

**Does the Need to Maintain an Honest Self-Concept Moderate the Association between
Perceived Unfairness and Dishonest Behavior?**

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Abstract

People have a tendency to do the right thing, yet the world is not fair. However, the ease of engaging in dishonest behaviors differs among individuals. The present study will investigate whether the contextual factor of perceived unfair treatment, will make people more inclined to engage in dishonest behavior. Besides focusing on situational circumstances, this research will also explore the impact of personal differences on dishonesty; namely the effect of an honest self-concept. More specifically, it is hypothesized that perceived unfair treatment will increase the likelihood of engaging in dishonest behaviors. Additionally, it is assumed that the difficulty to maintain an honest self-concept will have an attenuating effect on the hypothesized association between perceived unfair treatment and dishonesty. A between-subject experiment has been conducted among first-year students (N=52) at the University of Groningen. The study was divided in two parts; one assessing self-concept via a survey study and the second part included a reading task in which students were categorized in the easy task or hard task condition. The dependent variable dishonest behavior was inferred from the indicated difficulties students could report afterwards. These indicated difficulties would reward them with additional SONA-points. The findings of both the main effect and the moderating effect were non-significant with $p > 0.05$. Limitations and implications will be discussed in the discussion section.

Introduction

Justice enables the maintenance of harmony within our society and is therefore of great importance for human beings. However, the definition of justice is a rather abstract concept, with different interpretations depending on culture, context and date. The Latin definition of justice as 'right' or the 'law' (Abraham et al., 2022), seems similar to a more contemporary interpretation; some poor behaviors are prevented by laws to maintain justice within society. Yet, for smaller everyday situations, where the law does not provide clear guidelines, ambiguity arises. For these situations individuals' subjective perceptions of justice may or may not be employed in a self-serving way, which could lead to dishonest behavior. A better understanding in dishonesty is associated with reducing both economic costs, such as stealing at work, and social costs, such as the loss of trust in a relationship (Mouminoux, 2023). This makes dishonest behavior important to further investigate. To delve deeper into this decision-making process, it is interesting to consider how individuals react when they feel they are being treated unfairly.

Studies have shown that people who perceive that they were being treated unfairly, may engage in dishonest behavior to restore a sense of fairness. Houser and colleagues (2012) found that people were more likely to show dishonest behavior, namely cheating, in a subsequent unrelated task, *after* perceiving a sense of unfair treatment in a 'dictator game'. Moreover, research of Mouminoux (2023) suggested that engaging in dishonesty increases when people find themselves in unfair or unfortunate circumstances. However, not everyone will engage in dishonest behavior, even though they were treated unfairly. A study of trade-off games by Capraro and Rand (2018) demonstrated that people had a consistent preference for morally right actions. Yet, Capraro and Rand (2018) argued that there was no such thing as a general morality preference. This preference for acting honestly, was influenced by

individual preferences for acting prosocially. These individual differences can be explained by the theory of self-concept maintenance (Bem, 1972). As long as this dishonest behavior does not affect people their self-concept of being a ‘good person’, they may engage in dishonesty (Mazar et al., 2008).

All in all, this makes that some people have more difficulty to self-servingly justify dishonest behavior, even though they perceived being treated in an unfair manner. Therefore, it is interesting to examine which individuals would be (in)effective at justifying dishonest behavior to themselves.

Justification of Dishonest Behavior

In this research it will be investigated to what degree people can justify to themselves to engage in dishonest behavior, particularly when put into a situation where they perceive that they are being treated in an unfair manner. Research demonstrates that people seem to be reluctant in engaging in dishonest behavior. Shalvi (2012) discussed that in various settings, people preferred to act honestly instead of telling lies, even though they had the opportunity to get away with it. According to Shalvi (2012) people prefer not to engage in dishonest behavior because they have a need of self-justification. This self-justification entails having to rationalize our behavior to reconcile with one’s moral standards, which indicates that self-justification is balancing cognitive processes with personal values and beliefs. Thus, people need to find themselves within circumstances in which they can justify dishonest behavior to themselves.

