

# Self-Entitled College Students: Contributions of Personality, Parenting, and Motivational Factors

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**Abstract** Anecdotal evidence suggests an increase in entitled attitudes and behaviors of youth in school and college settings. Using a newly developed scale to assess “academic entitlement” (AE), a construct that includes expectations of high grades for modest effort and demanding attitudes towards teachers, this research is the first to investigate the phenomenon systematically. In two separate samples of ethnically diverse college students comprised largely of East and Southeast Asian American, followed by Caucasians, Latinos, and other groups (total  $N = 839$ , age range 18–25 years), we examined the personality, parenting, and motivational correlates of AE. AE was most strongly related to exploitive attitudes towards others and moderately related to an overall sense of entitlement and to narcissism. Students who reported more academically entitled attitudes perceived their parents as exerting achievement pressure marked by social comparison with other youth and materially rewarding good grades, scored higher than their peers in achievement anxiety and extrinsic motivation, and engaged in more academic dishonesty. AE was not significantly associated with GPA.

**Keywords** Sense of entitlement · Academic entitlement · Parenting processes · Socially comparative achievement pressure · Achievement anxiety · Student–teacher relationships · Academic dishonesty

## Introduction

Anecdotal evidence suggests a substantial rise over recent decades in the number of students who beleaguer their professors for higher grades, forecast dire personal outcomes if they do not get the grades they feel they deserve (or want), and expect professors and teaching assistants to go to exceptional lengths to accommodate their needs and preferences. A search of Lexis/Nexis (2007) reveals that references in the print media to the joint terms “sense of entitlement” and “students” have increased six-fold in the past decade: from 16 in 1996 to 102 in 2006. The phenomenon of entitlement in the academic arena has not yet been examined systematically by researchers.

In contrast, the more general phenomenon of entitlement has attracted substantial amounts of both media and research attention. In 2005 alone, there were 468 mentions of “sense of entitlement” in major newspapers (LexisNexis 2006), up from 293 mentions in 2000 and 114 mentions in 1995. Many, if not most, of these articles concern children, adolescents, and young adults (see, for example, Newbart 2005, regarding the attitudes of wealthy adolescents; and Paschke 2005, regarding athletes). A recent large-scale empirical study by Trzesniewski et al. (2008) reported that a generalized sense of entitlement had increased slightly from 1996 to 2007. In that study, entitlement, or “the expectation of special privileges over others and special exemptions from normal social demands” (Raskin and Terry 1988, p. 890), was measured using the entitlement

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subscale of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin and Terry 1988).

Campbell and colleagues, conceptualizing entitlement similarly as “a pervasive sense that one deserves more and is entitled to more than others” (Campbell et al. 2004, p. 31), developed a scale that appears to improve upon the NPI entitlement subscale in several respects and provided evidence that entitlement is an independent construct, i.e., one that can be differentiated from narcissism. Regardless of which measure of entitlement is used, researchers have demonstrated convincingly that entitlement is associated with a wide array of maladaptive and socially-problematic traits, including greed, aggression, and lack of forgiveness (Campbell et al. 2004), Machiavellianism (McHoskey 1995), and the perception by others that one is hostile and deceitful (Raskin and Terry 1988). Recent research has raised the possibility that entitlement may not be a unifactorial construct, but rather, may have both a maladaptive or exploitive component (consistent with studies demonstrating positive associations between entitlement measures and socially-destructive traits) and a non-exploitive, potentially adaptive component (Lessard et al. 2007). Thus, “entitlement” remains a construct under construction.

In addition to examining the trajectory of the sense of entitlement over time, researchers have investigated whether other self-related traits are on the rise. Twenge (2006), for example, reported a 30% increase between 1982 and 2006 in the number of college students who obtained elevated narcissism scores on a commonly used measure of this trait (NPI; Raskin and Terry 1988). Other researchers (Trzesniewski et al. 2008), however, recently have disputed this conclusion, based on shortcomings of the NPI and analyses indicating that scores on most of its subscales (the entitlement subscale is an exception) have not shown a significant increase over this period. On the other hand, self-esteem clearly does seem to have risen over time. Twenge and Campbell (2001) examined data from successive cohorts of college students ( $n =$  approximately 66,000) who took the Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem Scale. They found that the average self-esteem score of college men in the mid-1990s was higher than that of 86% of college men in 1968, and the average self-esteem score of college women was higher than 71% of their peers at the earlier time-point. These findings suggest that self-enhancing processes are rising in at least some domains.

Returning to the topic of academic entitlement (AE), we think that several questions need to be addressed. Is academic self-entitlement a domain-specific expression of a more generalized disposition towards self-entitlement—especially, its maladaptive component, or of narcissism or exaggerated self-esteem? Does AE have correlates that these personality constructs do not? What are the circumstances that foster the behavior and attitudes of academic

self-entitlement: i.e., expectations of high rewards for modest effort, expectations of special consideration and accommodation by teachers when it comes to grades, and impatience and anger when their expectations and perceived needs are not met?

