



# Academic entitlement and counterproductive research behavior



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## ABSTRACT

This study explored whether academic entitlement predicts counterproductive research behaviors (CRBs), operationalized as study absences and careless responding. Academic entitlement has been linked with other forms of counterproductive academic behaviors, but most research has demonstrated this relationship using self-report measures. The current study employed behavioral measures of CRBs and found that academic entitlement (specifically externalized responsibility) predicted study absences and careless survey responding in undergraduate students. Academic entitlement was also predictive of careless task responding (but not study absences or careless survey responding) beyond personality and trait aggression.

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## 1. Introduction

Faculty often lament that some college students accept little responsibility for their academic success and expect high rewards for little effort (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). These same students may blame instructors for poor grades (Chowning & Campbell, 2009; Greenberger, Lessard, Chen, & Farruggia, 2008) and attempt to negotiate for higher grades (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). In other words, these students have “the tendency to possess an expectation of academic success without taking personal responsibility for achieving that success” (Chowning & Campbell, 2009, pg. 982), also known as *academic entitlement*.

Academic entitlement is associated with a variety of counterproductive behaviors in an academic setting (e.g., Chowning & Campbell, 2009; Greenberger et al., 2008). Consistent with theories positing individual differences as antecedents of counterproductive behaviors (e.g., Marcus & Schuler, 2004; Slotter & Finkel, 2011), we examined whether academic entitlement also predicts negative behaviors when students participate in research for course requirements, which we term *counterproductive research behaviors* (CRBs). We also explored whether academic entitlement is incrementally predictive of CRBs beyond other individual differences commonly linked to counterproductive behavior (i.e., honesty–humility, conscientiousness, agreeableness, emotionality, and explicit/implicit aggression; Bing et al., 2007; Marcus, Lee, & Ashton, 2007; Salgado, 2002).

## 2. Counterproductive research behaviors and academic entitlement

Chowning and Campbell's (2009) model of academic entitlement comprises two distinct dimensions. *Externalized responsibility* captures the extent to which students feel that they are responsible for expending effort to achieve desirable outcomes (e.g., grades). Individuals high in externalized responsibility perceive that the university, instructor, or classmates are primarily responsible for exerting the necessary effort in the educational process to help them succeed. *Entitled expectations* focuses on respondents' expectations of instructors (e.g., policies regarding grading processes, etc.) and considers the extent to which students feel that they should be exempt from instructors' course policies. Students with entitled expectations have misconceptions about college-level work, assuming that any amount of effort toward coursework should directly translate into desirable outcomes. Although Chowning and Campbell (2009) demonstrated the initial validity for their academic entitlement measure, more criterion-related validity work is needed, especially with respect to counterproductive behavior.

Multiple theoretical frameworks view effort-related individual differences as antecedents of counterproductive behavior (e.g., Marcus & Schuler, 2004; Slotter & Finkel, 2011). Counterproductive behaviors are potentially harmful actions that oppose legitimate goals of individuals or organizations (Marcus & Schuler, 2004). Study absences and careless responding on research tasks and surveys represent CRBs because these behaviors disrupt research processes and detract from data quality (Credé, 2010; Meade & Craig, 2012). Given that academically entitled students engage in behaviors with little concern for the impact on others (Greenberger

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et al., 2008) and are inclined toward academic dishonesty (Greenberger et al., 2008), these students may also be more likely to engage in CRBs. In fact, two investigations have tangentially explored this relationship. Chowning and Campbell (2009) found that academically entitled students were more likely to provide unfavorable evaluations of an experimenter who provided negative task feedback compared to less entitled students. Similarly, Kopp and Finney (2013) found that students who skipped a scheduled university-wide testing session were higher in academic entitlement than students who attended. This study focused on a broader set of objectively measured CRBs and hypothesized that:

**Hypothesis 1.** Academic entitlement will positively predict research study (a) absences and (b) careless responding.

### 3. Personality, aggression, and counterproductive research behaviors

Research has also rarely assessed whether academic entitlement provides incremental validity in predicting counterproductive behaviors beyond other individual differences. We address this gap by examining two categories of individual differences (HEXACO personality traits and implicit/explicit aggression) that have been previously linked with counterproductive behaviors.

#### 3.1. Personality

Viewed as an antecedent of various counterproductive behaviors, Marcus and Schuler (2004) offered a theoretical framework positing that personality dimensions represent stable individual differences that serve to either inhibit or contribute to a propensity to engage in counterproductive behaviors. For instance, several dimensions of the Five-Factor Model (FFM; Costa & McCrae, 1985) have demonstrated a negative relationship with work absences (Conte & Jacobs, 2003; although, see Salgado, 2002), and workplace deviance (Salgado, 2002). In addition, emotional stability, agreeableness, and conscientiousness are negatively related to employee turnover (Salgado, 2002) and engagement in counterproductive work behaviors (Marcus et al., 2007; Mount, Ilies, & Johnson, 2006).

