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## “I deserve better grades.” Compliance-gaining perspective of dark triad traits, power distance and academic entitlement in Chinese higher education

### Abstract

**Purpose** - Dark triad (DT) personality traits i.e., Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy are socially unenthusiastic and predict a range of antisocial behaviors. Academic entitlement similarly, demonstrates the students’ rising temptation of higher grades without putting corresponding efforts. Based on coercion theory, this research investigated power distance as mediator between DT and academic entitlement (externalized responsibility and entitled expectations). Further, this study examined DT model of personality as a predictor of academic entitlement in Chinese higher education institutions (HEIs).

**Design/methodology/approach** – Chinese HEIs were ascertained for data collection. Students (bachelors, masters and Ph.Ds.) responded 719 questionnaires for data analysis. Hypothesized relationships were examined through partial least squares structural equation model (PLS-SEM).

**Findings** – This study established positive and significant direct link between DT and academic entitlement. The indirect effect through power distance was found insignificant between the relationship of DT and academic entitlement.

**Originality/value** – Based on coercion theory, this study extends the prevailing literature through unexplored effects of DT on academic entitlement and role of power distance in Chinese HEIs. This study validated the effect of DT on academic entitlement; however, direct-only no-mediation of power distance between the relationships is novel in Chinese HEIs. Moreover, power distance as mediator is novel between the relationships. Hence, this study provides an understanding of mentioned associations and contributes to the literature.

**Keywords:** Dark Triad, Academic Entitlement, Machiavellianism, Narcissism, Psychopathy, Higher Education, China

## 1. Introduction and background of the study

### 1.1 Introduction

Coercion theory or compliance-gaining behavior causes change in individuals’ behavior, even when they do not wish to do so (Marwell & Schmitt, 1967). Individuals put their efforts to meet their wants even at the cost of others’ needs. This egocentric behavior, moreover, the malicious symptoms of selfishness are more common in students to get high grades without putting efforts;

this process is called academic entitlement (Curtis et al., 2022). Dark triad (DT) personality traits are composed of three infamous personality traits i.e., Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy. The mentioned personality traits are known to be socially unenthusiastic, hence predict a range of antisocial behaviors (Furnham et al., 2013; Jonason et al., 2015). Researchers are trying to visualize and validate strategies to counter DT and academic entitlement in HEIs (Turnipseed & Cohen, 2015). Since DT traits portray negativity therefore they have a positive relationship with academic entitlement (Chowning & Campbell, 2009; Menon & Sharland, 2011). Despite the augmented importance of DT in universities; DT and academic entitlement reduction strategies adopted by universities are insufficient (Sijtsema et al., 2019; Vedel & Thomsen, 2017), precisely in emerging nations like China (Huang et al., 2019; Ying & Cohen, 2018). Nonetheless, the relations between scholastic cheating (students' attempts to present others' scholastic work as their own) and personality constructs i.e., the Big Five and the DT has recently been investigated in Chinese university students (Zhang et al., 2019). Research similarly, investigated DT in Chinese HEIs (Qiao et al., 2021; Ren et al., 2022). However, none of mentioned studies investigated students' DT traits in relation with their academic entitlement. Since the variables are dissimilar therefore, it is inevitable to conduct an empirical investigation into students' DT traits and academic entitlement in Chinese HEIs.

Power distance argues for definite authority within colleagues and societies (Taras et al., 2010). Furnham et al. (2013) and Jones and Figueredo (2013) asserted that DT does not impact academic entitlement directly; however there are certain variables i.e., mediators that communicate the effects of DT to academic entitlement; Robertson et al. (2016) hence asked future researchers to investigate power distance as mediator between DT and academic entitlement in order to generalize the findings of their research conducted in United States and Philippines. In addition, it is still unclear that whether DT is an invariant construct across individualist and collectivist cultures. Likewise, association between DT traits and social behaviors benefit from identifying the targeted behavior; like interaction with an employee, a colleague, or a boss may change the nature of the relationship. Hence, it is vital to examine power distance since DT traits share a set of ethical standards counter to social expectations (Jonason et al., 2015). Further, it is argued that DT traits along with power distance not only expect respect from juniors, but also from colleagues and bosses therefore it may be another clarification for the DT and power distance's association with relational clash in the educational

and commercial spheres (Furnham et al., 2013; Robertson et al., 2016).

Power distance has vibrant association with DT which affects an individual's overall behavior (Robertson et al., 2016). Since DT is a combination of insensitivity, coldness, heartlessness, interpersonal and social dominance (Jones & Figueredo, 2013), therefore, it asks for personal authority submission while refuting other's social dominance. Taken together, DT and power distance work for personal authority without putting efforts (Robertson et al., 2016). Social behaviors like power distance and academic entitlement are known to each other among university students (Kopp et al., 2011; Robertson et al., 2016). Achacoso (2006) thought that students on higher academic entitlement consider grade negotiation as acceptable, thus, they practice it as their essential right. Ciani et al. (2008) further, endorsed the results reported by the Achacoso (2006). Hence, this study incorporated power distance as mediator to scrutinize the above mentioned literary gaps in relation with DT and academic entitlement in higher education. HEIs prepare personnel for societal, economic and infrastructural growth (Sahibzada et al., 2019; Shafait, Yuming, & Farooq, 2021; Shafait, Yuming, Meyer, et al., 2021). However, unfavorable situations induce personnel to underperform (Chen et al., 2022). Similarly, DT and academic entitlement are malfunctions for any institution and society to proceed successfully. On the other hand, HEIs advocate practices like team orientation, conviction, research and development, personal humility and professional strive and implementation of knowledge-based view for harmonized settings (Sahibzada et al., 2022; Shafait, Asif, et al., 2021; Shafait & Huang, 2022). Therefore, this study intends to put forth the empirical evidence to fill the prescribed gaps and enrich literature in higher education. This study hence, intends to answer the underneath research queries:

**RQ1:** Does DT (Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy) correlate with academic entitlement (externalized responsibility and entitled expectations) in universities of China (Xi'an, Sichuan and Hangzhou)?

**RQ2:** Does DT (Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy) correlate with power distance in universities of China (Xi'an, Sichuan and Hangzhou)?

**RQ3:** Does power distance correlate with academic entitlement in universities of China (Xi'an, Sichuan and Hangzhou)?

**RQ4:** Does power distance mediate the relationship between DT (Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy) and academic entitlement (externalized responsibility and entitled

expectations) in universities of China (Xi'an, Sichuan and Hangzhou)?