A host of factors might contribute to students' feelings of entitlement in the academic domain, among them, more general personality variables such as those noted above, traits such as a poor work ethic and low degree of concern for how their behavior impacts others, and certain socialization practices within the family. For example, parenting practices that lead to inflated self-esteem may encourage entitled attitudes and behavior in various domains of life, and studies have shown that unrealistically high and unstable self-esteem is associated with aggressive behavior (e.g., Twenge and Campbell 2003). Moreover, parents who have very high achievement expectations for their children and use social comparisons to motivate or guide their pursuit of excellence (“You should do better in school than your friends”, “Your cousin is such a fine student”) may unwittingly encourage the development of AE. In this type of family context, academically-entitled attitudes and behaviors may arise as a coping strategy for securing academic goals that are important to one's parents and, in many cases, oneself. The parenting practices described above may have other consequences as well, creating achievement anxiety in children and a focus on grades as opposed to the more intrinsic satisfactions associated with mastery and learning. Parents' use of extrinsic rewards in response to high achievement would likely exacerbate the effects of these parenting practices (Deci et al. 1999).

Still another possibility is that academic self-entitlement constitutes a coping strategy for students who experience a decline in grades, as may happen when they confront the more stringent demands of college and university course work and the more academically selective pool of fellow-students in that setting. Baumeister et al. (1996) proposed that when favorable views of the self are challenged by unflattering external feedback, the individual may view the feedback as inaccurate and unfair and direct angry emotions and behaviors towards the evaluator. It would be interesting to know whether blaming the teacher, the test, the text, or the grading for one's lack of academic success actually pays off in higher grades, and whether academically-entitled students are more likely than others to engage in dishonest practices to enhance their GPAs.

The current research has the following objectives: (1) to examine the association between academically entitled attitudes and other personality variables, with the purpose of understanding the dispositional correlates of AE; (2) to examine perceived parenting practices that are associated

with AE and investigate whether specific aspects of college students' academic motivation mediate this association; and (3) to determine whether academically-entitled attitudes, perceived parenting practices, and students' motivational characteristics are associated with GPA and academic dishonesty.

## Study 1

Study 1 was designed to investigate the extent to which AE is distinct from other personality and dispositional variables. We hypothesized that AE would be moderately and positively associated with generalized psychological entitlement, conceptualized by Campbell et al. (2004) as a unifactorial construct, and with self-esteem. Based on recent research suggesting that entitlement may have both exploitive and non-exploitive components (Lessard et al. 2006, 2007), we further hypothesized that AE would be associated with the former but not the latter. We also expected that AE would be associated with a weak work ethic and with attitudes reflecting little commitment to acting in the best interest of others. Overall, we expected the hypothesized association of AE with the above-mentioned personality dispositions to be moderate in magnitude, inasmuch as the latter are *general* personality dispositions whereas AE is a *domain-specific* construct.

## Method

### Sample

Participants were 466 undergraduates at a large public university. The sample included 364 women (78.1%) and 102 men whose age ranged from 18 to 25 ( $M = 20.1$  years,  $SD = 1.4$  years). The sample was ethnically diverse: 216 participants (46.4%) described themselves as East or Southeast Asian (Chinese, Korean, Japanese, or Vietnamese ancestry or a combination of these), 88 as Caucasian (18.9%), 50 as Latino (10.7%), and the remainder as Middle Eastern ( $n = 29$ ; 6.2%), Filipino ( $n = 27$ ; 5.8%), South Asian ( $n = 26$ ; 5.6%) African/African American ( $n = 5$ ; 1.1%), or mixed ethnicity ( $n = 24$ ; 5.2%). The majority of the sample (80.3%) was born in the U.S. The sample's ethnic composition reflects the diversity of the campus, and the sample's gender composition is similar to that of the two social science-oriented schools from which participants were recruited. More than half of the parents (50.6% of mothers, 58.2% of fathers) had completed at least a Bachelor's degree, whereas about 7% of mothers and fathers had not attained a high school diploma.

## Procedure

Participants were recruited through flyers posted at the Social Sciences Human Subjects Laboratory and a notice posted on its website. Participants completed an on-line survey and received a small amount of course credit for their participation.

## Measures

**Demographic Variables** Participants provided demographic information that included their gender, age, ethnicity, generational status in the U.S., and parents' educational attainment.

**Ethnicity** was ascertained by self-identification, using a multi-item checklist and an "other" category with a "write-in" instruction.

**Generational status** was determined by asking participants whether they had been born in the U.S. (1 = "yes", 0 = "no").

**Parental educational attainment** was indicated separately for father and mother, using five categories from 1 = "9th grade or less" through 5 = "Master's degree or higher." The higher of the parents' educational levels was used in subsequent analyses.

**Personality Measures** Sense of entitlement was assessed with three measures.

The 9-item *Psychological Entitlement Scale* (PES; Campbell et al. 2004) is a unifactorial measure of generalized sense of entitlement. A sample item, responded to on a 7-point scale from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree", is "I honestly feel I'm just more deserving than others." Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for this sample was .86.

**Non-exploitive entitlement**, a 5-item scale ( $\alpha = .76$ ), and **Exploitive entitlement**, a 7-item scale ( $\alpha = .75$ ), both use a 6-point scale from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 6 = "strongly agree" (Lessard et al. 2007). The non-exploitive scale, with items such as "I deserve the best things in life", is positively correlated with self-esteem (Rosenberg 1965) and unrelated to NEO Agreeableness (Costa and McCrae 1992). In contrast, the exploitive scale, with items such as "If I'm in a hurry, people should let me move ahead in line" and "When I have a lot 'on my plate,' I expect people to give me a break," is negatively correlated with both self-esteem and agreeableness (Lessard et al. 2007).

