

## Dishonesty and hypocrisy in service academy honor systems

Meredith J. Ortiz,  
University of the Rockies

James R. Oraker,  
University of the Rockies

Frederick V. Malmstrom  
University of the Rockies

Jason MacGregor,  
Baylor University

### ABSTRACT

This study examined the extent of both dishonesty and subsequent hypocrisy from surveys completed by 2,465 randomly selected graduates of all three major U.S. service academies (Army, Navy, Air Force) from 1959 through 2010. Results indicated major increases in admitted dishonesty by both cadets and midshipmen over the past half-century with toleration of dishonesty by fellow cadets and midshipmen as the greatest contributing factor to violations of their honor codes. The norm of toleration of known honor code violations by fellow cadets and midshipmen has persisted and even increased at a consistently strong rate over 13 generations of academy graduates. Further analyses revealed significance for two distinct types of hypocrisy (1) Self-deceptive, and (2) Opportunistic. Self-deceptive hypocrisy was found by far to be the most prevalent type, whereby individuals rationalize and discount their own dishonest behaviors. These results propose a model for examining the basic ingredients which lead to dishonesty and subsequent corruption of academic honor systems.

Keywords: dishonesty, ethics, hypocrisy, honor systems, service academies, whistleblowing, social norms

Copyright statement: Authors retain the copyright to the manuscripts published in AABRI journals. Please see the AABRI Copyright Policy at <http://www.aabri.com/copyright.html>

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades there have been increasing concerns regarding the moral and ethical choices and behaviors of individuals in positions of responsibility. At institutional levels of professional fields, from academia to elected individuals, dishonesty and its resultant hypocrisy would seem to become the norm rather than the exception (Austin et al., 2006). Even in institutions where current generations are progressively replaced by new ones, original institutional reputations of corruption and dishonesty stubbornly persist into new generations (Tirole, 1996).

Community leaders and executives alike have been widely criticized for widespread ethical lapses. In this study, it is considered whether these moral failures are indeed the result of corrupt corporate cultures or else whether these individuals have imported these tendencies into their society from elsewhere. This study does so by first examining the moral decision-making of college students enrolled in the major U.S. service academies. Hence, a unique empirical data set is leveraged which allows documentation of whether the widely held belief of declining societal morals is valid.

The modern economy relies upon honesty. For example, for tax purposes the government relies upon individuals to provide truthful reporting. Investors rely upon managers to provide truthful and transparent reporting. Voters rely upon political leaders to provide honest reports. Yet, dishonesty in society appears continues to be pervasive as typified by examples such as the Enron Scandal, Martha Stewart's perjury conviction, and even the U.S. presidential advisors John Poindexter, Robert McFarland, and Oliver North, all Naval Academy graduates who were convicted of perjury in the 1985-1987 Iran-Contra scandal (Barnouw, 1996).

While all forms of dishonesty undermine trust, perhaps the most offensive is hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is commonly defined as not practicing what you preach (Monin & Merritt, 2012). Yet, even within this broad definition, there are many types of hypocrites.

Consider the three major U.S. service academies (Army, Navy, and Air Force). These academies are fully accredited undergraduate institutions of higher education with each having an enrollment of approximately 4,000 students. This study utilizes the self-reported honor code violation survey from the randomly selected service academy of the graduating classes of 1959 through 2010. In doing so, the incidences of both dishonesty and hypocrisy can be directly accessed. Furthermore, it is hypothesized that hypocrisy can be separated into two separate types (1) self-denial hypocrisy as those graduates who denied violating their honor codes but tolerated others who did violate the codes, and (2) opportunistic hypocrisy as those graduates who admitted having violated their honor codes and yet continued to report others who violated their codes.

For two reasons, these issues are explored using a unique empirical data set of 2,465 graduates from the three major service academies. First, in these institutions a sense of community (MacGregor & Steubs, 2014) and loyalty is particularly strong. Contrarily, this sense of community would also seem to maximize the social penalty of peer betrayal. Second, explicit ethical codes are officially built into the institutions. As unfortunately happens within many organizations, tolerating dishonest behavior of others too often becomes the norm. Despite the explicit non-tolerance clauses within the service academies' honor and disciplinary codes, new social norms can develop, and as a result everyone wants to be a part of the "in group." Hence, toleration of dishonesty spirals insidiously upward.

In regard to social norms, classic social psychology studies by Jacobs and Campbell (1961) and later by MacNeil and Sherif (1976) showed that even artificial norms placed by confederates who were planted in innocuous autokinetic effect experiments persisted well into fifth and sixth

generations of naïve subjects, long after the original confederates had been replaced. It is of special interest whether there has also been a persisting norm of toleration of dishonesty within the service academy honor systems.

### **Identifying Factors of Interest**

**Hypocrisy.** Hypocrisy is an act of dishonesty wherein an individual deceives others. Within the spectrum of hypocrites, consider focusing upon two types: the opportunistic hypocrite and the self-deceptive hypocrite. Both types of hypocrites are trying to be perceived as moral while simultaneously failing to uphold that standard; the difference is that one type knows he or she is a hypocrite and the other does not.

**Modularity.** To explain this two-tiered paradox, Kurzban (2010) has presented the Theory of Modularity. Modularity proposes that the brain is not necessarily a singular entity which collects all available information, weighs the evidence, and from the top-down comes up with a plan of action. Rather, it is a collection of semi-autonomous modules which all too frequently and unfortunately compete with each other (Gazzaniga & LeDoux, 1978).

Indeed, there is powerful physiological support for Modularity. For instance, (Basile et al., 2011) found that the human emotion of guilt could be physically located and separated into two separate types. Barbara Basile and her colleagues located two spatially separate neurobiological brain substrates of the brain, one which identified “deontological guilt” and the other of “altruistic guilt.” Even guilt is not a simple process. This study proposes to show that neither is hypocrisy a simple process.