## **1.2 Background Explanation vis-à-vis Theoretical Underpinnings, Literature Review and Research Questions**

### ***1.2.1 Theoretical underpinnings***

This study is based on coercion theory or compliance-gaining behavior theory (Marwell & Schmitt, 1967). Lee et al. (1997) explained compliance-gaining as “an interdependent process, in which both the source and the target are active participants in the interaction, and both may be pursuing competing agendas” (p. 30). Thus, compliance-gaining and resisting is student-teacher communication based on vibrant, interactive and mutually-dependent process where power is negotiated on regular basis (Claus et al., 2012). Further, student-teacher relationship utilizes behavioral alteration techniques to negotiate power. Literature ascertained teachers' compliance-gaining approaches to assess students' perception towards approaches and at the same time to evaluate and re-establish students' learning outcomes (Richmond & McCroskey, 2012). In recent time, literature assessed students' role as influencer arguing their behavioral alteration approaches to explain their compliance-gaining behavior (Claus et al., 2012). Behavioral alteration approaches are used either by student or teacher to convince other party to conform academic assignments; while behavioral alteration messages are certain messages linked to every behavioral alteration approach (Kearney et al., 1984). Students therefore, resist (by showing constructive or deconstructive oppositional behavior) teachers through behavioral alteration messages in the shape of DT traits and power distance for academic entitlement. Additionally, literature has examined specific typologies of students' compliance-gaining approaches attempting to influence their teachers. Golish (1999) argued 19 (7 pro-social, 8 anti-social and 4 neutral) students' compliance-gaining approaches. Table-1 explains students' anti-social behavioral alteration approaches with corresponding messages. Further, students' compliance-gaining is self-directed i.e., for grade change/academic entitlement or learning-oriented (Claus et al., 2012).

Students sometimes, manifest anti-social behaviors i.e., DT traits and power distance for academic entitlement in response to their perceptions of teachers' fairness. Chory-Assad (2002) established that students show indirect aggression towards their teachers when they perceive that

teachers arrived at outcome through an unfair process. This process demotivates students hence they believe that course contents are irrelevant and perceive teachers negatively. As a result, students engage themselves in DT traits and power distance for academic entitlement.

*Table-1 Student behavioral alteration techniques (antisocial) and corresponding messages*

Students' behavioral alteration techniques	Students' behavioral alteration messages
Blame	(i) We weren't prepared for this exam. (ii) You didn't explain this assignment well enough. (iii) You graded the assignment too hard. (iv) The material was too difficult."
Complaining	(i) The questions were too ambiguous. (ii) I have too much to do in other classes (with statements such as these you continue to complain knowing that if you complain long enough, the professor will change his/her mind).
Public Persuasion	Purposefully asking your professor about the class or an assignment in front of another student when persuading him/her, thinking that it would be more difficult for him/her to say "no."
Emotional Displays	Attempting to look really sad, look like you are about to cry, or look the professor in the face so that he/she can see your emotion.
General Excuses	Using any excuse available that sounds reasonable, such as (i) My grandparent died, or (ii) My computer disk crashed, or (iii) I got the flu."
Punishing the Teacher	Giving the professor a bad course evaluation. You might also use statements like (i) This will reflect poorly on your evaluation or how students see the course.
Reference to Higher Authority	(i) If you don't change my grade, I will talk to the dean or the chair of the department. (ii) Other professors teaching this course don't have this many assignments."
Verbal Force/Demand	(i) I demand that you give me a better grade. (ii) I deserve a grade better than the one you gave me. (iii) You need to change this grade."

### ***1.2.2 The concept of Dark Triad***

Paulhus and Williams (2002), explained DT i.e., three personality traits psychopathy, Machiavellianism, and narcissism at a subclinical examination inside normal people. DT traits are combination of detested interpersonal conducts that are self-centered and socially aversive. People with DT traits are emotionless, manipulative, corrupt and prioritize themselves (Qiao et al., 2021). DT traits exhibit negative conducts and characteristics as dishonesty, adverse morality and evading social responsibilities (Furnham et al., 2013). DT traits are explained in details as follow;

#### *Machiavellianism*

Personalities having characteristics of Machiavellianism are pessimistic, distrustful, emotionless and hardheaded, display corrupt principles and disconnected touch (Rauthmann & Kolar, 2012).

Machiavellianism therefore is explained as cunning deeds and dishonesty for personal profits; these people choose short-term benefits over long-term personal/social development (Jakobwitz & Egan, 2006). People high in Machiavellianism exploit available opportunities to gain advantage, reputation, social standing and money without considering moral values (Zettler & Solga, 2013). They tend to live “fast lives” adopting short-term tactics to avail instantaneous fulfillment (Qiao et al., 2021) therefore, they avoid developmental conducts/initiatives for a better personal and societal growth. Similarly, these people strive hard to achieve power in order to plan and execute their goals at the expense (controlling) of others. Likewise, they use their institutes and colleagues as scapegoat to pursue their objectives and more importantly they engage in anti-social and counter-productive activities (Dahling et al., 2009). It is therefore argued that people with Machiavellianism are self-centered, they mainly focus on personal objectives and do not care about the social circle and colleagues around them (Zettler et al., 2011). Moreover, they tend to interact emotionlessly with mediocre moral/ethical input and execute personal goals at any cost (Qiao et al., 2021).

### *Narcissism*

*Narcissists* express extreme self-importance, are always looking for consideration and own approaches of prerogative they do not deserve (Lee & Ashton, 2005). Narcissism hence manifests overemphasis of self-obsession and prominence, supremacy over others and are cunning before others, nevertheless they have substantial logic of entitlement, self-importance and dominance (Ames et al., 2006). Apart from Machiavellianism and psychopathy, people high in narcissism are defined by their feeling/aspirations of entitlement and dominance towards others. This is why narcissists feel themselves superior and they seek respect from their social circuit (Jones & Paulhus, 2014). Hence, they always are self-concerned, seek appreciation and consideration from others (Twenge et al., 2008) therefore, they achieve supremacy, social status and respect maneuvering social relations. Narcissists rarely consider moral values and aspire to control others, force others to execute their plans and expect others to accept and follow their opinions. People high in narcissism feel themselves dominant, exploitative, superior and entitled (Lee & Ashton, 2005). Narcissists are argued to be multidimensional and exaggeratedly self-focused (Qiao et al., 2021) therefore they miscalculate their knowledge, skills and abilities (Myung & Choi, 2017). Narcissists, in short are self-centered, resist disapproval, self-admirer

and excessively arrogant thus they focus on personal growth and development disregarding their social relations (Qiao et al., 2021).