Research of Mouminoux (2023) suggested that opting for dishonest behavior can at least be partly explained by people making a cost-benefit analysis. Becker (1968) used an economic framework to describe the probability of people acting dishonestly; particularly regarding the participation in criminal activities. According to Becker (1968) there will be a higher probability of people acting dishonestly if the potential benefits of dishonesty

outweigh the combined probability of getting punished with the magnitude of subsequent punishment. Yet, viewing a decision-making process solely from an economic perspective, is rather short sided. Rosenbaum and colleagues (2014) suggested that, besides acting according a cost-benefit analysis, people also take into account moral reasoning. In some cases, people will opt for acting truthfully over economic gain because honesty is associated with prosocial norms, endorsed by positive rewards. Thus, people take into account both psychological costs and economical costs when deciding to act dishonestly. If these costs do not outweigh the potential gain, people can justify engaging in dishonest behaviors, such as lying and cheating. For example, Rosenbaum and colleagues (2014) found that the psychological loss of lying, decreases when individual rewards are dependent by the amount of effort instead of chance.

Literature indicates that when people perceive being treated unfairly in a given context, it could enable them to engage in dishonest behavior; to restore a sense of fairness. Now dishonest behavior could be self-servingly justified because it will avoid the psychological cost of acting dishonestly. For example, Houser and colleagues (2012) showed that participant's subjective perception of fairness in a 'dictator game' significantly increased the likelihood of participants cheating in a subsequent, yet unrelated task. Nicklin (2012) highlights that perceptions of fairness indeed have a substantial influence on attitudes and behavior, depending on the context. This can be explained following the fairness theory (Folger & Cropanzano, 2001). This theory focusses on *accountability judgements* (who is/should be responsible for a certain outcome) and *counterfactual thinking* (comparing the objective outcome to possible alternative outcomes). Thus, a situation will be perceived as unfair, when the outcome could have been more beneficial (*counterfactual thinking*) if the other person would and should have treated him differently (*accountability judgement*).

This research will further investigate the impact an unfair situation can have on the likelihood of engaging in dishonest behavior. More specifically, whether perceived unfair

treatment could enable people to engage in dishonesty to self-servingly restore a sense of fairness. This leads to the first hypothesis, that will assess the main effect of the research.

Hypothesis 1: The perception of unfair treatment in a given context, will elicit higher rates of dishonest behavior to restore a sense of fairness.

In other words, a sense of unfair treatment would make individuals more likely to engage in dishonest behavior. Yet, solely the presence of an unfair situation might not evoke the same dishonest behavior among everyone. This makes it interesting to extend this research to the impact of personal factors on the likelihood of behaving dishonestly.

Influence of Self-Concept

As stated before, personal differences may play a role in how people react to being treated unfairly. This leads to the additional question; what type of people are more likely to respond with dishonest behavior after experiencing unfair treatment? According to literature, the need to act in a self-serving matter may be related to the way people evaluate themselves. Ultimately people strive to sustain a positive image of themselves, according to the theory of self-concept maintenance (Bem, 1972). This theory posits that people strive to maintain a positive image about themselves to prevent a feeling of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). Dissonance is an unpleasant state of psychological tension, which arises when the behavior of an individual is not in line with his cognitions. If people find themselves in a state of dissonance, they will be motivated to change their cognitions to align with their behavior, which reduces this psychological tension.

Mazar and colleagues (2008) applied this theory in the context of dishonesty. They pointed out that people strive to find a balance between two competing motivations when acting dishonestly; maintaining a positive honest self-concept whilst gaining something by behaving dishonestly. This means that an individual's ability to reinterpret their dishonest behaviors in a way that balances the reward from acting dishonestly with the maintenance of

an honest self-concept, will determine whether an individual will engage or refrain from dishonesty. Some people are more flexible in finding this balance; hence they can reinterpret their dishonest behaviors to still maintain an honest self-concept. Contrary, those less flexible would need to negatively update their honest self-concept and therefore try to refrain from acting dishonestly.

