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## **‘See Me as I see Myself:’ A Phenomenological Analysis of Grade Bump Requests**

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# **‘See Me as I see Myself:’ A Phenomenological Analysis of Grade Bump Requests**

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## **Abstract**

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At the end of every semester, some students will boldly email me asking for their grade to be bumped. These requests and their motives seem closely tied to academic entitlement, which has mostly been studied quantitatively. Creating a dialogue with this published literature, this research seeks to uncover the lived meanings of a grade perceived as unjust. Using a Heideggerian life-world approach, I analyzed an email archive to explore how students are projecting lived understandings of themselves that are at odds with their grades. In their plaintive plea to change their grades, the students are seeking affirmation of their self-understanding, demanding to be seen and valued as they see themselves. These results are discussed in light of the literature reviewed and directions for future research are proffered.

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**Keywords:** grade bump, academic entitlement, qualitative, phenomenology

# **‘Véame Como me Veo a mí Mismo:’ Un Análisis Fenomenológico de las Solicitudes de Aumento de Calificación**

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## **Resumen**

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Al final de cada semestre, algunos estudiantes me enviarán un correo electrónico valientemente pidiendo que su calificación sea aumentada. Estas solicitudes y sus motivos parecen estar estrechamente vinculados con el derecho académico, que en su mayoría se ha estudiado cuantitativamente. Creando un diálogo con esta literatura publicada, esta investigación busca descubrir los significados de una calificación percibida como injusta. Utilizando un enfoque vida-mundo Heideggeriano, analicé un archivo de correo electrónico para explorar cómo los estudiantes proyectan entendimientos vividos de sí mismos que están en desacuerdo con sus calificaciones. En su suplicante demanda de cambiar sus calificaciones, los estudiantes buscan afirmación de su autocomprensión, exigiendo ser vistos y valorados como se ven a sí mismos. Estos resultados se discuten a la luz de la literatura revisada y se ofrecen instrucciones para futuras investigaciones.

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**Palabras clave:** aumento de calificaciones, derecho académico, cualitativo, fenomenología.

Some students will audaciously ask their professor to raise their grade, providing multiple reasons why they feel entitled to a higher grade: a desire to keep their scholarship or pursue graduate school, just shy of an ‘A’, or just because they want it. On social media, grade bump requests have appeared in forums with teachers debating whether this is ever warranted, discussing their frustration and resentment of even being asked (Quora, n.d.) and providing practical considerations of when and under what circumstances a grade bump should be given (Reddit, 2007). Some professors even publish their reply detailing why the request is denied and why the student should never ask (Engel, 2013; Patton, 2015). Yet, sparse published scientific literature exists on the specific request of grade bumps; one article expands on the practical advice and ethical considerations of granting this request by framing the decision within ethical ideologies (Dukewich & Wood, 2016). While grade bumps are part of the larger debate on grade inflation (Caruth & Caruth, 2013), I am interested in the specific instance when a student asks for this bump and not the reasons why grades are inflated or whether higher grades have been granted.

I sought to explore how these requests reveal certain understandings of what the grades mean to students and how these are revelatory of the students’ projects (see Heidegger, 1927/1962) of themselves. These requests and their motives seem closely tied to academic entitlement (AE), which measures both a sense of expecting a high grade and diminished personal responsibility. This study seeks to dialogue with the AE literature by phenomenologically analyzing emails from students requesting a higher grade. I aim to shed light on the students’ purpose and intentions of asking for a grade bump and how these requests reveal the lived meaning of a grade perceived as unjust.

### **Literature Review**

AE is defined as a stable trait that describes a student’s “sense of deserving more than others” coupled “with (often) little consideration of one’s qualities or performance” (Singleton-Jackson, Jackson, & Reinhardt, 2011, p. 232). When validating an AE scale, Chowning and Campbell (2009) identified two subscales: entitled expectations and externalized responsibility. The former describes “specific, relatively inflexible, entitled

expectations about professor behaviors and grades” (p. 985). The latter describes the degree to which students believe the teacher is responsible for the students’ learning and holding others responsible for one’s performance in class. The relationship between these two constructs is mixed with one study finding a moderate correlation (Turnipseed & Cohen, 2015) but two finding no significant correlation (Bonaccio, Reeve, & Lyerly, 2016; Chowning & Campbell, 2009). These two components of AE appear to be two different, but interrelated, ways of attuning to one’s grades.