**Opportunistic Hypocrisy.** Arguably, the most offensive hypocrite is the one who claims to be moral while privately acting immoral. Such hypocrisy appears to be the case in the widely publicized Atlanta school system cheating scandal wherein teachers violated their own sworn professional ethical principles of scholarship when, in fact, they knowingly were changing students’ exam answers (Brown, 2015).

Opportunistic hypocrisy is akin to moral hypocrisy, wherein the motivation to appear moral exists while, if possible, avoids the cost of actually being moral (Batson, Thompson, & Chen, 2002). Malpas (2012) expanded on this definition by proposing it is one who has a pretense of having a virtuous character, moral, or even religious beliefs of principles that one does not actually possess. This sort of hypocrisy is perhaps universally recognized in well-publicized incidents involving persons as the evangelical Pastor Ted Haggard or New York’s Governor Eliot Spitzer who both privately participated in activities they had publically denounced as either illegal or immoral.

**Self-Deceptive Hypocrisy.** There seems to be a second variant of hypocrisy wherein persons who have, personally and in apparent good conscience, exempted themselves from following their now avowed ethical standards.

This second variant of hypocrisy is herein operationally defined as Self-Deceptive Hypocrisy, a well-cited process presented originally as the Theory of Cognitive Dissonance (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959). Festinger proposed cognitive dissonance as a self-deceptive rationale in which persons do not behave in accordance with their stated public belief. Social psychologists Tavris and Aaronson (2007) have described cognitive dissonance theory as the mechanism whereby we practice self-deception or, in other words, how we justify lying to ourselves when we hold two or more contradictory beliefs, ideas, or values at the same time. It is often described as the “mental discomfort” that explores the conflict between the individual’s

behaviors and attitudes (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959). In this case, one will in good faith say, “I stole, but I am not a thief.” He simply does not believe himself to be a hypocrite. Self-Deceptive Hypocrisy furthermore proposes that one simultaneously subscribe to two mutually contradictory beliefs (Kurzban, 2010). Cognitive dissonance theory is at the very core of self-deceptive hypocrisy, as these types of hypocrites can easily recognize dishonesty in others but not in themselves. Awareness of one’s own hypocrisy creates a cognitive dissonance; self-denial and toleration of dishonesty co-exist.

**Neutralization: Side-Stepping the Guilt.** It appears that students who tolerate dishonesty in academia will justify and explain their behavior through rationalizing their own dishonesty. By means of rationalizing dishonesty, people are engaging in self-deception by convincing themselves they are “OK” with their behavior, but only if followed by a “because” statement. Brent and Atkisson (2011) identified six major “neutralization” (Read: rationalization) techniques on how students justify academic dishonesty. These six major neutralization themes have also been previously discussed by Malmstrom and Mullin (2013).

**Fallacious Silence.** MacGregor and Stuebs (2014) had investigated the motivations that 79 graduate accounting students would utilize for rationalizing their own “fallacious silence.” Fallacious silence is popularly known in law-enforcement circles as “The Blue Code of Silence.” That is, despite their clear ethical and legal obligation to report or even confront colleagues’ unethical professional lapses, they would fail to blow the whistle. Not unexpectedly, their findings revealed a mixed bag of significant factors why professionals rationalize their own fallacious silence (Read: turning a blind eye), in particular their own keen awareness of colleagues’ inappropriate activities, their ethical whistleblowing responsibilities, community values, and individual moral competence. The fallacious silence dilemma is further complicated by whether the potential whistleblower considers their colleagues’ rule-violating actions are severe and clear-cut or less severe and/or ambiguous.

### **The Service Academy Honor Codes**

**A Moral Standard.** A hypocrite can exist only in a setting where there is an agreed-upon moral standard. Rather than relying upon personal standards, communities develop formal moral standards to foster trust and ensure agreement on what is and what is not acceptable behavior. Academic institutions frequently formalize these standards in honor codes. Even a hypocrite must declare compliance to a known moral behavior such as honesty.

Consider the moral standards at the three major U.S. service academies which seek to discourage lying, cheating, and stealing. The Air Force Academy (USFA) adopted their current honor code in 1965. It states, “We will not lie, steal, or cheat, nor tolerate among us anyone who does” (Air Force Cadet Wing Handbook, 2009). West Point (USMA) has a nearly identical honor code. The U.S. Naval Academy does not include toleration as a violation of its honor code (officially referred to as “concept” rather than “code”). However, the Naval Academy has instead placed non-toleration of dishonesty as an additional disciplinary regulation which is expected to be adhered to. For simplicity, this paper utilizes the terms honor code and honor concept interchangeably.

The honor codes at all service academies are officially taken quite seriously. As part of the academies’ rigorous curricula, students receive mandatory military lessons on honor, and they take a solemn and formal oath to abide by uphold honorable behavior, including their honor codes. In addition, each academy has an elaborate “honor system” run primarily by cadets and midshipmen.

A violation of the honor code is defined as a finding that a cadet must have lied, cheated, stolen, or attempted to do so, or tolerated an honor code violation by another cadet or midshipman. Cadets and midshipmen may be tried by a board of their peers, and if found guilty, the findings will proceed up to Superintendent of the Academy, who has the discretion to either impose sanctions or recommend to a higher authority that the cadet or midshipmen be disenrolled (i.e. expelled) from the Academy.

### **A Broad Definition of Honor**

There is virtually no debate that overt acts of cheating, stealing, or lying are violations of the service academy honor codes, but their honor codes also include or presume the concept of non-toleration of dishonesty. “Toleration occurs when a cadet fails to report an unresolved incident with honor implications to the proper authority within a reasonable length of time. (AFCW Handbook, 2009).” In plainer language, a cadet is duty-bound to whistleblow either on others or on oneself.

**Whistleblowing:** Whistleblowing is defined as the disclosure by a person, usually an employee in a government agency or private enterprise, to the public or to those in authority, of mismanagement, corruption, illegality, or some other wrongdoing (Garner, 2009). For the purpose of this study, the terms “reported” and “whistleblowing” will be used interchangeably to describe a cadet or midshipman who disclosed honor code violations by another cadet or midshipman.

