



## Unveiling the Nexus between Dark Triad Personality Traits and Academic Dishonesty: The Parallel Mediation of Moral Disengagement and Academic Entitlement and Moderating Effect of Perceived Teacher's Approachability.

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### Abstract

This paper aims to explore the relationship between Dark Triad Personality Traits and academic dishonesty, using Social Cognitive Theory as a framework. It also investigates moral disengagement and academic entitlement as potential mediators and examines perceived teacher approachability as a moderator.

This study employs a quantitative approach. A sample of 336 business students across Bachelor's, Master's, and Ph.D. levels were surveyed using an anonymous questionnaire. The proposed model was evaluated using PLS-SEM 4.

The results revealed a positive correlation between dark personality traits and academic dishonesty. Mediation analysis indicated that moral disengagement mediates the relationship between dark traits and academic dishonesty. Furthermore, moderation analysis confirmed that perceived teacher approachability plays a role in reducing academically dishonest behaviors. Overall, the findings emphasize the significance of dark triad personality traits, moral disengagement, and perceived teacher approachability in predicting academic dishonesty, contributing to its prevention.

This study primarily relies on self-reported data, which may be affected by social desirability bias, and focuses on a single region, limiting the generalizability of the results.

**Keywords:** Academic Dishonesty (AD), Academic Misconduct (AM), Moral Disengagement (MD), Academic Entitlement (AE), Dark Triad Personality Traits (DTPT), And Higher Education Institutions (Heis).

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1. Background of the study

Academic integrity is a cornerstone in the realm of education, forming the foundation for knowledge acquisition and fair evaluation. However, the increasing instances of academic dishonesty have posed a grave menace to the fundamental mission of education institutions (MacLeod & Eaton, 2020). Academic dishonesty is defined as intentionally engaging in forbidden behaviors to gain an unfair academic advantage and includes students' involvement in behaviors such as cheating during examinations, bringing prohibited crib notes, copying others' assignments, forging the teacher's signature, and plagiarism (Waltzer et al., 2022).

Various studies have indicated a disturbing prevalence of academic dishonesty (Parnter, 2020), with over 50% of students admitting to cheating during examinations or assignments at least once in their academic life (Ridwan & Diantimala, 2021), raising significant ethical concerns in HEIs (Chiang et al., 2022). This trend is particularly concerning in developing countries, where academic dishonesty is seen as symptomatic of broader social and educational challenges (Bloomfield et al., 2021). Previous research on academic misconduct in Pakistan concluded that the majority of students at the university level are unaware of the severity and seriousness of academic dishonest behaviors (Azam & Naeem, 2022). Against this absence of academically ethical behavior and lack of recognition for a fair academic environment and merit in Pakistan, it is essential to understand the cultural and environmental factors contributing to academic dishonesty.

#### 1.2. Approaches to Study Academic Dishonesty

Earlier research on academic dishonesty has taken chiefly the four approaches: prevalence of academic dishonesty (Cuadrado et al., 2019), academic dishonesty's nature, type, and description (Bilen & Matros, 2021), prevention strategies (Baran & Jonason, 2020), and factors predicting these behaviors (Ives & Giukin, 2020). However, the notable concern is most of these studies have been conducted in Western countries, and there is a growing recognition by researchers to explore academic dishonesty in different contexts due to cultural differences (Marques et al., 2019). In Asian countries, individuals believe themselves to be part of a greater societal mechanism i.e., family and friends, and thus their behaviors are influenced by such societal network (Thomas, 2017). Given these psychosocial differences, it is interesting to see how individual cognitive constructs work in varying cultures.

#### 1.3. Key Factors of Academic Dishonesty

To comprehensively understand the drivers of academic dishonesty, there has been an upsurge in fascination with the role of personality traits in comprehending academic dishonesty (Carroll et al., 2023). Researchers have focused on studying the role of personality traits, as negative traits may predispose students toward antisocial behaviors (Campos et al., 2022). While the Big Five personality traits have dominated the research on academic

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dishonesty (Lee et al., 2020), these traits are criticized for lacking explanatory power for certain antisocial behaviors (Veselka et al., 2012). Researchers have started looking into other personality traits, such as the dark triad personality traits, which includes, narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy, in connection with undesirable academic behaviors, either separately or in combination with each trait (de Bruin & Rudnick, 2007). Given that academic cheating is a form of antisocial behavior, these dark traits of personality characteristics are expected to foresee students' proclivity for academic dishonesty.

