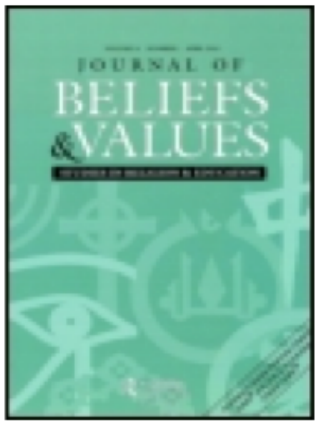

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The association between religion and self-reported academic honesty among college students

Yu Hongwei[a], Perry L. Glanzer[b], Byron R. Johnson[a], Rishi Sriram[b] and Brandon Moore[c]

[a]Institute for Studies of Religion, Baylor University, Waco, TX, USA; [b]Department of Educational Administration, Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion, School of Education, Baylor University, Waco, TX, USA; [c]McLennan Community College, Waco, TX, USA

ABSTRACT

Current research yields inconsistent findings about the association between religious variables and academic cheating among college students. In this study, we investigated possible reasons for this disagreement by examining whether, and to what extent, three particular religious variables: religious identity, affirmation of importance and religious services attendance, are associated with academic honesty among college students. Specifically, we utilised a sample of 2503 American college-aged students from Gallup® daily tracking survey and used analysis of variance (ANOVA) to address the proposed research question. Research findings indicate that religious service attendance is positively associated with academic honesty among college students. Specifically, students who attend religious services more frequently are less likely to be engaged in academic misconduct than students who attend less frequently. This finding remains consistent when other important factors such as student

KEYWORDS

Academic honesty; analysis of variance; religion; religious services attendance; effect size

religious identity, beliefs and practices and academic honesty (Burton, Talpade, and Haynes 2011).

Whether there is an association between religious identity, beliefs and practices and academic honesty are subject to disagreement among scholars who have empirically examined this matter among college students in the past five decades. Some studies have found little relationship between various religious identifiers of students and academic honesty (DeVries and Ajzen 1971; Huelsman, Piroch, and Wasieleski 2006; Michaels and Miethe 1989; Smith, Ryan, and Diggins 1972), whereas other studies have reported a statistically significant yet moderate relationship between particular religious variables and academic honesty (Bloodgood, Turnley, and Mudrack 2008; Burton, Talpade, and Haynes 2011; Fisher et al. 1998; Perrin 2000; Rettinger and Jordan 2005). Reconciling findings among these various studies often proves problematic, as most of these studies relied upon relatively small samples taken from either a single campus or a few college campuses (see Table 1).

Consequently, the current study utilised a national sample of American college students to examine the relationship between variables related to religious identity, belief and behaviour and academic honesty. Specifically, we sought to answer the following research question: Whether and to what extent are religious self-identification, religious beliefs, and religious service attendance associated with academic honesty among college-aged students? To address this question, we conducted a series of analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the sample. Based on the broader literature examining religion and its relationship with a host of outcomes (Koenig, King, and Carson 2012), we hypothesised that attendance at religious services would likely be the most important religious variable for determining differences in students' responses to academic misconduct. We utilised ANOVA rather than multiple regression to conduct data analysis in that the former one allows us to directly compare and contrast with different groups with regards to academic honesty

Other	Age	N	Findings
	College	146	Religiosity 'Showed Little Or No Effect On Cheating Intentions Or Self-Reported Behaviours'
	17–25	112	Religious Identity Was Not A Factor For Males; Female Jews Reported More Cheating Than Christians Or 'Others'; There Was Little Relationship Between Those Indicating 'My Religious Viewpoint,' As A Factor Preventing Cheating And Cheating Frequency
X	College	623	Level Of Religiosity 'Had Little Bivariate Or Net Effect' On Types Of Cheating
X	College	150	Those Who Score High On Religiosity Behave More Honestly
	18–24	151	More Religiosity Correlates With Reduced Reports Of Cheating Among Jewish Students
	Average 19.1	70	Overall, Religiosity And Academic Dishonesty Were Not Significantly Related. However, The 'Association Was Significant For Women But Not Men'
	'Early 20s'	230	Highly Religious Students Were Less Likely To Cheat In An Experimental Situation
	19–24	236	Students Who Participated In Religious Activities Were Significantly Less Likely To Engage In Cheating

Subjects; Findings: Research Findings.