One way to reinterpret dishonest behavior could be explained by the findings of Rosenbaum and colleagues (2014). They found in their literature review on cheating that individuals are more likely to engage in dishonest behavior, if they perceived that they have behaved in a morally acceptable way in the past or intend to do so in the future. This implicates that people could morally balance (self-servingly justify) their dishonest behavior, without having to negatively update their self-concept. Thus, when people can imagine doing a moral act in the future or can recall a good deed from the near past, it is easier for individuals to reinterpret their dishonest acts to maintain an honest self-concept. This serves as one explanation for the individuals that have more ease to maintain an honest self-concept.

Similarly, Vasquez and colleagues (2019) found the moral dissonance reduction framework which can be applied to explain how one can maintain an honest self-concept, when engaging in dishonest behavior. Vasquez and colleagues (2019) explain that people can justify dishonest behavior falling in between extremes, since refraining from extreme versions of dishonest behavior enables them to redefine their actions. In other words, the ability to lie a little or cheat a little, compared to an extreme case, enables people to maintain an honest self-concept. Thus, besides remembering or imagining a moral act, refraining from extreme cases of dishonest behavior can also serve as a mechanism that enables some individuals maintain an honest self-concept more easily.

In contrast, Mazar and colleagues (2008) found an explanation for the individuals who have more difficulty to reinterpret their dishonest behavior. They argued that the flexibility of

reinterpreting one's dishonest behavior can be attributed to the level of attention people pay to their personal moral standards. More specifically, individuals who pay more attention to acting morally as a prominent personal standard, would be confronted more rapidly with the implications of their dishonest behavior. This means that individuals who view honesty as an important moral standard, find themselves more easily in a state of dissonance, when behaving dishonestly. Consequently, this would compel them to update their honest self-concept in a negative manner. Conversely, people less attentive to honesty as a personal moral standard are less likely to evaluate their dishonest behavior against their moral standards; resulting in the maintenance of an honest self-concept.

Supporting this claim, Mazar and colleagues (2008) indeed found less cheating among individuals more aware to honesty as personal standard. This is because people with an honest self-concept compensate for the unfair treatment by reaffirming their self-concept. Thus, instead of reacting to unfair treatment by acting dishonestly, they gain the intrinsic reward of maintaining their honest self-concept. The reaffirmation of their self-concept as honest is therefore the motivation for these people to prevent themselves of engaging in dishonest behaviors.

All in all, maintaining an honest self-concept can have an effect on the engagement in dishonest behavior, which varies amongst individuals depending on the ease to reinterpret dishonest behaviors. Namely, individuals more flexible to reinterpret their dishonest behavior can maintain an honest self-concept, whereas those who are more attentive to their personal moral standards would be compelled to negatively update their honest self-concept. To be more specific, the maintenance of an honest self-concept could act as a moderator which would attenuate the association between perceived unfair treatment and engagement in dishonest behavior. This leads to the second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: The association between perceived unfair treatment and acting dishonestly, will be weaker within individuals who have greater difficulty to maintain an honest self-concept.

This means that these individuals find it more challenging to reinterpret their dishonest behaviors due to their heightened awareness of adhering to their moral standards. As a result this prevents them from a negative update of their self-concept. Conversely, the hypothesized association will be stronger among individuals less aware of their moral standards.

This research will add to literature of dishonest behavior by examining the role of a contextual factor, namely perceived unfairness. This will be assessed via an experiment that manipulates the perception of fair treatment between study conditions. Participants who receive unfair treatment could potentially restore this sense of unfair treatment by lying about circumstances inhibiting their focus, to gain extra credits. It is being hypothesized that these students will increasingly engage in dishonest behavior, namely lying, to restore a sense of fairness. Furthermore, the moderating effect of the maintenance of an honest self-concept on the association between perceived unfairness and dishonesty, will be assessed by a questionnaire. Following the second hypothesis, it is expected that individuals more aware of maintaining an honest self-concept will have more difficulty with lying about hindering circumstances to gain additional credits, even though they would benefit from the additional credits. Conversely, individuals less aware of maintaining an honest self-concept will be more likely to cheat.

