



Brief Reports

Ego and academic ethics: A brief investigation into the associations among three facets of narcissism, academic entitlement, and academic dishonesty

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ABSTRACT

Educators continue to face two challenges in the classroom: academic entitlement and academic dishonesty. While both have been linked to narcissism, much of the existing work has relied on only a single, unidimensional measure of the trait, obscuring how its facets may be differentially associated with these problematic academic beliefs and behaviors. The present preregistered study ($N = 338$) explores the associations of three facets of narcissism—antagonism, agentic extraversion, and narcissistic neuroticism—with academic entitlement and attitudes toward academic dishonesty. We found that antagonism was significantly positively correlated with academic entitlement and academic dishonesty, potentially due to the arrogance and deceitfulness characteristic of the facet. We also found that agentic extraversion was significantly positively correlated with academic entitlement but not academic dishonesty, perhaps a consequence of the facet's grandiose (but not necessarily deceitful) nature. Narcissistic neuroticism was associated with neither academic entitlement nor academic dishonesty, indicating that the shame and vulnerability typical of the facet likely do not play a role in either construct. These findings provide insight into the personality correlates of academic entitlement and academic dishonesty and could be used to help develop targeted interventions for combating these problematic beliefs and behaviors.

1. Introduction

Educators continue to grapple with two challenges in the classroom: academic entitlement and academic dishonesty. Academic entitlement refers to the tendency to expect academic success without taking responsibility to actually achieve that success (Chowning & Campbell, 2009). For example, it includes the belief that one shouldn't have to participate in class to secure a passing grade, that one should routinely be bumped up to the next letter grade, and that professors are to blame for poor academic performance. Academic dishonesty, on the other hand, refers to a wide variety of behaviors that compromise academic integrity, including copying from other students' tests, using cheat sheets, and plagiarizing (Bowers, 1964; McCabe & Trevino, 1996).

Both academic entitlement and academic dishonesty can contribute to worse outcomes for students. Despite being more focused on grades than the average student (Goodboy & Frisby, 2014), those high in academic entitlement are often less engaged (Knepp, 2016; Knepp & Knepp, 2022) and less confident in their academic abilities (Goodboy & Frisby, 2014; Knepp & Knepp, 2022; Kurtyilmaz, 2019). Perhaps as a result,

they also tend to have lower GPAs (Laverghetta, 2018; Seipel & Brooks, 2020; Wasieleski et al., 2014; see also Whatley et al., 2019; but see Greenberger et al., 2008), act out more in class (Goodboy & Frisby, 2014; Jiang et al., 2017; Knepp & Knepp, 2022; Laverghetta, 2018), and engage in (or are at least more accepting of) academically dishonest behaviors (Fletcher et al., 2020; Greenberger et al., 2008; Knepp & Knepp, 2022; Sohr-Preston & Boswell, 2015). Academic dishonesty is similarly associated with a lack of confidence in one's academic abilities (Krou et al., 2021) and a lower GPA (e.g., Baird, 1980; Bowers, 1964; Korn & Davidovitch, 2016; McCabe & Trevino, 1997; Pino & Smith, 2003; Roig & Neaman, 1994), potentially because receiving a low grade motivates a person to cheat and/or because cheating undermines one's learning, which, in turn, leads to lower grades.

Together, these findings indicate that academic entitlement and academic dishonesty can negatively impact student outcomes. This raises an important question: What factors contribute to a person feeling academically entitled and willing to cheat? If the factors that underlie these beliefs and behaviors can be identified, their outcomes can potentially be addressed through targeted interventions. In the present

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study, we consider one possible precipitating factor: narcissism.

Narcissism describes a person who is, for better or worse, inordinately focused on the self. Recent frameworks have decomposed narcissism into three parts: antagonism, agentic extraversion, and narcissistic neuroticism (Miller et al., 2016). Antagonism is characterized by arrogance, manipulateness, and a lack of empathy. Agentic extraversion is more adaptive and is associated with grandiosity, authoritativeness, and acclaim-seeking. Neuroticism, by contrast, captures the more vulnerable aspects of the construct, being defined by feelings of shame, a hypersensitivity to criticism, and a desire for admiration.

