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The role of perfectionism traits and affect in predicting academic dishnonesty of college students

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between perfectionism traits and affect on academic dishonesty in college students. This study involved 98 students as participants who were voluntarily filling out the survey after the final exams. Data were collected using the academic dishonesty questionnaire, the multidimensional perfectionism scale, and the positive-negative affect scale. Data were analysed using a correlation and comparative approach. The study found that only the socially prescribed perfectionism domain positively correlated with academic dishonesty in college students. The effect of socially prescribed perfectionism was diminished by the presence of emotions while controlling several demographic variables as covariates. Positive affect shows a greater effect on reducing the possibility of academic dishonesty occurrence. It highlighted that perfectionism may not be directly associated with academic dishonesty and limitations of self-report as a measure of dishonesty in college students.

Introduction

Unethical behavior by individuals has led to a decline in trust in educational institutions and companies. Several unethical acts such as corruption, sabotage, exploitation and others are often encountered by educational institutions and companies. The use of technology in scientific writing is also encountered, such as ChatGPT (Parker et al., 2023). Even though the effectiveness of using ChatGPT as a tool exhibits mixed stances. Some students may appreciate its aid in academic task or some express concern in plagiarism, academic dishonesty, and potentially erode the genuine learning experiences. Inappropriate use of artificial intelligence in scientific writing will lead to fraud, since it does not employ proper citation and repetitive sentences (Dinçer, 2024; Taiye et al., 2024). Some individuals may have planned to commit unethical acts from the beginning to take advantage of opportunities that benefit themselves (Brief et al., 2001), some individuals have good intentions at the beginning and then engage in unethical acts after some time.

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An unethical or illicit behavior is an action that can have an adverse effect on others and is prohibited or unacceptable to society (Jones, 1991). According to Brown (2008), forbidden, immoral, illegal actions can be categorized into seven groups, namely: (1) doing evil for personal gain (bribery, corruption, and theft), (2) conflict of interest, (3) unprofessional service (official misconduct), (4) poor administrative systems, (5) improper officer placement systems, (6) misusing regulations, and (7) complaints. Students as individuals in the academic world are not free from unethical behavior, namely academic dishonesty.

In 2016, it was reported that 77% of students admitted to committing academic dishonesty, and in 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was still rising to the point of concern (Herdian et al., 2021; Winardi et al., 2017). 31.3% were in the form of plagiarism, 31.6% in the form of cheating, and 37.1% in the form of collaboration. But, what's academic dishonesty? Academic dishonesty, according to McCabe et al. (2012) is the involvement of someone who performs at least one specific behavior that should not be done to get better grades. There are nine specific behaviors called cheating, namely (1) Copying sentences from writing without writing the source, (2) Including sources that are not actually used on assignments in the bibliography column, (3) Plagiarism of public writings, (4) Getting exam questions and answers before the exam takes place from other people, (5) Copying other people's answers during the exam, (5) Copying other people's answers during the exam, whether known or unknown to the person who is the source of the answer, (6) Working on assignments with others on assignments that are instructed to be done independently, (7) Claiming by changing names on assignments that are actually done by others, (8) Giving answers to other people during the exam, and (9) Using paper or sources that are not allowed to answer questions during the exam (McCabe et al., 2012).

Individuals who commit acts of academic cheating feel it is permissible to have an advantage over others due to low or minimal instructions from the instructor, such as individual assignments that allow them to be done in groups. Shalvi et al. (2011), states that unethical behavior occurs because there is room to justify their actions. Individuals who are given more than one opportunity increase the likelihood of committing unethical acts. Mazar et al. (2008) found that individuals will act unethically (lie) in the presence of greater rewards. (Kilduff et al., 2016) prove that unethical actions can also occur due to rivalry or competition with peers to increase self-esteem and status. Forms of unethical behavior in the educational context are plagiarism and academic fraud, such as cheating and exploitation.

Carrell et al. (2008) found that academic fraud perpetrators will increase at each grade. Individuals with similar characteristics will gather and behave according to the group's morals (Carrell et al., 2008; Yam et al., 2014). This shows a shift in moral values, that cheating becomes permissible. External influences, such as peers, dilute moral values so that individual self-control decreases to behave in accordance with the norms or rules set by the teacher/university. Students were required to sign declarations of 'academic honesty' on submitting assignments, confirming that all sources consulted have been acknowledged (Ashworth et al., 1997). These sets of rules were mutual; the institution and students drew up rules differentiating correct and impermissible practices in assessments, such as cheating and plagiarism. Students also benefit from this agreement to act morally and experience genuine learning. Even though the institution enforces this rule, students still engage in academic dishonesty throughout their academic years. In Indonesia, some internal factors that can inhibit cheating are religious beliefs, self-efficacy, and the desire to get higher grades (Farisandy & Putri, 2024; Salma et al., 2023). However, some previous studies have not considered internal factors, namely personality and emotions, as traits that shape individual character (Williams et al., 2010). Several studies on personality have been conducted to

examine its relationship with unethical behavior (Curtis et al., 2022; Day et al., 2011; Malesky et al., 2022), but trait perfectionism research in Indonesia still does not have a consistent relationship (Błachnio et al., 2022; Siaputra, 2013).