Moving beyond the FFM, Lee and Ashton (2004) proposed the six factor HEXACO model of personality. The largest contrast between this model and the FFM is the addition of the honesty–humility dimension, which is absent from other measures of personality (Lee & Ashton, 2004). Honesty–humility assesses dimensions of sincerity, fairness, greed avoidance, and modesty (Lee & Ashton, 2004), and has been shown to be negatively related to counterproductive behaviors (Lee, Ashton, & de Vries, 2005; Lee, Ashton, & Shin, 2005). The use of the HEXACO is further warranted in the current investigation given that the honesty–humility dimension provides a contrast to the characteristics of academic entitlement (e.g., expectations of receiving “special treatment”).

Importantly, the relationship between individual differences and counterproductive behaviors is not context specific (Marcus & Schuler, 2004), and is therefore predicted to emerge in a variety of settings. For example, Paunonen and Ashton (2001) found that personality predicted the neatness of participants’ questionnaire responses as well as absenteeism from experiments. Additionally, the honesty–humility dimension of the HEXACO model predicts counterproductive behavior in both work and academic settings (Marcus et al., 2007).

#### 3.2. Trait aggression

Aggression refers to an individual’s behaviors and intentions to harm another individual (Baron & Richardson, 1994). Explicit

aggression includes physical and verbal behaviors, affect (i.e., anger), and cognition (e.g., hostility; Buss & Perry, 1992). Hostility represents attributions of aggression, expecting aggression from others, bitterness and malice toward others, and perceptions of injustice, and is positively related to anger (Buss & Perry, 1992).

Trait aggression refers to hostile attributions of others’ behaviors, as well as a propensity to react angrily and act with hostility (Buss & Perry, 1992). One of the defining characteristics of trait aggression is the tendency to make hostile attributions (Tiedens, 2001), which can result in aggressive behavior. For instance, individuals high in trait aggression engage in aggressive behavior in ambiguous conditions, which may be the result of the hostile attributions that they make (Bettencourt, Talley, Benjamin, & Valentine, 2006). In an academic context, a student high in trait aggressiveness may make hostile attributions regarding instructors’ policies (e.g., strict deadlines for assignments) and policy adherence. Aggressive students may infer that professors’ policies are intended to be malicious, rather than functional. These hostile attributions are addressed in the current study’s examination of both explicit hostile aggression (overt) and implicit (covert) aggression.

Implicit aggression is assessed indirectly via a conditional reasoning test, which measures justification mechanisms individuals use to interpret everyday situations (James, 1998). This measure is less susceptible to socially desirable responding than overt, self-report integrity or aggression tests (James et al., 2005). Individuals with high implicit trait aggression tend to interpret harmful intent from others (James et al., 2005). One justification mechanism relevant to CRBs involves seeing the self as a victim of injustices inflicted by powerful authority figures (James et al., 2005). This victimization perception rationalizes the individual resolving the injustice through retaliation or withdrawal behaviors, such as absences or careless responding. The conditional reasoning test for aggression predicts counterproductive behaviors in organizational and academic settings, including class absences in undergraduate students (Bing et al., 2007; Berry, Sackett, & Tobares, 2010).

#### 3.3. Incremental predictive validity of academic entitlement

We have reviewed research demonstrating that both personality and trait aggression can be used to predict counterproductive behaviors. Yet the extent to which academic entitlement predicts counterproductive behaviors beyond these other commonly examined individual difference predictors remains unclear. Chowning and Campbell (2009) demonstrated that their two-dimensional measure of academic entitlement is related to, yet distinct from, personality antecedents of counterproductive behavior. However, these authors did not evaluate the incremental predictive validity of academic entitlement beyond other traits. Additionally, to our knowledge, no other research has examined the relationship between academic entitlement and trait aggression. Although conceptually distinct, these constructs also seem to reside within the same nomological network, as both are concerned with negative interpretations of others’ behavior in social interactions. Further, both have been linked to counterproductive behavior in the past (e.g., Bing et al., 2007; Berry et al., 2010; Chowning & Campbell, 2009; Greenberger et al., 2008). Thus, assessing HEXACO personality traits and explicit/implicit aggression allows the current study to examine academic entitlement’s incremental predictive validity beyond these other individual differences. Given the potential distinctiveness of the academic entitlement measure from other constructs, we hypothesized that:

**Hypothesis 2.** Academic entitlement will predict research study (a) absences and (b) careless responding beyond personality and trait aggression.

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