In a validation study, Chowning and Campbell (2009) used student-generated open-ended responses to situations that might evoke AE to predict students’ reactions to both appropriate and inappropriate actions. In one vignette, students described how they would respond to their final grade being just below the cutoff (e.g., 89 is one point away from 90). Instructors rated the appropriateness of the collected responses that ranged from accepting the grade earned and believing the instructor to be fair and honest (both deemed appropriate by instructors) to expecting the teacher to bump the grade up or believing perfect attendance entitles one to an A (both deemed inappropriate). Students with low AE rated the instructor-deemed inappropriate responses as less appropriate than the instructor-deemed appropriate responses. In contrast, high AE students rated the instructor-deemed appropriate and inappropriate responses similarly. Additionally, entitled expectations positively and significantly predicted the likelihood of engaging in instructor-deemed inappropriate behaviors. Hence, students with high AE do not make a distinction between what instructors would deem appropriate and inappropriate responses and are more likely to engage in the latter.

Regarding perceptions of teachers, students with high AE reported greater offense when teachers lectured the entire class period, failed to make the class interesting, called on an unprepared student, and asked questions that no student knew the answer to (Knepp, 2016). AE also positively predicted students’ perceptions of instructor bias (Linville & Grant, 2017). These differences in perceptions are also affecting teachers’ well-being. Teacher-reported uncivil behaviors fully mediated the relationship between AE and teachers’ strain and burnout (Jiang, Tripp, & Hong, 2017).

Another area of the literature explores how AE impacts academic performance and outcomes. Knepp (2016) found that higher externalized

responsibility, but not entitled expectations, significantly predicted lower student and schoolwork engagement. Perhaps not surprisingly, both AE subscales weakly, negatively, and significantly correlated with final course grades (Bonaccio et al., 2016). If students forsake personal responsibility for their academic work and perceive the grade as given (and entitled to), rather than earned, their engagement and final grades suffer. AE also significantly predicts college cheating (Stiles, Wong, & LaBeff, 2018) and less unethical views of cheating (Elias, 2017).

While Bonaccio et al. (2016) also found externalized responsibility significantly negatively predicted final grades, this was not the case after controlling for the Big 5 personality traits and general mental ability. Bonaccio et al. (2016) found agreeableness, openness, and conscientiousness were negatively correlated with entitled expectations, but externalized responsibility was not correlated with any of the Big 5 traits. Turnipseed and Cohen (2015) found positive and significant correlations between the dark triad personality traits (Machiavellianism, Psychopathy, and Narcissism) and both subscales of AE.

Low self-esteem was negatively, weakly, and significantly correlated with externalized responsibility but not entitled expectations (Chowning & Campbell, 2009). Sohr-Preston and Boswell (2015) found academic dishonesty positively predicted AE, while internal locus of control and positive family functioning negatively predicted AE. Self-concept, as a composite measure of both self-esteem and self-efficacy, was not a significant predictor. They also found an interaction effect whereby AE was highest in those with both low internal locus of control and low positive family functioning. Moreover, parent over-involvement (i.e., helicopter parents) positively predicted students' AE which in turn predicted counter-productive academic behaviors (Mahbod & Fouladchang, 2018). Additionally, student-rated parental warmth and parental psychological control were negative and positive predictors respectively of externalized responsibility (Turner & McCormick, 2018). Thus, students' AE is not an isolated individual trait, but part of a larger social pattern influenced by psychological well-being, parents, family functioning and perhaps even becoming a group norm (Hong, Huang, Lin, M.-P., & Lin, H.-Y., 2017).

## **The Current Study**

Most of the literature explores quantitatively how AE is related to personal individual factors (e.g., personality, self-concept) and its consequences (e.g., grades, engagement). In a qualitative analysis, Singleton-Jackson, Jackson, and Reinhardt (2010) illuminated the myriad ways in which students act as ‘consumers’ bringing an entitled expectation with respect to their understandings of professors (e.g., students deserve to pass, teachers should raise grades; professors work for students) and of themselves as shoppers of education (e.g., credit and grades are paid for). Singleton-Jackson et al. (2011) noted two definitions of AE had been proposed at the time. The first, described above, entails a sense of preferential treatment and lack of personal responsibility, which is captured by Chowning and Campbell’s (2009) widely used scale. The second definition includes three aspects: students’ sense of deserving a reward that is not based on academic merit, diminished sense of personal responsibility, and expectations about teachers beyond those of providing educational opportunities and instruction (Jackson, Singleton-Jackson, & Frey, 2011). Since then, other definitions have emerged (see Luckett, Trocchia, Noel, & Marlin, 2017). Taking up Singleton-Jackson et al.’s call for future research to further explore and define this construct, this study takes a closer look at one specific instance of AE: the request to raise one’s grades. By analyzing an archive of student emails asking for a grade change, I aim to illuminate the purpose of these requests by exploring students’ understandings of themselves and others as well as their expectations about grades. How are students’ expectations revelatory of the aims they have for themselves?