**Academic entitlement** was assessed using a newly-developed scale, hereafter referred to as the AE scale. The scale ( $\alpha = .87$  in this sample) consists of 15 items. Examples are "A professor should be willing to lend me his/her class notes if I ask for them", "If I have attended

most classes for a course, I deserve at least a grade of B”, and “I would think poorly of a professor who didn’t respond the same day to an e-mail I sent.” Responses are from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 6 = “strongly agree.”

*Narcissism* was measured using the total score for the 40-item Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin and Terry 1988). A sample item, to which respondents reply “yes” or “no”, is: “If I ruled the world, it would be a better place.” Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .86$  in this sample.

*Self-esteem* was assessed using Rosenberg’s (1965) 10-item Self-Esteem Scale ( $\alpha = .91$ ), with a 6-point response scale from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 6 = “strongly agree.”

*Work Orientation* was assessed using a 10-item scale from the Psychosocial Maturity Inventory (Greenberger et al. 1975), with responses from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 4 = “strongly agree.” This scale ( $\alpha = .79$ ) includes items such as: “I believe in working only as hard as I have to” and “Very often I forget work I am supposed to do” (both items are reverse-scored).

*Social Commitment* was assessed using an 11-item scale ( $\alpha = .75$ ), also from the Psychosocial Maturity Inventory. The scale measures the disposition to work toward the larger social good rather than pursue immediate self-interest; sample items, reverse-scored, are “I would only give a large sum of money to research on cancer if I knew they would find a cure in my lifetime” and “It’s not really my problem if my neighbors are in trouble and need help.”

## Results

Before addressing the hypotheses of this study, we describe participants’ responses on the AE scale. On average, AE scores tended toward “slightly disagree” ( $M = 2.63$  on a 6-point scale). However, a considerable proportion of the sample agreed with individual items, as shown in Table 1. For purposes of summarization, it is useful to view these items in three broad groups: (1) items agreed to (i.e., slightly agree, agree, strongly agree) by 40% or more of the study participants, (2) items agreed to by about one-quarter to a one-third of participants, and (3) items agreed to by approximately 10–18% of participants. Among the most highly-endorsed items (66.2%) was the item, “If I have explained to my professor that I’m trying hard, I think he/she should give me some consideration with respect to my course grade.” Among the second group of items, nearly 25% of students agreed that “A professor should be willing to lend me his/her course notes if I ask for them.” In the third group of items, nearly one in ten respondents endorsed the view, “A professor should let me arrange to turn in an assignment late if the due date interferes with my vacation plans.”

Table 2 shows the correlations among the major variables included in this study. As expected, AE was correlated positively with generalized PES,  $r = .40$ ,  $p < .001$ , exploitive entitlement ( $r = .47$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and narcissism ( $r = .26$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Also as anticipated, AE

**Table 1** Percentage of participants endorsing (slightly agree, agree, or strongly agree) academic entitlement items

Academic entitlement items	% Endorsers
If I have explained to my professor that I am trying hard, I think he/she should give me some consideration with respect to my course grade	66.2
I feel I have been poorly treated if a professor cancels an appointment with me on the same day as we were supposed to meet	41.1
If I have completed most of the reading for a class, I deserve a B in that course	40.7
If I have attended most classes for a course, I deserve at least a grade of B	34.1
Teachers often give me lower grades than I deserve on paper assignments	31.5
Professors who won’t let me take an exam at a different time because of my personal plans (e.g. a vacation or other trip that is important to me) are too strict	29.9
Teachers often give me lower grades than I deserve on exams	25.4
A professor should be willing to lend me his/her course notes if I ask for them	24.8
I would think poorly of a professor who didn’t respond the same day to an e-mail I sent	23.5
If I’m not happy with my grade from last quarter, the professor should allow me to do an additional assignment	17.7
Professors have no right to be annoyed with me if I tend to come late to class or tend to leave early	16.8
A professor should not be annoyed with me if I receive an important call during class	16.5
I would think poorly of a professor who didn’t respond quickly to a phone message I left him or her	15.3
A professor should be willing to meet with me at a time that works best for me, even if inconvenient for the professor	11.2
A professor should let me arrange to turn in an assignment late if the due date interferes with my vacation plans	9.5

**Table 2** Intercorrelations among, and means and standard deviations of academic entitlement and personality trait measures ( $n = 466$ )

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>M (SD)</i>
1. Academic entitlement	–							2.63 (0.73)
2. Psychological entitlement	.40***	–						3.53 (1.07)
3. Non-exploitive entitlement	.14**	.43***	–					4.63 (0.82)
4. Exploitive entitlement	.47***	.51***	.26***	–				2.71 (0.72)
5. Narcissism	.26***	.47***	.38***	.24***	–			0.49 (0.18)
6. Self-esteem	–.14**	.09	.30***	–.20***	.33***	–		4.47 (0.65)
7. Work orientation	–.30***	–.14**	.10*	–.32***	.03	.41***	–	2.85 (0.41)
8. Social commitment	–.42***	–.34***	–.03	–.39***	–.21***	.15**	.54***	2.97 (0.39)

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

was related inversely to measures of work orientation,  $r = -.30$ ,  $p < .001$ , and social commitment,  $r = -.42$ ,  $p < .001$ . Contrary to our hypothesis, students who scored higher on AE scored slightly lower on self-esteem ( $r = -.14$ ,  $p < .01$ ). AE was expected to be unrelated to non-exploitive entitlement, but instead was related modestly to this variable,  $r = .14$ ,  $p < .01$ .