Muris et al., (2017) recommended using other variables combined with dark triad personality traits to better understand the mechanism individuals adopt to engage in deviant behaviors. Moral disengagement is found to be one of the relevant drivers among the individual factors related to socially undesirable behaviors (Ridwan & Diantimala, 2021). Moral Disengagement introduced by Bandura (1990), encompasses social cognitive mechanisms that allow individuals to disengage from ego sanctions while maintaining the same standards of moral conduct. In this manner, moral disengagement might be viewed as a cognitive distortion, in which a person prefers to interpret rebellious behavior in ethically advantageous light (Wu et al., 2020). A sense of entitlement is another construct connected to dark triad personalities. Academic Entitlement refers to the perspective held by the students that they need special treatment by their instructors without putting required effort, which leads to disagreement and uncivil behaviors within the academic settings (M. M. Foley, 2014). However, we believe that personality traits are more stable and enduring in nature, thus preceding the feelings of academic entitlement, which are context-bound behaviors.

Alongside, the classroom, being a place for learning, is also a learning environment where interpersonal relationships develop. In such an environment, teachers are central places, and the quality of their relationship with students is fundamental to the academic aspects (Bryzgoria, 2022). Teacher support is defined as students' perception of the teacher's care, feedback, concern, availability, and concern, especially in the high context cultures like Pakistan, as this support by teachers might shape students' academic behavior, attitude, and conduct (Akram et al., 2023). Therefore, the quality of student-teacher relationships or support by teachers, or lack thereof, adds complexity to the issue of academic misconduct (Longobardi et al., 2016). While existing research on academic misconduct or academic dishonesty stems from the Western context, it is crucial to acknowledge the social factors, especially in collectivist societies that might contribute to mitigating academic dishonesty are often overlooked (Hadjar, 2017).

#### **1.4. Scope and Significance of the Study**

This study examines the complex relationship between dark triad personality traits and academically dishonest behaviors among Business students in Sindh, Pakistan. The study focuses on HEIs in Pakistan, a context where academic misconduct has reached the epidemic level and is influenced by individual personal characteristics, and cultural and environmental factors, distinct from the Western community. By addressing the interplay of these personal characteristics, cognitive mechanisms, and environmental influences, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to academic dishonesty and suggests interventions to mitigate the challenge. Previous research conducted in Asian countries examining the relationship between dark triad personality traits and moral disengagement with various deviant behaviors is still not clear when associated with academic dishonesty and therefore calls for further investigation (Alsheikh Ali, 2020). Additionally, there have been limited studies conducted regarding the influence of negative personalities on academic dishonesty among Pakistani students (Zia et al., 2020), this article seeks to add to the literature by studying negative personalities and their impacts on academic dishonest behavior through the intermediary function of moral disengagement and academic entitlement, as well as the moderating role of perceived teachers' approachability. The findings of the study can be helpful for educators, policymakers, and institutions in addressing psychological and contextual drivers leading to academic misconduct, enabling the development of targeted interventions to mitigate academic misconduct and foster academic integrity in HEIs. .

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Theoretical Background of the study**

This study is based on Bandura's Social cognitive theory of moral thoughts and actions, which attempts to explain how ethical thinking, in conjunction with other psychosocial variables regulates individual moral conduct. Bandura (1991) defines social cognitive theory as an "interactionist" approach to the development of moral conduct. Personal aspects such as ethical thoughts, emotional reactions to behavior, personal moral conduct, and environmental elements all interact and affect each other. (Bandura, 2016) aims to explore why an individual utilizes a lower level of moral reasoning when they are theoretically at a higher level using social cognitive theory. It also aims to explain how social interactions contribute to the formation of new moral standards and the modification of existing ones. The influence of modeling and other such social factors are explored as functions of growth and development (Bandura, A. 1991).

Accordingly, individuals use their moral thinking, rules, and standards to weigh their choices of actions where moral decision-making is required. However, individuals can selectively refrain from these self-regulating capabilities through moral disengagement. In the academic setting, students may avoid these self-consequences

and participate in academic dishonesty out of fear of society's judgment in case of academic failure, which may outweigh any sanctions. Bandura's theory posits that individual develops self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and self-regulatory mechanisms. Academic entitlement can be seen as a distortion of the beliefs of self-efficacy and outcome expectations. These distorted beliefs can influence their moral decision-making process, leading them to engage in dishonest behaviors. Bandura's theory has been used in the past to understand the relationship between personality traits and anti-social behaviors (Wang et al., 2017).

### **2.2. Contribution to Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory**

The study's conceptual framework integrates DTPT in combination with other mediating cognitive factors i.e., moral disengagement and academic entitlement, which enriches the understanding of how these personal factors influence moral cognitions and behavior of an individual and provides a detailed outlook of the cognition processes contributing to Bandura's cognitive restructuring mechanism. Furthermore, perceived teacher approachability represents the environmental factors that shape an individual behavior through a supportive environment to reduce dishonest behaviors among students. Lastly, by focusing on academic dishonesty, the study's framework provides a concrete example of how these factors interact to produce specific unethical behaviors, implying the practical implication of Bandura's theory.

