

Academic dishonesty and whistleblowing

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**Academic dishonesty and whistleblowing in a higher education
institution: A sociological analysis**

by

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Abstract

High rates of academic dishonesty are a concern, and whistleblowing is a mechanism that can curb the incidence thereof. ¹ This study attempted to identify the variables associated with the reporting of academic dishonesty, framing itself within the reasoned action approach. ⁴ It entailed a survey with a sample of 405 undergraduate sociology students. ¹¹ Data was collected by means of self-administered structured questionnaire. Five factors mediate the willingness to report: ⁴ students' general honesty; their level of academic honesty; the justification for committing academic dishonesty; the personal impact of reporting; and the adherence to principles as an influence on reporting. ⁴ Students with higher degrees of general honesty were more willing to report, the fear of retaliation contributed to an unwillingness to report, and institutional rules; norms and procedures influenced willingness to report.

Keywords: academic dishonesty, whistleblowing, reasoned action approach, higher education.

1. INTRODUCTION

¹ Academic institutions give students a broad understanding of the world, and aside from educating the students - they mould the students by placing a high premium on honesty and inculcating values in students that make them ethical. Students' perceptions of acceptable behaviour regarding dishonest practices are described in higher education, thus flowing over into their workplace (Saana, Ablordeppey, Mensah and Karikari, 2016:

2). Therefore, these academic institutions do not only serve the purpose of providing students with degrees but also create productive and ethical citizens.

Literature indicates that academic dishonesty is a commonly occurring phenomenon faced by higher education institutions globally (McCabe, Trevino and Butterfield, 2001; Hutton, 2006; De Bruin and Rudnick, 2007 and Caldwell, 2010). Research conducted at universities across the United States indicated that as much as 90% of students engage in academic dishonesty (Rabi, Patton, Fjortoft and Zgarrick, 2006: 1). Similarly, in an analysis of a range of different studies, Seals, Hammons and Mamieshvili (2014: 26) found that academic dishonesty was rife at university campuses.

Academic dishonesty is generally defined as behaviour that consciously contravenes the requirement that work submitted for the purposes of assessment was a student's own work (De Lambert, Ellen and Taylor, 2003: 98). The most commonly occurring forms of academic dishonesty are plagiarism (copying sentences from others' published work without the correct and required citations), and cheating in tests or examinations. Other forms include gaining access to examination papers in advance of the examination being written, as well as working with others on the completion of an assignment that should have been completed individually (Eastman, Eastman and Iyer., 2008: 211).

Thomas and De Bruin (2012: 13) noted that international literature have focused much more extensively on student responses to academic dishonesty than is the case in South African literature. Thomas and Van Zyl (2012: 143) supported this notion by stating that

issues related to academic dishonesty was a “relatively under-researched problem in South African universities”.

¹ Research at a university in Johannesburg, South Africa, showed that a large proportion (approximately 38% of the student respondents) had engaged in academic dishonesty on at least one occasion in their academic careers (De Bruin and Rudnick, 2007: 160). ¹ Data released by the Department of Student Ethics and Judicial Services (2014: 1) at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) indicated ¹ that during the first term of 2014, academic transgressions constituted the majority of disciplinary cases, which was 57% (53 out of 93). ¹ During the second term of 2014 (Department of Student Ethics and Judicial Services, 2014: 1) the same trend persisted as, yet again, academic transgressions constituted the majority of the disciplinary cases.

A study conducted amongst academic staff at the University of Johannesburg showed that they were aware of the high rate of prevalence of academic dishonesty at the university (Thomas and De Bruin, 2012: 13). They were knowledgeable about the seriousness of academic dishonesty, but few of them were willing to act against such behaviour (Thomas and De Bruin, 2012: 20). The prevalence of academic dishonesty in South African institutions is evident and as such it can be expected that this problematic, and commonly occurring, behavioural trend would transcend to the post-student lives of the individuals who commit academic dishonesty.

Academic institutions worldwide attempt to implement mechanisms to combat the problem of academic dishonesty endemic to many of them. Academic institutions in South Africa, similarly, place a high premium on academic honesty and use various mechanisms to increase the awareness thereof (Thomas and De Bruin, 2012: 22).

UJ is no exception. UJ's plagiarism policy (2013: 1) indicates that academic honesty and integrity are preconditions for fulfilling an ideal of research credibility. It identifies plagiarism "as a worldwide phenomenon", which is a threat to UJ's "goal of realising the highest international standards of academic and professional performance". The UJ plagiarism policy (2013: 1) attempts to combat plagiarism through instilling ethical values, academic honesty and integrity; and through preventing and managing acts of plagiarism.

Whistleblowing presents itself as a mechanism to remedy wrongdoing such as academic dishonesty. Whistleblowing is generally seen as an act where information about perceived organisational wrongdoing is reported to superiors by organisational members (Uys, 2008: 904). The disclosure recipient is an external entity who has the potential to remedy the wrongdoing (Jubb, 1999: 83). An internal disclosure recipient is someone within the confines of the organisation that receives the disclosure (Jubb, 1999: 90), whilst an external disclosure recipient is an individual outside of the respective organisation that possesses the necessary power to expose and rectify the situation that has occurred (Miceli and Near, 1992). This study will focus on anyone within UJ (student or staff) as a recipient that can receive disclosure information regarding academic wrongdoing, thus primacy will be placed on internal disclosure. This recipient can attempt to remedy the

wrongdoing through informal (a discussion with the student that committed academic dishonesty) or formal routes (reporting the student that committed academic dishonesty to a relevant institutional authority).

