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Personality as a Moderator of the Relationship between Stress and Academic Deviance

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Abstract
Academic deviance poses a continual threat to the education system from its persistence through generations and its presence in almost every form of institutionalized education (Davis et al., 1992). The aim of the present study was to integrate both situational and individual components of stress to examine their influence on academic deviance while testing the moderating role of trait impulsiveness on the degree of academic deviance displayed. Participants were 125 (98 women, 27 men) college students at a private university in the southern region of the United States. The Academic Dishonesty Inventory (Lucas, 2005) was used to measure academic deviance, while the Barratt Impulsiveness Scale 10 (BIS-10) was utilized in order to assess impulsiveness. The Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, Kamarck & Mermelstein, 1983) was used to gauge participants’ stress level. It was found that there was a significant, positive relationship between trait impulsiveness and academic deviance. However, the relationship between stress and academic deviance was not significant. Stress may play less of a role than impulsiveness in determining if an individual will engage in academic deviance. As Anderman et al. (2010) suggest, impulsiveness is indicative of the lack of self-control necessary to disincline individuals to be academically deviant.

The concept of academic deviance has been documented for the past 60 years while legitimate research has only began in roughly the last 20 years (Davis et al., 1992). Academic deviance can be here considered cheating among college students who intentionally use materials, information or study aids which are prohibited in work submitted for credit. The prevalence estimates for academic deviance from previous studies range from 76 to 90% of all college students in a given study (Baird, 1980; Stern & Havlicek, 1986). More men tend to engage in academic deviance than women and rates are higher among college students than other groups. The prevalence also varies by the type of school attended, where larger public schools report more academic deviance than smaller private ones (Davis et al., 1992). Academic deviance poses a continual threat to the education system from its persistence through generations and its presence in almost every form of institutionalized education.

The antecedents of academic deviance remain an issue of heavy dispute. Studies have shown that there are more factors at work that provide motivation for cheating behaviors besides academic success. There may individual or situational components to cheating behavior. According to McCabe and Trevino (1996), one situational component to academic deviance originates in a student’s academic environment. In small private institutions students feel a sense of community with their classmates where individuals may feel guilty about cheating. Ethical values at such institutions are encouraged more so than in their larger public counterparts. Attitudes were a contributing factor to academic deviance in a study by Klein, Levenburg, McKendall, and Mothersell (2006). Business students were compared to other majors and no statistical differences were found, yet the attitudes of college students with business majors made them more relaxed about committing academic deviance. Parental perceptions were found to be a factor affecting academic deviance, and it was the second biggest predictor of cheating behaviors (Koljatic et al., 2003). Gender and age have also been seen to influence academic deviance at an individual level. In a meta-analysis men were shown to cheat more than women (Ford & Richardson, 1994). Younger unmarried students were also found to cheat more than others (Whitley, 1998). The aim of the present study is to integrate both situational and individual components by examining stress...
(a situational component) and evaluating its influence on academic deviance while testing the moderating role of personality (an individual component) on the degree of academic deviance displayed.

**Stress as a Predictor of Academic Deviance**

The theoretical framework of stress has evolved over time and lends itself to a host of different interpretations. Selye (1956) introduced one early definition of stress which maintains that stress is as a result of demands placed on a body, which may take the form of any nonspecific response. The author proposes that stress responses are stressor specific and can be predicted. Thus, Selye devised the theory called general adaptation syndrome (GAS). GAS is a theory that is based on the medical model, therefore holds physiological responses as its focus. This is a response based theory that comprises three stages. In the alarm stage, the body releases adrenaline in preparation for dealing with a potentially dangerous stressor. Heart rate and blood pressure increase and blood flow is redirected to the muscles and brain as well. As the stressor persists, the resistance stage commences. This stage is characterized by the physiological adaptation to the stressor for a short duration until the resources are depleted in the individual, signaling the beginning of the final stage. In the last stage, exhaustion occurs until the body shuts down. As a medical model of stress, this theory concentrates on the individual and neglects situational components of stress.

