

# Report on Bachelor Thesis

Institute of Economic Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University in Prague

<b>Student:</b>	<b>Mikayel Harutyunyan</b>
<b>Advisor:</b>	<b>doc. PhDr. Julie Chytilová, Ph.D.</b>
<b>Title of the thesis:</b>	<b>The Truth Behind the Lies: The Experiment</b>

## OVERALL ASSESSMENT

Mikayel Harutyunyan submitted a thesis that studies links between personality traits and dishonesty in an incentivized economic experiment performed on Armenian children 10-18 of age. Baseline of his thesis is created by the task in which secondary school students throw a dice in private and then report a number, which then determines their payoff in terms of number of candies received (1-5 for respective dice numbers, zero for reporting 6). The distribution of claimed payoffs (274 observations) contrasted to the uniform distribution provides insights into the honesty behavior of the whole sample, lacking unfortunately the possibility to study deception on the level of an individual subject. Moreover, Mikayel links the study of honesty to individual personality traits measured by two personality inventories—the Big Five inventory (openness to experience, conscientiousness, agreeableness and neuroticism) and the Dark Triad inventory (narcissism, psychopathy, Machiavellianism). Answers to these two measures of personality traits enables him to statistically analyze patterns of cheating within each elicited traits and also to compare both inventories as predictors for cheating.

The results of Mikayel's study supports a theory of self concept maintenance rather than classical Simple Model of Rational Crime postulated by Becker (1968), since "*non-negligible part of subjects lied, but not to the fullest extent possible, and there were distinct groups of unconditionally honest and income-maximizing subjects as well*" (p. 84). Narcissism, extraversion, openness to experience and neuroticism personality traits are found to be associated with the dishonest behavior while conscientiousness and agreeableness, traits most frequently associated with cheating in self-reported studies, did not prove themselves as significant predictors. Finally, Mikayel's research supports conventional fact that morality has positive impact on honesty behavior and that family background influences cheating behavior through several channels (divorced parents, ownership of private property, unemployment of parents).

There are also several interesting individual results in Mikayel's research. Children who solved higher number of CRT tasks, a proxy for cognitive abilities, were more likely to cheat, while children with worse academic performance cheated less. Mikayel explains this by two possibilities: first, he does not rule out the possibility that students cheated already at the CRT task, or, second, he claims that in general, weaker students might not have realized the possibility to cheat at all. Another finding suggests that females seem not to be exploiting the opportunity to cheat to the full extent, reporting the outcome of 4 more frequently than males. This can lead to a conclusion that females are not as reward-maximizing as men.

## Contribution

Mikayel Harutyunyan contributes by his thesis in several instances. Generally, he adds to the literature a link between personality traits and dishonesty using an incentivized economic experiment. Moreover, he applies given methodology on an unusual subject pool and obtains therefore valuable experimental results. Last but not least, the experiment was conducted in an Armenian language and therefore both personality inventories had to be translated and translations had to be tested accordingly. Even though inventories were not finally validated through factor analysis since it would be out of the scope of already extensive bachelor thesis, I value the contribution as highly significant.

## Methods

The author develop an experimental methodology consistent with recent theoretical literature of cheating (Fischbacher and Föllmi-Heusi, 2013) or self-concept maintenance (Mazar et al., 2008). He uses valid experimental procedures that produce qualitatively good results and he validates these results by several robustness checks.

Mikayel tried to minimize the possibility of communication between experimental subjects and therefore contamination of the sample by several precautions. First, individual treatments within same

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grades were conducted in one day or in different buildings of the school. Moreover, an entire class was excluded out of the sample when the researches found out their familiarity to the subject.

One of the standard reproofs to the study would be limited external validity of the results due to the experimental sample used. Contrary to Mikayel's thesis, I would dispute that the sample of STEM (Sciences, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) students is a representation of general population or it does not comply parameters of a WIERD sample (Western, Educated, and from Industrialized, Rich and Democratic countries). The STEM students are obviously selected from the general population on performance criteria and therefore at least resemble what a WEIRD sample might represent. Moreover, female to male ratio being 1:3.05 is another (although interesting) fact that shifts generalizability of the sample. But generally I advocate for the experimental method used and for the results obtained on an interesting sample of individuals. I also appreciate that the author discuss these limitations in the thesis.