¹ This study explores the problem of academic dishonesty at a South African higher education institution and explores why the mechanism of whistleblowing is or is not used by students to expose the wrongdoing. It focuses on factors that would facilitate students reporting academic dishonesty at UJ.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

³ 2.1 The intention to blow the whistle: The reasoned action approach

The reasoned action approach argues that background factors ¹ culminate in an individual's experience of the social world, which determines their behavioural beliefs, normative beliefs and control beliefs (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010: 16). *Behavioural beliefs* are the beliefs that an individual holds "about the positive or negative consequences they might experience if they performed the behaviour", and these behavioural beliefs determine an individual's *attitude toward the behaviour* (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010: 16).

¹ Normative beliefs are beliefs of how one might be evaluated ¹ by an 'important' individual or group when performing a certain behaviour, and in turn these normative beliefs produce a *perceived norm* (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010: 16). Thus, a perceived norm is a perceived pressure to act out a certain behaviour.

Control beliefs are the “beliefs about personal and environmental factors that can help or impede their [an individual’s] attempts to carry out the behaviour”, and results in one’s perception of self-efficacy or *perceived behavioural control* (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010: 16). Perceived behavioural control is an individual’s perception of the degree of control possessed to act out a specific behaviour. This set of factors, namely an individual’s attitude toward the behaviour, perceived norms and perceived behavioural control determines intention (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010: 16). The intention, in turn, predicts an individual’s behaviour (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010: 18). The reasoned action approach suggests that intention is the foremost predictor of behaviour, however actual control (skills, abilities and environmental factors) must also be considered when predicting behaviour (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010: 17).

2.2 Reporting academic dishonesty

In predicting the intention to report academic dishonesty, the behavioural beliefs are the beliefs associated with the perceived impacts of reporting academic dishonesty. These beliefs entail the consequences of reporting and are impacted by factors such as a fear of retaliation. If a student feels that the potential consequences of retaliation such as labelling, victimisation and ostracising are negative, that student will develop an attitude that is inclined to not reporting academic dishonesty. Whether an individual is inclined to become a whistleblower is greatly determined by the policy of the institution they reside in (Callahan and Collins, 1992). An institution that wishes to encourage whistleblowing will promote a policy that protects the whistleblower from retaliation. Mesmer-Magnus and

Viswesvaran (2005: 280) provide evidence that supports the view that contextual factors are linked to whistleblowing and add that "potential whistleblowers who perceive a threat of retaliation...are much less likely to blow the whistle". Students who are encouraged by the institution to blow the whistle would be more likely to do so, however, a deterrent to blowing the whistle could come in the form of potential retaliation. Elliston (1982) places emphasis on the anonymity of the whistleblower, by claiming that the higher the likelihood of the organisation protecting the identity of the whistleblower, the more likely it is that members of that organisation will be inclined to be whistleblowers.

Henningsen, Valde and Denbow (2013: 154-161) report on students' willingness to blow the whistle on academic dishonesty, at a large Midwest university (USA), which indicated that students were more likely to blow the whistle on those who committed academic dishonesty, when attending the same classes as they were, as opposed to those not attending the same classes. This indicates that students were more willing to report on those students who were in academic competition with them, than those that were not. The normative beliefs are associated with the positive evaluation that students strive to achieve from 'important' individuals or groups (i.e. academic staff). The perception of a positive evaluation is associated with reporting witnessed academic dishonesty, as it is a norm established by the institution to exercise a morality of loyalty and act out in good faith. Thus, a perceived norm manifests that it is right to report academic dishonesty, however not all students accept such a norm.

Control beliefs such as perceptions of being in academic competition with a dishonest student influence the perceived behavioural control of a student to report academic dishonesty. These three, cumulatively, affect the student's willingness to report academic dishonesty. The willingness to report academic dishonesty is the intention, and in turn predicts the outcome which is the act of reporting (or not reporting) academic dishonesty. It is also important to note that actual control such as an obligation to academic honour codes, stronger institutional requirements and encouragement to report academic dishonesty can have a direct impact on reporting. Larmer (1992) places great emphasis in his argument on loyalty, and that loyalty (or rather the individual's definition of loyalty and the situational and organisational emphasis placed on loyalty) will determine whether an individual will be inclined to become a whistleblower. The extent to which a student identifies with an institution, and in turn exhibits loyalty toward that institution will determine the extent they are willing to report wrongdoing within the respective institution.

Research in England and Wales noted that colleges provided information about whistleblowing procedures through employee handbooks, but the most common methods at universities is via institution related web pages (Lewis, Ellis, Kyprianou and Homewood, 2001: 223). With the provision of such a resource via easily accessible Internet links, a student's access to resources, in terms of blowing the whistle, is increased.

Ultimately, the access to resources increases a student's degree of comfort (due to ease of access) when faced with the dilemma of blowing the whistle. These students that report academic dishonesty "participate in the creation of [a] moral context" (McCabe et al.,

2001: 32) This can add positive results benefitting academic institutions, and lead to an increase in whistleblowing among students.

2.2.1 *Morality*

¹ If students have a higher degree of morality present, they are more likely to blow the whistle on academic dishonesty to the faculty (Henningesen et al., 2013: 162). A higher degree of morality is typically dictated by one's awareness of what is right and wrong, thus the individual exercises general honesty.

¹ Whistleblowers could emerge when an individual considers that there is an "ethical conflict between personal and organization values" (Jubb, 1999:78). According to this argument, an individual, who might be more inclined to become a whistleblower, is one that occupies a position that he or she feels might conflict with their personal values or ethics. For example, a student with a high degree of morality delegated to doing academic group work with other students committing academic dishonesty.