Lazarus (1966, 1991) subsequently maintained that there are both individual and situational components of stress, i.e., that there is a transaction between a stimulus and a response. The theoretical framework of the transactional model incorporates stress as a naturally ongoing process, where individuals constantly receive stimuli from the environment and find ways to cope with stressful events that occur (Cooper et al., 2001). As a result, stress is always in a state of flux in tandem with a specific environment. This theory is sometimes used interchangeably with the interactional approach to stress as they both involve a stimulus and a response that influence each other in an individual's environment. The transactional process involves two types of appraisal before an individual can begin to adapt to the stressor. Lazarus (1966) proposes that primary appraisal takes place when available coping resources are identified. In the first appraisal, meaning is attributed to the stimuli. The meaning attributed to the stressor directly affects what coping strategies are used during the secondary appraisal. Moreover, there is no secondary appraisal unless the stimulus is considered threatening. Therefore stress occurs when formidable stimuli are appraised to be beyond the capabilities of the coping strategies, putting the individual's well-being in jeopardy (Lazarus, 1991).

One of the earlier studies to link stress to academic deviance was undertaken by Drake (1941). The purpose of the study was to identify factors motivating cheating behavior as well as the extent to which cheating behaviors occur among college students. Participants were 126 women who were either sophomores or juniors in an all women college where a strict honor system was in place. The participants were first given psychometric tests and it was determined that the scores were approximately normally distributed. The participants were given achievement tests each week on material covered that same week in their classes. The tests were submitted for correction unbeknownst to
them, and then handed back. The students were then able to score their own tests and submit their results to the experimenter and a confederate. Students were unaware that their tests were being checked twice to assess whether there were cheating behaviors involved. It was found that 30% of all participants altered their scores. Of the aforementioned percent, no A students engaged in academic deviance while four percent of B students, 23% of C students, 75% of D students, and 67% of F students changed their scores on the tests. Therefore, Drake concluded that the percentage of the students that engaged in academic deviance was almost directly proportional to poor academic achievement. Drake suggests that the competitive system in academia is at least a contributory factor to the cheating impetus apparent is college students. This is especially true for environments where academic excellence is paramount in the culture of the institution, usually in the form of an honor system.

Moon et al. (2009) sought to utilize the general strain theory (GST) to investigate the effects of key strains, affect and various conditioning factors on general deviance. Moon et al. explain that GST entails different key strains that have significant effects on the youth by producing negative emotions which lead to deviance. Strains are psychosomatic responses to stressors and the literature identifies goal blockage, family conflict, parental punishment, teacher emotional punishment, racial discrimination, gender discrimination, criminal discrimination, and negative community environment as the key strains that lead to deviance. Participants were 294 (153 women, 141 men) freshmen college students of a University in the western United States. Participants were 79% Caucasian and 21% non-Caucasian. Freshmen were used because the social interaction level will still be indicative of a high school capacity. Questionnaires were used to evaluate each strain, the mediating effect of negative affect, and to identify salient conditioning factors. Conditioning factors included deviant peer association, problem solving ability, familial support, and attitude toward violence. Participants were also asked the frequency at which they demonstrated deviant behaviors. It was found that there was a significant relationship between general deviance and goal blockage, teachers’ emotional punishment and racial discrimination. In particular, racial discrimination was positively associated with violent deviance. In addition, teachers’ emotional punishment was positively associated with all types of measured deviance in the study which included general deviance, violent deviance, and nonviolent deviance.

Judge, Scott, and Ilies (2006) focused on the measurement of workplace deviance and the influence of hostility and job attitudes, while investigating the moderating effects of trait hostility. Participants were 74 full-time employees located in organizations throughout the southeastern United States. The average age was 36 years and most participants were women (72%). Participants were recruited via e-mail to participate in a web-based survey which was to be completed after every work day for the duration of three weeks. Measurements were conducted for 15 possible observations which were included in the item subsets of the surveys. Participant supervisors, significant other, and family members were given separate surveys which measured overt participant behavior. Findings indicated that job satisfaction was negatively correlated to workplace deviance whereas momentary hostility and workplace deviance were positively correlated. Within-individual differences accounted for over
have the variance in workplace deviance ratings. Judge et al. suggest that the remaining variance may be attributed to situational factors which subsequent research may address.