Method

Participants

During one week in May 2024 a group of first-year B.Sc. Psychology students were recruited using the University of Groningen online participants' pool SONA. The final sample included data from 52 students, of whom 39 identified as female, 10 identified as male, and 3

as non-binary or other. The average age was between 18-24. The questionnaires were to be completed in English.

Procedure

The current study employs a between-subject experimental design. *Experimental Condition* serves as the independent variable, representing the two study conditions ('easy' task; $N = 26$) vs. 'hard' task; $N = 26$), and *Reported Difficulties* is the main dependent measure. The dependent variable was categorical (yes/no). Ethics approval was received from the Faculty of Behavioral and Social Sciences (BSS) ethics committee at the University of Groningen.

This study makes use of deception at multiple points throughout. To obfuscate the true nature of the study, it was divided into two parts. In the first part, participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire that included all moderating measures. The questionnaire was introduced as a questionnaire about attitudes towards moral judgment to be used in another project.

The second part of the study featured the experimental manipulation and dependent variable. Multiple steps were taken to induce a feeling of unfairness. The purpose of the study was framed as assessing mechanisms of reading comprehension in two different conditions. Participants were told they could either receive the 'easy' task condition or the 'hard' task condition, which was allocated randomly. In reality, all participants received the same task. The task included reading a text as well as work on a cognitive and a reading comprehension task. Participants were deceived about the requirements of the task. Participants were presented with a visual overview of both conditions, which depicted a short text for the 'easy' condition, and a long text for the 'hard' condition. The text itself was an excerpt of a cognitive neuroscience article, including a lot of technical terms that are likely unfamiliar to first-year students.

Participants were instructed that they would have to answer questions about the text. All were informed of the possibility that correct answers are rewarded with bonus SONA credits. Participants in the ‘easy’ condition were told that they would need to provide correct answers on a majority of questions to receive the bonus, whereas participants in the ‘hard’ condition were told that they would need to answer all questions correctly. In reality, one of the questions was impossible to answer based on the text, to guarantee that all participants in the hard condition would experience failure. All of these steps were taken to induce a perception that being allocated to the ‘hard’ condition would require substantially more work to earn the same SONA points, as well as being eligible for the bonus. At the end of the study, participants were asked to indicate whether they had any issues with reading comprehension or other problems that could have hindered their performance, which is the main dependent measure of this study. Specifically, they could tick up to six boxes representing various difficulties (see Appendix C). Each box ticked allowed a participant to receive the aforementioned bonus SONA credits, regardless of correctly answered questions. A reminder was present that participants cannot be identified by the researchers.

Measures

This study is part of a larger survey, therefore only measures employed in the current investigation will be described.

Indicated Difficulties

To capture dishonest behavior, participants were provided with the opportunity to be dishonest by ticking boxes of statements about any possible reading and/or concentration difficulties that could have affected their performance. This was introduced as a way to account for legitimate reasons why someone would be disadvantaged in this study. If an induced perception of unfairness indeed leads to more dishonest behavior, more participants would indicate having difficulties in the ‘hard’ condition than in the ‘easy’ condition - to still

be eligible for the bonus. Examples of box items included "It is hard for me to pay attention for longer periods of time" or "Something distracted me during the study".

Average_Self

Assessment of the strength of a person's honest self-concept was done using a subset of items from Black and Reynolds' (2016) Moral Identity Questionnaire, divided into the Moral Integrity subscale (MIQ-MI) and the Moral Self subscale (MIQ-MS). Items were picked based on perceived relevance for the study. Appendix A shows an overview of all items used to measure an honest self-concept. The reliability of the combined scales were assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which was 0.75 for all items combined. Answers to the items were rated on a 6-point Likert scale (1= *strongly disagree* to 6=*strongly agree*)

Results

The dependent measure of indicated difficulties was summarized into a dummy variable (0= no difficulties indicated; 1=one or more difficulties indicated). Descriptive statistics demonstrated a mean of 0.71 ($SD=.46$) which indicates that on average more participants reported they encountered any difficulties compared to no difficulties at all. The independent variable 'Condition' was categorical ('easy' or 'hard') thus a Chi-squared test was conducted to assess the correlation between 'Indicated Difficulties' and 'Condition'. The Chi-squared test demonstrated that there is no significant association ($p>.05$) between 'Indicated Difficulties' and 'Condition' with $X^2=.84$, $p=.36$.

