

The Constant Pressure

By Leah Kostelecky

Age 17

Senior in high school

Home schooled

The pressure to succeed in this world is astronomical. The world measures success by the amount of stocks a person owns, how big his house is, or how many Lamborghinis he drives. Gaining material wealth requires having an affluent job, which one gains primarily by getting a degree from a prominent university. The cost of attending college is astounding; it is essentially impossible for a student to graduate debt-free from college on his own. While federal money helps some, it will barely begin to scratch the surface of the total cost of attending college. Many students will turn to scholarships to help pay for their education. The highly competitive nature of scholarship applications requires incredibly high ACT/SAT scores, outstanding grade point averages, and overall commitment to excellence. Most students realize the significance of good grades, and are willing to try anything to inch their way closer to achieving perfection. Students should be focused on completing homework, studying extensively for tests, and learning the taught material thoroughly. The problem is that some are not willing to make the extra effort, especially when there is an option that is viewed as "easier." Studies show that 70 percent of all high school students have cheated on an exam (Josephson and Peter 72). Of those 70 percent, only 12 percent have been caught cheating, and in that group, only 7 percent of students actually stopped cheating because they were caught (Cheaters' Open Season Begins as Colleges Prepare for Finals Week)!

Cheating has become a common practice at most high schools and colleges around the United States. It is widely accepted by people of all ages, and does not necessarily stop after one's education is complete. Dishonesty is not restricted to any area of life; résumé fraud is a common practice for many people. Examples such as Martha Stewart and Bill Clinton prove that all people have the ability to cheat, and many succumb to the constant pressure. Teenagers agree that the pressure to succeed begins in high school, which supports the fact that a high percentage of high school students cheat. Students agree that cheating is not a major issue; they follow the crowd, whether the decision is ethically sound or not. Donald McCabe, Founder of *The Center for Academic Integrity*, states, "Students feel justified in what they are doing. They are cheating because they see others cheating and they think they are being unfairly disadvantaged. The only way many of them feel they can stay in the game, to get into the right school, is to cheat as well" (Academic Cheating Background).

Students have become more and more creative in their methods of cheating. Traditional crib notes, notes smuggled on a small piece of paper used to aid a student during a test, have become re-vamped. Students have been caught with crib notes on the bills of ball caps, crib notes written on various parts of their body, and even crib notes on classroom furniture (Clabaugh and Rozycki)! Technological advances have made cheating even easier. Students can text message their friends answers during tests; some even program answers into their scientific calculators. A few very clever students have been caught turning in a blank exam. When a teacher sees the exam, he thinks he has given someone an extra copy. The trick is that when the tests are handed back, the student that did not take the test complains bitterly that his test was “lost” and needs to be retaken. In the meantime, the student can view other students’ test to help him “study”. Another popular option is to pay someone money in exchange for a written paper. Students do this at a local level, or they obtain help from nationally acclaimed websites. One such site, School Sucks, has reported on average of 80,000 hits per day (Academic Cheating Background). For only 9.95/page, students can purchase pre-written papers that are guaranteed to give them a good grade (School Sucks). Fraternities and Sororities often accumulate past-written term papers into paper mills which members have easy access to. All of these well-thought out, creative methods to cheat on exams must have taken quite a bit of brain power. It makes me wonder what would have happened if the students that came up with these methods would have devoted this energy into actually learning the material, and not coming up with ways to avoid it.

Although students have created many ways to mislead teachers, many teachers and schools have created their own creative ways to bamboozle those dishonest students. Web sites have been created to easily prove when students plagiarize portions of already-published works. Teachers type a statement from their student’s paper into a search engine, and it will instantly show if the statement was original or stolen. Many schools have adopted Honor Codes into their student policy. Incoming students must sign a written document which states that they will follow all rules and policies set by that school. Such policies promote honesty and integrity. While honor codes are most certainly a step in the right direction, just because a student signs something does not necessarily mean he will follow what it says. Proof of this statement is shown in the fact that 67 percent of students that

study at a school that follows an honor code admit to cheating; compare that to only 41 percent of students that cheat that attend a school that does not require an honor code (Cheaters' Open Season Begins as Colleges Prepare for Finals Week). A change of perception must happen if a permanent transformation is to occur.

Having been home schooled from Pre-K to my sophomore year of high school, I myself never had the opportunity to experience cheating. My parents have taught me from a young age to be honest in all that I participate in and if I ever was caught cheating, the consequences would be painful, very painful! Whenever I imagined cheaters, I visualized nasty bullies beating up a dorky "smart kid" until he promised to finish their book reports, or ditzy cheerleaders writing answers to math problems on the bottom of their sneakers. I did not realize how twisted my perspective was until my junior year of high school, when I left home schooling and attended a small Christian school. I was absolutely horrified at the amount of cheating that occurred. Stealing teacher's manuals, copying one another's homework, and plagiarizing straight from the internet were all common practices. Often, after one student had completed a test, he would write all of his answers onto a sticky note that was passed around the classroom to any student that needed "help." Being stereotyped as a "smart kid", I repeatedly had students ask me if they could copy my homework or if I would assist them in cheating on a test. Upon my prompt negative answer, I was met with eye rolls, deep sighs, and general teenage attitude.

There is no single answer for solving the academic cheating epidemic. The only solution would require complete honesty from both students and teachers, which is essentially impossible to achieve. Every small step taken on the road to academic honesty contributes to achieving the larger goal of complete truthfulness in all areas of life. Instilling confidence, honesty, and integrity in students at a young age would help combat many of the attitudes which "magically appear" during the adolescent age, when cheating is rampant. Schools trust parents to show their children the difference between right and wrong. With the divorce rate and number of single parent homes rising higher and higher every year, many children have no solid examples to follow. If young, developing students were given a morally-sound leader to model their lives after, there would be a drastic change in not only academic honesty, but how those children view the world in general. Imagine the prosperity and growth the universe would witness due to young minds

that are not cluttered with unnecessary thoughts, but are free to explore the paths set before them.

Endnotes:

1. "Academic Cheating Background." Cheating Is a Personal Foul. 1999. ETS/Ad Council. 21 Dec 2007 <http://www.glass-castle.com/clients/www-nocheating.org/adCouncil/research/cheatingbackgrounder.html>.
2. "Cheaters' Open Season Begins as Colleges Prepare for Finals Week." 23 May 2007 20 Dec 2007 <<http://www.nbc26.com/news/tech/7649872.html>>.
3. Clabaugh, Gary K. , and Edward G. Rozycki. Preventing Cheating and Plagiarism. 2nd Edition . Oreland, PA: NewFoundations Press, 2003.
4. "Home Page." School Sucks. 23 Dec 2007 <http://www.schoolsucks.com/free-term-papers.php>.
5. Josephson, Michael, and Val J. Peter . Parenting to Build Character in Your Teen. Boys Town Press, 2001.

6. Newberger, M.D., Eli. "Why Do Students Cheat?." School For Champions. 18 Dec 2007 <[http:// www.school-for-champions.com/character/newberger_cheating2.htm](http://www.school-for-champions.com/character/newberger_cheating2.htm)>.