A regression analysis was conducted to examine the relative contributions of PES, non-exploitive entitlement, exploitive entitlement, narcissism, self-esteem, work orientation, and social commitment to AE. We controlled for the following demographic factors on Step 1: gender, age, ethnicity, generational status, and parental educational attainment. In order to co-vary ethnicity, we selected the two largest groups, East/Southeast Asian and Caucasian, and created dummy variables with “Other” as the reference group. The seven personality measures were added on Step 2. The full model accounted for 31% of the variance in AE (all but 4% due to the Step 2 variables). Exploitive entitlement made the single largest unique contribution to AE ( $\beta = .26$ ,  $t = 5.22$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Additionally, PES ( $\beta = .14$ ,  $t = 2.76$ ,  $p < .01$ ), social commitment ( $\beta = -.18$ ,  $t = -3.49$ ,  $p = .001$ ), and narcissism ( $\beta = .09$ ,  $t = 1.98$ ,  $p < .05$ ) had independent associations with AE, but the remaining measures did not.

Although not central to the present study, it is of interest to note that demographic variables had only minor associations, at best, with AE. Males scored slightly higher on AE than females ( $M = 2.80$  and  $M = 2.59$ , respectively;  $t(462) = 2.57$ ,  $p < .05$ ). There was a significant but small effect for ethnicity,  $F(2,350) = 3.99$ ,  $p < .05$ , and a subsequent Scheffe test revealed that Asian students ( $M = 2.81$ ) had significantly higher AE scores than Caucasians ( $M = 2.50$ ),  $t = 2.65$ ,  $p < .05$ . (Contrasts of these two groups with participants classified as “Other”,  $M = 2.65$ , were nonsignificant.) Participants who were born in the U.S. had somewhat lower scores ( $M = 2.59$ ) than foreign-born students ( $M = 2.84$ ),  $t(459) = 2.91$ ,

$p < .01$ . Participants’ age ( $r = -.08$ ) and parental education ( $r = .02$ ) were not significantly related to AE.

### Preliminary Discussion

Across the set of 15 items, students on average reported a modest level of AE. This is not surprising, in light of the very unflattering self-portrait that higher mean scores would entail. However, students showed considerable support for specific items.

A key question of this study concerned the relation of AE to other dispositional characteristics. Results indicated that AE has both meaningful relations to, and important differences from, other personality variables. AE is not simply a manifestation of narcissism or a generalized sense of entitlement that is expressed in the academic domain: The correlations between AE and these two constructs are only moderate. Furthermore, there are important differences in their correlates. For example, there was a significant negative association between work orientation and AE ( $r = -.30$ ,  $p < .001$ ), but a nonsignificant association between work orientation and narcissism ( $r = .03$ , *ns*). Although AE has significant shared variance with generalized sense of entitlement, the exploitive aspect of entitlement, and to a somewhat lesser extent, with narcissism, the degree of overlap is moderate, as was expected. Likewise, our findings do not support the view that entitled attitudes in the academic domain are simply a reflection of exaggerated self-esteem: The association between AE and self-esteem was not only modest but *negative*: i.e., the more academically entitled students have lower self-esteem. In short, AE seems to be a domain-specific construct with some elements in common with other measures of self-entitled, self-centered dispositions.

The negative correlations of AE with work orientation and social commitment are consistent with a description of academically-entitled students as expecting rewards beyond what their efforts have earned and requesting special treatment with little regard for its impact on others.

## Study 2

The purposes of this study were three-fold. Our first aim was to investigate whether the parenting practices we described at the beginning of this paper are in fact associated with students' AE. The second goal was to ascertain whether these parenting practices are linked to students' AE indirectly through students' own motivational characteristics (i.e., achievement anxiety and extrinsic motivation for academic achievement). The final purpose of the study was to determine whether AE is linked to academic outcomes and dishonesty in carrying out academic tasks.

We hypothesized that AE would be related positively to students' perceptions of high parental expectations for top grades, perceived parental pressure to compete favorably with others in their academic performance, and to parents' use of material rewards for high achievement. These variables have been shown to be important in relation to children's and adolescents' school achievement (Steinberg 1996) and have been found to vary across ethnic groups (Chao and Tseng 2002). We expected these domain-specific (i.e., school-related) measures of perceived parenting to be related to AE after controlling for a more general measure of the quality of the parent-child relationship—i.e., perceived parental warmth and acceptance. We also hypothesized that participants' levels of achievement anxiety and extrinsically-motivated academic goals might mediate the association between the aforementioned parenting practices and AE. Finally, we predicted that AE would be associated with higher GPA but also with greater involvement in academic dishonesty. Students who expect to get good grades without commensurate effort might be willing to take improper short-cuts to attain their goals.