	N	%
	1412	58.1
	1018	41.9
r college	553	22.1
ar college	35	1.4
r college	1319	52.7
ar college	596	23.8
n Catholic and Eastern Orthodox	292	12.0
stian Protestant and Christian-Mainline Protestant	433	17.8
gelical Protestant & Non-denominational	194	8.0
e with a religion or practice a religion	379	15.6
s	104	4.3
	1028	42.3
ree	1869	76.9
	383	15.8
or disagree	92	3.8
	42	1.7
	44	1.8
ree	93	3.8
	261	10.7
or disagree	638	26.3
	824	33.9
	614	25.3
rch services several times a year	1483	61.0
rch services two to three times a month	391	16.1
rch services several times a week	556	22.9
ree	592	24.4
	285	11.7
or disagree	334	13.7
	292	12.0
	927	38.2

As can be seen from Table 1, previous studies of the relationship between religion and academic cheating among college students used relatively small sample sizes with all but one study relying upon a sample of less than 240 students. Moreover, the samples were often taken from a few institutions of higher education. One reason the studies come to different and sometimes contradictory conclusions could pertain to these relatively less representative samples. Two of these studies were also limited in that they were undertaken among one religious group (Rettinger and Jordan 2005) or were heavily weighted with one religious group (Smith, Ryan, and Diggins 1972). Finally, two other studies of younger school age students that are commonly cited merely compare students at religious and secular schools (Bruggeman and Hart 1996; Guttmann 1984). The design of these studies means they tell us very little about the relationship between student religiosity and academic honesty, because students at secular schools could actually be quite religious according to various measures and vice versa.

The variance in some of the research findings may also be due to how religion or religiosity is defined. As Table 1 indicates, the studies varied in whether they used religious identification, religious belief, frequency of participation in religious services, or some other measure as an indicator of religiosity. In some studies, researchers used two of these indicators, but not one study used measures focusing on religious identity, belief and behaviour.

Our study sought to address the weaknesses mentioned above by analysing data from a national study of academic honesty that included one religious variable associated with religious identification, belief and behaviour respectively. In particular, we hypothesised that the last category of religious behaviour would likely be the most significant variable. Our reason for this hypothesis is that within the social and behavioural sciences, an increasing number of publications have found that participation in religious services not only tends to be the best predictor of various outcomes related to academic dishonesty (Bloodgood,

McCabe and Trevino 1997), although some smaller studies have reported that women cheat as much as men (Baird 1980; Ward and Beck 1990). In fact, several studies reported female students report academic misconduct more than men (Antion and Michael 1983; Leming 1980), although a meta-analysis has confirmed the tendency of women to self-report less cheating (Whitley, Bichlmeier, and Jones 1999). Since the relationship between gender and academic honesty/dishonesty has been discussed extensively and the results are equivocal, we included gender as a factor when evaluating the association between religion and academic honesty using two-way ANOVA.

Attitude toward academic cheating and academic honesty

Research findings pertaining to studies of the role of students' attitude toward cheating have been more consistent. Overall, these studies find that students who hold more favourable attitudes toward academic misconduct, or who hold a less serious attitude toward cheating, are more prone to be engaged in academic misconduct than students who hold less favourable attitudes toward academic misconduct or take cheating more seriously (Haines et al. 1986; McCabe, Butterfield, and Treviño 2012; Whitley 1998). Therefore, we treated student attitudes toward cheating as an integral factor when running two-way ANOVA to evaluate whether and to what extent religious variables are associated with academic honesty among college students.

Perception of the faculty's action toward cheating and academic honesty

Research also consistently reveals that students' perception of faculty attitudes and actions plays an integral role in constructing an ethnical environment for academic honesty. For instance, students have been found less likely to report engaging in academic dishonesty incidents if they indicate their professors spend time discussing various standards and con-

A total of 2503 college students were selected for this study. The final data-set included 2430 college undergraduates (73 cases were deleted for missing values using listwise deletion).

