



Short Communication

Academic entitlement and socially aversive personalities: Does the Dark Triad predict academic entitlement?



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ABSTRACT

Academic entitlement is a well-established problem; however its causes are not well understood. This study ($n = 169$) investigated the role of the Dark Triad as a predictor of academic entitlement. The Dark Triad, comprised of Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy, was measured with Jonason and Webster's (2010) concise measure, and academic entitlement was assessed with Chowning and Campbell's (2009) academic entitlement construct (comprised of externalized responsibility and entitled expectations). Gender and psychopathy predicted externalized responsibility and narcissism predicted entitled expectations. Findings are discussed regarding the contribution of psychopathy and narcissism to academic entitlement. Also discussed is the potential learned aspect of entitlement, due to narcissism being a cause of both entitled behavior and resultant uncivil behavior that occurs when entitled behaviors fail to achieve the desired outcome.

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1. Introduction

We live in an age in which individuals are increasingly insistent on getting what they want, when they want it, even if satiating their desires means negatively affecting others (Fisk, 2009). Young adults are more selfish, superficial, and entitled than ever before (Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline, & Bushman, 2004). This age of entitlement extends from societal resource distribution, to workplace performance evaluations, to academic entitlement characterized by students demanding high grades without concern for performance. This sense of deservingness is an attitude (Snyders, 2002) called psychological entitlement, defined as “a stable and pervasive sense that one deserves more and is entitled to more than others” (Campbell et al., 2004, p. 31). Psychological entitlement is a fairly stable, universal characteristic in which individuals expect high rewards or preferential treatment regardless of ability and performance level (Harvey & Harris, 2010).

Academic entitlement is a distinct construct, and although moderately correlated, not a component of psychological entitlement (Chowning & Campbell, 2009). Academic entitlement is exhibited exclusively in academic settings (Chowning & Campbell, 2009), unlike psychological entitlement which does

not result from a specific situation and is manifested globally (Campbell et al., 2004). Achacoso (2002, in Ciani, Summers, & Easter, 2008) identified two dimensions of academic entitlement: entitled expectations, defined as beliefs of entitlement to high grades without much personal effort, and entitlement negotiations, defined as beliefs of entitlement to debate and demand higher grades. Both dimensions were positively related to maladaptive causal attributions. Chowning and Campbell (2009) identified two related dimensions of academic entitlement: externalized responsibility, which is an entitled lack of personal responsibility, and entitled expectations, defined as students' inflexible entitled expectations about grades and professors' behaviors.

Academic entitlement is linked to low levels of self-esteem, external locus of control (Chowning & Campbell, 2009), lower academic success (Jeffres, Barclay, & Stolte, 2014), low college course self-efficacy (Boswell, 2012), a consumerist view of education, parental pressure for academic success, and academic dishonesty (Greenberger, Lessard, Chen, & Farraggia, 2008). Males are generally higher on academic entitlement (Chowning & Campbell, 2009; Greenberger et al., 2008). Self-esteem, personal control, and a need for cognition, considered adaptive in the academic environment; and extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness are negatively related to academic entitlement (Chowning & Campbell, 2009).

The dark traits of narcissism and exploitiveness or Machiavellianism are positively correlated with academic

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entitlement (Chowning & Campbell, 2009; Greenberger et al., 2008; Menon & Sharland, 2011), and with trait entitlement (Lessard, Greenberger, Chen, & Farruggia, 2011). Further study is needed to identify stable individual differences that predict academic entitlement. This study examines the influence of the aversive personalities on academic entitlement.

2. The Dark Triad

Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy, often called the Dark Triad, are aversive personality traits. Machiavellianism is characterized by externalization of blame, duplicity, and the use of manipulative interpersonal strategies to achieve personal gain. Machiavellians tend to be cold, pragmatic and immoral thinkers, and deceitful and exploitative (Christie & Geis, 1970), and unmoved by emotional involvement with others (Harrell, 1980).