Whether the moderating variable 'Honest Self-Concept' was associated with 'Indicated Difficulties' was assessed by a Pearson correlation. Therefore, a combined averaged variable 'Average_Self' of the items from the MIQ-MI scale and the MIQ-MS scale was computed. The combined subscales resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of .75, which made the combined subscales reliable to use ($\alpha >.7$). Pearson correlation found non-significant results

($p > .05$) with a correlation of $r = -.055$, $p = .70$ between 'Indicated Difficulties and 'Honest Self-Concept'.

All in all, both the association between the dependent variable and the independent variable and the association between the dependent variable and the moderating variable, are non-significant.

To further test both hypotheses, a logistic regression has been conducted, with 'Indicated Difficulties' as the dependent variable and 'Condition' and 'Average_Self' (including their interaction) as the predictors. Firstly, only 2.1% of the variance in 'Indicated Difficulties' could be explained by the model (McFadden $R^2 = 0.021$). Furthermore, Table 1 shows an overview of all results from the logistic regression. The first hypothesis assumed a positive effect of perceived unfair treatment on engagement in dishonest behavior. Results show no significant difference of 'Condition hard' ($B = .56$; $p = .37$) on 'Indicated Difficulties' between the two study conditions. This means that, despite a nominally higher rate of indicated difficulties in the hard text condition, the difference in indicated difficulties between the easy and the hard condition is statistically non-significant. Therefore, no evidence of a higher rate of dishonest behavior, which is inferred from the indicated difficulties, in the hard condition could be observed.

The second hypothesis predicted that the difficulty of maintaining an honest self-concept moderates the effect of the text condition on indicated difficulties. Table 1 shows the results of the interaction effect $\text{Average_Self} * \text{Condition}$ as non-significant ($B = .66$; $p = .58$). Thus, no evidence of an attenuating effect of maintaining an honest self-concept on the assumed association between the hard text condition and dishonest behavior could be found.

In conclusion, both hypotheses should be rejected.

Table 1

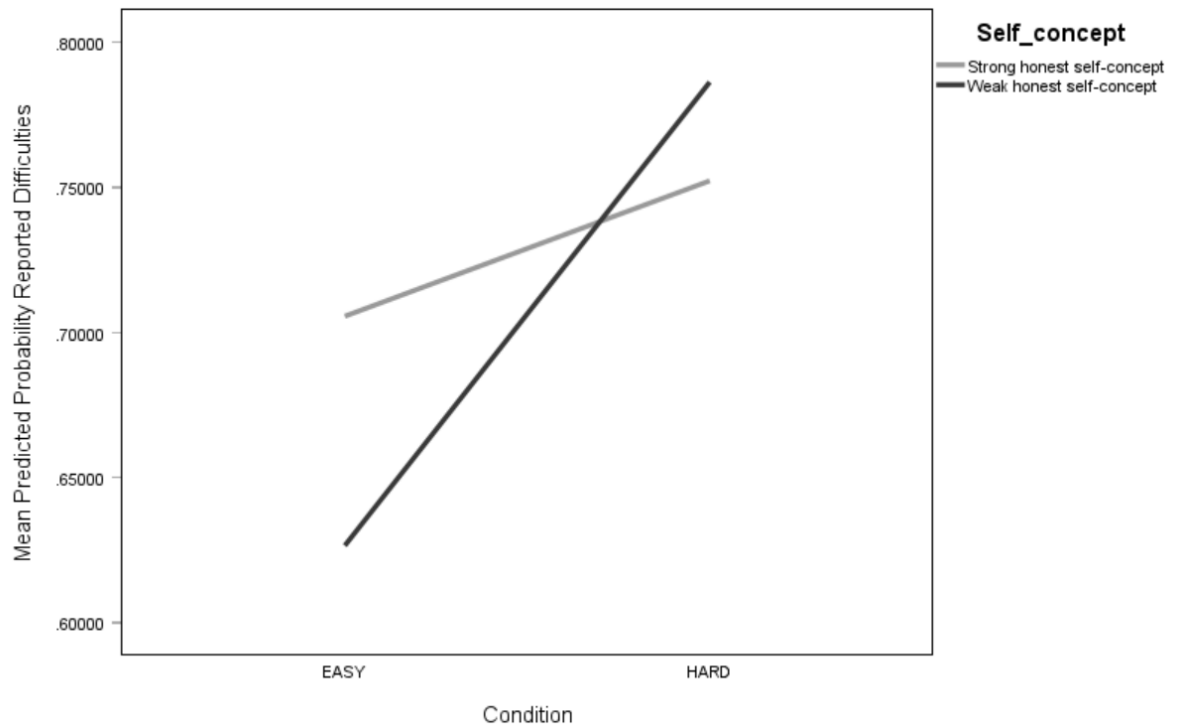
Logistic Regression of Condition (HARD) on Indicated Difficulties, moderated by Average_Self.