As indicated by Table 2, among these students, 1412 (58.11%) were male students, while 1018 (41.89%) were female students. In this selected sample, 553 (22.1%) attended public two-year institutions, 35 (1.4%) attended private two-year institutions, 1319 (52.7%) attended public four-year institutions and 596 (23.8%) attended private four-year institutions. A total of 292 (12.2%) students identified as Catholic/Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox, 433 (17.82%) students identified as Protestant or with a denomination associated with Mainline Protestant, 194 (7.98%) students identified Evangelical Protestant, Non-denominational or a denomination associated with these two groups, 379 (5.6%) students did not identify themselves with a religion, 104 (4.28%) students identified as believers of other religions (e.g. Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, etc.), and 1028 (42.30%) identified using the category of Others. Due to a technical problem with the survey response instrument, we were unable to capture the specific denominations of the 'Other' religious respondents as we had originally intended. Future studies would benefit from more specific religious identification of the 'Other' category. The basis for our categorisation of particular Protestant denominations is derived from categorisations of denominations used in sociology of religion studies (Dougherty, Johnson, and Polson 2007; Wuthnow 2007).

Key measures

One important challenge when measuring academic honesty is that researchers have different definitions of the term and measure it differently (Haines et al. 1986; Jendrek 1989; McCabe, Butterfield, and Treviño 2012). In this study, we utilised a standardised measure of academic honesty that had already been used in the literature. We asked students about

Table 3. One-way ANOVA (dependent variable: academic honesty).

Variable	Source	df	SS	MS	F
Gender	Model	1	264.46	264.46	26.85***
	Error	2428	23,918.15	9.85	
	Total	2429	24,182.61		
Attitude towards cheating	Model	4	2551.43	637.86	71.51***
	Error	2425	21,631.17	8.92	
	Total	2429	24,182.61		
Faculty and staff's action towards cheating	Model	4	841.55	210.39	21.86***
	Error	2425	23,341.06	9.63	
	Total	2429	24,182.61		
Religious service attendance	Model	2	142.48	71.24	7.19**
	Error	2427	24,040.13	9.91	
	Total	2429	24,182.61		
God purpose in life	Model	4	69.30	17.32	1.74
	Error	2425	24,113.31	9.94	
	Total	2429	24,182.61		
Religious affiliation	Model	5	49.38	9.88	0.99
	Error	2424	24,133.23	9.96	
	Total	2429	24,182.61		

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

Table 4. Multiple mean comparisons among different levels of religious service attendance (dependent variable: academic honesty).

Parameter	Estimate	se	t
Attended several times per year (vs. two to three times per month)	0.0024	0.1789	0.01
Attended several times per year (vs. several times per week)	−0.5759	0.1565	−3.68**
Attended two to three times per month (vs. several times per week)	−0.5783	0.2077	−2.78**

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

importance of God in one's life purpose (belief), and religious affiliation (identification),

Table 5. Two-way ANOVA interactions (academic honesty).

Variable	Source	df	SS	MS	F	p
Gender and religious service attendance	Gender	1	211.79591	211.7959	21.6***	<.0001
	Religious service attendance	2	110.8279	55.4139	5.65**	0.004
	Gender X Religious service attendance Interaction	2	33.3471	16.6735	1.70	0.183
Attitude toward cheating and religious service attendance	Attitude toward cheating	4	2024.2809	506.0702	57.08***	<.0001
	Religious service	2	4.0289	2.0144	0.23	0.797
	Attitude toward cheating X Religious service attendance Interaction	8	141.6368	17.7046	2.00*	0.043
Faculty and staff's action towards cheating and religious service attendance	Faculty action	4	677.1572	169.2893	17.66***	<.0001
	Religious service	2	28.8078	14.4039	1.50	0.223
	Faculty action X Religious service Interaction	8	88.2332	11.0291	1.15	0.326

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

between religion and academic honesty by adding important factors such as gender, attitudes toward academic cheating, and perception of faculty's action toward academic cheating. While multiple regression analysis can be conducted, ANOVA is a more direct and straightforward approach to compare the mean difference and magnitude of such difference. Both one-way and two-way ANOVAs were implemented using the statistical analysis system (SAS) programme.

Results

One-Way ANOVA and Multiple Mean Comparisons

As indicated in Table 3, God-focused purpose in life (religious belief), F (4, 2425) = 1.74,

Table 6. Multiple comparisons (Non-significant interaction between two factors) (dependent variable: academic honesty).

Parameter	Estimate	se	t
Attended several times per year (vs. two to three times per month)	0.0106	0.3600	0.03
Attended several times per year (vs. several times per week)	−1.0199	0.3137	−3.25**
Attended two to three times per month (vs. several times per week)	−1.0305	0.4151	−2.48*

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001.

