

THE POLITICS OF LIES AND DECEIT. WHY DO PEOPLE COPY IN EXAMS?

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Abstract

Cheating and copying in exams in schools and universities is not only an unethical behavior, but a genuinely widespread phenomenon, stemming from the very nature of the public school system. The present paper aims at approaching the issue of cheating and copying at exams, from high-school to university level and beyond, in the public life, politics, at exams for getting a job, encountered at both young students and adults. A phenomenon spanning countries, going beyond national borders that has persisted all along the years and adapted to modern technology. The analysis focuses on students who copy at the exams, professors who cheat at the tenure exam, supervisors who tolerate cheating and helping at exams are all aspects each and every one of us has faced whether in one's personal studies and professional experience or coping with one's school children school problems in order to avoid this mass, generalized phenomenon.

The main research method employed for the present presentation is participant and non-participant observation, years of work experience, being drawn up from the point of view of a keen observer of the phenomenon backed by recent studies on the topic. The results of the study show that the reason why people resort to this are varied, the most relevant perhaps, being the attempt at achieving more than one could possibly do and for increasing self-esteem or gaining the desired outcomes easy as possible. To conclude, the way numerous studies show, there is a growing concern for the phenomenon, which spans countries, from Europe to the US and other, while the future looks worrying once the educational system of a country is being forced into on-line study which is shown to lessen the quality of education and fair assessment.

Keywords: *Cheating & copying, integrity, plagiarism, ethics & unethical behavior, fraud.*

I. Introduction

The practice of copying in schools, high-schools and faculties is so widespread that it is hard to believe that there *is* a way to counteract this widespread and advanced phenomenon. It is acknowledged that it is and has become a “national phenomenon” that has transcended borders as well. True to say, though, any person who sits for an examination is tempted to do so. Copying is not an honest thing to do, neither for oneself, nor to one's colleagues, let alone professors. Copying is fraud, but nowadays it is very common, in line with the times!

The present paper is an attempt at highlighting the phenomenon which has continued for generations and trying to find answers to the question “why do people copy”? As to the methods of counteracting the phenomenon, the most common of them are the administrative measures, and criminal sanctions. This type of fraud is associated with corruption and unfortunately corrupt professors are to be found both in schools and universities, accepting goods, money and there are several cases resorting to sexual favors are implied. In this analysis I aim at showing that people

and mostly students may be tempted to cheat in their work or exams either because of high demands on one's time or uncertainty about your academic capabilities. What is done about the phenomenon? Not much, and thinking of the consequences for the person involved or others does not occur often. Education in Romania has a lot to change, even there where 'on paper' it is apparently all right. Education changes with the new technologies, knowledge is more difficult to convey than in the past, because the people need more complex things and this is one weak point of the system.

Methods used. The main research method employed for the present presentation is participant and non-participant observation, years of work experience, being drawn up from the point of view of a keen observer of the phenomenon backed by recent studies on the topic. Faced with this intriguing issue present in every corner of our mundane life, one wonders what channels are best to be explored. Copying at the exams in Romania has been a phenomenon encountered both in communist times and in the would-be democracy of nowadays.

It is not only a phenomenon that is present in school exams, but also in other professions. According to specialists in the field [Danilet, C. 2019] there have been found judicial police officers aiming at becoming magistrates who were caught copying at the exam using performing devices from their workplace! When looking at the TV talk shows, at the attitudes and language of the people both in the street and in the digital media, the politicians' discourses and the background of people who reached high up on the social ladder, going all through what is going on in daily life, with an increasing number of crimes and offences, it is obvious that all this is the result of a faulty system, of education at least.

In an academic setting, the issue the students are confronted with is this multi-faceted one, that of cheating, plagiarizing and copying things that are at their hand in order to facilitate work and task submission. Having reached a length of work that precedes years of study, reading and lecturing, analyzing university trends and witnessing various practices, thus observing gradually how things lose value, I would say, right from the start, that I *have never met* a person not to cheat or copy in exams! More specifically, in various stages of one's professional formation and becoming. I would not dare say that "*there is no* person not to have cheated" since maybe there are those of the kind, but for sure, very few of them!.

