



Liars, Cheaters, and Thieves: Correlates of Undesirable Character Behaviors in Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

Many commentators have indicated that our nation is in a crisis of character. This study examined the relationship between cheating and lying behaviors and constructs previous research has shown to be associated with health behaviors. Participants in the study were 700 students in grades 6–12 from a single southern school district. The questionnaire included items dealing with health and character issues, self-esteem, educational expectations/life goals, self-efficacy scale, and religious beliefs. Results indicated that substantial numbers of students had participated in the following undesirable behaviors in the last year: told lies to stay out of trouble (83.95%), told lies to keep someone else from getting in trouble (70.68%), cheated on an examination in school (47.54%), stole one or more items from stores (17.29%), and stole items from an individual (24.51%). Those who thought these behaviors were wrong were significantly less likely to have engaged in these behaviors. A variety of negative behaviors were related to religious feelings, religious behaviors and educational expectations. Logistic regression results indicated that, of the self-esteem subscales, school self-esteem made the most consistent contribution to distinguishing between students who had engaged in lying, cheating, or stealing and those who had not engaged in these behaviors. Results indicate a high rate of occurrence of some of these undesirable behaviors, highlight the relationship of the home, school, peers, and religion to these behaviors, and have implications for the development of intervention programming.

Many commentators have indicated that our nation is in a crisis of character. They cite figures indicating that behaviors such as cheating on examinations in school and shoplifting are commonplace among young people. Discussions of cheating, lying and academic dishonesty have occurred in both the news media^{1,2,3} and in academic and research media.^{4,5,6,7,8}

A variety of sources have indicated that approximately one-half to three-quarters of high school students self-report having participated in some form of academic dishonesty.^{9,10,11} Similar statistics have been reported among college students.^{12,13} According to the Josephson Institute of Ethics,¹⁴ the percent of high school students

who self-reported cheating on an exam at least once in the past year rose from 61% in 1992 to 74% in 2002. Theft increased from 35% in 2000 to 38% in 2002 while those who said they would be willing to lie to get a good job jumped from 28% to 39% during the same time period. Girls were significantly less likely to engage in theft or other dishonest practices but were as likely to cheat and lie as boys. Participation in sports was a differentiating factor only in cheating on examinations where athletes were significantly more likely to cheat. Students at religious schools were less likely to steal but were more likely to cheat and lie to teachers and parents.

Some have argued that the increase in

cheating is part of a larger cultural atmosphere in which dishonesty, cheating and other forms of unethical behavior are more widely accepted.^{5,15,16} They cite high profile

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examples such as the Enron bankruptcy scandal, sexual abuse scandals in the Catholic church, lying and dishonesty surrounding the relationship between a former president and a White House intern, former Notre Dame coach George O'Leary lying on his resume, and plagiarism by historians Doris Kearns Goodwin and Steven Ambrose. More recently, the controversy surrounding the *60 Minutes* news program and its use of apparently forged documents provides another example.

Bensley¹⁷ presented the case that issues of character such as honesty, cheating, and lying are the missing components of health education/promotion programs. He argues that the gap between "knowing the good" and "doing the good" is bridged by the virtues of honesty, integrity, compassion, etc. Governali¹⁸ posits that not only is it appropriate for health education/promotion programs to promote the development of virtues but also that such programming has historically and does currently advocate the development of selected values through direct or indirect methods.

To encourage honesty and to discourage lying, cheating, and stealing among young people, it is important first to identify correlates of these and other character behaviors. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between constructs such as self-esteem, self-efficacy and educational expectations/life goals and character issues of lying, cheating, and stealing.

METHODS

Sample

Participants in the study were 700 students in grades 6–12 from a single southern school district. The school district had requested assistance with a survey that would address health behaviors and character issues. Students voluntarily, and with parental permission, completed a questionnaire in their regular classroom setting.