### *Psychopathy*

*Psychopathy* discusses greater personal impulses, negligence, low compassion and concern for others. Psychopathy has characteristically been researched and studied in the perspective of experimental/clinical and forensic psychology; exemplifies a blend of behaviors comprising glory, artificial charisma, insensitivity, impulses and carelessness (Long et al., 2014). Psychopathy therefore is explained as larger individualistic desires and lesser concern for others (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). They undergo short-term decisions for shorter benefits like prestige, power and control over colleagues and surroundings (Boddy, 2006). Psychopaths are argued as threat to organizational ethics because they are conscienceless and they do not care about impact/influence of their behaviors on surroundings (Qiao et al., 2021). Therefore, psychopaths steer their institutes without considering social ethics and values. Psychopaths hence dislike respecting social norms moreover they lack empathy.

Undeniably, research argues that DT traits exhibit relationship with hostility, intimidation and intolerance hence incompatible conducts appear in relational and social circumstances. For instance, personalities on higher side of psychopathy are more inclined towards physical and/or verbal aggression (direct aggression) along-with rumors diffusion (indirect aggression) (Muris et al., 2013), likewise personalities on higher side of Machiavellianism are inclined towards both types of aggression and more specifically towards indirect aggression; narcissism equally is more inclined towards direct aggression (Lau & Marsee, 2013). Psychopathy stands out when it comes to bullying followed by Machiavellianism and narcissism (Baughman et al., 2012).

### ***1.2.3 Dark Triad and Academic Entitlement***

Kopp et al. (2011) explained academic entitlement as either context specific or innate i.e., trait specific. Tracing it down, Gentile et al. (2010), explained self-esteem movement which started in school system in early 1980s. This movement is considered as start-point of academic entitlement beliefs. Similarly, “participation ribbon” i.e., every child was awarded with a ribbon as recognition; it created severe significances among the generation. Moreover, “trophy kids” awarded for even a minimal effort (Alsop, 2008) enticed generations towards academic

entitlement. Rather reinforcing a sense of encouragement these activities ignited beliefs of entitlement that remained with students whole of their lives (Twenge & Campbell, 2003).

DT traits share significant association with academic entitlement in academia (Turnipseed & Cohen, 2015). Academic entitlement is sensed as a prerogative by students who ask for higher scores/grades without putting corresponding performances. The mentioned prerogative therefore is an attitude and assertiveness (Snyders, 2002). Academic entitlement hence is interconnected with lower standards of self-admiration and at the same time it is self-extended external locus of control (Chowning & Campbell, 2009). Hence, college course self-efficacy and academic achievements remain on lower side (Jeffres et al., 2014). Additionally, Chowning and Campbell (2009) argued that students with high entitled expectations assume that lecturers should help them in examination and if their marks are below than their expectations, so it should be reevaluated by their lecturers. According to Turnipseed and Cohen (2015), psychopathy and Machiavellianism are positively related to externalized responsibility dimension of academic entitlement and narcissism is related to entitled expectation of academic entitlement. Based on the logical arguments; we therefore infer the following hypothesis;

**H1.** Dark triad traits i.e., Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy has positive effect on students' academic entitlement in universities of China (Xi'an, Sichuan and Hangzhou).

#### ***1.2.4 Dark Triad, Power Distance and Academic Entitlement***

Robertson et al. (2016), explained power distance as powerful element associated with DT that channelizes individual's overall behavior. Power distance asks for authority and autonomy within social circle (Taras et al., 2010). Power distance therefore is explained as an extent to which societies approve someone for his/her unquestionable domination without even passing judgment (Taras et al., 2010). Jones and Figueredo (2013) narrated DT personality traits as composed of characteristics like interpersonal and social dominance, callousness, distance and cold-bloodedness. Therefore, keeping these traits in mind, power distance requires authority reverence that argues for personal supremacy rather than social ascendancy. Summing it up, DT and power distance are accelerated for personal admiration and supremacy (Jones & Figueredo, 2013).

Power distance and academic entitlement have their roots in social and behavioral terrain (Achacoso, 2006; Chowning & Campbell, 2009). Moreover, their presence is found in university students (Kopp et al., 2011). Achacoso (2006) and Ciani et al. (2008) explained this phenomenon

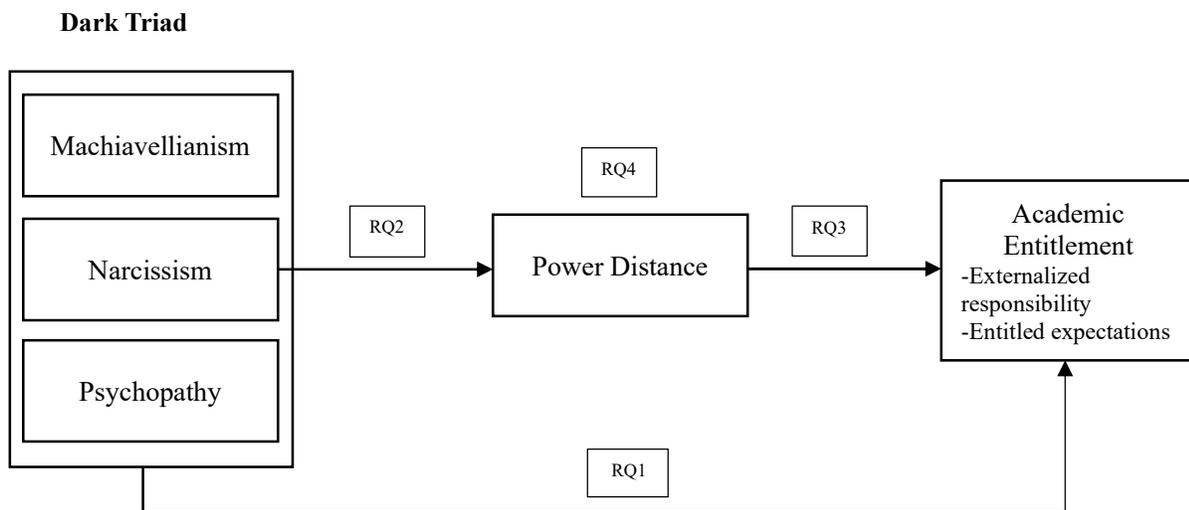
that students with higher level of academic entitlement argued grade negotiation as a fair play and they did this quite powerfully. Further, power distance has been used as mediator in previous studies (Robertson et al., 2016; Seppala et al., 2008). Robertson et al. (2016) examined the link of DT with interpersonal facilitation and interpersonal counterproductive work behavior through the mediation of independent and interdependent self-construal and power distance. Seppala et al. (2008), further investigated power distance as mediator between supervisor and subordinate’s reciprocal trust. Based on the logical arguments; we therefore infer the following hypotheses;

**H2.** Dark triad traits i.e., Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy has positive effect on power distance in universities of China (Xi’an, Sichuan and Hangzhou).