## Method

### Sample

Participants were 353 undergraduate students enrolled at the same university as those in Study 1. The sample included 244 women (69.1%) and 109 men, ranging in age from 18 to 25. Average age was 20.4 years ( $SD = 1.5$  years). Participants included 154 East and Southeast Asian Americans (43.6%), 54 Caucasians (15.3%), 36 Latinos (10.2%), 31 Filipinos (8.8%), 25 Middle Easterners (7.1%), 19 South Asians (5.4%), 7 Africans/African Americans (2.0%), and 27 individuals (7.6%) of mixed ethnicity. The majority of participants (78.5%) were born in the U.S. Slightly over half of their parents (53.1% of fathers, 50.3% of mothers) had at least a 4-year college degree; 5.1% of fathers and 8.6% of mothers did not graduate from high school.

## Procedure

Participants were recruited through the Social Sciences Human Subjects Pool, as in Study 1. After reading a Study Information Sheet and verbally assenting to participate, participants completed a questionnaire booklet in which they provided demographic information and completed measures of perceived parenting practices, AE, academic motivations, GPA, and level of involvement in academic dishonesty. Students received a small amount of extra course credit in return for their participation.

## Measures

**Demographic Information** The same demographic information obtained in Study 1 also was obtained in Study 2.

**Academic Entitlement** This was assessed as in Study 1 ( $\alpha = .86$  in this sample). The consistency of Cronbach's  $\alpha$  across the two studies is noteworthy in relation to this newly-developed measure.

**Perceptions of Parenting Parental Warmth and Acceptance** is an 8-item scale ( $\alpha = .84$ ) adapted from Greenberger et al. (1998). Its 6-point response continuum ranges from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 6 = "strongly agree." The scale assesses the overall emotional quality of the parent-child relationship. A sample item is "I know that they [my parents] will 'be there' for me if I need them."

**Parental Achievement Expectations** was adapted from the parenting subscale of the Perfectionism scale (Frost et al. 1990) and re-worded to reflect expectations for academic performance. Six identical items, for separate mother and father scales, included "Only outstanding academic performance was good enough for my mother/father." Responses were made on a 5-point continuum from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree." Because the two scales were substantially correlated ( $r = .62$ ), we averaged responses to each item to form a single parental achievement expectations scale ( $\alpha = .81$ ).

**Socially-Comparative Achievement Pressure**—A 10-item scale was newly developed for this study to assess parents' use of social comparisons to convey their achievement expectations. The socially comparative achievement pressure (SCAP) scale (so-named to reflect socially-comparative achievement pressure) has items such as "My parents encourage competition in my family when it comes to grades" and "My parents are always comparing me academically to my siblings and cousins." The 6-point response continuum ranges from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 6 = "strongly agree." Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for this scale was .92.

**Parental Rewards for Achievement**—Respondents answered a 3-item scale ( $\alpha = .87$ ) that was accompanied

by the same 6-point response continuum described above. A sample item is, “My parents give me anything I want when I get good grades.”

**Academically-Relevant Motives Achievement Anxiety**—Participants completed a newly-developed, 12-item measure of *Achievement Anxiety* ( $\alpha = .92$ ) with items such as “I am desperate to do better in school” and “I feel that everything depends on my doing well in school.” This scale, with response options from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 6 = “strongly agree,” is positively correlated with the State Anxiety scale (Spielberger et al. 1970),  $r = .57$ ,  $p < .001$  (Greenberger et al. 2007, Unpublished Manuscript).

**Extrinsic Academic Motivation**—This construct was assessed using a 6-item scale ( $\alpha = .76$ ). Sample items are, “I will not take a course in which the grading is hard, even if I am interested in the material” and “Good grades are more important to me than learning interesting things.” Respondents answered on a 6-point scale where 1 = “strongly disagree” and 6 = “strongly agree.” In a previous study (Greenberger et al. 2007, Unpublished Manuscript), Extrinsic Academic Motivation was correlated negatively with all three intrinsic motivation subscales of the Academic Motivation Scale (Vallerand et al. 1993) and was related positively to the external regulation subscale of this measure’s extrinsic motivation subscales.

**Academic Outcomes GPA**—Grade point average was reported numerically and rounded to one decimal place (e.g., 3.3).

**Academic Dishonesty**—Participants responded to Bolin’s (2004) 9-item adaptation of McCabe and Trevino’s (1997) 12-item Academic Dishonesty Scale. In addition to deleting 3 items, Bolin slightly re-worded some items and improved

the reliability of the original version of the scale. The resulting scale, with 5 response options from 1 = “never” to 5 = “many times,” was shown by Bolin to be associated with lack of self-control and attitudes reflecting acceptance of academic dishonesty. Sample items are “turned in work done by someone else” and “copied material and turned it in as your own work.” In the present study the Academic Dishonesty Scale had  $\alpha = .88$ .