Testing Instrument

Data were collected using a student self-report questionnaire. The questionnaire included a number of items dealing with

Table 1. Results of Factor Analysis: Educational Goals/Success Factor

Item	Factor Loading
I have a good idea of my future life goals.	0.630
I am confident that I will graduate from high school.	0.844
I believe I will graduate from college.	0.877
I believe I will have a successful future.	0.845

health and character, the Kelley short-form of the Hare Self-esteem Scale, a six-item self-efficacy scale, a four-item scale that addressed educational goals/success, and two items dealing with religion. The Hare Self-esteem Scale provides an area-specific measure of self-esteem in the areas of peer, school, and home. Evidence of the reliability and validity of the Kelley short-form of the Hare Self-esteem Scale with similar samples has been previously published.¹⁹ The Kelley short-form of the scale has been used in several studies that have examined the relationship of self-esteem to adolescent sexual and substance use behaviors.^{20,21,22} For this sample the internal consistency for the three area-specific sub-scales were as follows: Peer—alpha = .623, School—alpha = .781, Home—alpha = .836.

The self-efficacy items dealt with initiation and persistence and were taken from the general self-efficacy portion of the self-efficacy scale.²³ Bandura²⁴ has indicated the important role of expectations of self-efficacy in initiating and persisting in a behavior. Thus, this measure was chosen because we believed, based on Bandura's work, that adolescents who score high on this construct will make and maintain a commitment to strong character values. The researchers who constructed and validated the scale reported a coefficient alpha of .86 for the general self-efficacy subscale but did not report on the psychometrics associated with initiation and persistence.²³ For this sample, however, the internal consistency (coefficient alpha) was .606.

The educational goals/success scale consisted of items taken from various other instruments and grouped together to form a four-item scale. A factor analysis con-

firmed that the four items measured a single construct, with all items loading on the single factor at .63 or higher. The internal consistency (coefficient alpha) of the scale for this sample was .805 (Table 1).

We included two religiosity items: frequency of attendance at religious services (ritualistic) and degree of religious feeling (experiential). Frequency of attendance was measured on a six point scale from "never" to "more than once per week." Degree of religious feelings (experiential dimension) was measured on a five-point scale ranging from "deeply religious" to "not at all religious." Items such as these have been frequently used as measures of religiosity. They address what Faulkner and DeJong²⁵ called the ritualistic and experiential dimensions of religiosity.

The character behavior variables asked students ("yes" or "no") if they had participated in a variety of behaviors in the last year. Items in this section included whether they had told lies to stay out of trouble, told lies to get someone else in trouble, told lies to keep someone else from getting in trouble, cheated on an examination in school, stolen one or more items from stores, and stolen items from an individual. The character attitudinal items asked students to respond to statements regarding the appropriateness of these behaviors (i.e., "I believe that it is okay to tell lies to stay out of trouble") on a four-point Likert-type scale. Data were analyzed using SAS programs, which included frequency counts, chi-square, analysis of variance, and logistic regression.

RESULTS

The participants in the study included

**Table 2. Results of Chi-square Analysis—Behavior by Gender and Religious Variables**

Variable	Gender		Frequency of Attendance		Degree of Religious Feeling	
	Chi-square	Prob.	Chi-square	Prob.	Chi-square	Prob.
Told lies to stay out of trouble	2.60	0.107	9.08	0.106	14.40	0.006
Told lies to get someone else in trouble	10.42	0.001	0.96	0.965	7.91	0.095
Told lies to keep someone else out of trouble	2.09	0.148	8.01	0.156	18.04	0.001
Cheated on a test in school	0.99	0.321	10.35	0.066	12.44	0.014
Stole from stores	4.38	0.036	20.39	0.001	40.17	<.001
Stole from individuals	9.29	0.002	5.02	0.413	10.65	0.031

df = 1 for all tests associated with gender
df = 4 for all tests associated with degree of religious feeling
df = 5 for all tests associated with frequency of worship attendance

402 females (58%) and 288 males (42%). They were students in grades 6–12, with participation by grade level as follows: grade 6—210 (31%), grade 8—72 (10%), grade 9—127 (18%), grade 10—94 (14%), grade 11—122 (18%), and grade 12—60 (9%). The sample was largely Caucasian, 92%, with African-Americans, Hispanics, American Indians, Asian/Pacific Islanders, and other categories also represented. This was similar to the school population which was 96% Caucasian. When compared with state data, 27% of the pupils in the school district received free or reduced-price lunches, while 45% to 56%, depending on grade level of pupils, within the state receive free or reduced-price lunches.

