

The Connection of Belief in a Just World with the Attitude to Academic Dishonesty Among Schoolchildren with High and Low Loyalty to Cheating

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The article examines the relationship of Belief in a Just World (BJW) with the attitude to academic dishonesty among high school students. The research was aimed at checking the general hypothesis about the difference in the structure of the connection between the belief in a just world with the attitude towards dishonesty of schoolchildren who are loyal and not loyal to dishonesty. A total of 516 subjects, of which 274 were female, took part in the study; the average age was 15.5. The study used the Scale of Belief in a Just World (C. Dalbert), which includes two subscales: "Faith in a just world in general" and "Faith in justice towards the subject" and, to assess attitudes to academic impiety, the vignette method. The study showed that schoolchildren with high and low loyalty to cheating differ in the structure of the ties between the BJW and the attitude to dishonesty. Disloyal to dishonesty assess the permissibility of dishonesty as contrary to the image of a world that is fair to them personally and consider the possible punishment for cheating to be fair. The connections of the belief in a just world in general with the attitude to dishonesty are not significant. For those loyal to dishonesty, the assessment of the world as fair to them and to everyone is directly related to the prevalence of cheating, and the connections of both scales of the BJW with the assessment of the possible consequences of dishonesty and its permissibility are not significant. In schoolchildren loyal to dishonesty, both scales are directly related only to the assessment of the prevalence of cheating, the other links are not significant.

Keywords: Belief in a Just World, BJW for others, BJW for oneself, academic dishonesty, academic honesty, cheating, students, education.

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Связь веры в справедливый мир с отношением к академической нечестности у школьников с высокой и низкой лояльностью к читерству

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Рассмотрена связь веры в справедливый мир (ВСМ) с отношением к академической нечестности у обучающихся старших классов школы. Работа была направлена на проверку общей гипотезы о различии структуры связи ВСМ с отношением к нечестности лояльных и нелояльных к нечестности школьников. Всего в исследовании приняли участие 516 человек, средний возраст — 15,5 лет, из них 274 девушки. В качестве основного инструментария использовались: Шкала веры в справедливый мир (С. Dalbert, Belief in a just world), включающая две субшкалы — Вера в справедливый мир вообще (ВСМ_{общ}) и Вера в справедливость по отношению к субъекту (ВСМ_{личн}), а для оценки отношения к академическому нечестию — метод виньеток. Исследование показало, что школьники с высокой и низкой лояльностью к читерству различаются в структуре связей ВСМ с отношением к нечестности. Нелояльные к нечестности оценивают ее как противоречащее образу справедливого для них лично мира и считают возможное наказание за читерство справедливым. Связи ВСМ_{общ} с отношением к нечестности не значимы. У лояльных к нечестности оценка мира как справедливого и для них, и для всех прямо связана с распространенностью читерства, а связи обеих шкал ВСМ с оценкой возможных последствий нечестности и ее допустимости не значимы. У лояльных к нечестности школьников обе шкалы ВСМ прямо связаны только с оценкой распространенности читерства, остальные связи не значимы.

Ключевые слова: вера в справедливый мир, ВСМобщая, ВСМличная, академическая нечестность, академическая честность, читерство, ученики, образование.

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Introduction

Academic dishonesty (cheating) is an unfortunate but fairly widespread occurrence that includes a wide range of phenomena, from breaking rules to get better grades and other benefits to doing so to benefit others. In all cases, it has harmful consequences for both students and the educational system as a whole, particularly in reducing its credibility. In our study, academic dishonesty refers to any type of dishonesty associated with breaking the rules of academic activity.

Research on actual dishonesty shows that not all participants resort to dishonesty in an environment with a guaranteed lack of monitoring [10]. People seek both benefits and the preservation of a positive self-image. In the same conditions in which some schoolchildren cheat, others do not. A factor that may determine why is the notion of a just world structure.

According to M. Lerner [12], belief in a just world (BJW) is an adaptive illusion of the existence of rules, the observance of which will lead to success and violation of which will be punished.

The identification of two separate factors in the structure of belief in a just world — faith in a just world in general and faith in justice towards the subject [13] — showed that faith in justice towards the subject is directly connected with pro-social behavior [5; 21] because it corresponds to belief in the validity of rules [6], and faith in a just world in general — with a hostile attitude toward those who are in an unfavorable situation [20] because, if their suffering is not deserved, it prevents them from seeing the world as just.

In schoolchildren, the association of the belief in a just world with the self-assessment of cheating is mediated by the perceived justice of teachers [9; 17; 19]. This suggests that cheating and non-cheating students use different strategies in self-assessment.

Since belief in a just world reflects the idea that there are rules in the world and inevitable feedback on the observance thereof, it can be assumed that by high school age, adolescents are already forming an idea of the reality of formal and perceived so-called descriptive norms [7]. Descriptive norms may or may not coincide with prescriptive norms that contain information about how things should be. But if they do not coincide, as in the case of behavior that meets official disapproval, it is these norms that are more likely than prescriptive ones to predict, as meta-analysis of 196 individual studies shows, one's actual behavior [15].