The need for an effective whistleblowing program in any professional group is well understood. Yet understanding why individuals actually blow the whistle is not. In this study it is considered how a person's past moral failings may influence his or her decision to whistleblow on others.

Research into unethical behaviors displayed by leaders has historically relied upon case studies. However, literature on the toleration of dishonesty and hypocrisy in academia is limited. Therefore, this study instead examines whether toleration and hypocrisy can be directly modeled using empirical data. The results of previous studies suggest that toleration of dishonesty in academia is positively correlated with an overall increase in cheating and, hence, a corresponding weakening of their ethical systems (Malmstrom & Mullin, 2013; Carrell et al., 2007).

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The authors investigate four questions and subsequent hypotheses. First, one must consider what factors influence a cadet's or midshipman's decision to violate the honor code. Do components such as career intent, class standing, or respect for the code weigh in on the factors of whether a cadet or midshipman has reported, violated, or tolerated violations of the honor codes? Second, consider why some individuals report violators while others tolerate. Implicitly accepted and entrenched norms of toleration would be difficult for cadets and midshipmen to ignore. Third, it is of interest whether these alleged norms of honor violations have changed over the years. Fourth and finally, the authors examine the widespread speculation that there has been a gradual degradation in cadet and midshipmen honor values over the years. This study will hopefully provide empirical evidence contributing to the debate.

## METHOD

### Participants

Over 6,000 Army, Navy, and Air Force Academy graduates were mailed a 22-question survey with an especially satisfactory return rate of about 40%. The participants were 2,464 graduates from the U.S. Military Academy (n = 877), U.S. Naval Academy, (n = 781), and the U.S. Air Force Academy (n = 806) from the graduating classes of 1959 through 2010. As part of the anonymity protocol, there was no effort to record the gender, age, or exact graduating class of any participant. About 15 graduates were randomly selected from the academies' published *Registers*. Each class contained about 15 sampled graduates, and each sample was pooled into 13 four-year cohorts of about 60 graduates each.

### Instrument

All graduates recorded their responses on a Likert-type interval continuum ranging from 1 to 7. This original survey is referenced and reproduced in its entirety in Carrell et al. (2008) and is also presented in Appendix A of this study. The reader should refer to the survey questions in Appendix A to identify which variables relevant to this study were utilized. All relevant variables are identified by bracketed terms such as [Violated], etc..

The survey contained two demographic variables (a) the graduates' four-year cohort block of graduation [Class], and (b) the graduates Graduation Order of Merit [GOM] (either top or bottom half of their graduating class).

The survey included two Likert-type scaled survey questions, presented on a seven-point scale, asking (a) the cadet/midshipman's original motivation to make the service a career [Motivation], and (b) the cadet/midshipman's respect for the honor code [Respect]. These two questions and their corresponding Likert-type scales are also shown in Appendix Figure 1 as survey questions #5 and #6. Lastly, the survey presented ten questions (also shown in Appendix Figure 1), also presented on a seven-point Likert-type scale, asking directly the frequency with which the graduates as cadets or midshipmen had (1) known of, but not reported, others who had violated the code [Tolerated], (2) reported those who had violated the code [Reported], (3) committed a non-academic honor code violation [Violated (Part a)], and (4) committed an academic honor code violation [Violated (Part b)], and (6) personally admitted having cheated in high school [High School Cheated].

Because this survey initially distinguished the graduates' admitted honor code violations as either Academic (survey question #15) and Non-academic Violations (survey question #14). Both the two variables were combined into an overall variable of total admitted honor violations [Violated], which was merely the highest value recorded in any graduate's response to either question #14 or #15. For example, if a graduate responded to question #14 with a "2" and responded to question #15 with a "4" [see Figure 3], the combined honor violation was then scored a "4".

### Binary and Frequency Regression Models

The survey questions were selected so as to be examined utilizing both (a) binary or (b) frequency regression models.

The binary regression model was basically a simplified yes/no response for the three critical REPORTED, VIOLATED, and TOLERATED question variables. That is, if a graduate disclaimed ever having reported, violated, or tolerated an honor code transgression, his/her response was recorded as a zero. If, however, the graduate admitted to having reported, violated, or tolerated an honor code transgression at least one or more times, his/her response was recorded as a “1”.

For the frequency regression model, the following data conversion of the responses was utilized analyzing to the three critical question variables REPORTED, VIOLATED, and TOLERATED: If a graduate reported “Never” as ever having reported, violated, or tolerated an honor code transgression, his/her response was recorded as a “0”. However, if the graduate admitted having reported, violated, or tolerated an honor code transgression “1 - 3 times total”, then his/her response was conservatively recorded as a “1”. Similarly, if a graduate admitted having reported, violated, or tolerated an honor code violation “1 - 4 times a year” then his/her response was conservatively recorded as a “4”, and so on. The conversion of the Likert-type 1 to 7 scale to frequencies is shown in Appendix Table 1.

### Research Design.

For the examination of the two hypocrisy models, Self-Denial and Opportunistic, it was first necessary to examine the relative strengths of the critical question variables, REPORTED, VIOLATED, and TOLERATED. The components of the three question variables, regressed against the frequencies of other remaining question variables: Class, Graduation Order of Merit, Career Motivation, Respect for the Code, High School Cheated, and Violated, are shown in Table 2 in the Appendix.

Second, having established the values for the critical REPORTED, VIOLATED, and TOLERATED question variables, the models were established for Hypothesis 1 (Self-Denial Hypocrisy) and Hypothesis 2 (Opportunistic Hypocrisy), as shown in Table 3 of the Appendix. Self-Denial Hypocrisy is defined as VIOLATED *minus* TOLERATED. Opportunistic Hypocrisy is defined as VIOLATED *plus* REPORTED.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A preliminary univariate analysis suggested two interesting approaches. First, over 20% of service academy graduates who paradoxically denied ever having violated their respective honor codes nevertheless admitted to having tolerated classmates who had violated the codes. This contradictory behavior would be akin to self-deceptive hypocrisy. Second, and to a lesser extent, there seemed to be a significant but measurable number of cadets and midshipmen who admitted to having violated their honor codes but also continued to report classmates who violated the code. This behavior would be akin to opportunistic hypocrisy.