	B	SE	Odds Ratio	Z	p
Intercept	1.34	2.01	1.93	.67	.50
Average_Self	-.19	.54	1.75	-.36	.72
Condition (HARD)	.56	0.62	0.66	.90	.37
Average_Self*Condition	.66	1.18	1.94	.56	.58

In Figure 1 the interaction effect between ‘Honest Self-Concept and ‘Condition’ on ‘Indicated Difficulties has been plotted. The plot demonstrates the differences in ‘Indicated Difficulties’ from both categories of ‘Condition’ between the two different groups from ‘Average_Self’; namely ‘Weak Honest Self-Concept and ‘Strong Honest Self-Concept’. The ‘Strong-Honest Self-Concept’ group represents the individuals more aware of maintaining an honest self-concept. The plot itself seems to show an interaction effect, yet no conclusions can be drawn from Figure 1 since results were non-significant with $p=.58$ (see Table 1).

Figure 1

Interaction effect between perceived unfair treatment (Condition) and Self-Concept (Average_Self).



Discussion

Justice is of great significance for people since it helps them to maintain harmony. Therefore, honesty is highly valued within societies. Laws are designed to provide a framework to protect people from injustice, yet it cannot always offer clear answers to smaller or more ambiguous acts of unfairness. This makes that dishonesty, even though undesirable, still remains an important concept in our society.

This research paper aimed to contribute to the literature on dishonest behaviors by examining factors influencing individuals to engage in such behaviors, specifically in small-scale scenarios. This was done by analyzing the impact of perceived unfair treatment (a situational factor) as well as the impact of personal differences, namely the difficulty of maintaining an honest self-concept. The first hypothesis proposed that a perception of unfair treatment would elicit higher rates of dishonest behavior to self-servingly restore a sense of fairness. Additionally, the second hypothesis assumed that the difficulty of maintaining an honest self-concept would attenuate the proposed association between perceived unfair treatment and dishonest behavior.

Both hypotheses could not be supported. Regarding the first hypothesis, even though there seemed to be a nominally higher rate of indicated difficulties in the hard condition, no statistically significant result was found for the proposed association between perceived unfair treatment and dishonest behavior. Regarding the second hypothesis, no significant result of the interaction effect between an honest self-concept and perceived unfair treatment on dishonest behavior was found either. Due to the low statistical power and the non-significant results from the logistic regression analysis, findings of this study for both hypotheses are inconclusive.

Implications

Results are not in line with past research. First of all, regarding the economic framework on engaging in dishonest behaviors proposed by Becker (1968), participants would gain more from reporting any difficulties after the harder reading task, since this would give them extra SONA-points. Additionally, they were told that there was no possibility of checking any of the reported difficulties. Therefore, opting for one or more difficulties during the harder reading task seemed like a significant and economically logical reward of engaging in dishonesty. Besides, the chances of getting caught were low since participants knew no consequence (potential punishment) could follow from indicating any difficulties. In other words, the benefits of showing dishonest behavior clearly outweighed the potential loss of getting punished.

