

ACADEMIC ENTITLEMENT PLUS TEACHING TO THE TEST: RECIPE FOR IGNORANCE

Dylan A. Keenbergh and Barbara A. Drescher

Department of Psychology

Introduction

The current university landscape differs from that of previous decades in the proportion of courses taught by tenure-track faculty, the amount of time the typical student spends on outside activities such as work, the proportion of students pursuing post-graduate education, and study habits acquired during primary and secondary education. Outcomes-based learning (teaching "to the test") is increasing due to dependency on test scores for funding mandated by law and learning strategies conducive to success are reinforced in lower-division college courses through the continued use of multiple-choice testing.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that attitudes of entitlement and rehearsal-based study habits have increased dramatically in recent years as have discrepancies between reality and students' perceptions of the effort needed to succeed, the strategies which are most effective, and the importance of knowledge gained relative to grade received. Kruger and Dunning (1999) found that incompetence is perpetuated by ignorance of incompetence. External attributions for failures and self-serving biases prevent awareness of such incompetence, thus perpetuating incompetence. The result is that the typical student habitually employs rehearsal approaches to learning and maintains the belief that such approaches are effective in the face of evidence to the contrary. In addition, they are unable to judge the competency of peers and are equally unaware of this deficit.

Recent findings suggest that academic entitlement attitudes are positively correlated with narcissism, external attribution patterns, feelings of superiority, and exploitative attitudes (Greenberger, et al., 2008; Achacoso, 2002). However, little is known about the relationships among expectations, study strategies, metacognitive skills, and entitlement attitudes.

To examine these variables, we asked students in upper-division psychology courses to complete a survey of expectations in addition to self-report measures of academic entitlement, attribution style, personality, and learning strategy efficiency. We also measured metacognitive skills through self-reports of performance.

References

Achacoso, M. V. (2002). *What do you mean my grade is not an A? An investigation of academic entitlement, causal attributions, and self-regulation in college students*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Texas, Austin.

Greenberger, E., Lessard, J., Chen, C., & Farrugia, S.P. (2008). Self-entitled college students: Contributions of personality, parenting, and motivational factors. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 37, 1193-1204.

Kruger, J. & Dunning, D. (1999). Unskilled and unaware of it: How difficulties in recognizing one's own incompetence lead to inflated self-assessments. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 77(6), 1121-1134.

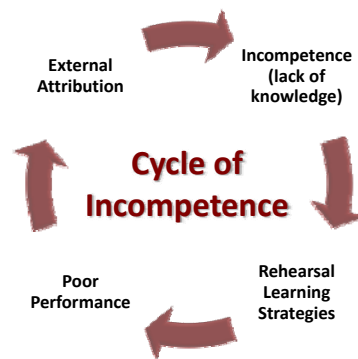
Lefcourt, H. M., von Baeyer, C. L., Ware, E.E., & Cox, D.J. (1979). The multidimensional-multiattribitional causality scale: The development of a goal specific locus of control scale. *Canadian Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 11(4), 286-304.

Method

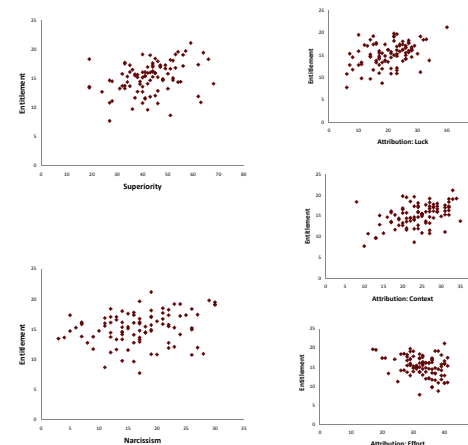
Participants were 95 students in four upper-division psychology courses ranging in age from 19 to 42 years, $M = 23.38$.

Participants completed:

- ♦ Multidimensional-Multiattribitional Causality Scale: Achievement Subscale (Lefcourt, Baeyer, Ware, & Cox, 1979)
- ♦ Superiority Scale (Robbins & Patton, 1985)
- ♦ Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin & Hall, 1981)
- ♦ Learning Strategies Survey: forced-choice ranking task designed to identify primary learning strategies as active, rehearsal, or passive. In 14 situations, participants were asked to rank approaches from most to least effective. Examples:
 - Studying course material:
 - Active = Reading the textbook to answer study questions
 - Rehearsal = Reading the textbook while highlighting key passages
 - Passive = Reading the textbook
 - Writing papers:
 - Active = Using extensive written instructions
 - Rehearsal = Using past/sample papers as templates
 - Passive = Discussing papers extensively in class
- ♦ Academic Entitlement Survey: Original measure of academic entitlement attitudes using a 7-point Likert scale. Sample questions:
 - If almost everyone in a class fails an exam, the instructor should adjust the scores upward.
 - If a teaching assistant told me something that turned out to be wrong and I lost points as a result, the instructor should give me those points.
 - Instructors should provide students with sample questions which are exactly like questions they will get on the exams.
- ♦ Metacognitive: Participants evaluated the validity of ten syllogisms (all invalid), then estimated the percentage they answered correctly.



Results



- ♦ Number of classes participants thought it was acceptable to miss was negatively correlated with the time they thought should be needed studying to do well, $r = -.296, p < .01$.
- ♦ Degree to which achievement was thought to be determined by context was positively correlated with attitudes of superiority, $r = .273, p < .01$.
- ♦ Entitlement attitudes were positively correlated with attitudes of superiority, $r = .316, p < .01$.
- ♦ Entitlement attitudes were positively correlated with narcissism, $r = .234, p < .05$.
- ♦ Entitlement attitudes were negatively correlated with active learning strategies, $r = -.293, p < .01$.
- ♦ Entitlement attitudes were positively correlated with rehearsal learning strategies, $r = .245, p < .05$.
- ♦ Entitlement were positively correlated with degree to which achievement was attributed to context, $r = .447, p < .001$.
- ♦ Entitlement were positively correlated with degree to which achievement was attributed to luck, $r = .4, p < .001$.
- ♦ Entitlement were negatively correlated with degree to which achievement was attributed to effort, $r = -.313, p < .01$.
- ♦ Overestimation of performance was positively correlated with estimated performance, $r = .7, p < .001$, but negatively with actual performance, $r = -.639, p < .001$.
- ♦ Number of classes participants thought it was acceptable to miss was positively correlated with the degree to which achievement was thought to be determined by luck, $r = .227, p < .05$.
- ♦ Rehearsal learning strategies were positively correlated with the degree to which achievement was thought to be determined by luck, $r = .212, p < .05$.

Conclusion

Overestimations of cognitive performance were positively correlated with the estimation itself, but negatively so with performance. The lower a student scored, the more they overestimated their performance.

As predicted, entitlement attitudes were positively correlated with superiority and narcissism. In addition, entitlement was correlated with achievement attributions of context and luck, and negatively with attributions of effort. Rehearsal learning strategies were also correlated with entitlement and external attributions. These findings suggest that students who believe that rehearsal strategies work best are more likely to feel entitled to use them and less likely to attribute their failures to those strategies or their own efforts. Instead, they will attribute them to external forces such as luck, instructors, and other situational factors. As a result, they continue to use the same failed strategies.

The cycle of metacognitive ignorance and rehearsal strategies ensures that students continue with poor strategies and poor outcomes, remaining ignorant of the need for change.

For more information, contact the second author at:

Department of Psychology
California State University, Northridge
18111 Nordhoff Street
Northridge, CA 91330

drescherma@yahoo.com