Data were analyzed by means of two separate regression methods. The first method, binary regression, simplified the data spread into simple ordinal yes/no responses on the critical questions, Reported, Violated, and Tolerated. That is, any graduate who admitted to having at least once (no matter how many times) Reported, Violated, or Tolerated, was scored with a 1. If he/she denied ever having done so, the response was scored with a zero.

The second method, frequency logistic regression, used the actual frequencies with which the graduate admitted to having either Reported, Violated, or Tolerated. Frequency conversion

numbers are, as stated before, shown in Table 1. It was hypothesized that the frequency regression would yield information whether the increasing numbers of honor violations were being committed by the general population or only a small fraction of violators.

### **Analysis 1: Binary Regression Model**

The summary table for the binary regression analyses is shown in Table 3 of the Appendix as Model 1 [Reported]; Model 2, [Violated]; and Model 3 [Tolerated]. Furthermore, each model is broken down to show the variance components of contributed by each service academy, USMA, USNA, and USAFA. The overall variance components for all service academies combined are presented as “All Academies.”

Model 1 [Reported]. Model 1 shows significance ( $p < .0001$ ) for all four treatments, (All Academies, USMA, USNA, and USAFA).

Model 2 [Violated]. Model 2 shows significance ( $p < .0001$ ) for all four treatments, (All Academies, USMA, USNA, and USAFA).

Model 3 [Tolerated]. Model shows significance ( $p < .0001$ ) for all four treatments, (All Academies, USMA, USNA, and USAFA).

Although all three models show strong significance, when the pseudo  $R^2$  of the three All Academy models are compared it is evident that the relative strengths of each model vary significantly. Reported is the weakest, contributing not less than 3.44% of the explained variance. Violated is the second strongest of explained variances, with not less than 9.44%. Finally, Tolerated shows the strongest contribution of explained variance, an overall 28.81%.

First, the relatively weak variance contribution of Reported suggests that graduates of all three academies were consistently quite reluctant and remiss in reporting classmates for known honor code violations. Second, there appears to be a wide gap between the explained variances of Violated and Tolerated, suggesting that a large percentage of graduates at all academies, especially those of more recent years, simply have personally dismissed Tolerated as a violation of their honor codes. In particular, the USAFA pseudo  $R^2$  for Tolerated shows an especially high explained variance of 33.33%.

### **Analysis 1: Binary Regression Hypotheses**

Hypothesis 1 (Self-denial Hypocrisy). (Model 1) shows acceptable significance levels for all three treatments by academies separately for USMA, USNA, and USAFA ( $p = 0.004$  to  $p = 0.031$ ) and overall significance for All Academies combined ( $p \leq .0001$ ). Binary regression analyses are shown in Table 3 of the Appendix.

Hypothesis 2 (Opportunistic Hypocrisy). Opportunistic Hypocrisy (Model 2) yields acceptable significance for all three treatments by academies combined, USMA, USNA, and USAFA ( $p = .0021$ ). However, by individual academy, acceptable significance is reached only for both USMA ( $p = .0087$ ) and USAFA ( $p = 0.0361$ ). Interestingly, Opportunistic Hypocrisy for USNA does not reach acceptable significance ( $p = 0.0904$ ).

It appears that although all service academies show significance for Self-Denial hypocrisy, only USMA and USAFA show significance for Opportunistic hypocrisy. The fact that USNA did not achieve significance ( $p = .0924$ ) suggests the absence of a USNA non-tolerated clause in their honor code obviates the need for a guilty midshipman of rationalizing himself or herself from



contradictory actions of both denying dishonesty while at the same time reporting others for dishonesty.

### **Analysis 2: Frequency Logistic Regression Model**

The summary table for the frequency regression analyses is shown in Table 4 of the Appendix as Model 1 [Reported]; Model 2, [Violated]; and Model 3 [Tolerated]. As before with the binary model, each model is broken down to show the variance components of contributed by each service academy, USMA, USNA, and USAFA. The overall variance components for all service academies combined are presented as “All Academies.”

Model 1 [Reported]. Model 1 shows acceptable significance ( $p < .021$ ) for three treatments, (All Academies, USMA, and USNA). However, USAFA by itself does not yield acceptable significance, ( $p = .329$ ).

Model 2 [Violated]. Model 2 shows significance ( $p < .0001$ ) for all four treatments, (All Academies, USMA, USNA, and USAFA).

Model 3 [Tolerated]. Model 3 shows significance ( $p < .0001$ ) for all four treatments, (All Academies, USMA, USNA, and USAFA).

Although all three models show overall strong significance, when the adjusted  $R^2$  of the three All Academy models are compared it is again evident that the relative strengths of each model vary significantly. Reported is the weakest, contributing not less than 0.5% of the explained variance. It is noteworthy that USAFA was the only academy where Reported did not achieve significance ( $p = .3289$ ). Hence, it would appear that the USAFA non-toleration honor code clause is of little or no effectiveness.

Violated is the second strongest measure of explained variance, with not less than 10%. Finally, Tolerated shows the strongest contribution of explained variance, an overall 35%. First and as before the relatively weak variance contribution of Reported suggests that graduates of all three academies were quite reluctant to report classmates for honor code violations. Second, there appears to be a wide gap between the explained variances of Violated and Tolerated, suggesting that a large percentage of graduates simply did not consider Toleration as a violation of their honor codes. In particular, the USAFA adjusted  $R^2$  for Toleration shows an especially high explained variance of 54.15%.