**H3.** Power distance has positive effect on academic entitlement in universities of China (Xi’an, Sichuan and Hangzhou).

**H4.** Power distance mediates the relationship between dark triad and academic entitlement in universities of China (Xi’an, Sichuan and Hangzhou).

**Figure-1: Conceptual Framework**



*RQ = research question*

## 2. Research Methodology

### 2.1 Sample and data collection procedure

This study selected HEIs from Xi’an, Sichuan and Hangzhou China for data collection. Data collection through survey is considered a fitting practice as it allows investigator to get in touch

with a larger portion of population, hence responses collected from targeted sample can indiscriminately be generalized over population (Shafait & Huang, 2023a, 2023b). This study requested 1200 students from twenty-seven HEIs i.e., nine HEIs on average from three provinces. HEIs were selected on the basis of convenience sampling (non-probability sampling technique) which encircles participants on the basis of their availability and willingness to take part in the survey. Questionnaires further were sent to students using WeChat application, mail and by hand method. The questionnaire was addressed to the bachelor, master and Ph.D. students. Out of 1200, 719 respondents (59.9%) returned their valid responses. Further the response ratio is acceptable while keeping in view the number of responses and response proportion (Sahibzada et al., 2022). We requested students in university time to answer the DT, power distance and academic entitlement questionnaire. Furthermore, a researcher was constantly present to immediately resolve potential doubts. Furthermore, demographics of respondents are enlisted in Table-II underneath;

**Table-II: Details in relation with demographics of Respondents**

<b>Demographic details</b>	<b>Occurrence rate</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b><i>Age bracket</i></b>		
21-25	195	27.1
26-30	243	33.8
31-35	184	25.6
36-40	97	13.5
<b><i>Gender</i></b>		
Male	381	53.0
Female	338	47.0
<b><i>Education</i></b>		
Bachelors	259	36.0
Masters	273	38.0
Ph.D.	187	26.0

## **2.2 Measures selected against the utilized concepts:**

This study selected 32 measurements items from prevailing research. Further minor adjustments nevertheless were incorporated in the phrasing/words of items to represent HEI setting. Survey likewise, engaged a five-point Likert scale that extended from “1” denoting “strongly disagree” to “5” denoting “strongly agree”. References of selected measurement instruments are

represented in Table-III.

*2.2.1 Dark triad traits i.e., Machiavellianism, Narcissism and Psychopathy (12 items);* DT personality traits of HEIs students were examined through twelve items scale (with four items each for Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy) adapted from Jonason and Webster (2010). Turnipseed and Cohen (2015) have recently supported this scale in education sector. Further, minor changes were assimilated in the wordings of items to synchronize them with HEIs setting. A sample item for Machiavellianism is “I tend to manipulate others to get my way”; a sample item for narcissism is “I tend to want others to admire me”; and a sample item for psychopathy is “I tend to lack remorse”. Further, Machiavellianism ( $\alpha = .85$ ), narcissism ( $\alpha = .87$ ) and psychopathy ( $\alpha = .83$ ) were demonstrated internally consistent by Robertson et al. (2016).

*2.2.2 Academic entitlement (15 items);* In order to investigate students’ academic entitlement we followed construct devised by Chowning and Campbell (2009); a recent study by Turnipseed and Cohen (2015) has validated the same instrument in educational sector. Students were asked to evaluate their externalized responsibility with 10 items and entitled expectations with remaining 5 items. Minor changes nonetheless were assimilated in the wordings of items to synchronize them with HEIs setting. Further, the targeted sample i.e., students were inquired to evaluate their academic entitlement while responding to distributed questionnaire. Items in this regard were described as “It is unnecessary for me to participate in class when the professor is paid for teaching, not for asking questions”. Further, externalized responsibility ( $\alpha = .83$ ) and entitled expectations ( $\alpha = .69$ ) were demonstrated internally consistent by Chowning and Campbell (2009).

*2.2.3 Power distance (5 items);* Similarly, power distance of HEIs students were evaluated through five items scale incorporated by Earley and Erez (1997). Robertson et al. (2016) has recently validated this scale. Minor changes nonetheless were assimilated in the wordings of items to synchronize them with HEIs setting. Further, students were queried to assess their power distance in terms of mentioned items. Items in this regard were described as “In most situations, superiors should make decisions without consulting their subordinates”. Further, power distance ( $\alpha = .77$ ) was demonstrated internally consistent by Earley and Erez (1997).

***Table-III: Measurement instruments and their references***

Main variable	Sub-category	Items No.	Items	Reference
Academic Entitlement	Externalized Responsibility	10	Most professors do not really know what they are talking about.	Chowning and Campbell (2009)
	Entitled Expectations	5	My professors should reconsider my grade if I am close to the grade I want.	Chowning and Campbell (2009)
Power Distance		5	In most situations students should make decisions without consulting their professors.	Earley and Erez (1997)
Dark Triad	Machiavellianism	4	I tend to exploit others towards my own end.	Jonason and Webster (2010)
	Narcissism	4	I tend to expect special favors from others.	Jonason and Webster (2010)
	Psychopathy	4	I tend to be unconcerned with the morality of my actions	Jonason and Webster (2010)