Frequency of Undesirable Behaviors

Results indicated that substantial numbers of students had participated in these undesirable behaviors in the last year: told lies to stay out of trouble (84%), told lies to get someone else in trouble (29%), told lies to keep someone else from getting in trouble (71%), cheated on an examination in school (48%), stolen one or more items from stores (17%), or stolen items from an individual (25%). The majority of students, however, disagreed with statements that indicated participation in these behaviors was okay: “I believe that it is okay to tell lies to stay out of trouble” (disagree—44%, strongly disagree—32%), “I believe that it is okay to tell a lie if it will keep someone else from getting in trouble” (disagree—37%,

strongly disagree—22%), “I believe it is okay to cheat on an exam in school, if it will help me get a better grade” (disagree—31%, strongly disagree—49%), “I believe that it is okay to steal something, as long as it is from a rich person or a big profitable company” (disagree—24%, strongly disagree—64%). Those who indicated that these behaviors were not okay were less likely ($p < .01$) to report having engaged in these behaviors. Reported behaviors were, however, not always consistent with stated values. Even among those who “strongly disagreed” that a behavior was “okay,” substantial numbers of these students indicated that they had engaged in the behavior in the last year: 70% had told lies to stay out of trouble, 42% had told lies to keep someone else out of trouble, 26% indicated that they had cheated on an examination, 9% had stolen from stores, and 18% had stolen from individuals.

Differences Between Behavior Participants and Non-participants

Chi-square tests were used to determine if participation in behaviors was independent of gender, frequency of attendance at worship services and degree of religious feeling. Gender was not independent of having told lies to get someone else in trouble ($p = .001$), having stolen items from stores ($p = .036$), and having stolen items from individuals ($p = .002$). In each case, males were more likely to report participation in the behavior. Gender was indepen-

dent of participation in having told lies to stay out of trouble ($p = .107$), having told lies to keep someone else out of trouble ($p = .148$), and having cheated on an examination in school ($p = .321$).

Frequency of attendance at worship services was not independent of stealing from an individual ($p = 0.001$), with those attending most frequently less likely to report participation in the behavior. Frequency of attendance at worship services was independent of participation in the other five behaviors. Degree of religious feeling was not independent of: having told lies to stay out of trouble ($p = .006$), having told lies to keep someone else from getting in trouble ($p = .001$), having cheated on a test in schools ($p = .014$), having stolen items from stores ($p < .001$), and having stolen items from individuals ($p = .031$). In each case, those who reported the greatest degree of religious commitment were the least likely to report participation in the behavior (Table 2).

It is interesting to note that even those who attended religious services more than once per week and those who considered themselves deeply religious reported participation in these behaviors within the last year. For example, among those who attended religious services more than once per week, 81% indicated that they had told lies to stay out of trouble, 32% indicated that they had told lies to get someone else in trouble, 69% indicated that they had told



Table 3. Results of Analysis of Variance: Behavior by Self-esteem, Efficacy, and Educational/Success Variables

	Peer Self-esteem				School Self-esteem				Home Self-esteem			
	Partic.	Non-partic.	F	Prob.	Partic.	Non-partic.	F	Prob.	Partic.	Non-partic.	F	Prob.
Told lies to stay out of trouble	<i>m</i> 16.82	16.82	0.00	0.990	17.23	18.47	12.05	<.001	19.65	20.46	4.21	0.040
	<i>sd</i> 3.01	2.56	3.54	3.07	3.88	3.65						
Told lies to get someone in trouble	<i>m</i> 16.33	17.03	8.78	0.003	16.51	17.81	20.46	<.001	19.16	20.06	8.08	0.005
	<i>sd</i> 2.97	2.91			3.90	3.27		4.02	3.77			
Told lies to keep someone else out of trouble	<i>m</i> 16.89	16.70	0.56	0.453	17.00	18.47	26.36	<.001	19.49	20.48	9.54	0.002
	<i>sd</i> 3.03	2.71			3.54	3.22		4.00	3.50			
Cheated on a test in school	<i>m</i> 16.84	16.84	0.01	0.916	16.71	18.07	26.61	<.001	19.35	20.21	8.55	0.004
	<i>sd</i> 3.13	2.77			3.56	3.33		3.99	3.70			
Stole from stores	<i>m</i> 16.87	16.87	0.00	0.983	15.97	17.75	24.91	<.001	18.17	20.13	24.67	<.001
	<i>sd</i> 2.92	2.90			3.84	3.34		4.56	3.65			
Stole from individuals	<i>m</i> 16.57	16.96	2.24	0.135	16.27	17.82	25.78	<.001	18.67	20.14	18.51	<.001
	<i>sd</i> 3.26	2.80			3.90	3.27		4.17	3.74			
	Efficacy				Educational Goal/Success							
	Partic.	Non-partic.	F	Prob.	Partic.	Non-partic.	F	Prob.				
Told lies to stay out of trouble	<i>m</i> 22.18	23.39	8.19	0.004	13.84	13.98	0.36	0.548				
	<i>sd</i> 3.86	4.10			2.35	2.29						
Told lies to get someone in trouble	<i>m</i> 21.26	22.80	21.18	<.001	13.50	14.08	8.91	0.003				
	<i>sd</i> 3.92	3.86			2.41	2.23						
Told lies to keep someone else out of trouble	<i>m</i> 22.15	22.83	4.23	0.040	13.77	14.18	4.48	0.035				
	<i>sd</i> 3.82	4.15			2.36	2.20						
Cheated on a test in school	<i>m</i> 21.77	22.88	13.13	<.001	13.65	14.13	7.75	0.005				
	<i>sd</i> 3.89	3.90			2.43	2.16						
Stole from stores	<i>m</i> 21.25	22.60	10.88	0.001	13.06	14.05	17.06	<.001				
	<i>sd</i> 4.16	3.85			3.02	2.12						
Stole from individuals	<i>m</i> 21.28	22.73	17.19	<.001	13.24	14.10	17.66	<.001				
	<i>sd</i> 4.00	3.85			2.67	2.17						