## **Method**

### **Data Collection and Sample**

The data comprise an archive of 16 emails I, as the professor, have received from students who have inquired about changing their grades. Emails were received between Fall 2013 to Spring 2019 from students attending one of three universities. Emails were included if students inquired about their grade and asked if it could be changed. The grades in question could be for any assignment, but most emails concerned the final course grade. The

supporting quotes were anonymized. This research was registered as exempt by the University's Institutional Review Board.

## **Approach**

The analysis was informed by a phenomenological approach, which is characterized by a focus on describing the essences of everyday lived experiences (see Giorgi, 1985; von Eckartsberg, 1998). Phenomenology “tries to give a direct description of our experience as it is, without taking account of its psychological origin and the causal explanations which the scientist... may be able to provide” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2005, p. vii). The analysis is not focused on elucidating what precedes and gives rise to AE or what contributes to or causes a student to request a grade bump, but rather seeks to illuminate how such a request is revelatory of a stance before a world that is challenged. How must a student understand themselves, their role as a student, the meaning that grades have for them such that this grade bump request is made? What are the students' intentions when sending such a request?

The analysis specifically draws from Heidegger's (1927/1962) interconnected notions of *projecting* and *understanding*. For Heidegger, human beings are characterized as ‘being ahead of themselves’, aiming towards possible ways we can be. These telic futural projections are disclosive of certain understandings. Certain ways of looking (projecting) are related to ways of apprehending (understanding). For example, a student's understanding that an ‘A’ is desirable is revelatory of the projects they have for themselves; it is desirable given one's project to be a good student, to apply to graduate school, to make their parents proud, among others. If one gets a ‘B’, the understanding that one has fallen short is interconnected with the student's future possibilities they have envisioned for themselves. If the student has other projects, such as passing the class with a ‘C’ or getting one's degree, the ‘B’ is no longer understood as falling short, but understood as having surpassed one's goal. This study answers the following question: What are the invariant projects and understandings that comprise what is at stake for students requesting a higher grade?

The data were interrogated from an inductive frame of reference, seeking to take the ontic particulars (specific examples or instances) as manifest in the emails themselves and arrive at the essential structures that

comprise this phenomenon by using imaginative variation (Wertz, 1985). The emails provide the particular ways in which students understand the situation of receiving a lower-than-expected grade. These specific instances and those that can be imagined as other possible ways of understanding this situation will be transformed into the essential elements or structures that characterize the phenomenon. These transformations will be expressed in terms of van den Berg's four essential fundamentals or stances of meaning: body, world, other, and time (1972). The results detail the telic horizons out of which a student makes such a request, where the possible future projects that students have for themselves are shaping their understandings of themselves, others, and the world.

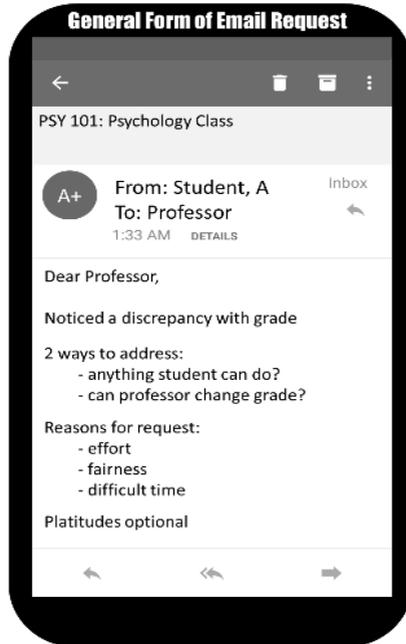
### **Data Analysis**

Drawing from a Heideggerian life-world approach (Landrum, Guilbeau, & Garza, 2017), the analysis aimed to illuminate how the students project certain understandings of themselves and perceive a disconnect with their grade. Data were read and interrogated in light of how the students' understandings of their grades are reflective of their various projects. Using thematic moments analysis (Garza, 2004), the parts or moments of the emails that were revelatory of the students' lived understandings of grades were identified and transformed to shed light on the students' projects. These transformations were then grouped into themes aiming to elucidate the lived meanings of grades, elaborating on what is at stake for the students and their visions of themselves.

