Academic Entitlement, Adults in Higher Education, and Popular Culture: An Examination of the Potential Interface

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Abstract: This study is two-fold in nature and will investigate the nature of academic entitlement within the adult graduate-student population and will examine the role public pedagogy through popular culture has on adult learners in respect to academic entitlement.

Since the 1950's the U.S. society has experienced significant changes; notable since that time are shifting social viewpoints and personal dispositions about gender roles, race inequities, personal wealth, economic power, and social responsibility. With this change many of the social institutions that structured the American culture in decades past also began to be reshaped; and in accord with this shift the America culture increasingly became individualistic. By the early 1980's, desires for social freedom, self-interests, and decreasing need for social acceptance and conformity were well observable in the American landscape (Roberts & Helson, 1997; Twenge & Im, 2007). In the decades since, dialogue and debate have focused on the increasing emphasis of self-importance and personal interests (Twenge & Campbell, 2008). This idea of "self" is often associated with Western society's orientation towards consumerism rooted in capitalistic ideals and marketplace practices (Molesworth, Nixon, & Scullion, 2009). These practices offer up a philosophy that daily relations, (economic, social, political or otherwise) are or reflect marketplace transactional in their nature.

This philosophy is not unfounded in higher education. The haven of safety and distance historically perceived and held in academia has equally eroded over recent decades. Consumerism and entitlement mentalities within adult and college-bound learners are now more prevalent than in decades past. For education this mentality is known as academic entitlement (Greenberger, Lessard, Chen, & Farraggia, 2008). And although viewpoints differ in the literature about entitlement's genesis and attributes (behavioral or psychological), existing research does confirm its growing presence within the undergraduate population (Boswell, 2012; Chowning & Campbell, 2009; Goodboy & Frisby, 2014).

Much of the research, however, is centered on and within educational viewpoints addressing aspects of social or psychosocial influences. Research rooted in the role public pedagogy, specifically popular culture plays in fostering this mentality is scant. And while both qualitative and quantitative studies continue to examine undergraduates and entitlement, little emphasis is given to the potential of entitlement mentalities in adult learners, specifically adult graduate students. Given adults constitute a significant portion of matriculating graduate students who are often viewed as matured professionals with focused purpose in workplace, life, and academic endeavors (Benshoff, Cashwell, & Rowell, 2015; Kasworm, 2003), this inquiry into the presence of academic entitlement is timely.

Framed within a public pedagogy of popular culture, this study can offer insights into the role and relationship popular culture has with entitlement beliefs and how adult learners manifests entitlement behaviors. Thus the purpose of this study is two-fold: a) to investigate the nature of academic entitlement in adult graduate students and b) to examine the public pedagogy

of popular culture as an influence on adult graduate students in respect to academic entitlement.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study draws on two concepts which forms an intersectional view to better examine and understand entitlement mentalities and cultural contributions: *popular culture* as a lens situated within public pedagogy and *exchange theory* employing a *Students-as-Consumers* (SAC) perception situated within the context of marketplace transactions in a consumer society.

Methodology

This study will examine the presence of academic entitlement in adult graduate students and the potential role popular culture has in fostering this mentality using a mixed-methods sequential exploratory design will be used in this research.

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