The assessment by a given student of the prevalence of cheating is one of the most useful predictors of academic dishonesty [16; 18], and for Russian students, perceived norms contribute more to one's self-assessment of dishonesty than to one's attitude toward dishonesty itself [14].

The prevailing norms are realized in the consequences of observance to and violation of them. For Russian students, cheating has no meaningful links with academic performance [2], but if knowledge is seen as important for later mastery and success, students are less likely to turn to dishonest behavior compared to those who pursue external goals [1; 4; 18]. At the same time, there is a fairly widespread belief in Russian culture that success in life is often achieved by low-performing students. Perhaps such attitudes legitimize dishonesty in the eyes of the students, allowing them to assess academic dishonesty as something that is characteristic of successful people and therefore, perhaps, a just and justifiable action.

Besides the intrinsic motivations above, the probability of subsequent punishment for cheating [1; 16; 18] can of course be a deterrent to dishonesty. It can be assumed in this case that, if one's image of a just world is formed based on prescriptive norms, punishment for cheating can be seen as just,

and if one's image of justice is based on perceived norms, then, it can be assumed, punishment of cheating can be perceived as a violation of the de facto status quo, as an unjust action.

At the same time, longitudinal studies show that academic performance directly depends on belief in a just world, while belief in a just world does not depend on academic performance [8]. Those who believe in the possibility of achieving good grades through effort do achieve them. It is also possible that one's assessment of how just one's environmental, which mediates the connection between cheating and belief in a just world [8], is a product of academic effort among those students who believe that academic results will lead them to success in the future. Therefore, they do their homework, get good grades, and consider the existing rules to be just. Meanwhile, those who do not associate success with study may have an equal level of belief in a just world but do not consider academic requirements to be just.

The analysis conducted allowed the following hypotheses to be formulated:

Schoolchildren with faith in dishonesty and those without have different perceptions of the prevalence of academic dishonesty and its consequences. Those with such a faith believe cheating is more common, causes less trouble and less damage, and is particularly common among children who turn out to be successful than schoolchildren without such a faith do. Those with a faith in dishonesty consider academic knowledge less important for future success than non-cheaters, and agree to a greater extent that success is achieved by low-performing students, and that success cannot be achieved by honest means.

For students with high faith in dishonesty, faith in justice towards the subject has a direct relationship to the permissibility of dishonesty, the likelihood of success as a result of dishonesty, and inversely to pun-

ishment for dishonesty and possible harm to others.

When one's faith in dishonesty is low, the belief in a just world includes official norms and the value of school knowledge. In this case, the belief in a just world is directly related to the likelihood of punishment for cheating, damage to others, and inversely to the perception that dishonesty at school age is peculiar to those who are successful and to the permissibility of dishonesty.

Methods and sampling

Sampling

A total of 516 students between the ages of 13 and 17, with an average age of 15.5, 274 of whom were female, and one who did not indicate gender, participated in the study.

Methods

Five vignettes were used to analyze attitudes toward academic dishonesty, describing different instances of cheating that included dishonesty for one's own benefit and for the benefit of others:

1. Pupil A. used a cheat sheet on a test;
2. Pupil A. offered to write an essay for another pupil for money;
3. Pupil A. forged a note from his parents to avoid a test for which he was not ready;
4. Pupil A. wrote an essay for a classmate for money (other remuneration);
5. During a test, pupil A. passed the solution of the problems on his variant to the other pupils.

Judgments were offered for each variant of the situation, and agreement with them was assessed on a 10-point scale:

1. This is common behavior for students.
2. I believe that if it is absolutely necessary, it is okay to do this.
3. This action would hurt other people.
4. It would have unpleasant consequences for the student.
5. I assume that people who became successful used to do so as children as well.

Cronbach’s alpha for agreement with all judgments regarding the 5 vignettes was 0.778, indicating a fairly high consistency of responses and allowing for summary measurements of agreement with each statement to be used in the analysis of results.

The level of belief in a just world was measured using the scale of belief in a just world (C. Dalbert, Belief in a Just World) as adapted by S. K. Nartova-Bochaver and colleagues [3].

Statement of results

The data were processed using the Jamovi 2.2.5 statistical package.

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics of the sums of agreement scores for each of the 5 vignette statements.

The upper and lower quartiles of the agreement distribution with the statement that it is okay to cheat were used to identify sub-samples with high and low levels of permissibility.

Table 2 shows the sub-sample with low faith in dishonesty, which consisted of 142 respondents with scores from 1 to 25 (the lower quartile of the overall distribution) and for the sub-sample with high faith in dishonesty — 134 respondents with scores from 40 to 50.

Nonparametric criteria were used to process the results since an ordinal Likert scale was used to assess agreement with the dishonesty statements.