2.2.2 General academic dishonesty

¹ While research shows that students generally considered dishonest behaviour to be wrong, certain acts, such as plagiarising, were not considered to be dishonest (Rennie and Crosby, 2001: 274-275). Examples of behaviour identified as dishonest included: “copying in exams, submitting a senior student's work, or copying another student's work”. This leads Rennie and Crosby (2001: 275) to conclude that “scenarios involving plagiarism may indicate students' lack of understanding regarding referencing”. Thus, a ¹ reason why students commit academic dishonesty is because they do not understand which behaviours qualify as academic dishonesty.

Rennie and Rudland's (2003: 97) study conducted ¹ in Scotland indicated that pressures to succeed result in students' engagement in various forms of academic misconduct. Additionally, ¹ Hutton (2006: 171) identified various reasons, using empirical evidence, for academic dishonesty in her study concerning college students. The main reasons for cheating included laziness, ¹ wanting to achieve higher grades, and pressures to succeed. ¹ In this study half of the students did not believe that academic dishonesty was an immoral act.

¹ Research has also indicated that students would be more likely to engage in cheating behaviour if they consider it acceptable or in line with the subjective norm. McCabe and Trevino (1997: 392) argued that students in the United States were likely to engage in academic dishonesty in “environments where peers are cheating and where peer disapproval of cheating is low”. A norm of cheating often develops if students observe

their peers engaging in such behaviour, especially if they refrain from confronting their peers or blowing the whistle to university authorities (Henningson et al., 2013: 149).

2.2.3 Justification of academic dishonesty

¹ Almost 70% of the students that participated in a study by Monica, Ankola, Ashokkumar and Hebbal (2010: 79) had previously committed academic dishonesty and felt that cheating would not have any significant effect on their futures. They gave a “fear of failure” as a justification for committing academic dishonesty (Monica et al., 2010: 81). The fear of failure is a by-product of the pressure to succeed, hence the two motives are directly related.

2.2.4 Personal impact of reporting

¹ The willingness to report academic dishonesty can also be greatly influenced by a fear of wrongdoer retaliation. Uys (2008: 905) identifies a number of actions that wrongdoers use to enact revenge on the whistleblower, for being reported on. These entail the isolation of the whistleblower; a reduction in friendliness toward the whistleblower; labelling the whistleblower as a ‘troublemaker’; and stonewalling the whistleblower (Uys, 2008: 905).

¹ This research has not located literature with regards to retaliation among peer-reported academic dishonesty. ¹ However, whistleblower retaliation has been identified in other contexts. Black’s (2011: 26) research conducted among nurses in the USA indicated that the most frequent response for not reporting wrongdoing was a ‘fear of retaliation’.

¹ Retaliation due to peer-reported academic dishonesty can manifest in the form of labelling, victimisation or ostracising (as identified in other contexts). The ¹ fear of such retaliation can directly impact a student's willingness to report academic dishonesty.

2.2.5 Adherence to principles

¹ A morality of loyalty should compel a student to expose a wrongdoing occurring in the organisation of a higher learning institution. Loyalty is the ¹ obligation to protect the reputation of an organisation by acting in good faith and reporting a wrongdoing incident (Uys and Senekal, 2008: 38).

3. METHOD

¹ Using a quantitative approach, the research measured University of Johannesburg sociology students' attitudes to perceived academic dishonesty, as well as the extent to which they were willing to engage in whistleblowing within the institution. ¹ Data was collected utilising a self-administered questionnaire which was distributed electronically via the University of Johannesburg's academic Internet portal 'Blackboard'. ¹ A census was used for the purposes of the research, to counteract the tendency of a low response rate with self-administered questionnaires (Bourque and Fielder, 2003: 154). Thus, the link to the online questionnaire was distributed to the entire undergraduate sociology population rather than drawing a sample. This proved more effective as sample loss did not have as significant an effect. The biographic characteristics of the sample respondents were compared statistically to the entire UJ undergraduate sociology population to determine

whether the sample was representative of the population. A total of 405 respondents completed the questionnaire, which gave a response rate of 20.52%.

¹ Close-ended questions were used in the questionnaire and were based on the findings of studies in the body of literature. ¹ The Likert-type scale was employed where respondents expressed their attitudes in terms of ordinal-level categories that are ranked along a continuum. The questionnaire consisted of seven sections, namely:

- section 1 providing biographical information;
- section 2 gauging the respondents' varying degrees of morality;
- section 3 explored the respondents' understanding of academic dishonesty;
- section 4 looked at the justifications for dishonest behaviours;
- section 5 attempted to determine the respondents' willingness to report academically dishonest behaviour;
- section 6 dealt with justifications for reporting or not reporting dishonest behaviours; and
- section 7 contained general questions that determined whether the respondents had witnessed and/or reported academic dishonesty.

The data was analysed by using SPSS 22. ¹ Inferential statistics such as the Chi-Square test of independence; the t-test; analysis of variance (ANOVA); and Pearson's r test were used to test the hypotheses (Bless and Kathuria, 1993: 85).

Factor analysis and item analysis providing the Cronbach's alpha internal consistency measure ensured the validity and reliability of the scales developed during the data

analysis. ¹ Exploratory factor analysis was used to create the scales measuring the dimensions of whistleblowing which resulted in the reduction of items to fewer, more interpretable factors (Eiselen and Uys, 2016: 108) thus enabling a construction of two or more continuous scales for the purposes of hypothesis testing. Principal Axis Factoring was used as the extraction method ⁸ as it is able to better “recover weak factors” and ensure “that the maximum likelihood estimator is asymptotically efficient” (de Winter and Dodou, 2012: 695). The Oblimin with Kaiser Normalisation rotation method was used. For the the ² Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO), a value of 0.6 is needed for there to be ¹ sufficient correlation between the pairs of items in order to proceed with further factor analysis. Additionally, the Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity needs to reject the null-hypothesis to ensure that the items are uncorrelated so that factor analysis can continue (Eiselen and Uys, 2016: 111), and a p-value smaller than 0.05 will ensure this. The Measure of Sampling Adequacy (MSA) needs to exceed 0.6. The inter-item reliability was determined utilising Cronbach’s alpha. ¹ A Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient of 0.7 or higher is considered acceptable for the purposes of social science research.