### **Analysis 2: Frequency Logistic Regression Hypotheses**

The summary of the hypotheses 1, Self-Denial Hypocrisy and Hypothesis 2, Opportunistic Hypocrisy are shown in Table 5 of the Appendix.

Hypothesis 1 (Self-denial Hypocrisy). Self-Denial Hypocrisy (Model 1) shows acceptable significance for all three treatments by academies combined USMA, USNA, and USAFA ( $p = 0.0001$  to  $p = 0.0058$ ) and overall significance for All Academies combined ( $p \leq .0001$ ).

Hypothesis 2 (Opportunistic Hypocrisy). Opportunistic Hypocrisy (Model 2) yields acceptable significance for all academies combined, USMA, USNA, and USAFA ( $p \leq .0001$ ) and individually for each academy USMA, USNA, and USAFA ( $p \leq .0001$ ). It is noteworthy that the adjusted  $R^2$  for Opportunistic Hypocrisy at USAFA ( $R^2 = 11.95\%$ ) is noticeably higher than for the other two academies USMA and USNA.

Finally, Figure 2 as shown in the Appendix illustrates the historical gap between Tolerated and Reported, i.e. Self-Denial Hypocrisy. Figure 2 graph presents the percentage of service

academy graduates who admitted to having Violated, Tolerated, and Reported honor code violations at least once from 1959 through 2010. The factor Reported has remained historically both low and essentially flat over the past half-century. In sharp contrast Tolerated has grown to either equal to or having exceed Violated. There is scant evidence to suggest that the presence of non-toleration sanctions at any of the service academies has had any influence on curtailing honor violations. If anything, there is an indication that the academies have established a strong social norm of toleration of dishonesty which has persisted over 13 generations.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Empirical data from U.S. service academies have been utilized throughout this study because the academies have traditionally and clearly defined rules for personal honor and ethics which have enforceable, legal punishments for violators. In other words, unlike ethical policies within many formal organizations, the academy honor systems are not mere guidelines; they are firmly understood rules.

There are indeed numerous personal factors contributing to honor and ethics violations. Regretfully, previous studies have also shown there are also equally numerous reasons which people utilize to rationalize their violations (Brent & Atkisson, 2011; MacGregor & Stuebs, 2014), and among these is rationales is the venerable Theory of Cognitive Dissonance (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959). Cognitive dissonance is commonly described as an exercise in self-denial, such as a person hypocritically both saying and believing, "I stole, but I am not a thief."

This study examined hypocrisy within the service academy honor systems, and it is concluded that there are at least two distinctive types of hypocrisy present, (1) Self-Denial Hypocrisy and (2) Opportunistic Hypocrisy. Presence of two types of hypocrisy lend support to the theory of Modularity (Kurzban, 2010). Both types of hypocrisy have existed at significant levels at all U.S. service academies over the past half-century. Although both forms of hypocrisy are present, Self-Denial Hypocrisy appears by far to be the most prevalent, and it has been increasing.

The major contributor to both types of hypocrisy, as determined by both binary logistic and frequency regression, is toleration of (Read: turning a blind eye) others' dishonesty. Toleration appears to be an especially strong contributor to Self-Denial Hypocrisy. Although toleration of dishonesty is clearly defined as an honor code violation at both the Military and Air Force academies, over the past half-century, graduates of all academies are increasingly prone to personally rule out toleration of dishonesty as a violation of their own ethics and honor codes.

The U.S. Naval Academy does not define toleration of dishonesty as an honor code violation. However, either the absence or presence of a non-toleration (read: whistleblowing) clause in its honor code seems also to have no effect on the incidences of honor violations at any of the academies.

Reporting of violations (whistleblowing) at all academies has remained consistently low and flat over the past half-century while toleration of dishonesty has been steadily climbing. Air Force Academy graduates have been especially reluctant to report violations, despite it being their sworn duty to do so. Most curiously, toleration of dishonesty at the Naval Academy is significantly lower than at USAFA, despite USNA's absence of a non-toleration clause in their honor systems.

## The Need for Validating Character Development Programs

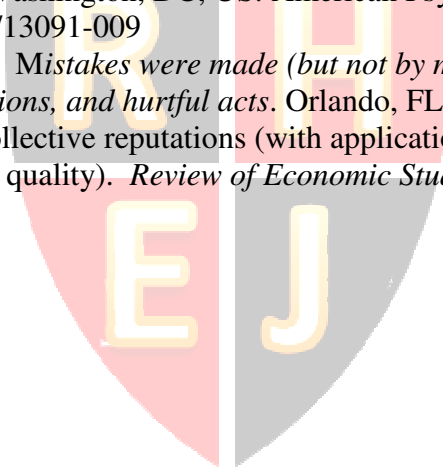
Large, formal organizations routinely present mandatory ethics training to their members as a defensive measure to counter personal and organizational lapses in ethics and honesty. Training instruction is apparently given under the assumption that if members are aware of the rules, then they will then make the proper ethical choice to avoid those lapses. However, it seems that teaching “Awareness” (MacGregor & Stuebs, 2014) by itself is not enough. The service academies now have over 100 hours of mandatory honor training built into their schedules over a 4-year period, and yet toleration of dishonesty continues to increase. Toleration of dishonesty appears to be a strongly persisting social norm.

Finally, Christian Miller, philosophy professor at Wake Forest College, has noted that corporations, schools, universities, and military officer training institutions have devoted millions of dollars into character development programs, and yet the effectiveness of these programs has never been validated. He states, “... a big question remains: are these programmes actually doing the job? (Miller, 2015).” The authors propose that group and community norms may be even stronger disincentives which override ethical and dishonesty lapses. Furthermore, it is suggested that solving the dilemma of toleration of dishonesty within any organization would be an important first step in reducing both Self-Deception and Opportunistic Hypocrisy.

