagiarism for others.* Results of regression analysis for the dependent variable *accepting cheating and plagiarism for others* (Table 2) show that the only independent variable included in the model was *locus of control*. The stronger the external locus of control, the higher the acceptance of cheating and plagiarism for others and the more inclined the individual is to praise helping others by writing theses and papers for them. It can be assumed that individuals with an external locus of control, due to their higher submissiveness, may be more inclined to agree to provide others with cribs and illegal materials or allow them to copy their work. Hypothesis 2b was confirmed. We should reject hypotheses 2a and 2c.

*Predictors for accepting witness passivity of cheating and plagiarism.* The following variables were found to be significant predictors of acceptance of witness passivity as a result of regression analysis: *utilitarianism*, *the Golden Rule* (dimensions of individual moral philosophy) and *justice sensitivity (victim perspective)*. Said variables were included in the resulting model (Table 2).

The main predictor explaining the variability of that dependent variable is *utilitarianism*. This is a negative predictor, meaning that the more one accepts the principle that "the goal of action should be 'the greatest possible happiness of the largest possible number of people'", the less they praise silence when one witnesses cheating and plagiarism. Traits which are connected with the general acceptance of witness passivity were also found to be *justice sensitivity from the victim perspective* and acceptance of *the*

*Golden Rule* (“treat others in the same way as you wish to be treated”), leading to consent to silence when we witness someone’s fraudulent behaviour. Hypotheses 3a and 3c were confirmed. Hypothesis 3b should be rejected.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

My research results focused on selected conditions of acceptance of cheating and plagiarism, resulting from personal traits and individual morality. The results confirm the relationship suggested in the model between some predictor variables and the attitude declared by the survey respondents towards cheating and plagiarism. Such factors may be considered as variables important for understanding the acceptance of academic dishonesty - cheating and plagiarism and the acceptance of witness passivity to such forms of behaviour. It may also be assumed that they may increase the inclination towards such behaviour.

The following variables are connected with the acceptance of cheating and plagiarism: justice sensitivity (from the victim and the undeserved beneficiary perspectives), selected dimensions of moral philosophy (accepting moral relativism, the cost-benefit analysis principle, the Golden Rule and utilitarianism) and locus of control.

The results show the connection between justice sensitivity and one’s attitude towards cheating. Justice sensitivity from the undeserved beneficiary and the victim perspectives supported significant, confirmed findings from earlier research. In fact, Lupfer, Weeks, Doan and Houston (2000) demonstrated that people sought strongly to change a situation when they were faced with injustice only if they themselves felt disadvantaged or strongly affected by its consequences in any manner. This is most probably why observer sensitivity may be less significant. People more inclined to feel injustice from the victim perspective are individuals who find situations hard to bear when others benefit instead of them. They most probably feel more jealous or angry then. These are probably individuals who find it hard not to be successful. It is easy to imagine them being more inclined to violate ethical laws in order to prevent their failing. This assertion requires, however, further empirical studies. In my research, these individuals accept cheating and plagiarism for oneself to a significantly higher extent and agree more easily to the passive role of witnessing cheating and plagiarism.

Individuals more sensitive to justice from the beneficiary perspective, tormented by a guilty conscience when they obtain rewards others deserved, react in the opposite way: they accept to a significantly smaller extent cheating and plagiarism in general, as well as cheating and plagiarism for oneself. Clearly, this perspective points to their high sense of justice. They would most probably feel bad knowing that they were obtaining benefits

without being entitled to them, and this is why persons more sensitive in this respect show definitely smaller acceptance of academic dishonesty.

Data concerning the locus of control obtained in my research show the submissive nature of persons with an external locus of control. Such individuals also accept to a larger degree (compared to those with an internal LOC) dishonesty consisting in helping others, and probably allow others more often to copy and plagiarise their work. Earlier results were not confirmed, on the other hand, pointing to the alleged relationship between locus of control and acceptance of cheating and plagiarism for oneself or acceptance of witness passivity toward of cheating.

Other variables which are connected with accepting cheating and plagiarism include selected dimensions of individual moral philosophy. Moral relativism proved to be the most significant of all ethical principles. Agreeing with it involves consenting to cheating and plagiarism in general and for oneself. Relativism and following the cost-benefit analysis principle may thus constitute significant predictors of the inclination towards cheating.

Forsyth (1992, p. 462) points out that relativists believe that “harm is sometimes... necessary to produce good.” Relativists are convinced that no universal standards or principles can be found indicating how one should behave in a specific situation. Every situation is different and therefore one always needs to consider all the current circumstances before making a decision. People who are relativists seem less inclined to treat or define people’s behaviour as “unethical” and to actively intervene in situations that spark ethical controversy, since they need to learn about the full background of the behaviour and know all its aspects before they make a decision and give an unequivocal opinion. Relativism may constitute a significant premise for acceptance of cheating for oneself: a relativist seems to be an individual who will find many justifications for the need to use someone else’s work or materials. Recognition of the cost-benefit analysis principle is also connected with positive attitude towards cheating and plagiarism for oneself. Cheating and plagiarism may contribute to obtaining more benefits for oneself; so acceptance of such behaviour by someone performing cost-benefit calculations seems obvious.