### **Results**

The following figure depicts the general form of the requests that I have received from students. The form is depicted as an email on an electronic device as I have never been asked to change a grade by a student in person. The students may find this request is easier to make when they do not have to face the teacher. Without the possibility of being looked at, the electronic device renders their body absent. This may offer the chance to hide one's embarrassment and seek refuge behind a screen to possibly avoid con-fronting this head on, face-to-face. The email does con-front in the sense that 'con' could be taken up as 'with': the student is attempting to bring the

teacher's view of them in line with theirs. 'Con' can also be defined as persuading someone to believe something or do something, typically deceptively: the student is engaging in a misdirection, to deflect the teacher's attention away from their failing and towards their strengths; in some instances, students will even request that grades be bumped, asking the teacher to lie about the grade the student earned.



*Figure 1.* Depicts the general form of the email request demanding a grade change.

Generally, the emails begin with a statement that their grades are lower than expected, with some expressing surprise and dismay. The students will offer ways to address this discrepancy and provide reasons why they are requesting a grade change. Some emails will include various platitudes about how much they enjoyed the class, learned so much, had a great time, etc. The results below are grouped into four themes with supporting quotes: Lived Disparity, Need for Recognition, Redress, and Justification.

## **Lived Disparity**

In the emails, students are noting a disparity in their final grade and the one they were anticipating.

“Though I wasn't expecting the A- which I was working towards, I also was not expecting the solid B.”

The perceived unjustness of the final grade is understood in light of the students' own self-concept. Their understandings of themselves as hard-working, an 'A' student, never missing a class or assignment, struggling and/or hardship are not reflected in their final grade. This suggests that these students understand their grades as either an affirmation or denial of their projective sense of self, their concern with the possibility that they are seen by others as they see themselves. When there is a disconnect, the possibility of an unshared sense of self emerges, whereby the students' sense of self is not co-perceivable by others and is not part of the shared social reality. This lack of correspondence occasions a moment of self-questioning: 'Am I not the student I thought I was?'

“I should have earned a 91 on my final, not a 70.”

The students' requests to bump their grade is a claim that they are as they see themselves and a demand that the professor affirm this vision. This perceived grade unfairness is always occasioned when the students' expectations are higher than the grade earned; no student has yet requested a grade be bumped down, expressive of an unworthiness of being given a grade too high.

## **Need for Recognition**

This claim to be seen in accordance with their own understanding reveals a need to be recognized and given credit for what they have done over the course of a semester. In perceiving a disparity, students feel unvalued in their efforts, unrecognized for their performance or progress.

“...at least show you that I was a serious student in your class.”

“By me not doing my work, it looked as if I did not care, but I do.”

The request is sent in the hopes of forestalling the understanding that they have fallen short. The email is a demand: ‘See me as I see myself.’ Implicit in these demands to share their self-understanding, the student is questioning the teacher’s understanding: ‘You agree, right? I worked hard this semester’ or ‘You don’t want me to not attend grad school/lose my scholarship, right?’

“having a b- will only lower my GPA and prevent me [from] being in the program.”

The email is sent in the hopes that their grade, as given by the teacher, can be brought into line with their self-understanding and once again affirm their sense of who they are. The student is inviting the teacher to share in their future goals and self-identity. The students perceive a disconnect between their self-understanding and how they are viewed by others. The email is a plea for the teacher to revise their view and bring it in line with how the students view themselves; the student demands that ‘reality’ conform to their vision rather than a call to transform themselves in light of that vision.

## **Redress**

For the student thus challenged, the lived unjustness of the grade must be righted. For these students, it is not just a grade, but their identity as a smart student, a good student, an A student that is in question. Their grades are part of the future self they are aiming towards: going to graduate school, maintaining one’s scholarship, applying for an internship program, passing this class, among other possibilities. For some, the expected grade is not just what they are owed, entitled to, deserving of, but the disconnect is one in which they feel they have been robbed, that something was taken from them.

“Is there anything that can be done to get **my** points back?”[emphasis added]

The student feels the need to right the lived injustice, to bring their vision into the shared world with others as the foundation of their place within it. The lack of correspondence must be redressed so that the actual grade matches the expected one - the grade must be brought in line with their expectations. In order to right this perceived wrong and come to terms with the disparity, students attempt to address the problem in two ways: a) what can the student do to raise their grade (e.g., extra credit, resubmit an assignment); b) can the teacher raise the grade? These two solutions are not mutually exclusive, with some students asking for both in the same request.