## REFERENCES

- Air Force Cadet Wing Honor Code Reference Handbook, Vol. I. Honorable Living* (2009). U.S. Air Force Academy CO: Center for Character Development. Print.
- Austin, Z., Collins, D., Remillard, A., Kelcher, S., & Chui, S. (2006). Influence of attitudes toward curriculum on dishonest academic behavior. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 70(3), Article 50.
- Barnouw, E. (1996). *The spectacle of history: Speech, text, and memory at the Iran-Contra hearings*. NC: Duke University Press.
- Basile, B., Mancini, F., Macaluso, E., Caltagirone, C., Frackowiak, R. S., & Bozzali, M. (2011). Deontological and altruistic guilt: Evidence for distinct neurobiological substrates. *Human Brain Mapping*, 32(2), 229-239.
- Batson, C. D., Thompson, E. R., & Chen, H. (2002). Moral hypocrisy: Addressing some alternatives. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 83(2), 330-339. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.83.2.330
- Brent, E., & Atkisson, C. (2011). Accounting for cheating: An evolving theory and emergent themes. *Research in Higher Education*, 52, 640-658.
- Brown, E. (April 14, 2015). “Nine Atlanta educators in test-cheating case are sentenced.” *The Washington Post*.
- Carrell, S.C., Malmstrom, F. & West, J. (2008). Peer effects in academic cheating. *Journal of Human Resources*, 43 (1), 201-204.
- Festinger, L. & Carlsmith, J. M. (1959). Cognitive consequences of forced compliance. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 58(2), 203.
- Garner, B. A. (Ed.). (2009). *Black's law dictionary* (9<sup>th</sup> ed.). St. Paul, MN: West Group.
- Gazzaniga, M. & LeDoux, J. (1978). *The integrated mind*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Geary, David C. (2005). *Evolution of brain, cognition, and general intelligence*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

- Jacobs, R.C. & Campbell, D.L. (1961). The perpetuation of an arbitrary tradition through several generations of a laboratory microculture. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 62(3), 649-658.
- Kurzban, R. (2010). *Why everyone (else) is a hypocrite*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- MacGregor, J. & Stuebs, M. (2014). The silent Samaritan syndrome: Why the whistle remains unblown. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 120, 149-174.
- MacNeil, M. & Sherif, M (1976). Norm change over subject generation as a function of arbitrariness of prescribed norms. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 34(5), 762-773.
- Malmstrom, F. & Mullin, R.D., (2013). Dishonesty and cheating in a federal service academy: Toleration is the main ingredient. *Research in Higher Education Journal*, 19, 120-137.
- Malpas, J. (2012). *Behaviorism*. In E.N. Zalta (Ed.). The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Retrieved from <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/davidson/>.
- Miller, C.B. (September 26, 2015). Moral dilemma. *New Scientist*, 227, 26-27.
- Monin, B., & Merritt, A. (2012). Moral hypocrisy, moral inconsistency, and the struggle for moral integrity. *The social psychology of morality: Exploring the causes of good and evil* (pp. 167-184). Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association. doi:10.1037/13091-009
- Tavris, C. & Aronson E. (2007). *Mistakes were made (but not by me): Why we justify foolish beliefs, bad decisions, and hurtful acts*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt.
- Tirole, J. (1996). A theory of collective reputations (with applications to the persistence of corruption and to firm quality). *Review of Economic Studies*, 63, 1-22.



**APPENDIX**

Figure 1. Honor Code Survey

**HONOR CODE SURVEY**

**PART I. DEMOGRAPHICS**

Please circle whichever applies to you.

1. I graduated from:

- a. USMA [Army]
- b. USNA [Navy]
- c. USAFA [Air Force]

2. In the class of: [Class]

- |                          |                        |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| a. 1959, 60, 61, or 62   | b. 1963, 64, 65, or 66 |
| c. 1967, 68, 69, or 70   | d. 1971, 72, 73, or 74 |
| e. 1975, 76, 77, or 78   | f. 1979, 80, 81, or 82 |
| g. 1983, 84, 85, or 86   | h. 1987, 88, 89, or 90 |
| i. 1991, 92, 93, or 94   | j. 1995, 96, 97, or 98 |
| k. 1999, 2000, 01, or 02 | l. 2003, 04, 05 or 06  |
| m. 2007, 08, 09, or 10   |                        |

3. My current military status is: (Please disregard any Reserve or National Guard Status)

- a. I am still on active duty.
- b. I voluntarily resigned from the service.
- c. I voluntarily retired from the service.
- d. Other (medical retirement, not commissioned, etc.)

4. My graduation order of merit was: [GOM]

- a. Top 1/4
- b. Second 1/4
- c. Third 1/4
- d. Fourth 1/4

**PART II. QUESTIONNAIRE.** Please circle whichever you feel applies. If you prefer not to answer any question, just leave it blank.

5. As a cadet/midshipman, my *respect* for the honor code was: [Respect]

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
totally negative	strongly negative	mildly negative	neutral	mildly positive	strongly positive	totally positive

6. As a cadet/midshipman, my *motivation* to make the service a career was:  
[Motivation]

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
never intended to stay	strongly non-career	mildly non-career	neutral wait and see	mildly pro-career	strongly pro-career	totally pro-career

7. As a cadet/midshipman, I *suspected* (but could not confirm) other cadets/midshipmen of violating the honor code:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
never	1-3 times total	1-4 times a year	occasionally every few months	about once a month	2-3 times a month	routinely weekly or daily

8. As a cadet/midshipman, I *knew of* (but did not report) other cadets/midshipmen who were violating the honor code: [Tolerated]

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
never	1-3 times total	1-4 times a year	occasionally every few months	about once a month	2-3 times a month	routinely weekly or daily

9. As a cadet/midshipman, I *wanted to* (but did not report) violations of the honor code:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
never	1-3 times total	1-4 times a year	occasionally every few months	about once a month	2-3 times a month	routinely weekly or daily

10. As a cadet/midshipman, I *confronted* other cadets/midshipmen who I felt had violated the honor code:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
never	1-3 times total	1-4 times a year	occasionally every few months	about once a month	2-3 times a month	routinely weekly or daily