Perfectionism is a behavioral tendency for individuals to strive for unrealistic results according to their abilities (Baumeister & Vohs, 2012). In educational institutions, individuals with perfectionist tendencies will be motivated to achieve maximum grades. In the world of work, individuals will tend to try to get the best assessment on each key performance indicator (KPI). Perfectionist tendencies are not only driven by individuals, but many types of perfectionism are practised. Hewitt & Flett (1991) explained that perfectionism does not only focus on individual cognition, but there are implicit factors that also become other factors that encourage individuals to have perfectionist tendencies. Some of the existing perfectionism factors are self-oriented perfectionism (SOP), socially prescribed perfectionism (SPP), and other-oriented perfectionism (OOP). The two dimensions of environmentally motivated perfectionism (SOP and OOP) also need to be measured in determining whether individuals have perfectionist tendencies.

Self-oriented perfectionism is the discrepancy between the actual self and the ideal self. The tendency of perfectionism is directed towards the self by evaluating the self and trying to avoid failure. Other-oriented perfectionism is the tendency for individuals to set unrealistic standards for others, position others as perfect, and constantly evaluate others' performance. This tendency is outwardly directed. Socially prescribed perfectionism is the individual's tendency to acquire standards and fulfil expectations from others. Expectations given by others are always tried to be fulfilled by the individual, resulting in discrepancies between the actual self and the self desired by others. These three dimensions can be categorised into two comprehensive groups in research, namely perfectionistic concern (or can be called maladaptive perfectionism) and perfectionistic striving (positive striving perfectionism) (Dunkley et al., 2006; Stoeber, 2014).

Perfectionism is the tendency of individuals to try to meet unrealistic standards according to their abilities. This tendency can arise adaptively or maladaptively. To meet these unrealistic standards, individuals may involve themselves in unethical actions, for example, cheating and plagiarism. Individuals' involvement in cheating is an attempt to protect their self-concept, which has high standards (Mazar et al., 2008). Individuals who believe they can achieve their standards can be called adaptive or personal standards perfectionists, whereas individuals who cannot are called maladaptive or self-critical perfectionists (Slaney et al., 2001; Yang et al., 2016). Individuals with maladaptive perfectionist tendencies are likely to experience fear of failure, negative affect, anxiety, and depression. They may use maladaptive coping techniques to deal with daily problems, and when they often feel excessive negative feelings they will exhibit aggressive behaviors directed at themselves or at others when receiving negative appraisals (Chester et al., 2015; Levine et al., 2017).

Various forms of negative perfectionist tendencies will make individuals engage in unethical behavior (Levine et al., 2017). Individuals who strive to meet the expectations of their environment may engage in unethical behavior, such as cheating, exploiting loopholes, and other actions to achieve the standards set by their environment. Yip & Côté (2013) shows that the emotions felt by individuals also cause their involvement in making decisions. The decision that may be made is to take unethical actions, such as cheating.

Affect as a form of emotions is a mental state involving evaluative feelings, which a person feels good or bad, or likes or dislikes what is happening (Ekkekakis, 2013). These emotions could be shown in positive or negative. Positive emotions such as pride, happiness, excitement, gratitude, awe, love, and compassion. Negative emotion such as anger, anxiety,

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envy, guilt, disgust, shame, and sadness. The emotions that individuals feel make them more focused on themselves or focused on others in making decisions. When individuals feel emotions that involve themselves, they will reduce their attention to others and start behaving unethically, in this case individuals will engaged in academic dishonesty (Kouchaki, 2015). Increased feelings of negative emotions in college students are positively associated with increased attitudes and behaviors towards cheating (Tindall et al., 2021). In contrast, Zhong (2011) found that individuals when feeling emotions involving others will give unbalanced judgments. Individuals will tend to behave in accordance with the norm, individuals will speak honestly. These results are similar to Curtis (2023), negative emotions act as a buffer in predicting fraud. By feeling guilt and shame, students try to avoid cheating. Individual emotional conditions can reinforce or reduce the occurrence of student academic dishonesty.