A study by Roberts, Scherer, and Bowyer (2011) examined the role of psychological capital (PsyCap) in determining the degree to which uncivil work behaviors are influenced by job stress. Psychological capital refers to a positive psychological state which may be operationalized into self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resiliency. Participants were 390 employees (64% women, 36% men) of a variety of industries who ranged in age 19 to 52 years ($M = 20.86$, $SD = 3.45$). Participants were employed for at least six months averaging two years of overall tenure. There were 96% of participants who were also full-time students during the study. Participants were directed to a survey which was administered online via Qualtrics.com where their results would only be valid if the participant was 19 years, worked in the same job for at least six months, and provided consent. Results indicated that there was a significant positive correlation between job stress and incivility. There was a negative correlation found between PsyCap and job stress. In addition, PsyCap was found to moderate the relationship between job stress and incivility, where higher levels of PsyCap mitigated the levels of incivility induced by more elevated levels of job stress. Roberts et al. suggest that PsyCap is responsible for individuals not engaging in deviance even with elevated levels of job stress due to the resulting outlook on one’s life and the incorporation of resilience.

The Moderating Role of Personality

The study of personality as proposed by Costa & McCrae (1992) encompasses the investigation of stable traits or individual differences. These may be broken down into five main categories which include openness to experience, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. Atkinson, Atkinson, Smith, Bem and Nolen-Hoeksema (2000) explain that with openness to experience individuals may exhibit unusual ideas and curiosity for learning. By extension creativity may be seen as well as an appreciation for novelty and variety. Conscientiousness describes an individual with a well-developed sense of discipline, meticulousness, and are goal-oriented. Individuals in this category are rarely spontaneous. People exhibiting extraversion are energetic, assertive, and are highly gregarious. These individuals typically have positive dispositions as well. Agreeableness entails individuals being compassionate and cooperative while neuroticism describes a susceptibility to unpleasant emotions. There is also a lack of impulse control apparent which allows people to act on the discomfort that is felt.

More specific to the higher order factor neuroticism is the facet of impulsiveness. Impulsiveness outlines a general tendency for action devoid of consideration for the logical consequences of said action (Anderman, Cupp & Lane, 2010). Dickman (1990) proposes that there is both a functional and a dysfunctional type of impulsiveness. Functional impulsiveness entails individual acting using very little forethought once this method proves most effective. Dysfunctional impulsiveness outlines action using little forethought when it typically proves to be a source of difficulty.
Anderman, Cupp, and Lane (2010) examined the relationship between impulsivity and academic cheating. The study integrates the concepts of classroom goal structures and teacher credibility in their analysis. Classroom goal structures are the perceptions that students have regarding their goals that are stress inducing in a classroom setting, while teacher credibility describes students’ perceptions of the competence, trustworthiness, and caring of their teachers. The study encompasses four main hypotheses: (H1) Impulsive students will report more cheating behaviors than non-impulsive students, (H2) Cheating behaviors will occur less frequently when students perceive a mastery of goal structure, (H3) Cheating behaviors will occur less frequently when students perceive that their health teachers are credible, and (H4) The relations of impulsivity to cheating behaviors will be moderated by perceptions of a classroom mastery goal structure and by perceptions of teacher credibility. Specifically, impulsive students will be less likely to report cheating in master-oriented classrooms and when they perceive their teachers as being credible. The study comprised participants from a larger study of HIV and pregnancy prevention. Participants were 583 (280 men, 303 women) high school students attending schools in the western region of the United States. The majority of the participants were 9th graders (81.1%). Participants completed a survey in their health education classes. The survey assessed academic cheating behaviors, classroom goal structures, and teacher credibility. Demographic information was also collected.

