

## **The Correlation Between Demographic Factors and Academic Entitlement**

Diana Dominguez, Katrina Fitzpatrick, Erin Hamby, and John Wright  
School of Social Work  
Texas State University  
601 University Drive  
San Marcos, Texas 78666 USA

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Carla Ackerson, EdD, LMSW

### **Abstract**

Academic entitlement is when a student believes they deserve to receive good grades in their classes, regardless of the actual effort made or quality of their work. The research question investigated was, “How do demographic factors including socioeconomic background, household structure, parents’ generation, and English as a second language correlate to academic entitlement?” Surveys were distributed via campus e-mail to undergraduate students to self-report their experiences. The surveys included demographic questions as part of a study on academic entitlement. Academic entitlement may be linked with the parents’ socioeconomic background. In order to determine if a correlation exists, participants were asked for a broad estimate of their parents’ annual income, then that data was compared to their responses on the academic entitlement survey. Differences were explored between students raised in a variety of household structures. Several studies have separately linked academic entitlement and family structure to parenting styles and locus of control, however little research has been done to determine a direct relationship between family structure and academic entitlement. Next, the relationship between the generational assignment of parents and the undergraduate student displaying academic entitlement was studied. By identifying the ages of the parents of students in the study, it was determined whether parental generations have any correlation to academic entitlement in students. Finally, while most research surrounding academic entitlement has been linked to factors such as parenting styles, there has been little research reflecting how English as a second language may impact a student’s sense of entitlement. A question regarding whether English is the primary language spoken in the student’s home was included in the questionnaire to determine any correlation to academic entitlement.

**Keywords:** Academic Entitlement, Demographics, Undergraduate Students

### **1. Introduction**

Academic entitlement is when a student believes they deserve to receive good grades or special treatment in their classes, regardless of the actual effort made or quality of their work. These expectations may include receiving higher grades than are warranted, being granted excused absences which do not meet the professor’s or university’s criteria for an excused absence, the acceptance of late assignments with few or no penalties, and being able to bend classroom rules for the student’s individual situation. While it is known that the incidence of academic entitlement is increasing on college campuses,<sup>14</sup> researchers have primarily focused on the correlation between parenting styles and academic entitlement.<sup>3,26</sup> The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a relationship between selected demographic factors, including socioeconomic background, household structure, parents’ generation, and English as a second language, and academic entitlement on college campuses. This information was collected as part of a larger 2019 study conducted by Dr. Carla Ackerson. Surveys were distributed via campus e-mail to undergraduate students to self-report their attitudes and experiences related to academic entitlement, which included demographic questions. This demographic data is the basis of our study.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Socioeconomic Background

When thinking of factors that may influence the presence of academic entitlement in college students, one may think of parental income of the student. Prior studies have shown that academic entitlement is a multidimensional construct made up of three dimensions: grade, behavior and service.<sup>19</sup> When discussing the privileged or academically entitled students, this study showed that it was mostly males with few common rules and manners in a classroom setting, who often expected a B despite putting in the requisite effort toward the work.<sup>19</sup> The students also had high expectations of their professors to have fast response times and to “friend” them on social media. These students were more likely to browse the internet during class, along with coming to class late or leaving early. This group was among the youngest studied with an average age of 22.4 years. Their parental household income was high (\$72,300) and the students were less likely to pay their own tuition or phone bill. Through finding the characteristics that make up academic entitlement, the study found that if privileged students were properly motivated and supervised, they may become great classroom team leaders, presenters and negotiators.<sup>19</sup>

Another study examined the impact of socioeconomic status and demographic factors on the academic performances of students.<sup>22</sup> This researcher found that there is a positive correlation between academic performance and previous performances within the scientific track. A positive regression was found with family annual income, but it was not found to be significant. The importance of raising socioeconomic and standard levels of living for students was also discussed.<sup>22</sup>

Criticisms about students and their increasing sense of entitlement include their attitudes about grades (e.g., good grades should not be too hard to acquire, and professors should give them a break), which is seen by professors as unreasonable and disrespectful behavior.<sup>14</sup> There is a negative correlation between academic entitlement and self-esteem, meaning students who score high on academic entitlement have low or unstable senses of self-esteem.<sup>14</sup> These behaviors do not appear to pay off in higher grades in college.<sup>14</sup>

### 2.2 Household Structure

One of the predictors of academic entitlement is having an external locus of control (LOC).<sup>26</sup> The degree of family functioning may influence internal vs. external LOC. For example, children who come from a family environment where the parents are divorced or a father is absent, often feel less supported at home, less in control of their own destinies, and may have the sense that life events are unpredictable, all of which can contribute to having an external LOC.<sup>26</sup> An externalized LOC has a positive correlation with traits such as entitlement, grandiosity, and narcissism.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, students who had an external LOC and had negative perceptions of family function were more likely to exhibit academic entitlement.<sup>26</sup> Students who have an external LOC also tend to have feelings of helplessness and decreased motivation, and were less successful students than those with an internal LOC.<sup>18</sup>