4. RESULTS

¹ 4.1 Willingness to report academic dishonesty

This factor analysis dealt with the willingness to report academic dishonesty and was measured using questions pertaining to students’ most likely immediate actions when encountering academic dishonesty. The questions aimed to determine what students’ ¹ most likely response would be in a set of scenarios, and were provided with the following

possible responses: 1 'keep quiet', 2 'talk to the offender', 3 'discuss your concerns with other students', 4 'discuss your concerns with an appropriate authority within your given academic institution' and 5 'discuss with an individual in authority outside of your given academic institution'. These responses indicate a progression from not taking any reporting action, to reporting internally and lastly to reporting externally. The scale measures to what extent students are willing to take active measure. As the scale progress, the consequences become more serious for the wrongdoer as well as the whistleblower.

Table 1 indicates the two factors that were created. ¹ Factor one is the willingness to report severe academic dishonesty. Factor two is the willingness to report less severe academic dishonesty.

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Table 1: Pattern matrix – willingness to report academic dishonesty

	Factor	
	1	2
1 You notice that a fellow student has brought notes into the test or exam	0.924	
You notice that a fellow student is using their cellular phone during a test or exam (for what appears to be cheating)	0.894	
You notice that a student is cheating during a test or exam	0.892	
You become aware that a student has gained access to a test or exam prior to it being written	0.692	
You become aware that a fellow student has used a senior student's assignment for submission as their own	0.583	
You become aware that a fellow student has deliberately not referenced others' published work in their assignment		0.890
A fellow student receives help from someone else in writing parts of an essay		0.833
You become aware that a fellow student created fake sources for their assignment		0.805
You become aware that a fellow student's essay was written by someone else		0.632

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Cronbach's alpha Factor 1 = 0.913; Cronbach's alpha Factor 2 = 0.891.

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Figure 1 indicates that the distribution of the sample responses for the willingness to report severe academic dishonesty is positively skewed. The mean of responses for the willingness to report severe academic dishonesty was 2.67, thus fewer than half of the respondents were likely to respond to perceived severe academic dishonesty beyond speaking to the wrongdoer.

Figure 1: Histogram - willingness to report severe academic dishonesty

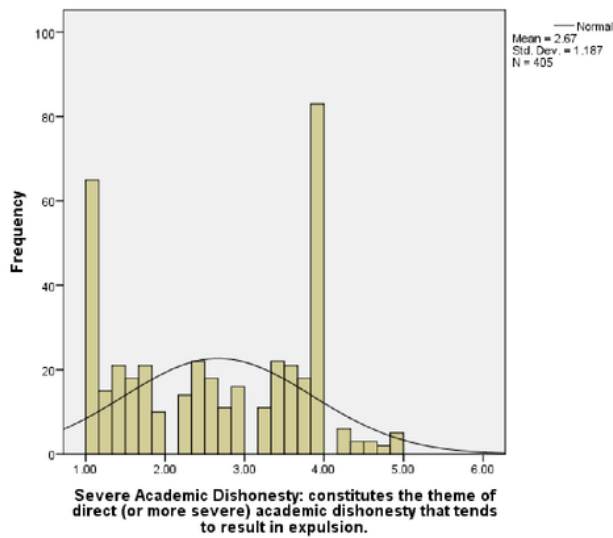
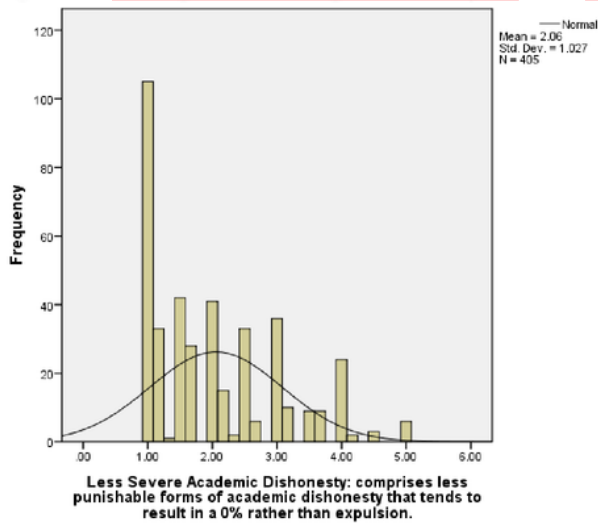


Figure 2 indicates that the distribution of the sample responses for the willingness to report less severe academic dishonesty is positively skewed. The mean of responses for the willingness to report less severe academic dishonesty was 2.06, thus fewer than half of the respondents were likely to respond to perceived less severe academic dishonesty beyond speaking to the wrongdoer.

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Figure 2: Histogram - willingness to report less severe academic dishonesty



The results indicated that there were at least some students who were willing to report academic dishonesty, however little. Two factors have been identified: 1 willingness to report severe academic dishonesty and willingness to report severe academic dishonesty. Some students were willing to report severe academic dishonesty. However, students were generally inclined to not engage in internal whistleblowing with regards to severe academic dishonesty. Generally, students were only willing to talk to the offender. The same can be said for the willingness to report less severe academic dishonesty. Students were generally inclined to at most talk to the offender and not engage in the internal reporting of academic dishonesty.