lies to keep someone else from getting in trouble, and 40% indicated that they had cheated on an examination in school. Among those who considered themselves to be deeply religious, 73% indicated that they had told lies to stay out of trouble, 26% indicated that they had told lies to get some-

one else in trouble, 60% indicated that they had told lies to keep someone else from getting in trouble, and 38% indicated that they had cheated on an examination in school. Analysis of variance was used to determine if there were differences in scores for self-esteem, efficacy, and educational/

success goals between behavior participants and non-participants. Participants and non-participants differed in regard to school self-esteem, home self-esteem, and self-efficacy for all six behaviors. In each case, non-participants had higher scores than participants. Participants and non-



participants differed in regard to scores for educational goals/success for all behaviors except “told lies to stay out of trouble.” Again, for the five behaviors for which there was a significant difference between participants and non-participants, non-participants had higher scores than participants. Participants and non-participants differed on peer self-esteem scores for only one behavior: “told lies to get someone in trouble.” Those who indicated that they had lied scored lower on peer self-esteem than those who indicated that they had not lied (Table 3).

Distinguishing Between Behavior Participants and Non-participants

Logistic regression was used to identify those variables that distinguish between participants and non-participants relative to the following behaviors: (1) lying to stay out of trouble, (2) lying to get someone else in trouble, (3) lying to keep someone else out of trouble, (4) cheating on an examination, (5) stealing from a store, and (6) stealing from an individual. In each analysis the following variables were used to predict group membership: frequency of attendance at religious services, degree of religious feeling, peer self-esteem, school self-esteem, home self-esteem, educational goals/success, and efficacy (Table 4). For all six behaviors, results indicated that the set of predictor variables did distinguish between those who reported engaging in the behavior and those who indicated that they had not engaged in the behavior. Percent concordant values ranged from 64.4% to 73.4%. Max-rescaled R-square values ranged from 0.084 to 0.179.

For the variable “having told lies in the past year to stay out of trouble,” logistic regression results indicated that two predictor variables, school self-esteem and self-efficacy, made unique contributions to distinguishing between participants and non-participants. The percent concordant value was 67.7. The max-rescaled R-square value was 0.084.

For the variable “having told lies in the past year to get someone else in trouble,” logistic regression results indicated that

three predictor variables—frequency of attendance at religious services, degree of religious feeling, and school self-efficacy—each made unique contributions to distinguishing between participants and non-participants. The percent concordant value was 64.6. The max-rescaled R-square value was 0.084.

For the variable “having lied in the past year to keep someone else out of trouble,” logistic regression results indicated that degree of religious feeling, peer self-esteem, and school self-esteem each made unique contributions to distinguishing between participants and non-participants. The percent concordant value was 66.1. The max-rescaled R-square value was 0.094.

For the variable “having cheated on an exam in the last year,” logistic regression results indicated that four predictor variables—religious feeling, peer self-esteem, and school self-esteem—each made unique contributions to distinguishing between participants and non-participants. The percent concordant value was 64.4. The max-rescaled R-square value was 0.086.