I also found that the more one agreed with the Golden Rule, the less they accepted cheating and plagiarism for oneself and the more inclined they were to consent to passivity and silence when others cheat. Acceptance of the utilitarian maxim is connected with disagreement with silence and passivity when one witnesses others cheating or plagiarising. Erondy, Sharland and Okapara (2004) point out that any behaviour is morally right for utilitarians if it contributes to the general good and brings advantages to the entire community. Clearly, those who accept that moral principle consider silence when

faced with cheating and plagiarism as morally wrong. Perhaps passive consent to such behaviour does not contribute to the general good, in the respondents' opinion. Agreement with utilitarianism turns out to be a significant factor, which is confirmed by the position that utilitarian justifications are some of the most important criteria taken into account when people formulate moral judgements and make ethical decisions (cf. Kujala, Lamsa & Penttila, 2011). In my research, no connection between other moral principles: idealism, Machiavellianism, narcissism/egoism or altruism and the acceptance of cheating and plagiarism was found. This result is quite surprising, since research points to a relationship between the moral convictions listed above and the manner of making ethical decisions.

The obtained results require further empirical explorations. In further research it would be worthwhile examining the role of determinants from both groups at the same time: external and individual. Among factors related to situational and social contexts, it would be advisable to include in the model the probability of being caught cheating or plagiarising, the actual degree of consent to cheating or plagiarism on the lecturer's part as perceived by students, and the type of examination when cheating may occur most frequently. Research shows, in fact, that the type of task to be performed, and whether it depends on one's skill or just chance, influences the persons' cheating inclinations differently depending upon their internal or external locus of control (Karabenick & Srull, 1978). In order to consider such factors, a different methodology and experimental research would have to be applied. There are further individual difference traits that could legitimately be examined in future work, including just world beliefs, belief in immanent justice, and empathy.

To recapitulate, one needs to bear in mind that the purpose of university studies is to educate young people and to help them obtain the knowledge and skills they need to work in their future job, for which they should prepare themselves in a mature and responsible manner. Ethical decisions they will make in the future will determine their attitude towards clients, subordinates, co-workers, and perhaps even the fate of the companies employing them or run by them (Scott & Jehn, 2003).

Educating young people with regard to ethical conduct, even though it might not bring the expected results immediately, makes them more likely to take an ethical decision in the future (Bloodgood et al., 2010). Research results support the idea that teaching people how to behave ethically in various situations improves understanding of ethical issues and leads to ethical behaviour (Gautschi & Jones, 1998) as well as significantly improving ethical attitudes among students (Weber & Glyptis, 2000).

Poland is a post-Communist country and the Socialist regime probably contributed to a change in moral values recognised by its citizens. This conclusion may be derived

from the cultural comparisons made by Grimes (2004) or by the author and her collaborators (Chudzicka-Czupała, Lupina-Wegener, Borter & Hapon, 2013), who focused on Ukraine, Poland and Switzerland, three countries with different political systems and cultures. The results of the mentioned research show that despite the growth of institutional and social differences between Poland and Ukraine, cultural similarities still persist in terms of cheating and existing social norms. Our study suggests that Poles still might not have sufficient ethical awareness, and consent to such behaviour is perceived as high. On the other hand, in Switzerland the attitude towards dishonesty is different and different norms prevail there: social consent to such behaviour is significantly lower.

Dalton (1998) sees the sources of dishonesty in young people's conduct in the erosion of social and family values and structures, as well as in the reductionism of basic social institutions. The contemporary world is full of ethical traps and thus contributes to upsetting the systems of values which need to be rebuilt, at least concerning honesty at universities and schools.

This may potentially be achieved by talking and writing about cheating and plagiarism as unethical behaviour, as well as in preventing such behaviour by holding courses on ethics for students and teachers. Such courses could include diagnosing individual moral philosophy, justice sensitivity, and the participants' other predispositions, not in order to single out and discriminate against those who might be prone to manipulating others more often or are more inclined towards unethical behaviour, but in order to make people aware of the significance of certain traits and their relationship with cheating or with an observer's passivity. Realizing one's own predisposition, making efforts to modify it and attempting to change one's convictions or behaviour seem actions that are possible. Educating young people and instilling in them the sense that cheating and plagiarism do not contribute to the development of sound professional skills seem to be significant goals. Haswell and others (1999, p. 211) point out that "...students are the next generation of ... professionals. The values they hold now are likely to be carried over into professional life unless modified by real-world exposure to the professional culture."

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