“I was wondering if there was anything I could do, or any way that you would be able to bump my grade up to a B+?”

The first solution is an offer to rectify the situation by working to right the perceived discrepancy and a second chance to demonstrate their self-understanding and correct the teacher’s misperception of them. This instrumental orientation is an attempt to once more prove one’s effort and hard work in the class by offering to complete *extra* work. ‘Just in case you didn’t notice the first time, let me demonstrate how hard I can work.’ The student is extending an invitation to the teacher to re-assess them, to bring the teacher’s evaluation of them in line with their own understanding. The student seeks to demonstrate, prove and gain recognition for their work, at last.

The second solution belies an understanding that the grade is given by the teacher, rather than earned.

“Seeing that I am only 1 point away from an A, would it [be] possible to bump my grade from an A- to an A?”

The students want to be rewarded for their struggle, understanding the grade to be a reflection of how hard they worked. In this view, the grade is not a reflection of mastery but rather of one’s efforts. The grade is not only part of the students’ identity but an understanding of belonging to a certain group or deserving of a title (an ‘A’ student, a passing student). This attempt to redress the situation is a non-instrumental demand entailing a global transformation of their place in the world alongside others to

conform with their pre-emptive understanding; the student demands that the teacher bestow the grade title upon them, to just ‘make it so.’ The demand for the teacher to raise their grade, no matter how small the bump, is an attempt to claim the title without the work; the student is demanding that others conform to their understanding rather than seeing it as a call to transform themselves. Yet, this request undermines the significance of the (earned) grade through the arbitrariness of simply adding one point out of thin air.

### **Justification**

The move to re-dress (as in dress anew) the lived disparity is an attempt to not only cover over but re-cover (like one might re-upholster a piece of furniture) and reframe the situation by focusing on specific qualities or aspects. While not all students included this in their email, most students highlighted their hard work, how they struggled mightily throughout the semester, and that they did everything that was asked of them to redirect the teachers’ focus to their efforts. In the present moment, students attempt to deflect away from their failings; the misdirection is an attempt to preserve their current understanding.

“I worked hard in this class and was really hoping to get at least an A-”

In calling the teacher’s attention to what they have done, the students are casting themselves in the most favorable light, indicative of a project of putting their best academic face forward. In this insistence on being viewed in the best possible light, students are also covering over what they have failed to do, being selectively closed off to the possibilities that the grade is earned and reflective of their academic performance.

“Though my quiz grades were not what I had wanted them to be, I believe I only missed one class and possibly one lab at most, but I was the first in class every other day and participated often to show that I was still working hard.”

While some students acknowledge their low grades or missed assignments, they quickly redirect the focus to their hard work in the hopes the teacher will overlook those failings or look the other way. The move to redirect and reorient the professor's gaze to their best self is part of a larger attempt to justify their demand. Some students call attention to their hardships and the struggles they faced during the semester.

“I was very overwhelmed due to the workload of taking 19 credits”

“I have been going through family issue due to mom [sic] illness”

Students appear to be rewriting the semester by claiming that ‘if only’ this hardship had not befallen them, they would have performed better. The students are inviting the professor to reimagine with them the possibilities of how the semester could have gone. In this imagined and rewritten past, the students are holding onto the certain and unquestioned future outcome of their anticipated grade. The expected aimed-at grade and future selves are indubitable and irrefutable for the student; the past is ambiguous, undetermined, pending and unresolved. The present is part of a deflected now, a misdirection to focus on their best selves. This misdirection is also a fantastical claim that the path to the aimed at self is and remains clear and attainable.

Whether a focus on effort or hardships, students feel the need to explain why the grade change is warranted and how their current grade is unfair. It is a further attempt to solidify their sense of self and present themselves as worthy of the expected grade. The grade once again emerges as an affirmation of their self-understanding. One way the re-dress is manifest is an attempt to cover over their weaknesses, re-cover with a focus on their strengths and recover their initial pre-emptive self-understanding.