For the variable “having stolen from stores in the past year,” logistic regression results indicated that four predictor variables—religious feeling, peer self-esteem, school self-esteem, and home self-esteem—each made unique contributions to distinguishing between participants and non-participants. The percent concordant value was 73.4. The max-rescaled R-square value was 0.179.

For the variable “had stolen from individuals in the last year,” logistic regression results indicated that a single predictor variable, school self-esteem, made a unique contribution to distinguishing between participants and non-participants. The percent concordant value was 67.1. The max-rescaled R-square value was 0.101.

DISCUSSION

Results of the univariate analyses indicated that school and home self-esteem and self-efficacy were significantly related to participation in all six character behaviors; religious feeling and educational goals/success were related to five of the six behaviors; gender was related to three of the six; and frequency of religious attendance and peer self-esteem were each related to one behavior.

Results of the logistic regression analyses indicated that, as a set, the predictor variables were, in fact, significant predictors of the character behaviors in all six analyses, distinguishing between those who had participated in the behavior and those who had not. School self-esteem seemed to be the most important distinguishing variable, making a unique contribution to distinguishing between those who did and did not participate in a behavior for five of the six analyses, followed by religious feeling, which made a unique contribution in four of the six analyses.

Results indicate what seems to be a high rate of occurrence of some of these undesirable behaviors, highlight the relationship of area specific self-esteem, religion, self-efficacy, and educational/success goals to these behaviors, and have implications for the development of intervention programming. There are several results of this study that are worthy of further discussion. First, the percent of subjects who indicated that they had cheated on an examination in the past year was just under 50%. While this may seem high, and is certainly higher than desired, it is substantially lower than figures reported in previous studies.¹⁴ The Josephson Institute of Ethics reported that students who indicated they had cheated on an examination at least once in the last year increased from 25% in 1963 to 50% in 1993 and to 75% in 2001.¹⁴ Among older students, the Center for Academic Integrity reported that nearly 80% of students from 26 small-to-medium size colleges admitted cheating at least once.²⁵ Some factors that may have contributed to the lower percentage of cheating in this study may be the younger age of the subjects when compared with college students and the fact that the data were collected in a portion of the South generally perceived of as being part of the “Bible Belt.”

This study supports the claims of

**Table 4. Results of Logistic Regression Analyses: Distinguishing Between Participants and Non-participants**

Variable	Told lies to stay out of trouble		Told lies to get someone else in trouble		Told lies to keep someone else out of trouble	
	Odds Ratio Estimates	95% Confidence Limits	Odds Ratio Estimates	95% Confidence Limits	Odds Ratio Estimates	95% Confidence Limits
Religious Attendance	0.943	1.331	0.744	0.964	0.853	1.108
Religious Feeling	0.627	1.148	0.625	0.968	0.537	0.872
Peer Self-esteem	0.859	1.035	0.962	1.108	0.849	0.985
School Self-esteem	1.022	1.231	0.994	1.129	1.043	1.205
Home Self-esteem	0.943	1.113	0.937	1.048	0.972	1.105
Educational Goals	0.802	1.036	0.945	1.134	0.913	1.135
Self-efficacy	1.006	1.169	1.016	1.132	0.931	1.046
Likelihood Ratio	27.430	<.001	34.258	<0.001	37.242	<0.001
Percent Concordant	67.7		64.6		66.1	
Max-rescaled R-Square	0.084		0.084		0.094	

Variable	Cheated on a test in school		Have stolen from stores		Have stolen from individuals	
	Odds Ratio Estimates	95% Confidence Limits	Odds Ratio Estimates	95% Confidence Limits	Odds Ratio Estimates	95% Confidence Limits
Religious Attendance	0.898	1.130	0.975	1.327	0.858	1.121
Religious Feeling	0.668	1.000	0.558	0.933	0.696	1.095
Peer Self-esteem	0.856	0.976	0.825	0.989	0.889	1.034
School Self-esteem	1.036	1.171	1.010	1.179	1.033	1.181
Home Self-esteem	0.961	1.070	1.032	1.178	0.970	1.091
Educational Goals	0.943	1.128	0.968	1.186	0.976	1.174
Self-efficacy	0.992	1.098	0.952	1.087	0.994	1.114
Likelihood Ratio	37.579	<0.001	63.168	<0.001	39.324	<0.001
Percent Concordant	64.4		73.4		67.1	
Max-rescaled R-Square	0.086		0.179		0.101	