Based on the explanation above, this study aims to conduct a preliminary study to test the relationship between perfectionism with academic dishonesty by replicating (Krone & Rouse, 2012) research. In this study, we hypothesize there is relationship between perfectionism traits and emotional tendencies with academic dishonesty by students.

Method

These studies used quantitative research approaches by distributing a survey. Self-oriented perfectionism, socially prescribed perfectionism, other-oriented perfectionism, positive affect and negative affect were predictors of academic dishonesty in college students.

Participants

Participants were collected through convenience sampling in courses in Universitas Indonesia and Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang representing a public and private university. The 4 selected courses are descriptive statistics, quantitative research methodology, psychometry, and psychology measurement tool construction. 168 undergraduate students in these courses were asked to participate in the study. 98 (58%) of the students chose to complete the survey. The 98 students who participate are aged between 18-25 years old with average age of 21 years old (SD = 1.28). Most respondents (74%) were between 20 (n=51) and 21 (n=22) years old. Most participants were female (56%). 67% participant were from private university students.

Instruments

Academic dishonesty will be measured using the academic dishonesty instrument developed by Faradiena (2019) modifying McCabe & Trevino (1993) and Iyer & Eastman (2008) instruments. This instrument consists of 11 items. “I smuggle a cheat sheet during test”; “Copying materials and claiming it to be my own”. Statements are responded by choosing one of four rating scales, (1) never, (2) once, (3) twice, and (4) more than twice. The academic dishonesty instrument has an internal consistency of 0.89.

Perfectionism tendency was measured using the Indonesian Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale developed by Safitri & Preston (2020) based on the theory of Hewitt & Flett (1991). The IMPS consists of 45 statement items. “It makes me uneasy to see an error in my work” (SOP); “The people around me expect me to succeed at everything I do” (SPP); “The people who matter to me should never let me down” (OOP). Statements are responded to by choosing one of seven rating scales, (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree. The self-oriented dimension has an internal consistency of 0.87, other-oriented 0.63, and socially prescribed 0.75.

Positive Affect and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) is one of the instruments to measure individual emotions. The instrument uses PANAS (Watson et al., 1988) which has been adapted by Akhtar (2019) into Indonesian. PANAS consists of two dimensions of affect, positive affect of 10 items (interested, enthusiastic, determined) and negative affect of 10 items (distressed, alert, ashamed). Items are in the form of one word that describes the subject's feelings. Items can be responded to by choosing one of five rating scales, (1) Almost never to (5) Almost always. The positive affect dimension has an internal consistency of 0.86 and negative affect of 0.85.

Procedure and Data Analysis

The survey was distributed through course e-learning system. The survey can be filled in by students through the google form. Forms are distributed during the final semester exams to survey students' college experience. This survey consisted of multiple-choice and Likert-type items. The instruments used were academic dishonesty, multidimensional perfectionism scale, and PANAS. All instruments were presented in Bahasa Indonesia. Students who did not completed the survey were excluded. The data was analysed using JASP software and all statistical analyses were performed at the 0.05 level of significance. We ran correlational and comparative analyses to investigate the relationship between variables and the difference from each group.

Results

Table 1

Means, standard deviation, reliability, and correlations between variables

	M	*SD*	α	1	2	3	4	5
Academic Dishonesty	12.18	6.95	0.84					
Self-oriented perfectionism	67.86	12.49	0.89	0.08				
Other-oriented perfectionism	53.62	9.52	0.73	-0.08	-0.68[c]			
Socially prescribed perfectionism	56.18	8.07	0.62	0.23[a]	0.66[c]	0.53[c]		
Positive affect	40.64	6.86	0.88	-0.44[c]	0.13	0.18	0.15	
Negative Affect	23.42	8.47	0.92	0.45[c]	0.13	0.10	0.36[c]	-0.74[c]

a) $p < 0.05$*; b)* $p < 0.01$*; c)* $p < 0.001$*;* α = Cronbach's alpha reliability

Based on the results of the correlation test between variables, it was found that only socially prescribed perfectionism was significantly correlated to academic dishonesty variable. The greater pressure or expectancies from the environment could lead individuals to engage in academic dishonesty. Only positive emotions are negatively correlated with academic dishonesty, the higher the positive emotions that individuals feel academic dishonesty will decrease. The relationship between self-oriented and socially prescribed domains is quite strong ($r > 0.5$). Conceptually, the object of perfection resides in the participant or is directed at the participant. See Table 1.