1 4.2 General honesty

This factor analysis dealt with students' varying degrees of morality and was measured using questions pertaining to general honesty. The questions aimed to determine the

students' degree of general honesty. The students were asked to indicate to what extent they considered certain actions acceptable, and were provided with the following possible responses: 1 'completely acceptable', 2 'somewhat acceptable', 3 'neither acceptable not unacceptable', 4 'somewhat unacceptable' and 5 'completely unacceptable'.

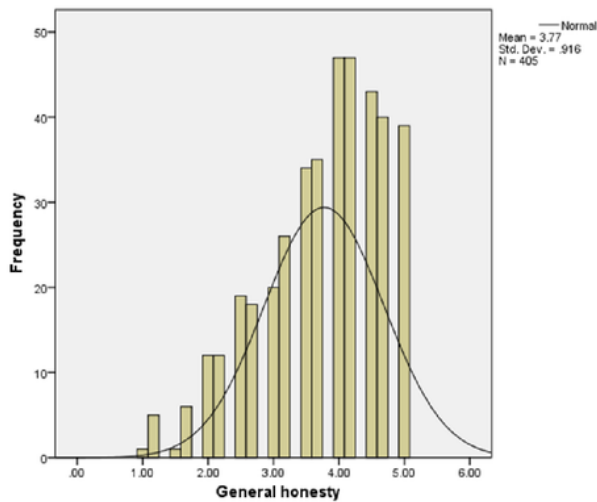
Table 2: Pattern matrix – general honesty

	Factor
	1
Offering a bribe to a traffic officer in order to avoid a fine	0.681
Illegally downloading music or movies from the internet	0.669
Bending the truth a little in order to receive a bursary	0.555
Taking stationery, such as pens and pencils, from an employer	0.507

Cronbach's alpha Factor 1 = 0.711.

Figure 3 indicates that the distribution of the sample responses for general honesty is negatively skewed. The mean of responses for general honesty was 3.77, thus the average student tended towards a higher degree of general honesty.

Figure 3: Histogram – general honesty



One factor has been identified: *general honesty*. It identifies that there is a relatively high level of honesty amongst the students of the sample. This is true, because the students found most of the statements pertaining to dishonest behaviour as unacceptable.

4.3 Students' level of academic honesty

This factor analysis dealt with students' level of academic honesty and was measured using questions pertaining to cheating behaviours. The questions aimed to determine the students' level of academic honesty, and students were provided with the following possible responses: 1 'completely acceptable', 2 'somewhat acceptable', 3 'neither acceptable not unacceptable', 4 'somewhat unacceptable' and 5 'completely unacceptable'.

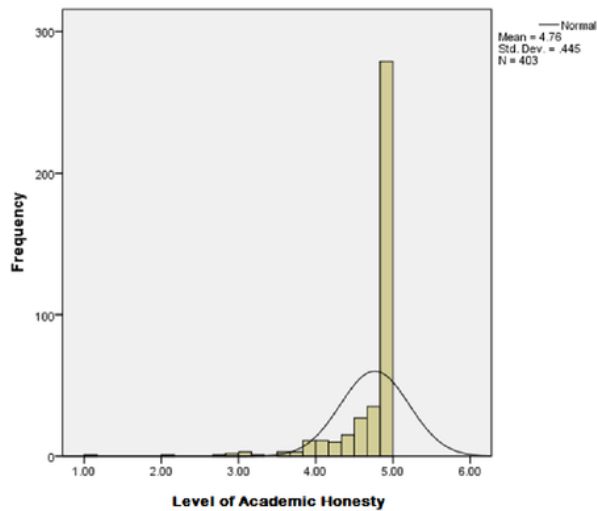
Table 3: Pattern matrix – level of academic honesty

	Factor
	1
Getting someone else to write a test for you	0.958
Copying work from another student during a test or exam	0.704
Taking notes into a test or exam	0.598
Copying sentences from the published work of others without citing the author	0.579
Using some else's ideas as your own	0.563
Utilising the internet to find the assignments of others to use as your own	0.521
Handing in an assignment identical to that of your friends	0.517

Cronbach's alpha Factor 1 = 0.834.

Figure 4 indicates that the distribution of the sample responses for students' level of academic honesty is positively skewed. The mean of responses for students' level of academic honesty was 4.76, thus students generally considered acts of academic dishonesty as unacceptable, indicating a high level of agreement amongst the sample on what constitutes academic honesty.

Figure 4: Histogram – level of academic honesty



One factor has been identified: *level of academic honesty*. The students constituting the sample had a very high ¹² level of academic dishonesty. They generally found the behaviours associated with academic dishonesty as unacceptable.

¹ 4.4 Justification of dishonest behaviours

This factor analysis dealt with justifications for committing academic dishonesty and was measured using questions pertaining to how acceptable students find justifications for academically dishonest behaviours. The questions aimed to determine to what extent the students justified reasons for improper academic behaviour, and student were provided with the following possible responses: 1 ¹ 'completely acceptable', 2 'somewhat acceptable', 3 'neither acceptable not unacceptable', 4 'somewhat unacceptable' and 5 'completely unacceptable'.