Given the self-enhancement and deceit characteristic of narcissism, it is plausible that it would be associated with both greater academic entitlement and academic dishonesty. Indeed, several studies have indicated that the trait is positively correlated with academic entitlement (e.g., Jackson, Frey, et al., 2020; Kurtyilmaz, 2019; Miller, 2013; Turnipseed & Cohen, 2015; Whatley et al., 2019). As a case in point, Greenberger et al. (2008) found that the more antagonistic and extraverted aspects of narcissism were associated with a composite capturing a wide variety of academically entitled beliefs, including the belief that one should get a B simply for attending class, that one should receive same-day email responses from instructors, and that exams should be rescheduled to accommodate one's vacations. Likewise, prior research has found mostly positive associations between narcissism and academic dishonesty (see Lee et al., 2020). Brunell et al. (2011), for instance, found that people high in narcissistic exhibitionism and power, facets reminiscent of antagonism and agentic extraversion, are more likely to report that they have cheated in the past and are more likely to report that they will cheat in the future.

Most of this prior work is, however, limited in one of two key ways. First, the majority of this work has focused on only *grandiose* narcissism, which is a form of narcissism that primarily captures the more antagonistic and extraverted aspects of the construct. It is largely unclear how the more vulnerable aspects of narcissism (e.g., narcissistic neuroticism) relate to academic entitlement and academic dishonesty (but see Jackson, Frey, et al., 2020; Whatley et al., 2019). Second, most of the prior work has approached narcissism as a unidimensional construct, making it difficult to determine how its facets may be differentially related to academic entitlement and academic dishonesty.

To address these limitations, the current project simultaneously explores the relations of the three aforementioned facets of narcissism with academic entitlement and attitudes toward academic dishonesty. We focus on *attitudes toward* academic dishonesty rather than actual engagement in academically dishonest behavior to reduce the potential for socially desirable responding resulting from participants not wanting to admit to engaging in a socially undesirable behavior (but see the *Limitations and future directions* section). We hypothesize that the three facets of narcissism will be positively correlated with academic entitlement. We also hypothesize that they will be positively correlated with permissive attitudes toward academic dishonesty.¹ The hypotheses, materials, and analytic strategy for this study are preregistered on the Open Science Framework (OSF) (https://osf.io/jhfm3/?view_only=f0a18289438f4206be41adb63f37eda3). The materials, data, analytic code, and output can also be found on OSF (https://osf.io/en6yg/?view_only=f0ba714c29664230be463897c374dfed).

2. Method

The study reported here was determined to be exempt from review

¹ We also hypothesized that academic entitlement would mediate the association of the three facets of narcissism with acceptance of academic dishonesty. Given the present study is cross-sectional and, therefore, ill-suited to evaluate such hypotheses, we report the results for these analyses in the Supplementary Material.

by the Human Subjects Review Committee at Union College (E24023).

2.1. Participants

Participants were recruited from the online data-collection platform CloudResearch Connect (Hartman et al., 2023) to complete a Qualtrics survey.² We used demographic prescreening to ensure that data were only collected from participants who reported being currently enrolled at a college or university in the United States. The final sample used for the analyses included 338 participants ($M_{AGE} = 27.11$, $SD_{AGE} = 8.53$; see Table 1).

2.2. Materials and procedures

After providing informed consent, participants were asked to confirm that they were 18 years of age or older and currently living in the US. They were also asked to confirm that they were a student, report their academic class standing (e.g., sophomore), and indicate their enrollment status (i.e., full-time or part-time). The participants then responded to the *Five-Factor Narcissism Inventory – Short Form* (FFNI-SF; Sherman et al., 2015; see also Glover et al., 2012), the *Academic Entitlement Questionnaire* (AEQ; Kopp et al., 2011), and the *Attitude Toward Academic Dishonesty Scale* (ATAD; Bolin, 2004; Davis et al., 1992) using a 7-point Likert scale (−3 = “Strongly disagree”; 3 = “Strongly agree”). The FFNI-SF is a 60-item measure of antagonism, agentic extraversion,

Table 1
Demographic information for the participants.