Results showed that academic cheating behaviors were positively associated with impulsive decision making and negatively with goal structure measures, teacher credibility, and grade point average, thus giving support for hypothesis 1 through 3 (Anderman et al., 2010). However, hypothesis 4 was not supported as classroom goal mastery did not moderate the impulsivity and cheating behaviors relationship. Authors note that a major limitation of their study was the use of young high school students who fall within the normal age range for above average impulsivity. Conversely, they maintain that the study was able to identify individuals who were more likely to engage in cheating behaviors later on in life and that impulsivity may be a contributory factor.

Lynam and Miller (2004) examined four different personality pathways through which impulsive behavior is manifested into deviance. The authors utilize the five factor theory of personality to establish a theoretical framework for the four pathways. The first pathway was impulsiveness itself, a facet of neuroticism, which outlines an individual’s tendency to give in to strong impulses accompanied by negative emotions. The second is excitement seeking, a facet of extraversion, where an individual has a higher preference for stimulation. Thirdly, self-discipline, a facet of conscientiousness, outlines an individual’s resilience for the purposes of goal attainment despite boredom or fatigue. Lastly, deliberation, also a facet of conscientiousness, entails a person’s ability to consider consequences of action before acting.

Three separate samples were used in the study (Lynam & Miller, 2004). The first sample consisted of 716 (260 men, 456 women) college students enrolled in psychology courses of a large university in the southeastern region of the United States. The second sample consisted of 481 (242 men, 239 women) participants from the Lexington Longitudinal Study of substance
abuse. Participants aged 21-22 years with histories of substance abuse. The third sample consisted of 211 (105 men, 106 women) participants enrolled in an introductory psychology course based on the results of a screening protocol. The first sample completed an impulsive behavior scale which measured the four pathways to impulsive behavior, the second sample were issued questionnaires before being brought into a lab for interviews lasting three-four hours. Once in the laboratory, participants filled out surveys that measured life histories and personality factors associated with the four pathways. The interviews assessed substance abuse. The third sample was issued self-report measures of personality as well as given tasks in the laboratory to complete which measured social information processing. Results indicated that impulsiveness is not a unitary structure as there were many factors that influenced the resulting impulsive behavior. Also, the results provided support for the four pathways to impulsive behavior, particularly in terms of deliberation. However sensation seeking was indiscriminately related to all forms of deviance. The authors argue that the study add to existing research of the multifaceted nature of the criminal origins. Personality variables are an important factor in determining impulsive behavior and whether it will lead to deviance.

Vigil-Colet and Morales-Vives (2005) examined the moderating effects of impulsiveness on intelligence and academic achievement. Participants were 241 (134 women, 107 men) secondary school students from two states schools in Montblanch and Catalonia, Spain. Participants ranged in age between 12 and 17 years (M = 14.21). Inventories were distributed to groups of 40 participants each which measured impulsiveness and intelligence, and the number of failed school subjects was provided by teachers. It was found that impulsivity was negatively related to intelligence scores, where the correlation was strongest (r = -.32) in word fluency intelligence subscales and least (r = -.15) in reasoning intelligence subscales. All impulsivity scales, except functional impulsivity, were positively related to number of failed subjects. The author suggests that results do not indicate that impulsivity is directly related to intelligence and the resources and achievements of individuals are moderated by impulsivity.

Trait affectivity has been utilized in order to predict job performance as well as counterproductive performance (Johnson, Tolentino, Rodopman, & Cho, 2010). Trait affectivity, unlike state affectivity, occurs independently of an individual’s awareness and is processed at an implicit level. The study used implicit and explicit measures to determine their usefulness in job performance prediction. Two pilot studies were done to gauge the agreement between the implicit and explicit scores, and also to examine score stability on the implicit measures. It was found that there was a positive correlation between implicit and explicit scores. Also there were strong and significant correlations between different scores in the second pilot study indicating stability. Regarding the primary study, participants were 59% men with an average of 35.70 years. Participants had and average tenure of 43.8 months, worked 41 hours per week, and were employed in either retail or government jobs. Participants were issued measures of implicit and explicit trait affectivity while participants’ supervisors were issued job performance surveys. Counterproductive work behavior was self-reported. Data was collected 120 matched pairs of employees and supervisors. Results indicated that positive affectivity had a positive relationship with job performance.
whereas negative affectivity had a negative relationship to job performance. Negative affectivity was positively related to counterproductive work behaviors. Johnson et al. indicated that relationships involving negative affectivity are more complex. This may be due to other implicit factors such as anxiety and rumination which were not accounted for yet interfere with completing tasks in the work environment.