While most studies of divorced fathers have focused on financial support or parental involvement, few studies have been conducted regarding the parenting styles of divorced fathers.<sup>2</sup> There are several factors that can predict divorced fathers' parenting.<sup>2</sup> For example, older fathers tend to withdraw more from direct parenting, and become less involved in their children's lives over time, which contributes to a higher likelihood of an uninvolved parenting style that is less likely to be authoritative.<sup>2</sup> Divorce itself may play a significant role, as divorced parents may display opposing parenting styles as a way of compensating for the other parent.<sup>25</sup> Fathers who have a college degree tend to be more aware of the importance of their parental role, and thus are more likely to be involved in child rearing, which correlates to having a more authoritative parenting style than those who are less educated.<sup>2</sup> These same patterns of parenting styles as related to age and education were present in both residential and non-residential fathers. The same study also determined that divorced fathers who cohabit with a new partner are less likely to be closely involved in parenting, regardless of past parenting styles.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, non-residential fathers are the most likely to have a permissive parenting style, followed by fathers with joint physical custody, while residential fathers are the most likely to have an authoritative parenting style.<sup>2</sup> This study was cross-sectional, which limits the ability to draw causal conclusions; and previous co-parental relationships were not investigated.<sup>2</sup>

Maternal household structure is another indicator of LOC.<sup>23</sup> There is a strong correlation between adolescents having an internal LOC and having fewer changes, and thus more stability, within the parent/partner structure of the mother's household.<sup>23</sup> This is in line with the “instability hypothesis,” which is defined as a prediction that children are more affected by disruption to their family environment as much or more than they are affected by their particular type of

family structure.<sup>12</sup> Changes such as separation, divorce, remarriage, and cohabitation all contributed to a cumulatively increasing likelihood of having an external LOC.<sup>23</sup>

Other studies have called some of these findings into question. One such study conducted at Texas A&M determined that there were no significant differences in adjustment in adolescents with either divorced or married parents; however young adults who were older when their parents divorced reported higher levels of self-esteem than their peers whose parents had divorced when they were young children.<sup>7</sup> Another study determined that while divorce was not a significant factor in predicting assertiveness or LOC, having a current negative perception of parental divorce was correlated with an external LOC.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, the gender of the child may have an impact on parenting styles, as fathers tend to be less involved with daughters than they are with sons.<sup>20</sup> Children also have a natural tendency to detach themselves from their parents as they get older in order to gain a greater sense of autonomy.<sup>2</sup>

### 2.3 Parents' Generation

Academic entitlement has become increasingly associated with academic consumerism, or the view that as paying customers for education, students have a right to the same degree of customer satisfaction and customer service as they would receive in any other setting.<sup>26</sup> Modern-day college students, a population currently made up primarily of the Millennial generation, were raised with unprecedented levels of positive reinforcement and attention.<sup>28</sup> As this generation entered college, the concept of academic entitlement gained increased attention.

Millennials, the generation born between 1982 and 2000,<sup>15</sup> are the children of the Baby Boomers (1946-1964) and Generation X (1965-1982).<sup>33</sup> Millennials frequently received awards, praise and other laudatory treatment from their parents, teachers, and coaches at much higher rates than experienced in previous generations, even when arguably unwarranted, in an effort to build their self-esteem.<sup>29,31,32</sup> Members of this generation tend to have had child-centered parents who exhibited a “trophy for all” attitude in what were previously competitive activities; as a result, these parental attitudes and behaviors sometimes created unrealistic expectations by the children unable to comprehend that not everyone wins and that their efforts may sometimes result in failure.<sup>1</sup>

While Baby Boomer and Generation X parenting practices are important to note and widely recognized, they combine with other fundamental socio-historical shifts occurring during Millennials' period of early development that are less associated with this sense of entitlement.<sup>30</sup> Millennial students are more technologically advanced, ethnically diverse, and socially connected than any of their predecessors; yet, the most distinguishing feature of this group, at least in the classroom, may be their academic entitlement.<sup>13</sup>

### 2.4 Presence of English as a Second Language

The number of students served in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs is increasing in several states across the country.<sup>17</sup> ESL students make up more than 10% of the Kindergarten-12 population in the United States,<sup>34</sup> yet possess lower graduation rates, limited access to college and career readiness programs, and limited placements to gifted educational programs compared to their white counterparts.<sup>17</sup> This is likely due to the ways in which some educators provide inappropriate or no modification of instruction, assessment, and activities tailored to the academic development of ESL students.<sup>21</sup> Many educators in the U.S. rarely acknowledge children's first languages while simultaneously viewing these students as “someone else's problem,” which can lead to the marginalization of this population of students.<sup>21</sup>

Not only are the perceptions of educators potentially harmful to the educational attainment of ESL students, language acquisition is a major obstacle in their lives as well. Lack of confidence,<sup>27</sup> language anxiety,<sup>11</sup> attitude,<sup>35</sup> and motivation,<sup>10</sup> have been recognized as factors that impede second language production and achievement.<sup>16</sup> It may take up to seven years for an individual to become fluent in English as a second language,<sup>8,9</sup> and it may take up to 10 years for a pupil with no schooling in their first language in either their home or host countries to fully access the National Curriculum and reach average levels of performance in school settings.<sup>5,6</sup>