There are many ways one can imagine students addressing the lived disparity, that I as the teacher would probably not be privy to, that students would keep private and not share with me. All of these are attempts by the student to persevere their sense of self. Some of these possibilities include self-handicapping, perceiving the teacher as unfair, claiming their work in the class amounted to ‘pearls before swine.’ All of these are extrinsic and non-identity reasons to account for why the disparity exists in the first place. It is a project that forecloses on the possibility that they are other

than how they pre-envisioned. If the student questions their work or identity and sees the unexpected grade as a chance to work harder next time, to improve their study skills, or just an opportunity to reflect on what they could have done differently to earn the grade they were expecting, the lived disparity is not coupled with a need for the teacher to recognize them as they see themselves or need for the teacher to redress the situation.

## **Discussion**

The results shed light on how students' understandings of grades are revelatory of the projects they have for themselves and others regarding their place in the academic world. The literature is mostly concerned with identifying individual traits that coincide with AE (e.g., Chowning & Campbell, 2009; Sohr-Preston & Boswell, 2015) as well as exploring the consequences of these entitled attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Bonaccio et al., 2016; Knepp, 2016; Linvill & Grant, 2017). By focusing on the lived meanings of the grade and exploring the purpose of these requests, the results reveal how students are taking a stance when confronted with a lower grade and how these requests are a claim before a world that challenges their self-understanding.

The analysis of the situation of requesting a higher grade reveals that students are invested in others seeing them academically as they see and understand themselves. Students have an abiding concern with preserving and maintaining their own self-understanding when faced with a world, as manifest in the grade given by the teacher, that fails to match up with and affirm this understanding. This lived discrepancy occasions the need to reassert and demand agreement with one's understanding and the need to correct the error to recover this initial sense of self.

The first three themes (Lived Disparity, Need for Recognition, and Redress) appear to be essential to the phenomenon. Using imaginative variation (Wertz, 1985), if one of these themes is missing, the phenomenon drastically changes. If one feels the grade is in line with their expectations or is higher than one's expectations, no protest or request is made. If the student feels their work, effort, or performance is being captured or understood accurately (from the students' point of view) by the teacher, there is no occasion to demand a need to be seen in a certain way; the student does not feel misapprehended or that their view of self is unshared.

If the student takes this disparity as a chance to work differently, change the way one studies, etc., the student would not demand that extra work be given or the grade bumped in order to resolve the disparity. In this situation, the power to change the disparity is seen as lying within the students themselves and no attempt to reach out to the professor is made.

The last theme, Justification, does not appear to be essential in that not all students made a plea to focus on their efforts or hardships in a bid to prove they were worthy of the demand. This theme appears to portray one of the many ways in which students attempt to resolve the lived disparity, focus on specific qualities and be seen in a certain light as well as ways to re-dress and re-cover the situation. In all of these attempts, students are also attempting to recover and regain their original sense of sense that was stolen from them with the lower-than-expected grade.

Drawing from van den Berg, the results can be rendered in light of the four fundamental dimensions of experience. In the current study, the *body* was revealed in its absence. By making these requests electronically, students did not have to face the teacher nor did they have to be seen. The demand and plead to be seen as they see themselves took place behind a screen, in a faceless encounter. Upon seeing a grade that was lower than their expectations, the students' *world* and their place in it was challenged and threatened. The students realize that their sense of self is unshared by *others*. As the demand unfolds over *time*, the students orient to the present moment as an opportunity to deflect attention away from their weaknesses and towards their strengths; the past is pending and mutable where aspects can be ignored, work resubmitted, and fantastical reimaginations of *what if* are enacted. The future outcome of getting the grade they expect is irrefutable and certain.

### **Return to the Literature**

AE measures the degree to which students expect high grades, particularly when they forsake personal responsibility. This study reveals that entitlement is understood not just as what is owed, as seen in the demand for a higher grade, but also entails a sense of being robbed of one's points. This was revealed in several instances where students described *their* points, as in the ones they are entitled to, and a feeling that they were stolen. The grade is inaccurate and they have been robbed of the

opportunity to have a grade that reflects their sense of who they are as a student.

Sohr-Preston and Boswell (2015) found that self-concept (self-esteem + self-efficacy) was not a significant predictor of AE. Indeed, the current results revealed that it is not about how good or bad one feels about oneself or one's confidence or lack thereof to perform well, but how their sense of self is tied up with the meaning of the grade. By treating self-concept as an *independent* variable, the students' sense of self is isolated and separate from their identity as a student, the meaning of grades, and the deservingness of being seen in a certain light. The students who make these requests view the grade as external confirmation and affirmation that who they think they are is indeed shared and reflected in how the teacher views them. Indeed, it is possible to imagine that students are facing an identity crisis where their self-esteem is being questioned; they are unsure about themselves upon receiving an unexpected grade. The request expresses an attempt to reassert, reaffirm, and maintain their sense of self while protesting the unfairness of this unexpected mark. The unexpected grade occasions the questioning of one's sense of self, the accuracy of the grade ('that can't be right'), and the request to be re-evaluated considering one's effort. These grade change requests shed light on the lived meanings of grades as being interconnected and affirming one's self concept, their identity as a student, and a recognition of their hard work.