Additionally, besides analyzing dishonesty from an economic perspective, Rosenbaum and colleagues (2014) considered the impact of psychological perspectives in their literature review; specifically, the moral component inherent to dishonesty. They concluded that the psychological loss of lying decreases when individual rewards are dependent on the amount of effort put in, instead of chance. All students in the hard task condition had to put in a lot of effort to understand the unfamiliar technical terms of the text

whilst knowing they have to answer all questions correctly for the extra points. Therefore, it would have been less difficult to engage in dishonesty according to research of Rosenbaum and colleagues (2014). This is because the potential psychological loss of cheating should have less weight due to these unfair circumstances.

However, research of Mouminoux (2023) could serve as a possible explanation of the inconsistent findings of this research with past literature. Namely, Mouminoux (2023) proposed that people show a higher likelihood of engaging in dishonest behavior when they are confronted with potential losses instead of gains. In this study participants were only faced with a potential gain of the additional SONA-points, but this was not evidently contrasted with a potential loss. Therefore, this could serve as a potential explanation of the insignificant effects of the proposed association in the first hypothesis.

As could be derived from the result section, the assumed impact of the difficulty of maintaining an honest self-concept showed to be insignificant as well. Yet, this is conflicting with findings from previous research. According to past literature, individuals who have more difficulty to reinterpret their dishonest behavior to still fit their honest self-concept, show a smaller likelihood in engaging in dishonest behavior. For example, Mazar and colleagues (2008) showed that individuals more attentive to their moral standards, showed less cheating. This is because these individuals gain an intrinsic reward by reaffirming their self-concept as honest. More specifically, following the findings of Rosenbaum and colleagues (2014) it would have been expected that individuals could have more ease with reinterpreting their dishonest behavior by recalling or imagining a morally acceptable behavior. Namely, this experiment offered students space to potentially recall or imagine morally acceptable behaviors, for example helping put a friend after reporting one or more difficulties. According to Rosenbaum and colleagues (2014) this could compensate for their dishonesty and would enable students to maintain an honest self-concept more easily.

Strengths & Limitations

One evident limitation of the current research was the low sample size (N=52). This undermines the statistical power of the analysis, which makes it challenging to draw robust conclusions. Furthermore, a small sample size also makes generalizability to the population problematic due to the low external validity.

Another limitation could be attributed to the set-up of the study. It could be that the different options of indicated difficulties (from which dishonesty was inferred), appeared as too little acts of dishonesty. For example, difficulties as ‘something important distracted me’ or ‘I am a slow reader’ can quite easily be altered to self-servingly justify selecting one of these difficulties. Thus, it could be that participants could fit these statements within their range of morally acceptable behaviors and therefore did not have to alter their self-concept. This way, even individuals more aware of their personal moral standards, did not perceive difficulty by indicating one or more difficulties.

Yet, the study also has some strengths. Firstly, the set-up of this research was done in a realistic setting; the study was namely conducted on the SONA-platform. This is a platform that first-year students have to partake in several psychological studies to gain points. These points (SONA-credits) are required to pass a certain psychological course. This makes that the dependent variable measures actual behavior and not behavior participants had to imagine. More specifically, students really had something to gain by reporting any difficulties.

Additionally, experiments on dishonesty can be challenging to conduct due to ethical considerations. However, the way dishonesty was assessed in this study was in line with ethical considerations and can thus be seen as another strength. Namely, dishonesty was inferred from the amount of reported difficulties. Furthermore, only the individual himself

would find the implications of acting dishonest, since this set-up assured that other people would not be affected by the potential dishonest behavior.

Future Directions

For future research, it would be interesting to see whether a statistically significant effect would occur, between dishonest behavior and perceived unfair treatment, by increasing the sample size. This is because there seemed to be a positive trend in the hypothesized association between perceived unfair treatment and dishonest behavior.