Psychopaths are impulsive, irresponsible, thrill-seeking, and manipulative; they cheat in academic settings, and are antisocial (Williams, Nathanson, & Paulhus, 2003). Psychopaths charm, manipulate and plow mercilessly through life, exhibiting reckless, immoral, inappropriate and violent behavior (Hare, 1999). They are unable to empathize, and lack guilt and regret (Williams & Paulhus, 2004).

Narcissists show arrogant, self-centered, exploitative behaviors in interpersonal relationships, have inflated views of self-worth, and use others to attain their needs for admiration and reinforcement of self-perceptions (Rhodewalt & Peterson, 2009). Narcissists exhibit overly aggrandized self, but tend to devalue others (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). They are arrogant, self-absorbed, extremely vain, and entitled (Raskin & Terry, 1988). Narcissists claim to have high status (Brunell et al., 2008), often lack integrity (Blair, Hoffman, & Helland, 2008), and take credit for successes and blame the situation for failures, often in anger (Rhodewalt & Morf, 1998).

3. The current study

This is the first known examination of the Dark Triad and academic entitlement linkage. The exploitations that characterize the Dark Triad are expected to predict the noxious beliefs and behaviors of academically entitled students who shift responsibility for academic success to professors or peers, and who believe that policies and grading strategies should favor higher grades. Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism – the Dark Triad – are hypothesized to predict academic entitlement comprised of higher levels of externalized responsibility and entitled expectations.

4. Methods

4.1. Participants

Volunteer business students ($N = 169$) completed the study instrument. The average age was 22.5 years (Std Dev = 4.9) and 38% were male. This study was approved by the University Institutional Review Board and conducted consistent with its guidelines.

4.2. Academic entitlement scale (Chowning & Campbell, 2009)

The 15 item Academic Entitlement Scale measures, on a 1–7 Likert-type scale (1 – strongly disagree; 7 – strongly agree), externalized responsibility with 10 statements and entitled expectations with five statements. Item scores were averaged to form the dimension scores.

4.3. Control variables

Age, gender, and race were added as control variables, and entered into hierarchical multiple regression models in step one.

4.4. Dark Triad concise measure (Jonason & Webster, 2010)

The 12 item Dark Triad concise measure assesses Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism with 4 items each. Participants indicate their agreement with each statement on a 7 point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Item scores were averaged to form the dimensions of Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism, and entered into the hierarchical multiple regression analysis in step two.

5. Results

Descriptive statistics, Cronbach alphas, and correlations are presented in Table 1. Correlation analysis indicated that externalized responsibility was correlated with gender, Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism. Entitled expectations was correlated with Machiavellianism and narcissism.

Subsequent to gender split of the data (men = 1, women = 2), means difference tests (Table 2) revealed that males scored higher on externalized responsibility, Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism.

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis indicated, for externalized responsibility, in step one, that gender was significant. In step two, gender and psychopathy combined to produce an R^2 of .22; consequently, psychopathy accounted for 8% of the variance in externalized responsibility (Table 3).

In the model for entitled expectations, in step one, the control variables were not significant. In step 2, narcissism explained 16% of the variance in entitled expectations.

6. Discussion

6.1. Gender and academic entitlement

Consistent with prior research (Jonason & Webster, 2010), males scored higher on the Dark Triad traits. Males also scored higher on externalized responsibility, suggesting that male students react to the gender-role socialization that causes gender differences in work settings (Desmarais & Curtis, 2001). Women generally report lower income entitlement, and earn less than men (Desmarais & Curtis, 1997). Women may perceive less entitlement because of lower pay, and men perceive more entitlement because they are paid more (Desmarais & Curtis, 2001). Gender-based stereotyping presents men as more competent than women (Williams & Best, 1990), which may explain why male students have stronger beliefs that they have the right to shift responsibility for grades to others. Males are also more narcissistic and believe themselves more academically entitled, i.e., have higher externalized responsibility.

6.2. Psychopathy and externalized responsibility

Psychopathic personalities – irresponsibility, interpersonal manipulation, and lack of empathy – are consistent with externalized responsibility. Cognitively shifting responsibility for academic success to the professor or fellow students are psychopathic behaviors that work well for entitled students. Academic entitlement is a significant contributor to student incivility (Chowning & Campbell, 2009), which may explain why students may not be

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