My results shed an interesting light on Chowning and Campbell's (2009) finding that students with high AE rated both instructor-deemed appropriate and inappropriate responses as equally appropriate. Two of the appropriate responses were deserving of the grade earned and expecting the professor to be honest. For the student requesting a grade bump (an instructor-deemed inappropriate response), they would accept the grade they earned if the grade was in line with their expectations. The lived disparity in a grade that is lower than what they are entitled to is one that they are unwilling to accept until the injustice is righted. Furthermore, the student who reaches out with this type of request could also believe the instructor is fair and honest and will do the right thing by changing the grade to truly reflect what the student feels they deserve (such as the instructor-deemed inappropriate belief that perfect attendance deserves an A).

Another similar instructor-deemed inappropriate response was “I would expect the professor to be a kind, gentle, understanding person and bump me up” (Chowning & Campbell, 2009, p. 990). This sheds some interesting light on how the students who request a grade bump are anticipating how their teacher will receive the request as well as an understanding of the type of professor they are dealing with. While my data did not include this explicit sentiment, it is tacitly there in that students probably reach out to professors for whom they feel are at least open to this consideration, will view the request favorably, or anticipate the professors can be persuaded. If the request is not granted, the student can claim the professor is mean, unkind, and not understanding, thereby preserving their view of themselves as a good student and entitled to a higher grade. There is also a sense that these students are not anticipating or not concerned (maybe even have not considered this as a possibility) that the request itself will change or alter (for the worse) the impression the professor has of them.

There are some striking similarities between my own experiences with receiving these emails and the story in Singleton-Jackson et al. (2011). The first author recounts a story when she, as the teacher, was approached by a student (at a mall!) complaining about the unfairness of the course due dates and how they were not satisfactory nor convenient for the student’s schedule. While the student admitted that no effort had been made to contact the teacher or the teaching assistant, Singleton-Jackson describes that she ended the conversation after it became clear the student was going to persist until the teacher saw it from the student’s point of view. Luckily, my students have not opted to continue persisting in the demand to change their course grade. In only one instance did a student carry on an email conversation with three replies until she dropped the matter by saying she ‘understood.’

I am certain that students can and do persist in their entitled expectations in ways that would not be shared with me as the professor. This persistence in demanding that one comes around and the inability to be dissuaded or adopt another’s point of view describes an incalculant holding on to one’s pre-emptive understanding that one is a good student. My results reveal that entitled expectations (one AE subscale) is also tied up in an understanding that one is a good student deserving of a high grade and a project of being invested in others (particularly the teacher) seeing them as they see

themselves. The students feel they are entitled to this understanding, never questioning how they see themselves.

Regarding externalized responsibility, it seems that it is not that one's effort is necessarily disconnected from high grades, as many of the students in this study called attention to their hard work, but rather an understanding that hard work or the work that they did do should be taken into consideration for the final grade. I have not (yet) experienced students debating the merits of assignments or feeling that the assignments did not allow them to demonstrate what they learned. The student with a lower-than-expected grade feels that their hard work, not what they learned, is what matters. To acknowledge that the grade is based on learning would also mean admitting that one did not learn the material and perhaps they are not in as strong a position as the teacher to be the judge of this outcome. Believing the grade is based on hard work, the student is the better judge of how much time they spent and how much effort they invested in the course.