### 3. Data Analysis

#### 3.1 Data analysis technique

This study utilized quantitative approach with cross-sectional research design. In order to analyze the collected data Smart-PLS 3.2 software along-with partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) method was utilized. PLS-SEM is considered as an evolving data analysis approach in management and social sciences investigations; similarly it analyses small size sample data as well as non-parametric data (Hair Jr et al., 2016). Furthermore this practice is applied as and when study intends to test prevailing principles/theories along-with multifaceted theoretical models (Ringle et al., 2018). PLS-SEM hence, is twin phased statistical investigation i.e., (i) measurement model specification and (ii) structural model evaluation (Ringle et al., 2018). Firstly, measurement model specification delineates the constructs having good indicator loading, composite reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity which are going to be utilized in next phase i.e., structural model. Table-IV shows the obtained results in relation with convergent validity and reliability for utilized constructs. Academic entitlement is assessed to have the values as alpha coefficient i.e.,  $\alpha = 0.79$ , Average Variance Extracted i.e., AVE = 0.51, and Composite Reliability i.e., CR = 0.87. Likewise, DT is assessed to have the values as  $\alpha = 0.81$ , AVE = 0.53 and CR = 0.88. Similarly, power distance is assessed to have the values as  $\alpha = 0.83$ , AVE = 0.54, and CR = 0.78. Secondly, structural model evaluation delineates that it will go through the path coefficients assessment while examining their respective significance through bootstrapping method. Mediation analysis further applied Preacher and Hayes (2008) method because it is known as rigorous technique to testify mediation likewise it is understood

as an appropriate one to practice with PLS-SEM method (Hair Jr et al., 2016). It is moreover interesting to mention that numerous studies have utilized PLS-SEM technique for data analysis in HEIs (Cai B, 2022; Shafait, Khan, et al., 2021).

Table-IV exhibited the results of loadings, CR and AVE; likewise Table-V exhibited discriminant validity results.

**Table-IV: Convergent Validity and Reliability**

Items	Mean	SD	Loadings	VIF	$\alpha$	AVE	CR
Academic Entitlement					0.79	0.51	0.87
AE3	4.34	0.680	0.51	1.51			
AE4	4.44	0.676	0.55	1.52			
AE6	4.35	0.768	0.67	1.74			
AE7	4.24	0.806	0.61	1.58			
AE8	4.29	0.794	0.54	1.41			
AE9	4.21	0.864	0.70	1.96			
AE10	4.14	1.001	0.68	2.20			
AE11	4.08	1.020	0.54	1.82			
AE12	4.06	0.951	0.63	1.83			
AE13	4.42	0.684	0.63	1.65			
AE14	4.34	0.684	0.55	1.48			
AE15	4.40	0.581	0.54	1.41			
Dark Triad							
Machiavellianism					0.77	0.53	0.81
M1	4.27	0.730	0.58	1.55			
M2	4.28	0.733	0.59	1.55			
M3	4.25	0.871	0.63	1.63			
M4	4.11	0.930	0.65	1.66			
Narcissism					0.82	0.50	0.79
N1	4.27	0.755	0.63	1.54			

N2	4.37	0.727	0.61	1.58			
N3	4.24	0.861	0.70	1.86			
N4	4.24	0.893	0.66	1.70			
Psychopathy					0.78	0.51	0.83
Psy1	4.20	0.831	0.54	1.60			
Psy2	4.24	0.778	0.57	1.51			
Psy3	4.29	0.719	0.63	1.53			
Psy4	4.80	1.020	0.69	1.81			
Power Distance					0.83	0.54	0.78
PD1	4.29	0.713	0.75	1.41			
PD2	4.13	0.959	0.75	1.28			
PD3	4.35	0.634	0.71	1.21			
PD4	4.37	0.813	0.79	1.23			
PD5	4.72	0.765	0.70	1.29			

**Table-V: Discriminant Validity (Fornell and Larcker Criterion)**

	AE	PD	DT
AE	<b>0.896</b>		
PD	0.609	<b>0.741</b>	
DT	0.880	0.603	<b>0.910</b>

*Note: Data mentioned on the slope that is represented in bold is square root of AVE of the construct whereas other data denoting correlations with other constructs. Abbreviations: AE, Academic Entitlement; PD, Power Distance; DT, Dark Triad*

### 3.2 Statistical assessment of Structural Model

Once after the statistical valuation of measurement model; the next phase executed statistical assessment of structural model. In order to perform structural model assessment, the developed research questions were ascertained in a succession of predetermined phases. Firstly, assumed direct effects of DT were examined on academic entitlement. Secondly, assumed direct effects of DT on power distance and academic entitlement were examined. Furthermore, in order to visualize the significance of direct paths and estimate standard errors bootstrap resampling method with 5,000 resamples (Ringle et al., 2005) was utilized. Additionally, table-VI statistically explains the executed outputs of assumed research questions for intended direct

relations. In conclusion, the effects of DT on academic entitlement by means of mediation of power distance were executed. Henceforth, table-VIII illustrated the extracted outcomes of mediation analysis. Likewise, Figure.2 has demonstrated the structural path model visually to make it more convenient and precise for readers.