Spearman correlation analysis was used in Table 3 to test the hypothesis of a relationship between the belief in a just world scales and attitudes toward cheating.

Discussion

The hypothesis of a difference in perceptions of the prevalence and consequences of dishonesty among schoolchildren with and without faith in it was confirmed. Ones with such a faith consider cheating to be more common, characteristic of successful people,

Table 1

Statistics of age, scales of belief in a just world, and sums of the agreement scores for each of the statements on the 5 vignettes

Indicator	Average	Standard deviation	Asymmetry (standard error 0.108)	Excess (standard error 0.215)
Age	15.430	1.003	0.019	-0.894
Faith in justice towards the subject	43.459	14.045	-0.083	-0.024
Faith in a just world in general*	32.453	10.681	0.479	1.268
This is a common behavior for students	29.736	9.390	0.085	-0.371
I believe that if it is absolutely necessary, it is okay to do this	32.027	10.583	-0.098	-0.541
This action would hurt other people*	18.647	9.790	0.674	0.044
There would have unpleasant consequences for the student	27.465	9.639	-0.052	-0.425
I assume that people who became successful used to do so as children as well	29.921	10.479	-0.065	-0.423

Note: * —distribution is significantly different from normal as per the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics and comparison of age, attitude toward justice, and attitude toward dishonesty among students with low and high level of faith in dishonesty using the Mann-Whitney test

Scales	Low loyalty to dishonesty		High loyalty to dishonesty		U
	Average	Standard Deviation	Average	Standard Deviation	
Age	15.317	0.999	15.624	0.926	7790.5
Faith in justice towards the subject	42.697	13.080	43.744	15.988	8859.0
Faith in a just world in general	32.634	9.878	32.353	11.783	9162.0
This is a common behavior for students	22.930	7.736	36.948	8.835	2286.5***
This action would hurt other people	21.634	10.266	14.918	9.462	5690.5***
There would have unpleasant consequences for the student	29.556	9.223	24.746	11.029	7020.5***
I assume that people who became successful used to do so as children as well	21.958	7.634	37.052	11.186	2491.5***

Note: *-<0.05, **-<0.01, *** < 0.001, significance is given with Bonferroni correction.

Table 3

Relationship of the belief in a just world with attitudes toward cheating among students with high and low levels of faith in cheating

Scales	Faith in justice towards the subject			Faith in a just world in general		
	Sample total	Among students with low faith in dishonesty	Among students with high faith in dishonesty	Sample total	Among students with low faith in dishonesty	Among students with high faith in dishonesty
Age	0.002	-0.133	0.080	-0.018	-0.048	0.069
This is a common behavior for students	0.055	-0.135	0.224*	0.082	0.027	0.270*
I believe that if it is absolutely necessary, it is okay to do this	0.046	-0.243*	0.129	0.019	-0.075	0.114
This action would hurt other people	-0.028	0.112	-0.088	0.069	0.100	0.045
There would have unpleasant consequences for the student	0.111	0.234*	0.048	0.130*	0.135	0.145
I assume that people who became successful used to do so as children as well	-0.016	-0.175	-0.049	-0.018	0.064	-0.023

Note: *-<0.05, **-<0.01, ***<0.001, significance is given with Bonferonni correction.

entailing less trouble and leading to less damage than those without such a faith. The difference in the assessments of the prevalence and consequences of dishonesty in the same environment suggests the presence of filters that selectively capture and evaluate information that corresponds or does not correspond to one's established image of reality.

The hypotheses about the difference in the structure of how one's belief in a just world corresponds to one's attitude toward dishonesty were partially confirmed. With low faith in dishonesty, faith in 'justice towards the subject' is inversely related to the permissibility of cheating and directly related to the likelihood of punishment. To the extent that what happens to them personally is assessed as a just result of their own actions, the negative consequences of dishonesty are also just.

For schoolchildren with high faith in dishonesty, the scales regarding a belief in a just world are related only to the assessment of the prevalence of cheating, but any correspondence with the possible consequences are insignificant. It can be assumed that either these students have not yet formed a stable idea of cause-and-effect relationships, or they are focused on norms and consequences not

taken into account in the questions. The correlation of the belief in a just world with one's assessment of the prevalence of dishonesty suggests that significant consequences also lie in the realm of actual peer relations, which needs to be verified.

Conclusions

The results confirm previous findings that there is no direct association of the belief in a just world with the permissibility of academic dishonesty among students.

However, students with high and low faith in cheating differ in the structure of their belief in a just world.

For students with low faith in dishonesty, the belief in a just world is inversely related to the permissibility of dishonesty and directly related to the probability of getting in trouble for such dishonesty. To the extent that the world is just to the subject himself, dishonesty is undesirable and punishment for it is likely.

For students who have faith in dishonesty, the scales of their belief in a just world are directly related only to their assessment of the prevalence of cheating; for them, the world is just to the extent that academic dishonesty is prevalent.

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