Last but not least I have two concerns regarding the personality questionnaires presented in the experiment. First, I would be concerned wheter the transalations of both linguistically difficult inventories to the Armenian language are not difficult for younger part of the sample (the age of the sample starts at 10 years; this concern would be valid not only for translation to Armenian). Second, given that the inventories would be linguistically suitable for children, I would be concerned by the length and difficulty of the task presented to the children. I completely understand and agree that a proxy questions and other measures for congintive depletion were (correctly) applied, but the complexity of the task is still very problematic.

## Literature

The literature of the topic is very well reviewed and described. The whole text meets academic standards well.

## Manuscript form

In case of the manuscript form I found several deficiencies that should be eliminated in future academic texts. First of all, the thesis is very long (99 pages excluding appendix). Even though the subject of the thesis is very complex and comprehensive it might and, more importantly, should have been written much shorter.

Moreover, parts of the manuscript seems to be written quite rashly showing several inconsistencies, e.g.:

- I) there seems to be no section 5.1.3. inside the thesis in contrast to the statement on page 51;
- II) incorrect table specification on page 68—it seem it should be table 7.2. according to the text at page 67;
- III) statement “(please see Table).” at page 69 unfortunately does not tell the reader which table should be seen.

The level of formal correctness is however sufficient, language and the flow of the text are coherent. I appreciate section 8 of the thesis where the author discuss the results, links them to theories and provides limitations of the study.

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## Summary and suggested questions for the discussion during the defense

I find the topic of Mikayel's thesis very interesting. The thesis shows author's knowledge of both the presented topic as well as analytical methods. Moreover, I would like to stress that there is a significant amount of work behind this thesis, according to my experience highly overrating the standard at bachelor level at IES FSV UK. I am very pleased to summarize that the author managed all aspects of a bachelor thesis well above the satisfactory level.

**I strongly recommend the thesis of Mikayel Harutyunyan to defense at the IES FSV UK. Based on the quality of the thesis I suggest the grade "A."**

Suggested question for the defense:

Why do you think that conscientiousness and agreeableness, traits most frequently associated with cheating in self-reported studies, did not prove themselves as significant predictors?

Which class was excluded out of the experiment? Was it at the beginning or at the end of the period when sessions were conducted? Could the exclusion of the whole class itself prevent students of later sessions from revealing their familiarity of the subject?

## **SUMMARY OF POINTS AWARDED** (for details, see below):

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>POINTS</b>
<i>Contribution</i> (max. 30 points)	30
<i>Methods</i> (max. 30 points)	26
<i>Literature</i> (max. 20 points)	20
<i>Manuscript Form</i> (max. 20 points)	15
<b>TOTAL POINTS</b> (max. 100 points)	<b>91</b>
<b>GRADE</b> (A – B – C – D – E – F)	<b>A</b>

**NAME OF THE REFEREE:** *Mgr. Jindřich Matoušek*

**DATE OF EVALUATION:** 28.8.2018

  
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**Referee Signature**

**EXPLANATION OF CATEGORIES AND SCALE:**

**CONTRIBUTION:** *The author presents original ideas on the topic demonstrating critical thinking and ability to draw conclusions based on the knowledge of relevant theory and empirics. There is a distinct value added of the thesis.*

Strong	Average	Weak
30	15	0

**METHODS:** *The tools used are relevant to the research question being investigated, and adequate to the author's level of studies. The thesis topic is comprehensively analyzed.*

Strong	Average	Weak
30	15	0

**LITERATURE REVIEW:** *The thesis demonstrates author's full understanding and command of recent literature. The author quotes relevant literature in a proper way.*

Strong	Average	Weak
20	10	0

**MANUSCRIPT FORM:** *The thesis is well structured. The student uses appropriate language and style, including academic format for graphs and tables. The text effectively refers to graphs and tables and disposes with a complete bibliography.*

Strong	Average	Weak
20	10	0

**Overall grading:**

TOTAL	GRADE
91 – 100	A
81 - 90	B
71 - 80	C
61 – 70	D
51 – 60	E
0 – 50	F