And this "one in a million" kind are for sure either those who study at all subjects chosen or imposed by the curricula, or the very best of them, be it out of a sheer correctness, unmatched at the young generation, or even out of fear!! I would rather believe that, the latter ones as well, have tried at least to do this at least once in a lifetime, even if more timidly, partly or less successful. Here, however, I face an inevitable association, i.e. to the *type of people* who cheat. But is it only those who play truant the ones who cheat, the "tricky" ones those who do not study in general, those highly well-versed in the art of cheating and copying, who skillfully make their most unbelievable cheat sheets, being very self possessed and certain that they would not fail, and other such typologies. I told myself "no", it is not only these who cheat.

I have seen various people, colleagues, hard working students and smart above all, cheating. Cheating [copying] implies a particular talent and of course courage. The courage of cheating, of tricking, of stealing even, while it implies as well a lot of self-control and the power to risk. One often hears the saying "don't steal your hat by yourself"! True, but it no longer matters!! because where will it be ever written that *I* have cheated or following the principle "the thief not caught – honest merchant"...? For the one cheating, the end justifies the means. Yet again, why do people cheat? – out of various reasons: he/she did not manage to study and has to pass an exam by all means.

One does not cheat for obtaining a high mark, but is content to pass, is happy to have got rid of the problem. It is a notable effort, isn't it? But there are some of those who think that "they are worth way better" and also by cheating aspire at getting a higher mark. Then we look at the issue of "what kind of exams can be cheated at? Of course, here one weighs carefully one's chances: can one cheat at this professor or categorically no! There are subjects in which "everyone cheats at the exam" and thus how can you do differently? The saddest thing in this case, as a rule, is when you – in the position of the diligent student, for whom it is inadmissible to do that, who does not cheat while everyone else around does, gets a lower mark than the other or the majority of those who have cheated! Perhaps we've all been through this as students once ... it hurts, it is frustrating, and one wonders "why study then"?!...

There must be highlighted the fact that along the years this phenomenon has persisted, the cheating 'techniques' have improved as well – and here I refer to the fact that during secondary school, or high-school, way back in time there were no mobile telephones or ear-phones and the student spent a lot of time writing cheating sheets. Others, more bold, used to copy right from the book on the knee, hidden beneath the desk! Nowadays, one can rarely encounter written desks or the so common writings on the palm... it would be truly funny if not silly!

Nor the efforts of making whole abstracts on papers that look like written on a draft are no longer common! Modern technology has brought along unimaginably intricate methods of copying, from cameras with microphones to pass the exams, to MP3s and smartwatches copying techniques, to device GSM spy '*pingnanillo nano*' devices. And along with these, incredible skills mastered at a very young age by children and people with rather modest backgrounds to be used to such purposes.

Again this recurrent "why"?! The pupils, and later on the students do not learn enough, they do not have a trained system of learning, they have a diminished capacity of analysis and synthesis, do not have an adequate vocabulary, they are overwhelmed by the volumes to be learnt. And one more thing, they cheat at the subjects that they are not interested in necessarily. What is more is that they don't even know *how to cheat*! So many of them copy word by word, hurriedly copying what they can without making sense of what they write or without being able to render the idea and more sadly, without caring whether they whether they rendered an intelligible idea or not...Or worse than that, without finishing the phrase! Most of the people boast with the fact that they "have written to the subject half a page" or more ... as if this thing would be relevant and defining for the one who reads.

What is worrying is the fact that this phenomenon has gone far in depth, reaching the even the secondary schools, the students whereof seem to have an inborn talent in "detecting" the professor at which they can cheat, for they lack no boldness, the young ones! Those having children to rear, on the other hand, are dismayed at what school implies nowadays, at the very handbooks the pupils learn from the primary school, with propositions difficult to understand for the parents themselves, let alone for a child who has not the power to distinguish the gist out of an intricate enunciation, formulated in a language which is not at all accessible for them ... overloaded curricula that cannot be thoroughly studied but very fast or not completely, the parents being compelled to supplement the acquiring of knowledge by private classes at two or three or even more subjects at a time, therefore it is no wonder that students try to make life easier for themselves.