The overall body of literature surrounding language acquisition and the development of ESL calls for more research that focuses on the acquisition of fluency in English, as well as appropriate fluency assessments that consider the different background characteristics of ESL students such as age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status. There is no empirical research that evaluates or predicts an ESL student's level of academic entitlement.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Design of the Study

This was a quantitative study that utilized a correlational research design in order to analyze the relationships between socioeconomic background, household structure, parents' generation, and English as a second language and the occurrence of academic entitlement in college students. Because the independent variable, selected demographic factors, has four factors (socioeconomic background, household structure, parents' generation, and English as a second language,) a multiple regression statistical technique was used for data analysis.

The study participants were undergraduate students in the College of Applied Arts (CAA) at Texas State University, a midsize four-year public institution in the southwestern United States. Prior to data collection, Dr. Ackerson received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Texas A&M University-Commerce in order to study human subjects. Permission was also granted from the Dean of the CAA at Texas State University. A sample of 4,012 undergraduate students in the CAA were invited via e-mail to participate in this study, and a detailed explanation of the research was included in the invitation. Participation in the study was limited to those who self-identified as being over 18 years old, was voluntary, and had no effect on students' grades. Students were then granted access to an electronic survey that gathered information on academic entitlement, parenting styles, and demographic information.

The electronic survey was administered with Qualtrics in order to ensure confidentiality. The data was retrieved from Qualtrics by a Graduate Research Assistant (GRA), who removed the participants' IP addresses in order to maintain confidentiality.

#### 3.2 Hypothesis

The following hypothesis was examined: There will be no relationship between selected demographic factors including socioeconomic background, household structure, parents' generation, and English as a second language, and the development of academic entitlement in undergraduate students.

#### 3.3 Research Question

Do demographic factors including socioeconomic background, household structure, parents' generation, and English as a second language relate to academic entitlement?

#### 3.4 Instrumentation

The survey used the *Parental Authority Questionnaire* (PAQ) and the *Academic Entitlement Scale* (AES), which were used with permission by their publishers. The survey utilized a Likert-type response scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 5 (Strongly Disagree). In addition, demographic information was gathered covering information about the student's age, ethnicity, gender, first-generation college status, socioeconomic status, year in school, parents' ages, household structure, and presence of ESL in the home. The survey had a combined total of 55 questions.

#### 3.5 Sample Selection

This study used convenience sampling, as only current undergraduate students in the CAA were invited to participate, a total of 4,012 students. An ideal sample size from this population would be approximately 400 students with a confidence interval of 95% and a margin of error of 5%. A total of 438 students completed the survey, and of those, 401 surveys were completed with no missing data. The first 210 study participants were offered a \$10 Amazon gift card.

#### 3.6 Data Collection and Treatment

Data generated by the online surveys were collected via Qualtrics. The GRA retrieved the data and anonymized the responses by removing the participants' IP addresses. The data was then imported into SPSS for Windows, version 25.0.0. Due to the presence of multiple independent variables, a multiple regression analysis of the data was used. An

independent T-test with a significance level of .05 was used to determine the statistical significance of the null hypothesis.

## 4. Results

A statistical significance of  $p < .005$  was used in analyzing the data. A total of 438 students participated in the survey, and 401 surveys (~ 91.5%) were completed with no missing data. The collective responses of the study revealed that there was no significant relationship between academic entitlement and family income ( $p = .980$ ) or parent generation ( $p = .989$ ). A univariate analysis of variance indicated that household structure was not a significant predictor of academic entitlement ( $p = .574$ ). While Caucasians had a higher academic entitlement score than Hispanics ( $p = .002$ ), Hispanics demonstrated a higher academic entitlement score than all other races surveyed ( $p = .014$ ). Although there was no significant relationship between the presence of academic entitlement and bilingualism/ESL, ethnicity is a significant predictor of academic entitlement.

## 5. Conclusions

The results of this research indicate that parenting style and ethnicity were the only significant predictors for academic entitlement. When analyzing the results of the household structure, it was found that there was an overrepresentation of two-parent households in this study (62.1%), and future research should be conducted using a more equal sample of household structure categories. While ESL was not shown to be a significant predictor of academic entitlement, the larger study found that Hispanics were second only to Caucasians in academic entitlement when compared to all other races. In light of this finding, future research should include how variables such as household structure, parents' education level, and geographical region affect the prediction of academic entitlement, and how these variables differ between ethnicities. Factors such as providing students with techniques and tips to develop self-sufficiency and resiliency, helping students develop a more internal locus of control, and organizing student support groups to help students identify self-sabotaging behavior and to learn better ways to deal with failure or disappointment in the classroom are several ways college professors and mental health professionals can combat academic entitlement in higher education while empowering students to practice accountability and self-determination.

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