**Results**

Examination of scale means (all on 6-point scales, except GPA and Academic Dishonesty; see Table 3) revealed the following picture. Participants in this study had a similar level of AE to that found in Study 1. (Moreover, the percentage of respondents who expressed agreement with individual items was very similar to that observed in Study 1). Turning to the parenting measures, we found that participants tended to agree ( $M = 4.87$ ) that their parents are warm and accepting and slightly disagree that their parents have very high expectations for their academic performance, compare their achievement to that of others, or provide material rewards for their academic accomplishments (mean ratings from 3.25 to 3.40). Participants tended to slightly agree with items that reflect anxiety about their level of academic achievement ( $M = 3.84$ ) and making academic choices based on extrinsic motives ( $M = 3.66$ ). The average participant’s grade point average (2.98) was just under a B. Students’ reports of the frequency of engaging in academic dishonesty (a 5-category measure, as described earlier) averaged less than one time across the nine items of this scale. However, a substantial proportion of students (between 15.1% and 60.7%) indicated that they had committed specific dishonest acts at least once. The most common dishonest acts were collaborating on what was supposed to be an individual assignment (60.7%),

**Table 3** Intercorrelations among, and means and standard deviations of academic entitlement, parenting variables, motivational variables, and academic outcomes ( $n = 353$ )

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )
1. Academic entitlement	–								2.70 (0.73)
2. Parental warmth	–.07	–							4.87 (0.88)
3. Parental academic expectations	.19***	–.39***	–						3.33 (0.80)
4. Parental SCAP	.24***	–.51***	.62***	–					3.25 (0.86)
5. Parental rewarding	.20***	–.13*	.37***	.38***	–				3.40 (1.31)
6. Achievement anxiety	.22***	–.33***	.34***	.37***	.33***	–			3.84 (1.05)
7. Extrinsic motivation	.28***	–.04	.20***	.16**	.15**	.23***	–		3.65 (0.74)
8. GPA	–.10	.08	–.12*	–.15**	–.14*	–.22***	–.05	–	2.98 (0.47)
9. Academic dishonesty	.22***	–.05	.12*	.18**	.13*	.03	.17**	–.05	1.76 (0.73)

Note: Parental SCAP = parents’ use of socially-comparative achievement pressure

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

followed by cheating on a test (52.6%), copying material and presenting it as one's own work (51.4%), and helping someone else cheat on a test (47.2%).

Of primary interest in this study are the links between AE and perceived parenting practices and between AE and aspects of students' behavior and performance in the academic domain. As Table 3 indicates, AE was correlated positively with perceived parental achievement expectations ( $r = .19$ ), SCAP,  $r = .24$ , and rewards for high grades ( $r = .20$ ), all  $p < .001$ ). However, AE was unrelated to perceived parental warmth and acceptance ( $r = -.07$ , *ns*), a measure of the overall quality of the parent-child relationship.

Although tangential to this study, we note that demographic variables in this sample, as in the Study 1 sample, showed little relation to AE. Once again, ANOVA revealed a small but significant ethnicity effect on AE, and the previously-noted difference between Asian ( $M = 2.81$ ) and Caucasian ( $M = 2.50$ ) groups was replicated (Scheffe  $t = 2.65$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The generational effect found in Study 1, however, was not replicated ( $M = 2.68$  for U.S.-born students and  $M = 2.79$  for foreign-born students,  $t(351) = 1.23$ , *ns*). The small gender difference observed in Study 1 (males scoring higher than females) was in the same direction (males'  $M = 2.80$ ; females'  $M = 2.65$ ,  $t(350) = 1.72$ , *ns*) but fell short of significance in Study 2. Participants' age ( $r = .01$ ) and parental education ( $r = .03$ ) were not significantly related to AE scores, as was the case in Study 1.

In subsequent analyses (see Table 4), AE was regressed on demographic variables (entered on Step 1 as controls; see Study 1) and the four parenting measures. SCAP (i.e., socially-comparative achievement pressure) made a unique contribution to AE ( $\beta = .22$ ,  $t = 2.62$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and the contribution of parental use of rewards for achievement approached significance ( $\beta = .11$ ,  $t = 1.86$ ,  $p < .07$ ). Adjusted  $R^2$  was .07, with parenting measures contributing all but 1% of the explained variance.

To test the hypothesis that achievement anxiety and extrinsic motivation might mediate the association between parenting variables and AE, we added the hypothesized mediators on Step 3 of the regression model. SCAP continued to make a unique contribution to AE ( $\beta = .18$ ,  $t = 2.17$ ,  $p < .05$ ), but the effect of parental achievement rewards on AE was reduced to non-significance ( $\beta = .06$ ,  $t = 1.20$ , *ns*). Neither achievement anxiety nor extrinsic motivation (Sobel  $z = 1.82$ ,  $p < .07$  for each of these variables) fully met the conditions for mediating the association between parental achievement rewards and AE. Achievement anxiety and extrinsic motivation each had significant main effects on AE ( $\beta = .13$ ,  $t = 2.06$ ,  $p < .05$  and  $\beta = .20$ ,  $t = 4.10$ ,  $p < .001$ , respectively). Their inclusion in the model increased  $R^2$  by .06, for an adjusted  $R^2$  of .13.