Multiple regression analysis conducted based on the correlational result. There is a negative effect of positive affect on academic dishonesty, while controlling the gender, age, year in college, and university $F(7.90) = 5.71$, $p<0.001$). Variance explained by the model was 30.8%. The effect of socially prescribed perfectionism and negative affect were diminished by the presence of positive affect. See Table 2.

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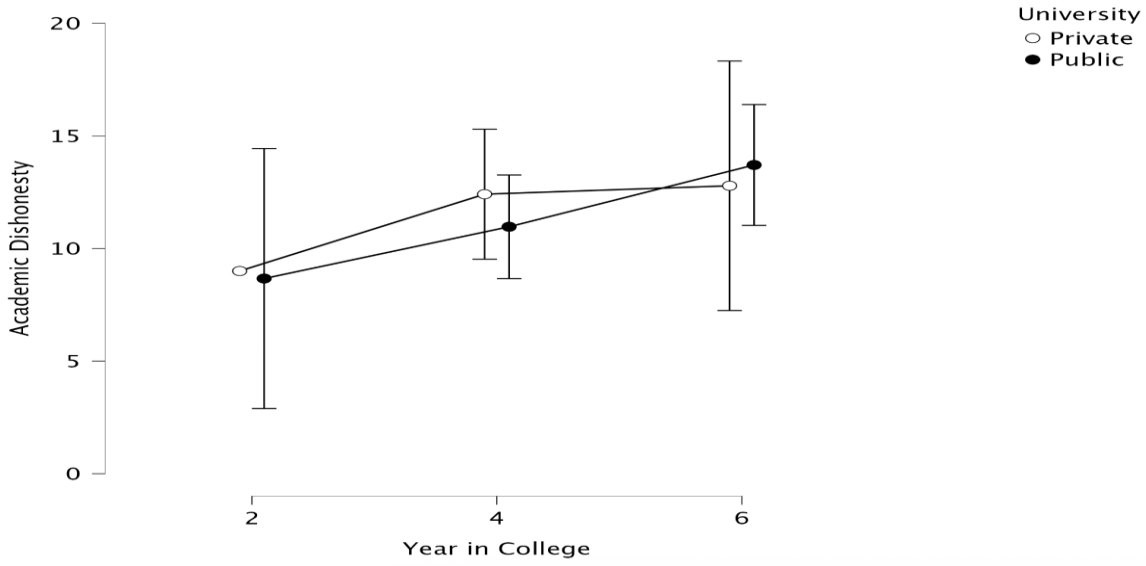
Table 2
Multiple regression analysis on academic dishonesty

	β	*p-value*	*R*	*R-squared*
Gender (reference: male)	-0.08	0.35	0.55	0.31
Age	0.24	0.02		
Year in College	0.02	0.83		
University (reference: public)	0.11	0.25		
Socially Prescribed Perfectionism	0.14	0.17		
Positive Affect	-0.32	0.02		
Negative Affect	0.19	0.19		

T-test and ANOVA was conducted to see if there were differences in individual involvement in academic dishonesty. There was no significant difference in engagement in academic dishonesty by male or female participants, t (96) = 0.67, p = 0.51. The researcher wanted to see if college level would drive students' engagement in academic dishonesty. Results showed no difference between first, second- and third-year students in their involvement in academic dishonesty, F (2.95) = 1.92, p = 0.15 (Figure 1). These findings show that each year they would likely to engage in academic dishonesty through several means. Since the freshmen already engage in academic dishonesty, it will be most likely to participate in unethical behavior in their further academic years.

Figure 1
Comparison of academic dishonesty on academic year and university



Discussion

This study aimed to examine the relationship between perfectionism tendencies and emotions towards academic dishonesty. Only socially prescribed perfectionism domain showed significant correlation with academic dishonesty. This result has similarities with the research of Nathanson et al. (2006), no significant relationship was found. Although respondents committed academic dishonesty, perfectionism trait that come from selves has not been able to prove the relationship directly. These findings also imply the greater role of environment shaping how individuals behave. High expectations from others could push

individuals to engage in academic dishonesty. Ashworth et al. (1997) academic dishonesty that occurred were done consciously to achieve benefits and has a small chance of being discovered or caught by supervisors. Students also take these actions a way to meet university expectations. In the process of cheating, individuals also feel a sense of guilt that may prevent themselves from cheating or a shift in moral values to feel it is not a problem.