Bensley¹⁷ and others that believing that something is wrong does not necessarily lead to behaviors that represent those beliefs. Nearly one-half of the subjects who indicated they “strongly agreed” that the behavior was wrong had lied to keep someone else out of trouble and nearly three-fourths had lied to keep themselves out of trouble. The percent of subjects who acted inconsistently with “strongly” held beliefs was substantially less for cheating on an exam (26%), stealing from individuals (18%), and stealing from stores (9%). These differences apparently indicate that lying is viewed as a less serious behavior than are cheating and stealing.

Further, Bensley¹⁷ posits that the reason that adolescents and young adults often have the requisite knowledge to make appropriate

health-enhancing decisions but do not make the decision to act in health-enhancing ways is based on issues of character. He argues that this cognitive dissonance is in essence a deficit of good character. It can be argued that having good character can be defined as knowing the good, valuing the good, and acting on the good. Thus, a person who knows that driving after drinking places themselves and others at risk but still engages in the behavior is, by definition, in need of improvement in areas of character. Governali¹⁸ presents the case that health education, currently and historically, involves the intentional and/or unintentional attempts to facilitate students in acquiring and acting upon value-laden health-enhancing knowledge and attitudes. Previous studies have found that a relationship

exists between area-specific self-esteem and specific health behaviors, such as adolescent sexual behavior^{20,21} and substance abuse.^{22,26,27} The findings of this study that relationships exist between area-specific self-esteem and lying, cheating, and stealing provides encouragement to examine a potential relationship between lying, cheating, and stealing and specific health behaviors. If these character behaviors are found to be linked to specific health behaviors, this may provide support for making character issues an integral part of health education programming.

These results tend to mirror previous findings relative to the role of school and home self-esteem and specific health behaviors, such as adolescent sexual behavior^{20,21} and substance use.^{22,26,27} Thus, the findings



seem to support a more generalized statement about the role of school and home self-esteem relative to participation in undesirable behaviors. Peer self-esteem was associated (in the univariate analyses) only with lying to get another into trouble, but made a unique contribution to distinguishing between participants and non-participants in three of the six analyses. These and other findings about the association between low self-esteem and dishonest behaviors appear to be inconsistent with findings reported by *Who's Who Among American High School Students*[®] that 80 percent of the top academic performers cheated during their academic careers (since one would expect that top academic performers would score high in school self-esteem).¹⁴

The questions related to lying in the present study asked about the motivation for lying, while other studies¹⁴ have asked questions about the person to whom the lie was told. In this study, which examined area-specific self-esteem, school and home self-esteem (in the univariate analyses) contributed to a variety of dishonest behaviors including lying to keep oneself out of trouble, lying to get another person in trouble, lying to keep another from getting into trouble, cheating on an examination, and stealing from stores and from an individual. School self-esteem also seemed to be the single most important predictor variable in the logistic regression analyses.

Previous research has not linked generalized self-efficacy to the behaviors examined in this study. The results of the study, however, may imply that those who are confident in their own abilities may feel less of a need to engage in activities such as lying, cheating, or stealing and are more comfortable taking a stand to resist the temptation or pressure to lie, cheat, or steal.

There are several factors that limit the study's findings. All of the data reported in this study are self-reported and are therefore subject to the same questions and limitations that are common with all self-report data. Second, the data in the study were collected from students at a single school district in the South. The sample is therefore

unlikely to accurately represent a national population, but may accurately represent a regional or local population. Third, the study was cross-sectional and thus deals with correlates, rather than antecedents, of behavior. Finally, the number of statistical tests does tend to increase the number of type I errors; however, most of the results presented are statistically significant p values that are close to or less than .01. Thus, the concern for type I error is less than would be the case if the p values were closer to .05.

Many commentators have noted that as a nation we are experiencing a significant decline in moral and ethical values. Promotion of positive character behaviors through education and community programming has been a topic of broad discussion in a variety of forums over the last decade. The results of this study highlight the importance of several variables, especially school self-esteem, relative to selected positive character behaviors. Future research should examine these relationships from a longitudinal perspective to identify the antecedents of behavior and test interventions designed to reduce negative behaviors. In addition, future research should examine the relationship of character behaviors with selected health behaviors.

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