**Figure-2: The structural path model**

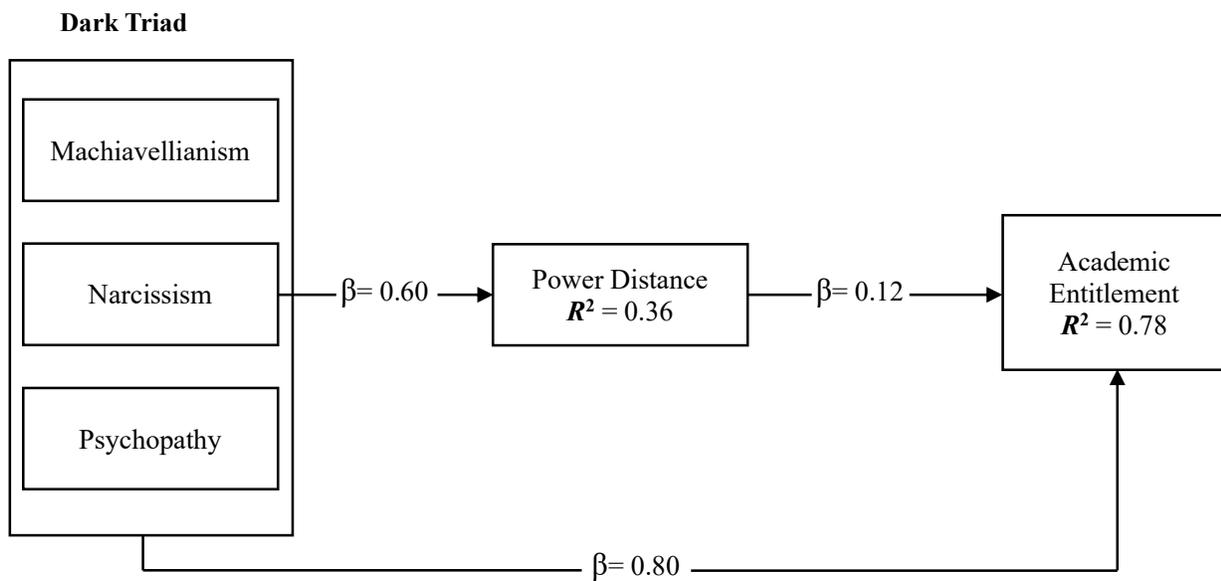


Figure-2 represents structural path coefficients and the detail of total effects, path coefficients/direct effects and indirect effects and their significance are given in Table-VI.  $\beta$  does not necessarily predict the criterion variable hence it is used as a starting point for further investigation. Additionally, for the sake of predictive accuracy we examined coefficient of determination ( $R^2$  value). Figure 2 showed  $R^2$  value of 0.78 for academic entitlement which suggests that exogenous constructs DT traits and power distance together explained 78% variance in academic entitlement that can be treated as substantial. Likewise,  $R^2$  value of 0.36 for power distance denotes that DT traits explained 36% variance in power distance.

**Table-VI: Outcomes executed through Structural Model path coefficient i.e., direct relations**

	Coefficient	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values	Outcome
<b>RQ1: DT -&gt; AE</b>	.80	.029	28.24	.000	Supported

<b>RQ2:</b> DT -> PD	.60	.033	19.65	.000	Supported
<b>RQ3:</b> PD -> AE	.12	.033	3.687	.000	Supported

Abbreviations: AE = academic entitlement; PD = power distance; DT = dark triad; RQ =research question

Results of structural model and research questions’ inference are presented in Table VI. Findings are discussed as follow; *RQ1* argued that DT correlates academic entitlement, results hence validated the research question i.e., *RQ1*:  $\beta = .80$ ,  $t = 28.24$ ,  $p < .001$ . Likewise, *RQ2* argued that DT correlates power distance, results hence validated the research question i.e., *RQ2*:  $\beta = .60$ ,  $t = 19.65$ ,  $p < .001$ . Similarly, *RQ3* argued that power distance correlates academic entitlement, results hence validated the research question i.e., *RQ3*:  $\beta = .12$ ,  $t = 3.68$ ,  $p < .001$ .

### 3.3 Explanation and interpretation of Mediation Analysis

We followed Zhao et al., (2010) mediation process where they described five potential aspects of mediation. Further, we have distinguished Zhao et al. (2010) and Baron and Kenny (1986) mediation processes as well. Zhao et al. (2010) argued non-recursive three-variable causal model identifying three mediation and two non-mediation patterns. (i) *Complementary mediation*: Mediated effect ( $a \times b$ ) and direct effect ( $c$ ) both exist and point at the same direction. (ii) *Competitive mediation*: Mediated effect ( $a \times b$ ) and direct effect ( $c$ ) both exist and point in opposite directions. (iii) *Indirect-only mediation*: Mediated effect ( $a \times b$ ) exists, but no direct effect. (iv) *Direct-only non-mediation*: Direct effect ( $c$ ) exists, but no indirect effect. (v) *No-effect non-mediation*: Neither direct effect nor indirect effect exists. The commonalities between Zhao et al. (2010) and Baron and Kenny (1986) mediation processes are explained through Table-VII.

**Table-VII:** The commonalities between Zhao et al., (2010) and Baron and Kenny (1986) mediation processes

Zhao et al. (2010) mediation process	Baron and Kenny (1986) mediation process
Complementary mediation	Partial mediation
Indirect-only mediation	Full mediation
Competitive mediation	No mediation
Direct-only non-mediation	No mediation
No effect non-mediation	No mediation

Finally, research question4 assesses whether power distance mediates between DT and academic entitlement. Results demonstrated a significant total effect of DT on academic entitlement ( $\beta = .88$ ,  $t = 72.19$ ,  $p < .001$ ); once the mediation is introduced in framework, the direct effect was

still found positive and significant ( $\beta = .80$ ,  $t = 28.24$ ,  $p < .001$ ); however, indirect effect found that DT no longer had a significant effect on academic entitlement ( $\beta = .04$ ,  $t = 1.88$ ,  $p = 0.07$ ). Hence, results reveal direct-only no-mediation (Zhao et al., 2010) of power distance between DT and academic entitlement. Therefore, research question4 is rejected.

**Table-VIII Mediation Analysis**

	Total effects		Direct effects		Research question	Indirect effects		
	$\beta$	t-Value	$\beta$	t-Value		$\beta$	t-Value	P value
DT→ academic entitlement	.88	72.19	.80	28.24	DT → PD → AE	.04	1.88	0.07

*DT = dark triad, AE = academic entitlement, PD = power distance*

#### **4. Discussion, conclusion, implications and limitations of the study**

##### *4.1 Discussion and conclusion of the study*

The objective of this research was to investigate the relationship between students' DT traits i.e., Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy and their academic entitlement in higher education institutes of Xi'an, Sichuan and Hangzhou China. Through literature authors explained that DT traits enhance academic entitlement among university students; therefore, future research may incorporate diverse/more mediators and even moderators in Chinese HEIs to better understand the framework. Moreover, this empirical study investigated power distance as mediator between DT and academic entitlement. Though, DT and academic entitlement studied extensively in literature (Lessard et al., 2011; Menon & Sharland, 2011), however power distance has not been studied as mediator between DT and academic entitlement irrespective of contexts. Results showed that DT and power distance have positive and significant influence on students' academic entitlement in Chinese HEIs.

Lessard et al. (2011), and Turnipseed and Cohen (2015) investigated and validated the relationship between DT and academic entitlement. Chinese higher education lacks the research relating to DT and academic entitlement relationship, hence, this study tried to fill that gap. Likewise, DT was investigated in different domains (Furnham et al., 2013; Jonason et al., 2015), but there was dearth regarding this very topic in Chinese HEIs. Robertson et al. (2016) and

Seppala et al. (2008), incorporated power distance as mediator in their studies, however not even a single study is found with power distance as a mediator between DT and academic entitlement and that too in explained context in this study. Therefore, depending on prescribed gaps this study incorporated power distance as mediator to analyze the influence of DT on academic entitlement in Chinese HEIs.