Social factors become a greater influence for student to engage in academic dishonesty. Students may felt pressure particularly from parents, peers, and scholarship committees (Heriyati & Ekasari, 2020). Pressure from parents and peer are the main contributor that changed students' behavior to act morally. Socially prescribed perfectionism is shaped by expectation from parents or peers as a social aspect (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). In the finding, only socially prescribed perfectionism could directly predict academic dishonesty. It shows that student could not control themselves to act with integrity. But the academic dishonesty does not only happen because of pressure. Opportunities and rationalization would construct a 'fraud triangle' (Becker et al., 2006). Opportunities to act immorally by cheating or plagiarism happen because lack of monitoring from the professor or the presence of technology. Heighten the supervision during the exams and in lectures would lower the potential of academic misconduct. Academic dishonesty also would likely to happen if students rationalized or perceived unfair competitions (Lewellyn & Rodriguez, 2015).

In addition, emotions and academic dishonesty have a significant relationship. Tindall et al. (2021) proved that negative emotions can increase the potential for academic fraud. The relationship between positive emotions and academic dishonesty in this study. When individuals feel positive emotions, it could reduce the potential for academic dishonesty. Individuals who feel interested, enthusiastic, and excited may not involve themselves in cheating and plagiarism. But also, the individuals who feel negative emotions, it could amplify the potential for academic dishonesty. Individuals who feel fear, anxiety, jealousy, and shame may involve themselves in cheating. Every negative emotion could justify the unethical behavior to protect their self-identity.

Positive emotions negatively predict academic dishonesty. It indicates that individuals who were feeling enthusiastic could reduce the potentiality of dishonesty. These findings against Vincent et al. (2013) that found individual who's experiencing positive affect to a greater extent may facilitate moral disengagement which promote a dishonest act. The feelings of being watched by others could affect the person ability to process moral. Either the urge to act morally to protect positive self in a long term or act unethical to take a short-term sense of fulfilment (Gino, 2015).

An interesting finding in this study is that there is no significant difference between male and female individuals, all of whom have been involved in academic dishonesty activities. This finding is also supported according to Chala (2021), woman consider cheating to be an unethical act, but their involvement is not much different from the male group. We also tested whether the level of study influenced participation in academic dishonesty. The involvement of first, second- and third-year students did not have a significant difference, although visually there was a difference (Figure 1). This finding is quite different from the research of Daneil et al. (2020) where third year students (seniors) are more likely to commit fraud than first- and second-year students. This possibility can occur because students in the early days of college are still adapting to the system. The habit of committing academic fraud at a higher level is trying to maintain high grades from previous evaluations.

In early academic year, maintaining expectation for the students by lecturers or teachers whom enforcing academic integrity would shape how they behave throughout the semester. Since based on our findings, academic dishonesty is associated with social expectations (socially prescribed perfectionism). Teachers could set a realistic goal for each student, together. Social factor such competitiveness between students also happens within

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class or lecture. Being in larger competition pool such as class could increase cheating by influencing one's expectation of other's cheating (Chui et al., 2021). Teachers or lecturers could divide them into smaller groups to minimize the potential of academic dishonesty. This also would reduce the perceptions of cheating as socially acceptable, which leading to more cheating (Eriksson et al., 2015).

Not only maintaining the expectation of the students, by managing their emotions, such as shame and guilt would reduce the intentions to engage in specific form of academic misconduct (Curtis, 2023). When students could face shame and guilt as a valid emotion even before doing an unethical behavior. Students that feeling enthusiastic and active while learning or doing tests less likely to act immorally. Creating fun activities such as interactive games, that would increase the positive emotions of the students could minimize the possibility of academic dishonesty and keeping them engaged (Costley, 2019; Sutherland-Smith & Dawson, 2022).

Despite of the findings above, some limitations in this study lead to results that may not be significant, namely: (1) The use of self-report measurement tools is not strong enough to measure unethical behavior so that behaviorist measurements need to be used through experiments, (2) the construct of perfectionism which is understood is still limited to a linear relationship, it is possible that there is a maximum point of academic dishonesty that occurs due to perfectionism at a moderate level, so that the relationship between perfectionism and academic dishonesty is quadratic, and (3) the withdrawal of the number of samples needs to be balanced to prove that there are differences in academic dishonesty at certain academic levels. Future research is expected to pay attention to the three things that are the limitations of this study. It is also reported in Pascual-Ezama et al. (2015), self-reported treatment has higher amount of lying. By employing more concrete tools to measure academic dishonesty, not by using self-report questionnaire that would likely to be bias or faking good on the responses by students.

Conclusion

Perfectionism has not shown a significant relationship with academic dishonesty in college students. Individual motivation to be perfect may be able to predict academic dishonesty due to other factors. The highest potential for academic dishonesty could occur if individuals had a high and low perfectionism or moderate level of perfectionism.

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Declarations

Author contribution. First author: idea conceptualization, literature review, data collection and writing the article. Second author: guide the research framework, review, and improve the manuscript.
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