11. As a cadet/midshipman, I *reported* other cadets/midshipmen who I felt had violated the honor code: [Reported]

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
never	1-3 times total	1-4 times a year	occasionally every few months	about once a month	2-3 times a month	routinely weekly or daily

12. As a cadet/midshipman, I *received* (but did not actively seek out) *academic information* in violation of the honor code:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
never	1-3 times total	1-4 times a year	occasionally every few months	about once a month	2-3 times a month	routinely weekly or daily

13. As a cadet/midshipman, I was *actively involved* in either receiving or passing academic information in violation of the honor code:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
never	1-3 times total	1-4 times a year	occasionally every few months	about once a month	2-3 times a month	routinely weekly or daily

14. As a cadet/midshipman, I felt I had violated *some NON-academic* aspect of the honor code: [Violated (part a)]

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
never	1-3 times total	1-4 times a year	occasionally every few months	about once a month	2-3 times a month	routinely weekly or daily

15. As a cadet/midshipman, I felt I had violated *some academic* aspect of the honor code: [Violated (part b)]

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
never	1-3 times total	1-4 times a year	occasionally every few months	about once a month	2-3 times a month	routinely weekly or daily

16. When I was in *high school*, I was actively involved in either receiving or passing academic information (activities which would otherwise have been academic violations of the academy honor code): [High School Cheated]

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
never	1-3 times total	1-4 times a year	occasionally every few months	about once a month	2-3 times a month	routinely weekly or daily

17. Today, my *respect* for the honor code is:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
totally negative	strongly negative	mildly negative	neutral	mildly positive	strongly positive	totally positive

18. Compared to civilian college and universities, I think *today's* service academy cadets/midshipmen are involved in academic cheating:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
much less	less than half as much	a bit less	about the same	a bit more	about twice as much	much more
[<1/10]						[>10X]

19. Of all those values I learned at the Academy, I rate these items (shown alphabetically below) to be of the following importance. Please rate using the number scale shown (*ties are acceptable*):

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
not at all	not very	at times important	moderately important	above average	very important	extremely important

Importance Rating:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Topics Learned:

- a. Academics
- b. Athletics
- c. Confidence
- d. Coping with pressure
- e. Honor
- f. Leadership
- g. Loyalty
- h. Self-discipline
- i. Working with others
- j. Other(s) [please specify]

20. My feelings about the honor code/concept today can be expressed as:

21. If, as a cadet/midshipman you feel you violated the honor code/concept, could you briefly describe those circumstances?

22. Do you have any other comments, suggestions, or questions? Many thanks for your cooperation.



Table 1. Likert Scale conversion to frequencies of the three critical question variables, REPORTED, VIOLATED, and TOLERATED.

<u>Likert Response</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
1) Never	= 0
2) 1 to 3 times total	= 1
3) 1 to 4 times a year	= 4
4) Occasionally every few months	= 24
5) About once a month	= 48
6) 2 to 3 times a month	= 96
7) Routinely, weekly or daily=	192

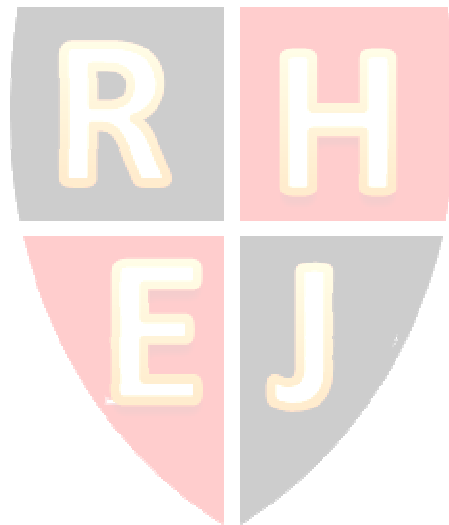


Table 2. Analysis 1: Binary Regression Components of the Three Variable Models REPORTED, VIOLATED, and TOLERATED by Service Academy.

Reported = $\beta_0 + \beta_1\text{CLASS} + \beta_2\text{GOM} + \beta_3\text{MOTIVATION} + \beta_4\text{RESPECT} + \beta_5\text{VIOLATED} + \epsilon$				
Model 1				
REPORTED	N	LR chi <sup>2</sup> (7)	P<	Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>
All Academies	2465	70.16	.0001	0.0344
USMA	877	31.69	.0001	0.0437
USNA	782	27.16	.0001	0.0430
USAFA	806	30.11	.0001	0.0442
Violated = $\beta_0 + \beta_1\text{CLASS} + \beta_2\text{GOM} + \beta_3\text{MOTIVATION} + \beta_4\text{RESPECT} + \beta_5\text{HSCHEAT} + \epsilon$				
Model 2				
VIOLATED	N	LR chi <sup>2</sup> (7)	P<	Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>
All Academies	2465	319.17	.0001	0.0944
USMA	877	113.31	.0001	0.0967
USNA	782	87.26	.0001	0.0813
USAFA	806	121.22	.0001	0.1085
Tolerated = $\beta_0 + \beta_1\text{CLASS} + \beta_2\text{GOM} + \beta_3\text{MOTIVATION} + \beta_4\text{RESPECT} + \beta_5\text{VIOLATED} + \epsilon$				
Model 3				
TOLERATED	N	LR chi <sup>2</sup> (7)	P<	Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>
All Academies	2465	494.44	.0001	0.2881
USMA	877	208.65	.0001	0.2193
USNA	782	114.99	.0001	0.1073
USAFA	806	345.70	.0001	0.3333

Table 3. Analysis 1: Binary Regression Models for Hypothesis 1 (Self-Denial Hypocrisy) and Hypothesis 2 (Opportunistic Hypocrisy) by Service Academy.