And then when are they to study, poor souls, when they get out from school at 14:00 hrs, rush to other extra-curricular activities, sportive or other, they get home in the evening tired and the next day they have to study for other six subjects?...Among students, there is this embedded idea that "everybody takes a higher education degree." Do as they can, come what may, at evening classes, on-line or distant learning education, being enrolled at a private university or at two at a

time, but they do it. But they do it already in parallel with a job or already having a family. And then they can no longer make the best of all. ... but the final goal is to graduate somehow and they avail themselves of every means to this purpose, as “the end justifies the means”, doesn’t it! Now, the *results* of the analysis show that going higher to analyze things, we’ve all witnessed the tough attacks that occurred with regard to high level plagiarizing, politicians, professors or public life personalities, occupying various positions, being the target of the media attacks, the outcome of which the PhD title was withdrawn, people having multiple workplaces, a solid financial situation and high positions on the social ladder.

Why did they copy, the question arises? Well, those who serve as "models" of high training and professional and moral attire? Also, because they do not evaluate their true value correctly, because they wanted to look great and intangible, because they wanted to show that they are someone getting an extra title, not counting the fact that it was obtained through fraud. What was the excuse for many of them? They did not know very well the notion of "plagiarism"... Plagiarism was not implemented in our country until late, they did not imagine that someone would investigate closely and reveal what they wrote. If the coordinating teacher himself didn't do it! ...

Last but not least there is one more answer to the question that seems to make one go around the same point, why? It is *time*. This “enemy” of us all. A more fearful enemy than ever! As we have said before, right from the primary school and all through adulthood, one learns how to manage time to the best of his abilities. But does one really manage to do so? We are always on the run, we always lack time. We rush in the traffic, we rush to work, we rush to school, there is no time left for the family, let alone for ourselves!

We get home overwhelmed by fatigue, by problems and sometimes hardships, yet most of the time overwhelmed by stress. But we have to do this and that. And so, if we have to study as well, we really don’t have when to do this properly. And then we rely on cheating! We thus become cheaters whose pride is flattered by success. We are successful in front of those who do not know how we obtained the results we aimed at! We feel good. We are “valuable”. We have got what we wanted. The rest no longer matters!

Coming back to the intricate web of issues I was referring to at the beginning, to the complexity of the question, that of the multitude of approaches, we cannot omit the other perspective, of the one that “lets” us copy. “Lets us do it” or is it us who manage to fool, or to “trick” him. How many of ‘us’ [those who copied] don't brag that they managed to copy to a very tough teacher or one who can't be copied at?! How many understood the indulgence or sometimes even the indifference of the one who let us copy? Did we respect that man? Did we ridicule him or did we appreciate him as a great ‘gentleman’ for closing his eyes to such an act?! ... Did he become an accomplice to our success through this? These are but a few aspects of the other side of the coin.

In the end, I did not refer at all to “*copying someone*”. Here, as well, there would be a lot to say. To copy someone in order to be like him or her, out of envy or admiration, out of the inability to be ourselves, neither as people, nor as apparel or as a way of expression, but out of a pronounced desire to be “like them” ! It is a common phenomenon, wanting to pretend to be someone else than we are... and also to flatter our own pride in the end. In an attempt to conclude, to the question “*why do people cheat?*”, a possible answer would be: to look better in our own eyes and in the eyes of others, out of inability to do things on our own, out of human weakness and last but not least, out of the deep-rooted speculation that “it is possible that way as well”! And this much easier, without intellectual effort and without wasting too much time. Time in which we try, but fail to fit in.

From the perspective of the person who has got to be beyond the faculty benches, that in which we are each at one's work place, we strive to sanction this habit, but unfortunately the conjuncture most often forces us to indulge in not seeing it, to overlook it, or worse, encourage it by tolerating and perpetuating it! How to discourage students from cheating particularly now, in an online driven education is a difficult issue to solve, since it is a well known fact that 'no assessment is uncheatable'![Harrison, D. 2020]. The way numerous studies show, there is a growing concern for the phenomenon, which spans countries, from Europe to the US and it is rather unlikely that this phenomenon is stoppable even in an educational system that has been forced online.

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