	Count	Percent
Sample		
Total	356	100.0 %
Excluded	18	5.1 %
Included	338	94.9 %
Gender identity		
Women	191	56.5 %
Men	130	38.5 %
Nonbinary	14	4.1 %
Genderfluid	2	0.6 %
Preferred not to answer	1	0.3 %
Culture/ethnic identity		
White	172	49.0 %
Asian or Asian American	45	12.8 %
Black or African American	42	12.0 %
Hispanic/Latinx	40	11.4 %
South Asian	5	1.4 %
Native American	4	1.1 %
Middle Eastern	1	0.3 %
Multiple cultures/ethnicities	39	11.1 %
Preferred not to answer	3	0.9 %
Academic standing		
First-year	44	13.0 %
Sophomore	73	21.6 %
Junior	84	24.9 %
Senior	88	26.0 %
Graduate	41	12.1 %
Other	8	2.4 %
Enrollment status		
Full-time	237	70.1 %
Part-time	101	29.9 %

Note. Additional demographic information can be found in the output provided on OSF. An a priori power analysis and a full accounting of the exclusions are provided in the Supplementary Material. Results excluding graduate students and part-time students are also provided in the Supplementary Material. These alternative results provide the same conclusions as those reported here.

² Privacy rights were observed and informed consent was obtained for all participants.

and narcissistic neuroticism. The AEQ is an 8-item measure of academic entitlement. The ATAD is a 4-item measure of attitudes toward academic dishonesty. The items from the measures were presented in randomized order across four survey pages. The length, reliability, and an example item for each scale can be found in Table 2. Participants ended the survey by reporting additional demographic information (e.g., their gender identities; their household incomes) before being redirected to CloudResearch Connect.

3. Results

To test our six hypotheses, we calculated Pearson r correlations for the associations of the three facets of narcissism with academic entitlement and permissive attitudes toward academic dishonesty (Table 3; Fig. 1). Antagonism was found to be highly positively correlated with both academic entitlement ($r = .53, p < .001$) and academic dishonesty ($r = .45, p < .001$). Agentic extraversion was found to be positively correlated with academic entitlement ($r = .22, p < .001$) but not academic dishonesty ($r = .05, p = .330$). Narcissistic neuroticism was associated with neither academic entitlement ($r = .05, p = .339$) nor academic dishonesty ($r = -.05, p = .341$).

4. Discussion

In this project, we examined the association of narcissistic antagonism, agentic extraversion, and neuroticism with academic entitlement and permissive attitudes toward academic dishonesty. We hypothesized that the three facets of narcissism would be positively correlated with academic entitlement. We also hypothesized that the three facets would be positively correlated with permissive attitudes toward academic dishonesty.

Turning to our first set of hypotheses, narcissistic antagonism and agentic extraversion were both positively correlated with academic entitlement. This is potentially because the arrogance and exploitativeness characteristic of antagonism and the grandiosity and acclaim-seeking characteristic of agentic extraversion result in students who feel entitled to special treatment from their instructors. By way of contrast, narcissistic neuroticism was not associated with academic entitlement. Despite possessing a greater desire for admiration, those high in narcissistic neuroticism also experience greater feelings of shame and vulnerability. These characteristics may limit a student's willingness to make audacious requests of their instructors.

With respect to our second set of hypotheses, antagonism was positively associated with permissive attitudes toward academic dishonesty. In this case, the deceitfulness and thrill-seeking common to those high in antagonism may open them up to engaging in academically dishonest behaviors. We did not find the expected associations for agentic

extraversion and narcissistic neuroticism. The failure to find these associations may be due to the grandiosity and acclaim-seeking of agentic extraversion and the shame and vulnerability of narcissistic neuroticism having little influence on a person's willingness to engage in underhanded behavior.