Table 7. Multiple comparisons of attitude towards cheating: 'Cheating is necessary to keep up' X Religious services attendance frequencies (dependent variable: academic honesty).

Parameter	Estimate	se	t
A1R1-A1R3	−0.537	0.166	−3.24**

A1 – Strongly disagree.
A2 – Disagree.
A3 – Neither agree or disagree.
A4 – Agree.
A5 – Strongly agree.
R1– attend religious services several times a year.
R2 – attend religious services several times a month.
R3 – attend religious services several times a week.
*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001.

Two-way ANOVA and multiple mean comparisons

In order to test our hypothesis further, we ran several two-way ANOVAs and conducted multiple mean comparisons. These analytical results provided more evidence supporting our hypothesis. As indicated by Table 5, gender, $F(1, 2424) = 21.60$, $p < .01$, and religious service attendance, $F(2, 2424) = 5.65$, $p < .01$, were significantly associated with student

up), there is indeed a difference (t (1554)= –2.81, p < .01) between students who attended religious services several times a year (M = 32.77, SD = 3.26) and students who attended religious services several times a week (M = 33.35, SD = 2.98). Cohen's was –.191 (–.307, –.075) SD. The effect size for the interaction between religious services attendance and attitude toward academic cheating (eta squared) is 18.99% ($\eta^2_{AB} = \frac{SS_{Ab}}{SS_b + SS_{Ab} + SS_{s/Cells}} = \frac{SS_{Ab}}{SS_{Total} - SS_A}$) (Olejnik and Algina 2003).

On the other hand, results from Table 5 indicate religious service attendance was not associated with academic honesty when including the variable, the perception of faculty and staff's actions toward cheating. Religious service attendance, F (2, 2415) = 1.5, p = 0.223, and the interaction between religious service attendance and faculty and staff's actions toward cheating, F (8, 2415) = 1.15, p = 0.326, were also not statistically significant.

Limitations

More measures of religion would have improved the study, but given the high costs of collecting data from a large sample, we were limited in the number of survey items we could use to measure religion. However, the selected survey items did identify three commonly used religious variables. In addition, given that we rely on student self-reported academic honesty, there may be reporting errors that bias the analytical results. We were also unable to control for students' prior academic performance, which was reported to be closely associated with student academic honesty in previous studies (e.g. Finn and Frone 2004). Readers should be aware of these above-mentioned limitations when interpreting the analytical results.

Discussion and conclusions

The guiding research question for this study asked whether and to what extent religious

when scholars use religious service attendance to measure the relationship between religion and academic honesty, religion is found to be positively associated with academic honesty (Burton, Talpade, and Haynes 2011). Overall, this study makes it clear that when talking about the relationship between religion and academic cheating, the particular aspect of religion being measured proves vitally important.

To summarise, this study provides evidence that a significant relationship exists between religious service attendance and student self-reported academic honesty. Our findings indicate the importance of behaviour over professed cognitive religious beliefs, a result which is consistent with other recent studies (e.g. Astin, Astin, and Lindholm 2011). In other words, the behaviour of going to religious services is more influential on academic honesty than student self-reported beliefs. We interpret this finding to mean that the actions of students could indicate more about the beliefs of students than what they espouse to believe.

This finding leads to the question: 'Why does attendance at religious services matter?' This is clearly an important question for future research. Further research that is both quantitative and qualitative in methodology can help to discover why religious service attendance matters and how it relates to students' views about academic honesty.

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Program on Pro-social Behavior. His newest book is More God, Less Crime: Why Faith Matters and How it Could Matter More.

Rishi Sriram currently serves as associate professor of Higher Education & Student Affairs, graduate program director for the Department of Educational Administration, and faculty master of Brooks Residential College–a living-learning community of approximately 400 students, at Baylor University. His research interests include student affairs practice, collaboration between academic and student affairs, and college student retention, engagement, achievement, and learning.

Brandon Moore earned his PhD in Curriculum & Teaching from Baylor University in 2013. He is trained in qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research methods. His research interests lie include character virtues and college students, enablers and inhibitors for veterans to attend college, standardized testing and public schools, and the deliberative curriculum. Brandon's current research focuses on character virtues and academic honesty for college students. Brandon has published peer-reviewed articles in Research in the Schools and American Education History Journal. He has also presented workshops on best practices in teaching high school and has published two book reviews.

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