Goussinsky (2011) also used personality in a moderating capacity, to examine the impact of customer aggression on employees with positive dispositions. This was done over the course of three separate studies. The first consisted of call center employees from northern Israel. Participants were 187 (70.5% women) employees who ranged in age between 20-35 years. There were 52.7% of participants that worked between one and three years, 35.7% worked for less than a year, and 11.5% worked for more than four years. Participants were issued questionnaires which measured frequency of customer aggression, negative and positive affectivity, and job induced tension. Results indicated a positive correlation between frequency of customer aggression and job induced tension. In addition, employees high in positive affectivity were more negatively affected, in terms of frequency, by customer aggression than employees low on positive affectivity.

The second study (Goussinsky, 2011) investigated whether positive affectivity moderated the relationship between customer aggression, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions. Participants were 422 (71.5% women, 28.5% men) service providers from welfare institutes, hospitals, banks, supermarkets, leisure and entertainment organizations, call center organizations and others. Participants ranged in age between 20-50 years. There were 51.2% of participants with at least one year of job experience while the rest were exceeded that amount. Participants were issued questionnaires that measured customer aggression frequency, negative affectivity, positive affectivity, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions. It was found that frequency of customer aggression was positively related to turnover intentions and negatively related to job satisfaction. Frequency of customer aggression was negatively related to job satisfaction and was higher for employees high on positive affectivity than for those with low positive affectivity. Employees that were low on positive affectivity were not affected by customer aggression. Customer aggression was positively related to turnover intentions for employees high on positive affectivity.

The third study (Goussinsky, 2011) investigated the moderating effect of extraversion on the relationship between customer aggression, job satisfaction, and emotional dissonance relationships while controlling for neuroticism. Emotional dissonance indicates the incongruence between emotions that are felt and those that are displayed. Participants were 156 (84% women) college students from northern Israel. Participants ranged in age between 20-35 years. There were 41% who worked less than a year, 42.9% worked one to three years, and 16% worked for four years and above. Questionnaires were administered during class hours which measured frequency of customer aggression, extraversion, neuroticism, job satisfaction, and emotional dissonance. There was a significant positive relationship between customer aggression and emotional dissonance and a negative relationship with job satisfaction. Customer aggression was negatively related to job satisfaction for students high in extraversion while customer aggression was positively related to
emotional dissonance only for students high in extraversion.

The moderating role of personality was also studied by Bowling and Eschleman (2010) to investigate the relationship between job stress and counterproductive work behavior (CWB). The transactional theory of stress was the study’s contextual basis to investigate whether CWB was a result of ineffective coping measures to job stress and if personality moderated this maladaptation. Personality was operationalized into agreeableness, conscientiousness and negative affectivity. Participants were 726 (55% women) who averaged 38 years. There were 80% of participants that attended college. A questionnaire was emailed to participants that measured conscientiousness and agreeableness, negative trait affectivity, role stressors, organizational constraints or limitations, interpersonal conflict, and CWB. The results indicated that role stressors, organizational constraints, and interpersonal conflict were positively related to CWB. There was also a positive relationship between negative trait affectivity and CWB. It was found that conscientiousness moderated the effects of the independent variables on CWB where employees high on conscientiousness exhibited less CWB than those low on conscientiousness. Bowling and Eschleman argued that response repertoires are responsible for the prioritization of coping strategies in employees. Individuals high on negative trait affectivity will quicker engage in CWB before using alternative responses whereas individuals low on negative trait affectivity, or high in conscientiousness, will resort to CWB only after exploring other avenues of coping. Gino, Schweitzer, Mead, and Ariely (2011) explored how self-control depletion promotes unethical behavior, where moral identity moderates this relationship, in four different studies. The first study sought to test the hypothesis that there will be a positive relationship between self-regulatory resource depletion and unethical behavior. Participants were 100 (58 men) college students from local universities in the southeastern region of the United States who had a mean age of 22.12 years. Participants were assigned to one of two groups; source depletion or no-depletion group. The experiment included a task to manipulate self-regulatory resource depletion and a task for cheating behavior assessment. Once the two tasks were completed, participants were required to complete a questionnaire in private cubicles. The questionnaire asked participants to rate the difficulty of the first task, rate the degree of self-control needed not to cheat, and to describe what they felt was the purpose of the experiment. Results indicated a positive relationship between self-regulatory resource depletion and unethical behavior, leading support to the first hypothesis.