It was argued and found that DT correlates academic entitlement. Findings were found compatible with the results of prior studies conducted in different contexts and cultures (Menon & Sharland, 2011; Turnipseed & Cohen, 2015). Furthermore, this argument was backed statically through results that DT correlates academic entitlement in Chinese HEIs (*RQ1*:  $\beta = .80$ ,  $t = 28.24$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Findings therefore are validating that DT is reality in HEIs. Further, coercion theory or compliance-gaining behavior (Marwell & Schmitt, 1967) is validated through the results; this theory inflicts change in one's behavior even if he/she does not want to. Further, students whenever they fail to attain expected scores/grades then their entitlement may lead them to aggression, impoliteness; hence they shift the responsibility for failure to the professor. Professors with incompetence, conflict-aversion nature or with insufficient administrative support reward students' demands. Hence, entitled behaviors are strengthened and repeated frequently (Turnipseed & Cohen, 2015). Contrariwise, Jiang et al. (2017)' qualitative research investigated and explained teachers' observations of students' academic entitlement with reference to potential effects on teachers' strain and well-being. Teachers therefore explained academically entitled students' behaviors as (i) students ask for distinctive exceptions to the class/ongoing procedures; (ii) evade taking responsibility of their miserable academic performance and (iii) own imposing beliefs of being more knowledgeable than rest of students and even teachers. These students if not granted their entitlement then they involve in uncivilized behaviors as (i) break classroom rules, (ii) demonstrate aggression and irritation, (iii) demonstrate impudence, (iv) defy authority and (v) file complaints and grade pleas. Likewise, it was argued that DT and power distance are correlated. Prior research has supported the relationship of DT and power distance in a dissimilar culture (Robertson et al., 2016). Findings of this research therefore, validated the relationship of DT and power distance in Chinese HEIs (*RQ2*:  $\beta = .60$ ,  $t = 19.65$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This research is novel in a sense that it has put forth the findings in relation with DT, power distance and academic entitlement in Chinese HEIs for the first time. Third research question further, assumed that power distance correlates academic

entitlement; this association moreover, is supported recently by Turnipseed and Cohen (2015). Findings hence, validated the research question positively (*RQ3*:  $\beta = .12$ ,  $t = 3.68$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Likewise, this study argued that power distance mediates the relation between DT and academic entitlement in Chinese higher education. Power distance mediation is validated through prior research (Robertson et al., 2016; Seppala et al., 2008); results however, argued that there is direct-only no-mediation (Zhao et al., 2010) of power distance between DT and academic entitlement. Therefore, research question4 is rejected in Chinese HEIs (DT -PD-AE = .07 with t-value 1.88). Research has claimed that power distance has negative and insignificant association with self-esteem (Schmitt & Allik, 2005); self-esteem nonetheless, is linked with DT (Martinez et al., 2008). Further, it is established that self-esteem plays inadequate role in establishing personalized views and opinions in high power distance countries like China (Robertson et al., 2016). Individuals therefore, with DT traits may become aggressive in response to threats to their self-esteem (Martinez et al., 2008), that may lessen the scope of power distance in process. Likewise, association between DT traits and social behaviors benefit from identifying the targeted behavior; like interaction with an employee, a colleague, or a boss may change the nature of the relationship (Jonason et al., 2015). Further, DT traits along with power distance not only expect respect from juniors, but also from colleagues and bosses therefore it may cause relational clash in the educational and commercial spheres (Furnham et al., 2013; Robertson et al., 2016).

To conclude, this study (being the first instance in Chinese HEIs) augments the DT literature through an elucidation of power distance to ascertain the academic entitlement. It is, now fairly apparent in HEIs that DT traits are complacent for academic entitlement. Nonetheless, researchers emphasized on the relationship between DT traits and academic entitlement abundantly (Lessard et al., 2011; Menon & Sharland, 2011), however, power distance as mediator in this relationship is almost abandoned. Similarly, Turnipseed and Cohen (2015) found that male students with higher DT traits and externalized responsibility score significantly higher; likewise psychopathy forecasted externalized responsibility and narcissism forecasted entitled expectations element of academic entitlement. The present study analyzed the mediating role of power distance between DT traits and academic entitlement as a novel literary contribution. Findings validated research questions i.e., *RQ1* (DT correlates academic entitlement), *RQ2* (DT and power distance are correlated), and *RQ3* (power distance correlates

academic entitlement) however, *RQ4* (power distance mediates the relation between DT and academic entitlement) was rejected.

#### ***4.2 Implications of the study***

This study has highlighted certain theoretical and practical implications. Firstly, this study argued certain preventive measures against DT traits explaining guidelines for students to avoid mentioned traits. Further, this study guides HEIs policy makers to demonstrate certain parameters for students to follow in order to avoid DT traits and academic entitlement. Students' impoliteness (DT traits) is a larger issue than education which has consequences for societies too. Students' impoliteness like individual differences in academic entitlement may urge them to think themselves as "entitled" for everything generally. Hence, HEIs specifically and societies generally maybe informed to plan and utilize better practices to counter this issue. HEIs and societies therefore should validate DT and entitlement scales to infer personalized differences. Moreover, DT traits and entitlement scales, ranging from education to personality research, have an ability to ascertain and educate students to counter issues relevant to education and societal settings. Secondly, the relationship between academic entitlement, power distance and DT model of personality contributes towards coercion theory or compliance-gaining behavior in HEIs. Thirdly, since Chinese government invites students from different countries on different scholarship programs; that may lead to increased academic entitlement amongst students. Therefore, the findings of this study will help HEIs' policymakers in designing the selection and examination mechanisms for students. Since, this study validated academic entitlement scale in Chinese HEIs; therefore HEIs are needed to validate this scale in laboratory and classrooms to ascertain the students' behavioral tendencies. Further, students' reactions to undesirable course evaluation/grading maybe assessed depending on their DT traits especially narcissism and ego threat (Chowning & Campbell, 2009). Similarly, students' reactions maybe assessed through the explanation of students and respective courses' characteristics. In the same vein, students' reactions may either be weighed through their classroom performance i.e., scores on a formative assessment of subject and grade point average or standardized testing i.e., placement examinations. Likewise, students' reactions maybe moderated in relation with their academic entitlement depending on situational characteristics i.e., major of study and application of course/material to their study program. Fourthly, academic practitioners may get an