Collectively, the present findings indicate that the three aspects of narcissism are differentially associated with academic entitlement and permissive attitudes toward academic dishonesty. This not only provides insight into the personality correlates of academic entitlement and academic dishonesty but also lays the groundwork for developing targeted interventions aimed at reducing these problematic beliefs and behaviors. For example, the present findings indicate that interventions that appeal to the more antagonistic and extraverted aspects of narcissism (such as those that highlight reputational costs) may be particularly effective at reducing academic entitlement among those high in narcissism. The feasibility of implementing such interventions at the college and university levels remains uncertain, however.

4.1. Limitations and future directions

Our study was not without its limitations. These limitations concern the sample, the measures, and the study design.

Turning first to the sample, it is important to note that we only recruited participants from the United States. The associations observed here may vary across different countries and cultures, and we encourage future cross-national and cross-cultural work to investigate such differences. Moreover, the average age of our sample was higher than would typically be expected of a student sample ($M = 27.11$), which may limit the generalizability of our findings to younger student populations. Future research should consider recruiting larger samples to explore age-related differences in these associations.

With respect to the measures, it is important to highlight that we used only self-report scales, which can be biased by socially desirable responding and can lead to inflated correlations due to common method variance. Future research could incorporate multiple sources of data, including informant reports (e.g., ratings of narcissism provided by school peers) and behavioral measures (e.g., plagiarism scores generated by TurnItIn; see Williams et al., 2010) to address this limitation. Additionally, we used a 60-item short-form version of the *Five-Factor Narcissism Inventory* as our measure of narcissism. Although the measure has proven reliable and valid in its own right (Sherman et al., 2015), the 148-item, long-form version of the scale could potentially provide a more fine-grained understanding of the associations among the facets of narcissism, academic entitlement, and academic dishonesty. We also assessed *attitudes toward* academic dishonesty rather than actual engagement in academically dishonest behavior. Prior research indicates that attitudes toward academic dishonesty are a good (but imperfect) predictor of academically dishonest behavior (e.g., $r = .38$; Whitley, 1998). Future research could use behavioral measures to address this limitation. Lastly, we used only a single, unidimensional measure of academic entitlement and academic dishonesty. Future research would be well advised to consider how the facets of narcissism differentially relate to different forms of these constructs (e.g., see Jackson, Frey, et al., 2020; Jackson, McLellan, et al., 2020).

Finally, turning to the study design, the present study was cross-sectional, which limited our ability to draw causal conclusions. Given that personality traits are remarkably stable (at least in adulthood; Bleidorn et al., 2022), attempting to experimentally manipulate levels of narcissism to test its effects on academic entitlement and attitudes toward academic dishonesty would seem ill-advised. Although it wouldn't be sufficient to establish causality, a longitudinal design could, at the very least, establish that heightened levels of narcissism temporally precede academic entitlement and permissive attitudes toward academic dishonesty.

Table 2

The measures, reliability estimates, and example items for antagonism, agentic extraversion, narcissistic neuroticism, academic entitlement, and attitudes toward academic dishonesty.

Construct	Measure	Items	α	ω	Example item
Antagonism	FFNI-SF	32	.92	.92	It's fine to take advantage of persons to get ahead
Extraversion	FFNI-SF	16	.88	.88	I tend to take charge of most situations.
Neuroticism	FFNI-SF	12	.92	.92	I feel ashamed when people judge me.
Academic entitlement	AEQ	8	.82	.82	Because I pay tuition, I deserve passing grades.
Academic dishonesty	ATAD	4	.74	.75	Students should go ahead and cheat if they know they can get away with it.

Note. FFNI-SF = Five-Factor Narcissism Inventory – Short Form; AEQ = Academic Entitlement Questionnaire; ATAD = Attitude Toward Academic Dishonesty Scale.

Table 3
Descriptive statistics for and zero-order correlations among antagonism, agentic extraversion, narcissistic neuroticism, academic entitlement, and attitudes toward academic dishonesty.