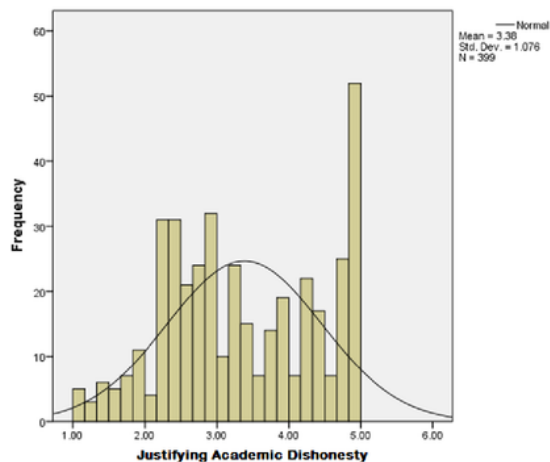
Table 4: Pattern matrix – justification of dishonest behaviours

	Factor
	1
There is pressure from the students' peers to do well	0.851
The student is trying to improve their poor marks	0.846
The student has to compete with other students	0.831
There is pressure from students' parents to do well	0.819
The student only behaves this way when it is absolutely necessary	0.762
This student doesn't behave this way often	0.697
The student is influenced by a fear of failure	0.668
No-one else is hurt by the students' behaviour	0.664
There is a lack of time to adequately prepare for an assessment	0.652
The student behaves this way because others are behaving this way too	0.602

Cronbach's alpha Factor 1 = 0.924.

Figure 5 indicates that the distribution of the sample responses for the justifications of academic dishonesty is not normally distributed. The mean of responses for the justifications of academic dishonesty was 3.38. However, whilst the mean is located around the average point, it is not a good description of the sample. This is due to a fairly large standard deviation which indicates a lot of variability in the scores. A portion of the students do find the justifications for academic dishonesty somewhat unacceptable, whilst others find it acceptable.

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Figure 5: Histogram – *justification of dishonest behaviours*



One factor has been identified: *justifications for academic dishonesty*. The students were gravitating towards finding the majority of the statements somewhat unacceptable (their responses were located between 'neither acceptable nor unacceptable' and 'somewhat unacceptable'). The mean of the students is located around a general neutrality towards the justifications for academic dishonesty, however due to a fairly large standard deviation the mean is not a good description of the sample. Some students find the justifications for academic dishonesty somewhat unacceptable whilst others find it acceptable.

1 4.5 Justification of reporting or not reporting

This factor analysis dealt with the reporting or not reporting of academic dishonesty. The questions aimed to determine why students justify reporting or not reporting academic dishonesty. The students were asked how influential certain factors were when considering reporting academic dishonesty, and were provided with the following set of possible responses: 1 'extremely influential', 2 'somewhat influential', 3 'slightly influential', and 4 'not influential at all'.

Table 5: Pattern matrix – justification of reporting or not reporting

	Factor	
	1	2
1 Fear of victimisation from other students if I report cheating	0.871	
Concern that students will retaliate if I report their cheating behaviour	0.843	
A perception that students who report on friends that cheat are said to be disloyal	0.738	
A perception that students who 'tell on' other students tend to have no friends at university	0.728	
Concern that reporting on students that cheat might ruin my relationship with those students	0.658	
2 Fear of the repercussions from blowing the whistle	0.504	
My belief that it is important to adhere to academic rules and regulations		0.869
My belief that academic dishonesty is a serious offence		0.819
My view that cheating behaviour damages the reputation of your academic institution		0.689
5 My belief that students who cheat create an unfair advantage for themselves		0.524

Cronbach's alpha Factor 1 = 0.885; Cronbach's alpha Factor 2 = 0.807.

Figure 6 indicates that the distribution of the sample responses for the justification of not reporting academic dishonesty (the personal impact reporting might have) is positively skewed. The mean of responses for the willingness to report severe academic dishonesty

was 2.32, thus the average student found the personal impact of reporting at least somewhat influential when justifying not reporting.

Figure 6: Histogram – personal impact

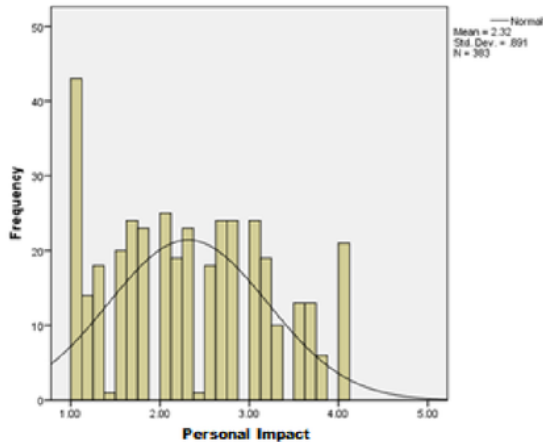
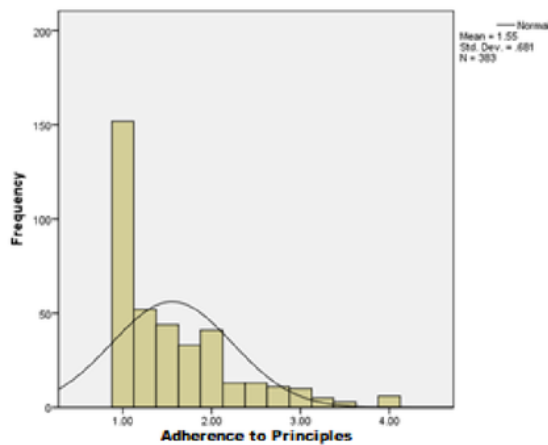


Figure 7 indicates that the distribution of the sample responses for the justification of reporting academic dishonesty (adherence to principles) is positively skewed. The mean of responses for the willingness to report severe academic dishonesty was 1.55 the average student considered the justification of reporting influential. This means adherence to principles is influential in students' decision-making regarding reporting academic dishonesty.