understanding of dark personality traits of students in relation with academic entitlement likewise faculty members may infer an insight, hence they may think of the ways through which DT traits and academic entitlement may be countered and minimized. Teachers should be aware of students' DT traits and their academic entitlement in order to deal them appropriately. Teacher-student combination should be known of their shared expectations to minimize unreasonable anticipations. Similarly, HEIs should design students' orientation to teachers' academic practices to modify students' unrealistic expectations including DT traits, power distance and academic entitlement. Likewise, HEIs should device proactive administrative strategies like intrusive advising to help students in relation with DT traits and academic entitlement. Lastly, profiling of students based on DT traits may help administration to screen out students expected to demonstrate higher levels of entitlement. Argumentatively, university cultures (even spanning across the single country) may witness differences hence influencing the process and manipulating the students' drive for DT traits, power distance and academic entitlement. Studies in Chinese context revealed that DT traits are significantly on higher side (Jonason et al., 2020; Qiao et al., 2021). This study further established that students' DT traits significantly affected their academic entitlement in Chinese HEIs. Power distance precisely, authenticated direct-only no-mediation between DT traits and academic entitlement. This significant rise/fall in DT traits is because of cultural differences of being collectivist (Chinese culture) and individualistic (Western cultures) cultures (Qiao et al., 2021), likewise, academic entitlement may be entitled to the cultural differences. Cultures with individualistic values/norms therefore endorse DT traits and academic entitlement to some extent. For instance, western societies endorse cultural products in the shape of elicit narcissism i.e., advertisements, song lyrics and reality television (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). Hence, the dissimilar findings between the relationship of DT traits and academic entitlement may be thought of the cultural difference on the basis of individualistic and collectivist societies. Similarly, people in individualistic societies elucidate social events through their internal attributions assuming social responsibilities (Qiao et al., 2021). However, collectivist societies (China) comprehend DT traits as a sign of self-centeredness and imprudence hence has a strong association with power distance and academic entitlement.

#### ***4.3 Limitations of the study***

This study has certain limitations to be examined in future. Limitations are explained as follow;

- (1) Future studies are required to investigate into a larger regional composition with even larger and diverse samples across the HEIs. In order to generalize the findings of this framework; it is needed to examine it in higher education across the borders of China; especially in other continents. This practice will enable us to differentiate the students' behavioral trends across the countries or even continents. Therefore, this may assist us to go for comparative studies across the regions.
- (2) This study investigated public HEIs from Xi'an, Sichuan and Hangzhou China; future research may consider private HEIs from China and even comparison of public and private institutes may be initiated.
- (3) Similarly, DT and power distance may also be combined with other social behaviors in different domains of life for further understanding of explained topic. This may be of extreme importance as both variables possess the values which demoralize individual and societal prospects (Jonason et al., 2015).
- (4) Additionally, self-reported measures of DT traits draw controversy. As high scores through collected samples recommend that the element of impression management is asking for further exploration. Argumentatively, personnel may underreport dark traits and conducts to give an impression of socially acceptable (Muris et al., 2017). Hence it is reported that response bias is particularly real for personnel high in DT traits and conducts (Muris et al., 2017). Further, a meta-analysis argued that measures of DT are vulnerable to falsifying when contributors are requested to rate themselves in either a positive or negative manner (Walker et al., 2022). Future research may utilize different information/methods to examine the framework of this study. Similarly, future research may use qualitative research design to comprehend the prevailing contrivances influencing the association between students' DT personality traits and their academic entitlement.
- (5) Further, utilization of one source data is another limitation of this study. This may cause common-method variance issue. There may be a possibility that common method variance may inflate associations between the variables of study (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To ensure the transparency, future research may collect data from multiple sources i.e., data collection from students and their supervisors.
- (6) Future research involving qualitative research design may acquire a better overview of dimensions that explain students' DT personality traits and their urge for academic entitlement. Additionally, students' psychological characteristics impact their DT personality traits and academic entitlement. Therefore, future research may investigate broader range of students' characteristics including the investigation into students' emotional intelligence and their learning goal orientation

(performance-based or avoidance-based) for expected academic entitlement. (7) In addition, personality development either complacent as DT traits or otherwise over the lifecycle means that students' samples have relatively slight age difference hence making generalizability an issue. Research has found that young people are going through transition i.e., personality development significantly (Roberts et al., 2006). The current findings therefore, may undesirably influence the generalizability to a varied population i.e., people with different age group. Hence, researchers may consider examining DT traits in higher education on different operational levels with different endogenous variables. Future research findings therefore will ascertain specific parameters to counter DT traits in HEIs across the operational tiers. (8) Future researchers should use other measures of DT traits to replicate this study so that findings may be distinguished across the constructs and regions. (8) Similarly, it is argued that academic entitlement is a learned behavior (Chowning & Campbell, 2009) therefore it should be investigated for more clarity.

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## Appendix

### **Dark Triad Machiavellianism**

1. I tend to manipulate others to get my way.
2. I have used deceit or lied to get my way.
3. I have use flattery to get my way.
4. I tend to exploit others towards my own end.

### **Narcissism**

1. I tend to want others to admire me.
2. I tend to want others to pay attention to me.
3. I tend to seek prestige or status.
4. I tend to expect special favors from others.

### **Psychopathy**

1. I tend to lack remorse.
2. I tend to be unconcerned with the morality of my actions
3. I tend to be callous or insensitive.
4. I tend to be cynical.

### **Academic Entitlement Externalized Responsibility**

1. It is unnecessary for me to participate in class when the professor is paid for teaching, not for asking questions.
2. If I miss class, it is my responsibility to get the notes.
3. I am not motivated to put a lot of effort into group work, because another group member will end up doing it.
4. I believe that the university does not provide me with the resources I need to succeed in college.
5. Most professors do not really know what they are talking about.
6. If I do poorly in a course and I could not make my professor's office hours, the fault lies with my professor.
7. I believe that it is my responsibility to seek out the resources to succeed in college.
8. For group assignments, it is acceptable to take a back seat and let others do most of the work if I am busy.
9. For group work, I should receive the same grade as the other group members regardless of my level of effort.
10. Professors are just employees who get money for teaching.

### **Entitled Expectations**

1. My professors are obligated to help me prepare for exams.
2. Professors must be entertaining to be good.
3. My professors should reconsider my grade if I am close to the grade I want.
4. I should never receive a zero on an assignment that I turned in.
5. My professors should curve my grade if I am close to the next letter grade.

### **Power Distance**

1. In most situations students should make decisions without consulting their professors
2. Once a decision is made, students should strictly follow the decision
3. Professors should not express disagreements with their students
4. Students should be able to make the right decisions without consulting with professors
5. Students who let their professors contribute in decisions lose credibility