

American Teens Lie, Cheat, and Steal— And Think They're Okay

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The Josephson Institute of Los Angeles, which studies contemporary ethics and morals, recently released its “2008 Report Card on the Ethics of American Youth.” According to the Institute, the “results paint a troubling picture of our future politicians and parents, cops and corporate executives, and journalists and generals.”

The Report Card was based on a survey of 29,760 high school students across the country. They were asked 62 questions about their actions and their attitudes.

STEALING: Thirty percent of those surveyed “admitted stealing from a store within the past year.” Contrary to what you might expect, girls were not significantly less likely to steal than boys—26 percent versus 35 percent.

Whatever drove kids to steal, it wasn't the impersonal nature of the offense—23 percent admitted to stealing from a parent or relative, and 20 percent acknowledged stealing from a friend.

CHEATING: Inside the classroom, 64 percent admitted to cheating on at least one test, and 38 percent said that they had cheated two or more times during the past year.

LYING: Forty-two percent said that they sometimes lie to save money, and 83 percent confessed that they had lied to their parents about “something significant.” Twenty-six percent even admitted that they lied on some of their survey answers.

Yet despite all the admissions of lying, theft, and cheating, 93 percent described themselves as “satisfied with their personal ethics.” Seventy-seven percent said that, when it comes to doing right, they are better than most people they know.