The second study set out to test two hypotheses. Participants that were depleted in self-regulatory resources will have less moral awareness than non-depleted participants, and that moral awareness mediates the relationship between depletion and unethical behavior (Gino et al., 2011). Participants were 97 (50 men) undergraduate and graduate students from local colleges in the southeastern region of the United States who had a mean age of 21.80 years. Participants were either assigned to the self-regulatory resource depletion condition or the no-depletion condition. Each group undertook three phases; a writing task (Manipulating self-regulatory resource depletion), a problem solving task (Assessing cheating behaviors), and a word completion task (Assessing ethical salience). The participants were required to answer a questionnaire upon
completing the three tasks which asked demographics and the same questions from the prior study. There was a positive relationship between moral awareness and unethical behaviors, as well as ethics-related concepts mediating the relationship. Thus, the results lend support to the two hypotheses.

The third study predicted that moral identities will be negatively related to unethical behavior irrespective of self-control resource depletion. Participants were 65 (29 men) undergraduate students from a college in the southeastern region of the United States who had a mean age of 21.33 years. Again the participants were assigned to either the depletion or no-depletion condition. The tasks were the same as those in the second study plus additional task which measured the difference between self-reported and actual performance of each participant. It was found that depletion increased participants’ tendency to inflate their performance among those low in moral identity. Therefore, the hypothesis was not supported.

The final and fourth study predicted that refraining from unethical behavior will consume self-control (Gino et al., 2011). Participants were 92 (48 men) undergraduate college students from a college in the southeastern region of the United States who had a mean age of 20.79 years. Participants were required to undergo the methods from the three previous studies and then given a final task to allow participants an opportunity to cheat while measuring self-control. Results indicated that participants who resisted the temptation to do cheating behaviors performed worse than those that gave into temptation, lending support to the final hypothesis. The authors suggest that impulsiveness may be a byproduct of and individual’s environment as everyday activities have the potential for self-control resource depletion. They maintain that once these resources are depleted, unethical behavior, in whatever contextual form appropriate, may arise as a result.

Empathy and narcissism were used in order to examine their moderating role in the relationship between types of students and ethical decision making (Brown, Sautter, Littvay, Sautter, & Bearnes, 2010). Participants were 244 college students in a large research university. There were 97 finance students, 73 management students, 42 marketing students, and 32 accounting students. The median student age was 21.4 years. The study utilized a web-based survey to get demographic information, assess psychological profiles, and to ascertain personality profiles. The results indicated that finance students, on average, had higher levels of narcissism that the other majors. Also, finance and accounting majors were less empathetic than the other majors. In addition, individuals exhibiting more narcissism made more deviant decisions than those individuals with less narcissism whereas those high on empathy made more morally accepted ethical decisions. The authors suggest that the business discipline is one that cultivates a particular mindset in students to leads to the lack of ethical decisions which is further exacerbated by personality differences.

Rationale and Hypotheses

Academic deviance poses a continual threat to the education system from its persistence through generations and its presence in almost every form of institutionalized education (Davis et al., 1992). The aim of the present study was to integrate both situational and individual components of stress to examine their
influence on academic deviance while testing the moderating role of trait impulsiveness on the degree of academic deviance displayed. Academic deviance refers to cheating behaviors among college students which include intentionally using materials, information or study aids which are prohibited in work submitted for credit. Stress refers to demands placed on a body, which may take the form of any nonspecific response (Selye, 1956). Impulsiveness outlines a general tendency for action devoid of consideration for the logical consequences of said action (Anderman, Cupp & Lane, 2010).