Construct	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Skew	Kurtosis	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Antagonism	−1.19	0.85	0.53	−0.26	–				
2. Extraversion	0.08	1.04	−0.13	−0.28	.46**	–			
3. Neuroticism	0.58	1.30	−0.39	−0.31	−.17**	−.09	–		
4. Academic entitlement	−1.17	1.06	0.45	−0.29	.53** _a	.22** _b	.05 _b	–	
5. Academic dishonesty	−1.84	1.08	0.80	−0.22	.45** _a	.05 _b	−.05 _b	.46**	–

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .008$. To account for Type I error rate inflation resulting from testing multiple correlations, we used a more conservative alpha level of .008 as the starting point for our interpretations. Different subscripts in the academic entitlement row indicate that antagonism, agentic extraversion, and narcissistic neuroticism showed significantly different correlations with academic entitlement at $p < .008$. Different subscripts in the academic dishonesty row indicate that antagonism, agentic extraversion, and narcissistic neuroticism showed significantly different correlations with academic dishonesty at $p < .008$. Results using Kendall's τ correlations instead of Pearson's r correlations can be found in the Supplementary Material. The results provide the same conclusions as those reported here.

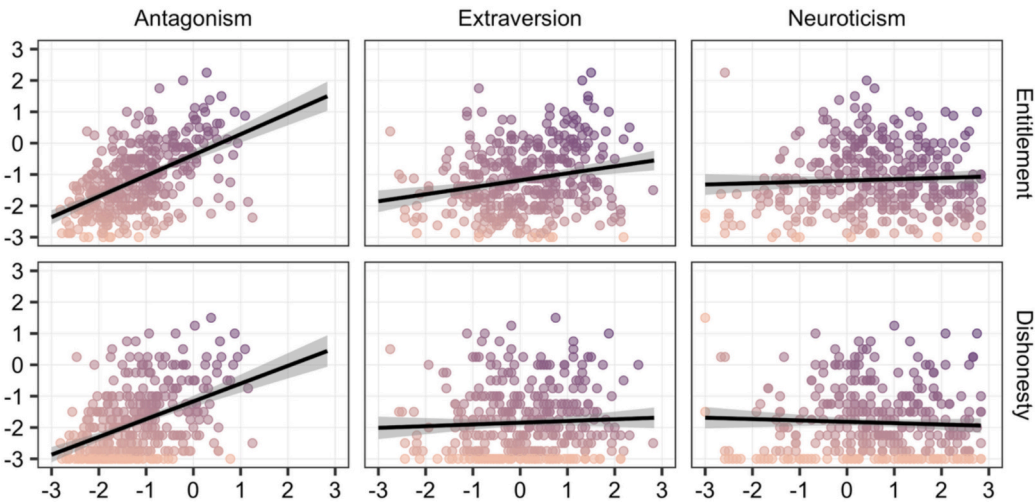


Fig. 1. Scatter plots with regression lines for the associations of antagonism, agentic extraversion, and narcissistic neuroticism with academic entitlement and attitudes toward academic dishonesty.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the relations of three facets of narcissism with academic entitlement and attitudes toward academic dishonesty. Our findings suggest that antagonism and agentic extraversion are linked to academic entitlement, while only antagonism is linked with permissive attitudes toward academic dishonesty. These findings provide insight into the personality correlates of academic entitlement and academic dishonesty. They could also be used to inform targeted interventions for combatting these problematic beliefs and behaviors.

Open practices

The pre-registration for the present study is provided at https://osf.io/jhfm3/?view_only=f0a18289438f4206be41adb63f37eda3.

The materials, data, analytic code, and output are provided at https://osf.io/en6yg/?view_only=f0ba714c29664230be463897c374dfed.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Trishikha Kiran Rao: Visualization, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization, Writing – original draft. **Cameron S. Kay:** Visualization, Supervision, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2025.113627>.

Data availability

The materials, data, analytic code, and output are provided at https://osf.io/en6yg/?view_only=f0ba714c29664230be463897c374dfed.

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