Implicit in both my and Singleton-Jackson's experiences is a sense that the students have an expected future goal and not only complain but demand the teacher change their view to be in line with the students'. For the student, the teacher becomes the instrument by which the future anticipated goal is reached rather than seeing themselves as the instrument to effect the goal by changing one's schedule to accommodate and manage one's time to complete the assignments or changing one's work habits to learn the material and earn better grades. In both cases, the student does not see themselves as instrumental to obtaining one's goal (this is seemingly related to self-efficacy which was not predictive of AE). By viewing the teacher as the person with the power to change the grade, the less-than-expected grade is perceived as unjust given that their understanding of themselves is not reflected nor shared by the teacher. From the students' point of view, they have done everything asked of them, worked hard, tried hard, etc. The student who demands a grade bump does not question their own self-understanding but questions the teacher's. If the student acknowledged that they had the power to change the outcome, it would require a re-understanding of oneself: 'Maybe I'm not the student I thought I was.' The 'externalized responsibility' component is manifest in the persistence to be seen as one sees oneself: the student, reluctant to consider another perspective or acknowledge one might be wrong, reaches out to the professor with a plea. This plea is an attempt to preserve, maintain, and

affirm their own private view of themselves by having it coincide with the world's perspective of them as manifest in the teacher's understanding and the grade they are 'given'.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The data only include emails that I have received from my students taking my psychology classes. While female teachers receive more student requests to change their grades and ask for extensions compared to male teachers (El-Alayli et al., 2017), it is also important to remember that students have some expectation and understanding about how their request will be received. Whether this is assuming the teacher is open, responsive, understanding and perhaps these are more commonly associated with female teachers, future research should explore students' perceptions of teachers when asking for these types of instructor-deemed inappropriate requests.

There are multiple definitions and scales for AE (see Andrey et al., 2012; Chowning & Campbell, 2009; Jackson et al., 2011; Kopp, Zinn, Finney, & Jurich, 2011) pointing to the complexity of this phenomenon as well as the need to solidify our understanding. The current results, while limited to just one entitled response, do include a dimension of students wanting their hard work to be reflected in their grade, but went a step further to elucidate how this is revelatory of the students' projects. To continue this goal of fully fleshing out this phenomenon, I propose that we consider the many situations where AE may emerge. Most of the literature on entitled expectations is concerned with grades (4 of the 5 questions in Chowning and Campbell's (2009) widely used subscale concern exams and grades) and the current study is no exception to this.

As Grubbs, Exline, Campbell, Twenge, and Pargament (2018) indicate, psychological entitlement is part of the larger construct under which AE is just one domain. Lockett et al. (2017) expanded our understanding of this construct by identifying three domains where entitlement is manifest: grades, behaviors, and service. Future research should expand on these AE domains to elucidate how entitlement is manifest in other student demands. Using imaginative variation, AE could also be manifest in what instructors might deem appropriate ways: a student could be expecting a class to be challenging and the class does not live up to their expectations. A student

could be expecting to take a class from a specific teacher, but the class is full. Other areas to explore include Singleton-Jackson's story (Singleton-Jackson et al., 2011) about changing course due dates and the vignettes created by Chowning and Campbell (2009) including students' surprise when an exam in an introductory required class covers material from the textbook and the lectures. These situations are revelatory of students' projects and understandings they have of themselves. When the students' (entitled) expectations are not met, students will look for anyone else responsible but not hold themselves accountable. To do so would require that the student re-understand themselves, to acknowledge that their hard work, being a good student, or however they see themselves is not shared, validated, or affirmed by others. The student who demands the world around them be changed has had their self-understanding threatened. Future research should aim to elucidate how students' understandings of these situations are revelatory of their projects and their concerns.

### **Conclusion**

As a professor, these entitled attitudes and behaviors can be dispiriting but if we recognize where these students are coming from, how they are understanding the role of education and how they view themselves, then we can begin to see how the student has a project of being invested in the other seeing them as they see themselves. While I only had one student persist in the grade bump demand, I am not convinced that my replies changed the students' view of themselves. The aims and projects that teachers have for their students and the ones students have for themselves may be increasingly diverging, as evidenced in several studies (e.g., Chowning & Campbell, 2009) as well as anecdotally with teachers expressing their concerns about the threat that this poses to higher education (Engel, 2013; Patton, 2015; Singleton-Jackson et al., 2010; 2011). It might behoove universities and administrators to take note and provide incoming students with an orientation session detailing the expectations and role of teachers as well as focusing on internalized responsibility (Buckner & Strawser, 2016). Teachers might also address this concern in the syllabus or on the first day of class and adopt specific rules to help curb these behaviors (see Jiang et al., 2017). Given that some literature suggests a relationship with parents (over-involvement and family functioning; Mahbod & Fouladchang, 2018;

Turner & McCormick, 2018) and the possibility of this becoming normative behavior (Hong et al., 2017), this phenomenon seems to be a larger systemic concern beyond just the student and their understanding of school. Future research can explore how students are embedded in larger social and cultural circles that are influencing these entitled expectations.

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