Many studies have provided support for the stress and deviance relationship and have indicated the need for future research in order to holistically postulate solutions to the problem. (Drake, 1941; Moon et al., 2009; Judge et al., 2006). These studies have recognized that over time the problem of academic deviance grows due to new methods of deviance being developed. New research must therefore be done taking into consideration factors which were not previously explored. Thus, the present study postulates the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: Stress will be positively associated with academic deviance.

Hypothesis 2: Impulsiveness will be positively associated with academic deviance.

Hypothesis 3: Impulsiveness will moderate the relationship between stress and academic deviance, where more impulsiveness will preclude the display of more academic deviance.

Method

Participants

Participants were 125 (98 women, 27 men) college students enrolled in a private university in the southeastern region of the United States. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 47 years ($M = 21.44, SD = 3.88$). Participant ethnicities were Hispanic (37.1%), African American (27.4%), White/Non-Hispanic (18.5%), Afro-Caribbean (8.1%), Asian (1.6%), Native American (.8%), and Other (6.5%). The majority of participants were psychology majors (46.2%) followed by biology (7.7%), criminology (5.4%), nursing (5.4%), pre-law (3.8%), exercise science (3.8%), communication (3.1%), theatre (2.3%), education (1.5%), history, art (0.8%), business (0.8%), chemistry (0.8%), and students also responded with “other” majors (11.5%). The grade point average of the participants ranged from 1.5 to 4.0 ($M = 3.15, SD = .52$) on a 4.0 scale. The participants were freshmen (16.9%), sophomores (35.5%), juniors (23.4%), and seniors (24.2%).

Procedure

Participants were contacted via email to participate in an online survey including a link to SurveyMonkey.com. Also, flyers were posted requesting participation in the study. A link to the website was posted on the flyers. Students had the opportunity to earn extra credit in a psychology course for their participation. Once participants entered SurveyMonkey.com, they were presented with a cover letter describing the project and the assistance required of them. Participants were then presented with a series of questions addressing the variables in the study as well as demographic questions.
Measures

*Academic deviance* was assessed using the Academic Dishonesty Inventory (Lucas, 2005). The measure contains 19 items on a dichotomous scale where the options were either 0 “Yes” or 1 “No”. The measure contains items such as “Did another student’s coursework for him or her?” A higher score indicated a higher level of academic deviance in individuals. The reliability coefficient for the measure stands at $\alpha = .85$ in the present study.

*Stress* was evaluated utilizing the Perceived Stress Scale 10 (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983). The measure contains 14 items on a 5-point scale which anchored from 0 “Never” to 4 “Very often”. Items such as “During last semester, how often had you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?” measured stress while items such as “During last semester, how often have you dealt successfully with irritating life hassles?” were reversed scored. A higher overall score was indicative of higher levels of stress in an individual. In the present study, the reliability coefficient for the measure stands at $\alpha = .77$.

*Impulsiveness* was measured using the Barratt Impulsivity Scale 10 (BIS-10) (Barratt, 1985). The measure contains 34 items on a 4-point scale in which anchored from 1 “Rarely/Never” to 4 “Almost Always/Always”. Items such as “I make up my mind quickly” were designed to test impulsiveness while items such as “I plan tasks carefully” were reverse scored. A higher overall score indicated a higher level of impulsiveness. The reliability coefficient for the measure stands at $\alpha = .85$.

Results

In order to test hypothesis 1, a correlation analysis was conducted between stress and academic deviance. The correlation was not significant ($r = .01, p = .914$). To test hypothesis 2, a correlation coefficient was then computed between impulsiveness and academic deviance. The zero-order correlation between impulsiveness and academic deviance was significant ($r = .22, p = .015$). Table 1 reports the means, standard deviations, correlations and coefficient alphas for all variables.