**Table 4** Hierarchical regression of academic entitlement on parenting and motivational variables ( $n = 353$ )

Variables	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>
<i>Step 2</i>			
Parental warmth	.08	.07	.05
Parental academic expectations	.03	.03	.06
Parental SCAP	.22	.19**	.07
Parental rewards	.11	.06	.03
$\Delta R^{2a}$	.07***		
<i>Step 3</i>			
Parental warmth	.10	.08	.05
Parental academic expectations	-.02	-.01	.06
Parental SCAP	.18	.15*	.06
Parental rewards	.06	.03	.03
Achievement anxiety	.13	.09*	.04
Extrinsic motivation	.20	.20***	.05
$\Delta R^2$	.06***		

<sup>a</sup> Demographic variables (gender, age, ethnicity, generational status, and parental education) were controlled

Note: Parental SCAP = parents' use of socially-comparative achievement pressure

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

We next examined associations between AE, parenting measures, academically-relevant motivations, and academic outcomes (GPA and academic dishonesty) (see Tables 3 and 5). Counter to prediction, AE was not significantly correlated with GPA; moreover, the trend was negative ( $r = -.10$ ,  $p < .07$ ). As expected, however, participants who held more academically-entitled attitudes reported significantly more academic dishonesty ( $r = .22$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In regression analyses that included demographics, AE, the four parenting measures, and the two motivation variables, only achievement anxiety ( $\beta = -.14$ ,  $t = -2.28$ ,  $p < .05$ ) had a unique association with GPA. Adjusted  $R^2$  for this model was .07. Both AE ( $\beta = .16$ ,  $t = 2.92$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and extrinsic motivation ( $\beta = .14$ ,  $t = 2.60$ ,  $p < .01$ ) contributed uniquely and positively to academic dishonesty. Final Adjusted  $R^2$  for the full 3-step model, shown in Table 5, was .13.

### Preliminary Discussion

Of the various perceived parenting practices that we examined, perceived parental comparison of one's performance with that of others appears to be linked most clearly with students' sense of AE. Overall, however, the parenting measures explained only a modest (albeit significant) amount of the variance in AE. It may be the case that other parenting variables, as well as variables outside the family system, have a greater influence on the development of AE.

**Table 5** Hierarchical Regressions of GPA and Academic Dishonesty on Parenting, Motivation, and Academic Entitlement ( $n = 353$ )

Variables	GPA			Academic dishonesty		
	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>
Parental warmth	-.03	-.01	.04	.03	.03	.05
Parental academic expectations	-.01	-.01	.04	.00	.00	.06
Parental SCAP	-.07	-.04	.04	.07	.06	.06
Parental rewards	-.08	-.03	.02	.04	.02	.03
Achievement anxiety	-.14	-.06*	.03	-.05	-.03	.04
Extrinsic motivation	.00	.00	.04	.14	.13*	.05
Academic entitlement	-.04	-.02	.04	.16	.16**	.06
$\Delta R^{2a}$	.05*			.07**		

<sup>a</sup> Demographic variables (gender, age, ethnicity, generational status, and parental education) were controlled

Note: Parental SCAP = parents' use of socially-comparative achievement pressure

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

Students' anxiety over doing well in college and, especially, their drive to do well for the sake of extrinsic rather than intrinsic rewards (e.g., satisfaction from learning new and interesting things) contributed directly to the variation in AE, rather than mediating the effects of parenting practices. The positive association of AE with academic dishonesty was expected, but the trend-level negative association with grades was not.

## Discussion

Diatribes about students' increasing sense of entitlement—their attitude that good grades should not be too hard to come by and that teachers should give them a “break,” often accompanied by what teachers see as disrespectful and unreasonable behavior—occur frequently in faculty members' conversations, blogs, and in opinion pieces and articles in newspapers and magazines (e.g., Benton 2006; Glater 2006). Results indicate that this domain-specific construct has only moderate overlap with broader, dispositional measures of entitlement and narcissism. Students' sense of entitlement in the academic domain is related to more general measures of entitlement, including a measure that emphasizes entitlement of an exploitive nature, and to unhelpful attitudes toward others and a poor work ethic.

The self-esteem movement of the 1980s, which emphasized the importance of engendering self-esteem in youth but has been criticized since that time for not linking self-esteem to the development of skills and competencies, has been held to task for the growth of self-centered attitudes in the younger generation (see, for example, Twenge and Campbell 2001). However, excessive self-esteem cannot be blamed in the current instance: Academically entitled attitudes are not associated with inflated self-esteem; on the contrary, AE and self-esteem are negatively related. This anomalous finding might be due to the fact

that AE and narcissism are modestly associated (see Study 1), and that college students who score high on AE, like narcissists (see Haugaard 2001; Twenge and Campbell 2003; Wink 1991), have an underlying low and/or unstable sense of self-esteem. Future research is needed to clarify the paradox of parallel increases in the inversely-related constructs of AE and self-esteem.

Taken together, the personality variables we examined explain substantially more of the variance in AE than do the perceived parenting measures examined in this study. Nonetheless, AE also appears to be embedded to some degree in the dynamics of the family. More academically entitled students report that their parents expect them to outshine others in their academic performance and provide them with material rewards when they do well. These students also experience more anxiety about their grades, and not surprisingly, have an extrinsic orientation toward their coursework that emphasizes getting good grades over the pleasures of learning and mastery. It is important to note that it is the socially-comparative aspect of parental achievement pressure, rather than high parental achievement expectations per se, that contributes uniquely to students' academically-entitled attitudes. Although the data for this study are cross-sectional, it is not unreasonable to suggest that such parenting practices may foster the development of AE.

Although students who express stronger feelings of AE are more likely to cheat in various ways, it is noteworthy that academically-entitled attitudes and behaviors do not appear to pay off in higher college grades.