Figure 7: Histogram – adherence to principles



Two factors were identified: *the personal impact of reporting academic dishonesty* and *adherence to principles* as being influential when reporting academic dishonesty. The personal impact of reporting academic dishonesty is somewhat influential in students' decisions to report or not report academic dishonesty. It is mainly impacted by a fear of retaliation from the wrongdoer and student community. Adherence to principles is influential in students' decisions ⁴ to report academic dishonesty. Students feel that rules, norms and procedures are very influential in making their decisions with regards to reporting academic dishonesty.

The dependent variable reflects two variables associated with it, namely the ¹ willingness to report severe academic dishonesty and the willingness to report less severe academic dishonesty. The independent variables are: general honesty; level of academic honesty; justification of dishonest behaviours; the personal impact of reporting academic dishonesty; and the adherence to principles. The the relationship between the ¹ willingness

to report severe and less severe academic dishonesty and the independent variables was then tested.

4.6 Tests

Table 6 indicates that there is a moderate correlation between general honesty and the willingness to report both severe and less severe academic dishonesty, as Pearson's r values are 0.352 and 0.348 respectively. Additionally, there is a statistically significant correlation between general honesty and the willingness to report academic dishonesty as the p -value is <0.0005 . Severe academic dishonesty and less severe academic dishonesty correlate positively with the factor 'general honesty'. Students who scored low on the factor 'general honesty' typically also scored low on the willingness to report severe and less severe academic dishonesty. Thus, students who are generally more dishonest are less willing to report academic dishonesty. Therefore, *there is a statistically significant correlation between general honesty and the willingness to report severe academic dishonesty as well as less severe academic dishonesty.*

There is also a weak-to-moderate correlation between students' understanding of academic dishonesty and the willingness to report both severe and less severe academic dishonesty, as the Pearson's r value is 0.241 and 0.197 respectively. Additionally, there is a statistically significant correlation between students' level of academic honesty and the willingness to report both severe and less severe academic dishonesty as the p -values are both <0.0005 . Both severe academic dishonesty and less severe academic dishonesty correlate positively with the factor 'level of academic honesty'. Students who

have a low level of academic honesty are less willing to report academic dishonesty and students with a high level of academic honesty are also more willing to report academic dishonesty. Hence, ¹ *there is a statistically significant correlation between students' level of academic honesty and the willingness to report severe academic dishonesty as well as less severe academic dishonesty.*

Additionally, ¹ there is a weak correlation between the justification of dishonest behaviours and willingness to report severe academic dishonesty, as the Pearson's r value is 0.180. However, there is a statistically significant correlation between the justification of dishonest behaviours and the willingness to report severe academic dishonesty as the p-value is <0.0005. Considering the correlation between the justification of dishonest behaviours and the willingness to report less severe academic dishonesty, there is a very weak correlation between the two indicating a Pearson's r value of 0.069. Furthermore, there is no statistically significant relationship between the latter mentioned factors clearly indicated by a p-value of 0.170. Both ¹ the willingness to report severe academic dishonesty and less severe academic dishonesty correlate positively with the justification of dishonest behaviours. However, only the correlation between severe academic dishonesty and the justification of dishonest behaviours is statistically significant. Therefore, ¹ students who justify academic dishonesty are less willing to report severe academic dishonesty, while students that do not justify academic dishonesty are also more willing to report severe academic dishonesty. Therefore, ¹ *there is a statistically significant correlation between the justification of dishonest behaviours and the willingness to report severe academic dishonesty.*

Table 6: *Pearson's r* – hypothesis tests

		Severe academic dishonesty	Less severe academic dishonesty
General honesty	Pearson correlation	0.352	0.348
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000
		405	405
Level of academic honesty	Pearson correlation	0.241	0.197
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000
		403	403
Justifying academic dishonesty	Pearson correlation	0.180	0.069
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.170
		399	399
Personal impact	Pearson correlation	0.104	-0.012
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.042	0.812
		383	383
Adherence to principles	Pearson correlation	-0.352	-0.245
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000
	N	383	383

The personal impact of reporting academic dishonesty and the willingness to report severe academic dishonesty indicates a very weak positive correlation as the Pearson's *r* value is 0.104. This result was found to be statistically significant as the p-value is 0.042. When testing the personal impact of reporting academic dishonesty against the willingness to report less severe academic dishonesty, no correlation was found (-0.012). The weak positive correlation found between the personal impact of reporting academic dishonesty and the willingness to report severe academic dishonesty indicates that students with higher scores for the personal impact of reporting academic dishonesty, are more willing to report severe academic dishonesty. The less influenced students are by the fear of personal repercussions, the more willing they are to report severe academic dishonesty. It is important to remember that this correlation is very low. Therefore, there

is a statistically significant correlation between the personal impact of reporting academic dishonesty and the willingness to report severe academic dishonesty.

Finally, table 6 also indicates the adherence to principles when reporting academic dishonesty tested against the willingness to report severe academic dishonesty. Pearson's r correlation indicates a moderate negative correlation (-0.352). There is also a statistically significant correlation between the two factors (p-value <0.0005). The adherence to principles indicates weak-to-moderate negative correlation (Pearson's r value = -0.245) with the willingness to report less severe academic dishonesty. The correlation between these two factors is also statistically significant (p<0.0005). It can be determined that the adherence to principles (such as institutional rules, norms and procedures) is responsible for influencing an individual's willingness to report less severe forms of academic dishonesty. Thus, *there is a statistically significant correlation between the adherence to principles and the willingness to report severe academic dishonesty as well as less severe academic dishonesty.* Seeing that these factors are negatively correlated it seems counterintuitive to argue that adhering to principles is responsible for an influencing an individual to be willing to report academic dishonesty. However, the answer categories were phrased in such a way that the lower the 'justification' factor the more likely a student is to report both severe and less severe academic dishonesty.