In order to test hypothesis 3, Baron and Kenny’s (1986) test for moderation was applied. The first relation examined was for stress. Impulsiveness was entered in step 2, followed by the interaction in step 3. The hypothesized moderation was not supported. The results are reported in Table 2.

Discussion

The present study sought to test the moderating role of impulsiveness on the relationship between stress and academic deviance. Results indicated that levels of stress in participants were not significant predictors of their subsequent displays of academic deviance, thereby not lending support to the first hypothesis. However, impulsiveness significantly predicted academic deviance, thus supporting the second hypothesis. Furthermore, impulsiveness failed to moderate the relationship between stress and academic deviance, i.e., hypothesis 3 was not supported. Interestingly, participants showing high levels of stress were also more likely to exhibit impulsiveness.

Contrary to expectations, students’ perceived level of overall stress did not
predict academically deviant behaviors. This could be attributed to the present study not examining the different sources of stress that may be associated with academic deviance. Prior research has found increased levels of deviance present in participants who had stress due to racial discrimination and the punishment of teachers as opposed to stress caused by goal blocking behavior (Moon et al., 2009). Future studies may expand upon the conceptualization of stress by identifying the types of stressors that are specific to the academic and social context unique to college students. This will function to isolate certain types of stress which may be more useful in the prediction of academic deviance.

The second hypothesis examined the relationship between impulsiveness and academic deviance. In line with predictions, individuals high on impulsiveness were more likely to display behaviors associated with academic deviance. Future research can further examine the issue by identifying certain triggers for impulsivity. For instance, Anderman et al. (2010) suggest that the credibility of teachers as well as the value placed on the information disseminated may be contributory factors to whether or not impulsivity is manifested among college students.

The moderating role of impulsiveness in the relationship between stress and academic deviance was to be investigated by the third hypothesis. That is, the higher degree of impulsiveness displayed by an individual the more academic deviance will be undertaken as a result of stress. However, there was no evidence for the moderating role of impulsiveness. This is contrary to previous findings possibly due to the manner in which certain variables were broken down and the participants that were tested in the present study. Lynam and Miller (2004) examined impulsiveness in four distinct pathways by which deviance was to manifest itself in participants. Breaking down impulsiveness in to four major constructs may suggest that some aspects of the variable are more useful in predicting deviance than others. Also, Bowling and Eschleman (2010) used participants above the typical college age and tested for CWB. Impulsivity can be then surmised to moderate a different variation of stress and manifested in the work environment rather than in the school environment.

Results indicated that elevated levels of stress were found to be associated with impulsiveness in participants. Findings are consistent with existing research (Diller, Patros, & Prentice, 2010), which suggests that possible explanation may be that stress contributes to students seeking instant gratification rather than delayed gratification. That is, the immediacy characterized by impulsiveness may be produced as a final resolution to cope with stressful events. The authors maintain that stress is an integral factor in in determining impulsivity however findings were specific to female college students.

Certain limitations must be considered in order to properly assess the results in the present study. It should be noted that the sample hails from a small catholic university in southeastern North America and is not representative of the entire student population. In addition, the present study makes use of self-report questionnaires which may susceptible to bias or deceit from the participants (Barratt, 1985; Cohen et al., 1983; Lucas, 2005). Also, the study did not seek to establish causal relationships, thus the variance may also be attributed to factors which were not taken into account (O’Grady, 1982). A further complication arises with the measures themselves. Results
are limited to account only for the variance allowed by the reliability of the measures. Thus even with large accounts of variance, there will still be considerable variance to be explained.

As Vigil-Colet and Morales-Vives (2005) suggest, the daily hassles in students’ lives contribute significantly to the depletion of psychological resources which, in turn, are exacerbated by trait impulsivity. Therefore, school administrators may want to implement more recreational services to mitigate the effects of stressful events, such as outings. In addition students may benefit from sharing their experiences with other students and forming bonds as a result. A more holistic experience may be necessary to combat the effects of stress associated with typical college life.

References