Interestingly, we found only minor associations between demographic variables and AE. The small magnitude of the few significant correlations, and inconsistencies in their significance across the two studies, lead us to forego interpretation of these findings. It is noteworthy, however, that in both studies, participants' age was unrelated to AE:

i.e., there is no indication that AE decreases with maturity—or increases. One might entertain the notion that experience in the college setting, which breeds familiarity with other students' attitudes and with professors' vulnerabilities, would be more likely than age per se to be associated with AE. However, post-hoc analyses showed that year in school (which is, not surprisingly, strongly correlated with age) also had nonsignificant associations with AE in both samples ( $F[3,462] = 0.11$ , *ns* and  $F[3,348] = 0.27$ , *ns*). Perhaps students already have developed the attitudes and behaviors that the AE measure taps before they enter college.

Although some of the family process variables examined in Study 2 were associated with AE, the magnitude of these associations was not large. These family factors, however, represent only a few of those that might be linked to AE. Thus, future researchers should seek to identify other parenting and family process factors, such as parental indulgence and overprotection of children in their early years, that might influence the development of academically entitled attitudes.

Factors outside the family venue, in the larger social context of late adolescent and young adult development, also are likely to contribute to academically entitled attitudes and behaviors. Among other things, changes in technology and educational policies and practices may contribute to students' academically-entitled attitudes and behaviors and their perceived increase over recent decades. For example, the advent of e-mail has led to a degree of access to professors that was not present in the past; and the culture of e-mail, which includes informal modes of expression and an expectation of rapid response, seems to have diminished status distinctions and the respectfulness of communications from students to teachers (Glater 2006; see Herring 2002 for a comprehensive review of internet communication). Perhaps respectfulness of student-to-teacher communications is more common in small schools, where students and teachers may know each other better. Seldom discussed is the possibility that the tone and content of teachers' e-mail communications to students also are less respectful than in-person communications.

The policy of requiring professors to obtain students' anonymous evaluations of their courses, which became widespread in 1970s, also may have spawned feelings of entitlement. Although this policy gave students a needed voice in their own education, it also may have conveyed upon them a degree of power that has not been entirely positive (Benton 2006; Redding 1998). College professors, especially but not only in their pre-tenure years, often express concerns about how their course evaluations will look and openly admit to taking steps to be liked (e.g., easy grading) and avoiding actions (e.g., discipline, "too much" reading) that might lower their ratings. Tabachnick et al.

(1991, p. 510) reported that 22% of academic psychologists stated that they sometimes give "easy courses or tests to ensure popularity with students."

Relatedly, grade inflation may contribute to students' sense of entitlement. Although there is debate about the extent of, and reasons for, grade inflation (e.g., teachers' giving higher grades than previously versus students' "shopping" for easier courses and/or course instructors), evidence from a large-scale study (Kuh and Hu 1999) of grade inflation between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s indicated an increase in average grades at research universities, selective liberal arts colleges, and moderately selective state universities. If students learn that they can get a high grade with minimal effort, or that trivial excuses often result in special favors (e.g., permission to postpone an exam), we should not be surprised if they develop entitled attitudes. In view of the widespread use of e-mail and anonymous course evaluations, and significant grade inflation in many educational institutions, it may be difficult to find sufficient variation to test the hypothesis that these factors are associated with students' academically-entitled attitudes.

This research contributes to the literature on adolescent and young adult development in several ways. Most important, this is the first research that systematically examines entitled attitudes in the academic domain. We believe we have demonstrated convincingly that AE is a viable construct, and a construct that can be measured. We also have developed several scales that should prove useful to researchers interested in parenting practices that may influence youth's academic goals and well-being.

Nonetheless, the two studies we presented have several limitations. The studies are cross-sectional in design and thus cannot yield causal interpretations, and they rely on data from a single source. Additionally, further evidence of the validity of some of our newly-developed measures would be desirable (e.g., scales assessing AE, parental use of socially-comparative achievement pressure, and parental rewards for academic achievement). However, the fact that the hypothesized relations among these variables were sustained by the data presented in this paper gives us reason to be optimistic about the value of these new scales.

Future research on AE should include replication in other samples, including samples with a different ethnic composition and from other parts of the country. Longitudinal research that begins with younger samples would allow us to trace the formation of academically-entitled attitudes. It also would be valuable to obtain data from sources other than students (e.g., teachers' ratings of students' entitled behavior, parents' own report of their socialization practices). It is possible, for example, that young people's *perceptions* of parenting practices are colored by the traits that are associated with AE.

Nonetheless, it would be difficult to argue that perceptions of parents' behaviors and expectations are not an important component of their offspring's cognitive and behavioral systems. Moreover, parents' reports also may be biased. Indeed, parents' and children's reports typically are only moderately correlated. In one study, Schwarz et al. (1985) found that adolescents' perceptions (i.e., reports) of family processes were more highly correlated with observed family processes than were parental reports.

This research opens a new area of investigation for social scientists and educators who are interested in the development of attitudes that influence interpersonal functioning among adolescents and young adults. In the long run, a better understanding of the sources of AE should be useful to those of us who interact with college students and might help us to deal with entitlement when we encounter it, or unwittingly encourage it, in our school and university settings.

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