To add to the literature of dishonest behavior it could be valuable to combine quantitative research with qualitative research. By conducting an interview with participants including attitudes and beliefs on the importance of honesty. Perhaps this could prime their personal norms and strengthen the self-concept. Consequently, an experiment with a manipulation, similar to the one in the current study, could be conducted. This could assess whether priming of morals within the self-concept, elicited higher or lower rates of dishonesty. Adding qualitative research would be a nice contribution in understanding the construct of fairness too. For example, even though the law provides a clear framework of what is fair, sometimes these rules are not being perceived as fair.

Conclusion

The results of this study were statistically insignificant, which means no direct contribution has been made to the existing literature of dishonesty. Yet, it is important to continue the research on dishonest behavior specifically on factors, both situational and personal, that contribute to this behavior. Policymakers can only design laws, regulating just behavior, for high-scale behaviors of dishonesty, such as corruption. However, it is the everyday low-scale acts of dishonesty that can be ambiguous and are prone to personal interpretation. Since honesty is highly valued by people and is crucial for maintaining harmony within our society, it is of great value to gain a deeper understanding of the

mechanisms underlying dishonesty. This study aimed to provide clearer insights into dishonest behavior within an academic environment. A better understanding in dishonesty with regard to academic rewards, can support the development of regulations to reduce dishonest behavior. This makes it important for future research to continue exploring the mechanisms underlying dishonesty.

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Appendix A

Moral Identity Questionnaire- Subscale Moral Integrity (MIQ-MI).

1. It is ok to do something you know is wrong if the rewards for doing it are great.
2. If no one is watching or will know it does not matter if I do the right thing.
3. It is more important that people think you are honest than being honest.
4. If no one could find out, it is okay to steal a small amount of money or other things that no one will miss.
5. There is no point in going out of my way to do something good if no one is around to appreciate it.
6. Lying and cheating are just things you have to do in this world.
7. Doing things that some people might view as not honest does not bother me.
8. If people treat me badly, I will treat them in the same matter.

Moral Identity Questionnaire- Subscale Moral Self (MIQ-MS).

1. Not hurting other people is one of the rules I live by.
2. It is important for me to treat other people fairly.
3. I want other people to know they can rely on me.
4. I always act in ways that do the most good and least harm to other people.
5. If doing something will hurt another person, I try to avoid it even if no one would know.
6. One of the most important things in life is to do what you know is right.

Appendix B

Manipulation Text

On the next screen, you will be randomly assigned to one of two conditions.

This can either be the easy reading comprehension condition or the hard reading

comprehension condition.

The goal of is the same in both conditions: You are asked to read a text and afterwards answer questions about it. Please make sure to carefully read the text. Based on our initial testing, the easy reading comprehension task should take about half as long as the hard reading comprehension task. Please try to give it your best efforts. This will really help us increase our understanding of the link between cognitive styles and reading comprehension. The difference between the conditions may seem unfair, but we cannot really study this in another way.

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated!

Appendix C

Assessment of Indocated Difficulties

Thank you for participating in this two-part study!

This study consisted of two parts.

In Part One, you were asked to fill out a few scales that will be used in further research down the line. In Part Two, you were asked to work on a cognitive task, and then to read a scientific text and answer questions about it.

Important Information!

Part Two offers bonus SONA credits for excellent performance. This was done to make it more likely that participants like you will give it an honest effort. Nevertheless, we are aware that individual circumstances might give an unfair advantage to some participants, thus making it difficult for others to claim the bonus reward.

If one or more of the following situations apply to you, you may still be eligible to claim the

bonus SONA credits. Even though this may touch on sensitive subjects, please note that **you remain unidentifiable** to the researchers of this study. The researchers are **not able to link your SONA number to your identity**.

If **any** of the following apply to you, you are eligible for bonus credits. If none apply to you, simply leave it blank.

- I am a slow reader
- It is hard for me to pay attention for longer periods of time
- I have a form of ADHD / ADD
- I am dyslexic
- Something important distracted me during the study
- There is something that affected my performance, but I do not want to say what it is.