Hypocrisy I = $\beta_0 + \beta_1\text{CLASS} + \beta_2\text{GOM} + \beta_3\text{MOTIVATION} + \beta_4\text{RESPECT} + \beta_5\text{HSCHEAT} + \epsilon$				
Hypothesis 1				
Violated - Tolerated	N	LR $\chi^2$ (7)	P $\leq$	Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>
All Academies	2465	47.54	.0001	0.0183
USMA	877	22.54	.0004	0.0231
USNA	782	12.26	.0314	0.0169
USAFA	806	12.98	.0236	0.0147

Hypocrisy II = $\beta_0 + \beta_1\text{CLASS} + \beta_2\text{GOM} + \beta_3\text{MOTIVATION} + \beta_4\text{RESPECT} + \beta_5\text{HSCHEAT} + \epsilon$				
Hypothesis 2				
Violated + Reported	N	LR $\chi^2$ (7)	P $\leq$	Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>
All Academies	2465	22.50	.0021	0.0200
USMA	877	15.42	.0087	0.0421
USNA	782	9.51	.0904	0.0260
USAFA	806	11.90	.0361	0.0305

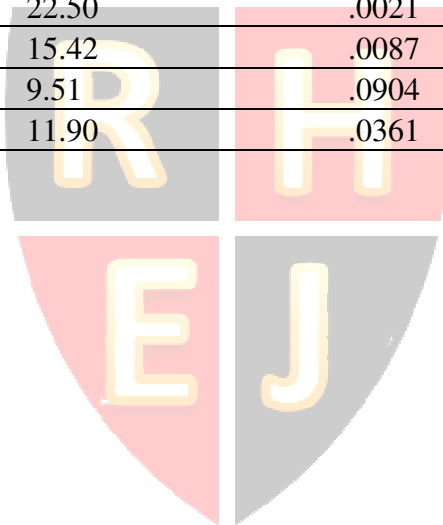


Table 4. Analysis 2: Frequency Logistic Regression Components of the Three Variable Models REPORTED, VIOLATED, and TOLERATED by Service Academy.

Reported = $\beta_0 + \beta_1\text{CLASS} + \beta_2\text{GOM} + \beta_3\text{MOTIVATION} + \beta_4\text{RESPECT} + \beta_5\text{VIOLATED} + \epsilon$				
MODEL 1				
REPORTED	N	F (df)	P <sub>≤</sub>	ADJ R <sup>2</sup>
All Academies	2465	2.57 (7)	.0121	.0045
USMA	877	22.34 (5)	.0001	.1086
USNA	782	4.97 (5)	.0002	.0248
USAFA	806	1.16 (5)	.3289	.0010

Violated = $\beta_0 + \beta_1\text{CLASS} + \beta_2\text{GOM} + \beta_3\text{MOTIVATION} + \beta_4\text{RESPECT} + \beta_5\text{HSCHEAT} + \epsilon$				
MODEL 2				
VIOLATED	N	F (df)	P<	ADJ R <sup>2</sup>
All Academies	2465	40.26 (7)	.0001	.1003
USMA	877	18.16 (5)	.0001	.0892
USNA	782	13.15 (5)	.0001	.0722
USAFA	806	33.16 (4)	.0001	.1378

Tolerated = $\beta_0 + \beta_1\text{CLASS} + \beta_2\text{GOM} + \beta_3\text{MOTIVATION} + \beta_4\text{RESPECT} + \beta_5\text{VIOLATED} + \epsilon$				
MODEL 3				
TOLERATED	N	F (df)	P<	ADJ R <sup>2</sup>
All Academies	2465	186.84 (7)	.0001	.3455
USMA	877	44.26 (5)	.0001	.1980
USNA	782	37.87 (5)	.0001	.1910
USAFA	806	191.14 (5)	.0001	.5415

Table 5. Analysis 2: Frequency Logistic Regression Models for Hypothesis 1 (Self-Denial Hypocrisy) and Hypothesis 2 (Opportunistic Hypocrisy) by Service Academy.

$$\text{Hypocrisy I} = \beta_0 + \beta_1\text{CLASS} + \beta_2\text{GOM} + \beta_3\text{MOTIVATION} + \beta_4\text{RESPECT} + \beta_5\text{HSCHEAT} + \epsilon$$

HYPOTHESIS 1				
Violated - Tolerated	N	F (df)	P <sub>≤</sub>	ADJ R <sup>2</sup>
All Academies	2465	22.45 (5)	.0001	.0574
USMA	877	3.30 (5)	.0058	.0130
USNA	782	12.09 (5)	.0001	.0663
USAFA	806	14.42 (5)	.0001	.0769

$$\text{Hypocrisy II} = \beta_0 + \beta_1\text{CLASS} + \beta_2\text{GOM} + \beta_3\text{MOTIVATION} + \beta_4\text{RESPECT} + \epsilon$$

HYPOTHESIS 2				
Violated + Reported	N	F (df)	P<	ADJ R <sup>2</sup>
All Academies	2465	35.74 (6)	.0001	.0780
USMA	877	15.74 (4)	.0001	.0631
USNA	782	16.18 (4)	.0001	.0449
USAFA	806	28.31 (4)	.0001	.1195

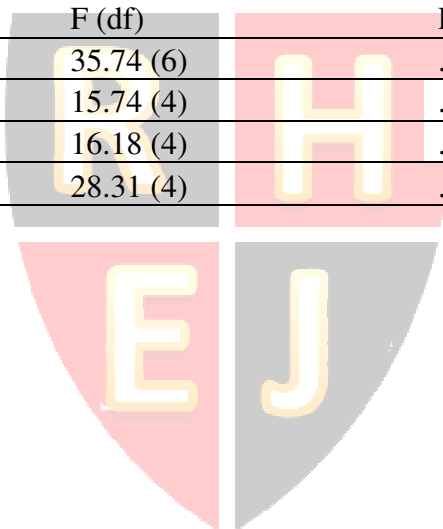


Figure 2. The 52-year trends of self-admitted honor violations, reporting of honor violations (whistleblowing), and toleration of honor violations by 2,465 U.S. service academy graduates. Each cohort data point represents about 60 subjects.