5. DISCUSSION

¹Jubb (1999: 78) had identified that whistleblowing tends to occur when an individual develops an ethical dilemma upon the witnessing of wrongdoing in any given organisation. Uys and Senekal (2008) had identified a morality of loyalty to an institution as a precursor to the reporting of wrongdoing. Therefore, themes that govern an individual's degrees of morality and its association to the willingness to report wrongdoing are rife. This study identified the relationship between general honesty and the willingness to report academic dishonesty.

This study has indicated that there is a statistically significant correlation between general honesty and the willingness to report academic dishonesty. Therefore, it can be concluded that an individual's degree of morality tends to impact on their willingness to report academic dishonesty. This is supported by the reasoned action approach which illustrates that individual background factors such as values (general honesty) impact on normative beliefs (a belief that general dishonest behaviour is acceptable), which in turn impacts on the attitude (an attitude of accepting academic cheating as normal) which predicts the intention (not being willing to report academic dishonesty). This research identified that students who exhibit lower ¹degrees of general honesty are less willing to report academic dishonesty, whilst students with a higher degree of general honesty are more willing to report academic dishonesty. Essentially, this means that students who are dishonest in their broader lives transfer that honesty into the academic environment. For example, a student who would bribe a police officer might also plagiarise an assignment.

¹ Hence, this research concurs with established literature that morality impacts ¹ on an individual's likelihood to report academic dishonesty (Henningson et al., 2013).

This study determined ¹ that there is a statistically significant correlation between students' level of academic honesty and the willingness to report academic dishonesty. This means that having a higher level of academic honesty ¹ plays a pivotal role in the willingness to report academic dishonesty. This coincides with the reasoned action approach, as it identified individual background factors (such as values) ¹ as having a significant impact on beliefs that influence the willingness to report academic dishonesty (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010: 18). Students who exhibit a lower level of academic honesty (having lower-set values) are less likely to report it. Those students with a higher level of academic honesty (having higher-set values), ¹⁴ are more likely to report academic dishonesty.

¹ Literature has indicated that students justify academic dishonesty due to a "fear of failure" (Monica et al., 2010). ¹ The research indicated that there is a statistically significant correlation between the justifications of academically dishonest behaviours and the willingness to report the severe academic dishonesty. Students that justified academic dishonesty were less likely to report severe academic dishonesty, such as test cheating.

¹ Wrongdoer retaliation has been identified as an integral variable that discourages individuals from blowing the whistle (Black, 2011). This study indicated that a statistically significant correlation exists between the personal impact of reporting academic dishonesty and the willingness to report severe academic dishonesty. This relates to the

notion of 'fear of retaliation', as identified in the literature. The research identified that the less fearful students are of personal repercussions (such as retaliation), the more willing they are to report severe academic dishonesty. Conversely, the more students are influenced by a fear of reprisals, the less willing they are to report academic dishonesty. Students, essentially, weigh up the personal impact that the act whistleblowing will have on their lives (this can be victimisation and ostracising), and if they deem the impact influential enough – they will not report the academic transgressions. This relates to the individual background factor of perceived risk in the reasoned action approach. Perceived risk directly influences one's beliefs which predict the intention to act. Herein, the perceived risk influences the reporting of severe academic dishonesty.

An individual's loyalty to an organisation should be a good predictor of whether they would report wrongdoing within that given organisation (Uys and Senekal, 2008: 38). This is evident in the reasoned action approach, as the environmental factors, which in this study are the rules; norms and regulations, act as an actual control that influences behaviour. Thus, it can be noted that the research largely concurs with the literature that an adherence to principles influences an individual's willingness to report. If a student feels that academic dishonesty is a serious offence which damages the reputation of UJ, and goes against the rules and regulations of UJ – that student would likely be willing to report the academic dishonesty.

6. CONCLUSION

The ¹ problem of academic dishonesty is a prevalent one in global and local institutions and the phenomenon persists within the context of this study. Blowing the whistle on academic dishonesty is not common practice amongst university students. The ¹ theoretical framework was located in the reasoned action approach, that illustrated how various factors and beliefs influence the propensity to report ¹ academic dishonesty.

The research concurred with literature that varying degrees of morality impact on a student's willingness to report academic dishonesty, because students with higher degrees of general honesty were more willing to report academic dishonesty. Students that had a lesser level of academic honesty were less willing to report severe and less severe academic dishonesty. Furthermore, students that justify academic dishonesty are less willing to report it. The personal impacts of reporting academic dishonesty influence ¹ the willingness to report severe academic dishonesty. Lastly, the adherence to principles influences a student's willingness to report. Importantly, the research indicated (across all factors) that the willingness to internally report academic dishonesty was generally not common amongst UJ sociology undergraduate students.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The ¹ following recommendations can be made to improve possible future research:

- i. ¹ This study focused on sociology undergraduate students. Should future research wish to conduct a more comprehensive study, it could consider that a population is selected that encompasses students from a varied array of subjects and faculties, and not just the field of sociology. Furthermore, it should also include post-graduate students along with undergraduate students. In targeting a diverse student population, the responses would be more representative of general student perceptions.
- ii. ¹ A mixed methods approach could be considered to improve the research as it would enable the researcher to yield large quantities of responses from quantitative research, as well as well as more descriptive attitudes; beliefs; and feelings regarding the topic via qualitative research. The qualitative element of research would assist in a more detailed understanding of factors contributing to reporting academic dishonesty, and ¹ if their individual opinions of cheating behaviours differ.

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