### **2.3. Academic Dishonesty in Asia**

The recent growth of Asian universities has captivated the academic community, sparking discussion about their true potential to challenge Western hegemony. While acknowledging the significant collective progress that Asian societies have made in higher education over the past several decades, one must not lose perspective of their challenges (Horta 2023). Undiscussed is the extent to which their future success could be hampered by the noxious academic culture, particularly the alarming issue of academic dishonesty, which spans from student plagiarism to scientific deception (Williams et al., 2014).

Asian nations such as China, Pakistan, and India have a more complicated etiology of academic dishonesty (Parnter, 2022), as their educational system pressures students to memorize material, leaning them more towards academic misconduct (Rodrigues et al., 2023). Academic dishonesty is known by many names in the literature, i.e. academic misconduct, academic fraud, cheating, and academically unethical behaviors (Bisping et al., 2008; Brimble & Stevenson-Clarke, 2005b; Djokovic et al., 2022b). The Centre for Academic Integrity defined academic misconduct as unethical behaviors or actions of cheating and plagiarism to gain an unfair advantage over other students to achieve academic success, that challenges academic integrity, merit, and stability of the academic environment (Macfarlane et al., 2014). Academic dishonesty involves a range of actions such as cheating in exams, plagiarism, data fabrication, and falsification of credentials (Stern & Havlicek, 1986). Based on multiple research, students in these nations cannot identify or acknowledge acts of plagiarism, or at least some types of academic misconduct, while practicing them unwittingly (Chien, 2014).

The decade of the 2000s was marked by widespread coverage of high-profile cases of scientific misconduct. In a postgraduate study by Fang et al. (2012), 67% of Asian scientific research retractions were a result of research misconduct, with 9.8% due to plagiarism, which is observed to be high in Japan, China, and India. Another study by Amos (2014) analyzing 835 repudiated publications between 2008 and 2012 revealed that India (36.7%), China (16.8%), and Italy (66.7%) had high rates of plagiarism-related retraction. These shocking figures show that academic dishonesty contradicts academic norms, principles, and system integrity.

In terms of academic dishonesty and its wide array of repercussions, HEIs in Asia have faced serious academic integrity challenges and recently gained researchers' attention due to cultural and societal factors distinguishing them from the Western world. Asian countries being high in power distance index and collectivism, emphasizing the regard for those high in authority, and higher levels of societal and family expectations, significantly are crucial in shaping individual behaviors and conduct (Zhao et al., 2022). Similarly, the hierarchical difference in classrooms, where teachers are believed to be high in authority, may discourage students from questioning instructors, leading them to confusion and unethical conduct (Zhang, 2013). Likewise, the societal pressure to achieve good grades, induces students to engage in unethical academic practice (Maeda, 2021).

Besides this, understanding academic dishonesty in Asia requires a multifaceted approach other than just the cultural explanations. It also requires realizing the structural realities of the education system, and the prevalent high competition to achieve good grades for a limited number of spaces in highly regarded and admired institutions, resulting in enormous pressure to excel in academic life, which sometimes nurtures an environment conducive to academic dishonesty (Ahmed, 2020).

Another contributing factors to academic misconduct are education institution policies and their reinforcement (Z. Iqbal et al., 2021). Secondly, technological advancement and the recent boom of freelancing have created easiness of purchasing online content, data availability, unapproved collaborations, plagiarism, etc. (Krienert et al., 2022). Despite the Academic misconduct-detecting software and online tools, educators face enormous challenges in tackling the issue (Elsalem et al., 2021). Altogether, these contributing factors to academic misconduct need a comprehensive and multifaceted approach to study. Academic integrity in education systems can be strengthened by incorporating academic integrity education into curricula and awareness sessions (Kiekkas

et al., 2020), instituting consistent and strict policies and enforcement (McCabe et al., 2006), and shifting the focus from rote learning and high-stakes testing to critical thinking and comprehension (Bertram Gallant, 2017).

#### **2.4. Academic Dishonesty in Pakistan**

Academic misconduct, threatening academic credibility and integrity is a widespread challenge in Pakistan, where academic pressure, high-stakes exams, cultural factors, and academic inadequacies unwittingly promote academic dishonesty (Nazir & Aslam, 2010). Nazir and Aslam (2010) studied bachelor's and master's students' academic dishonesty perceptions and prevalence across various universities in Pakistan. The findings of the study revealed that several students perceived academic dishonesty as no grave offense and engaged in such unethical practices as there is no punishment and strict regulations for such acts. Another major reason highlighted in previous studies is outdated or rote learning and the high-stakes examination system in Pakistan (J. Iqbal & Ahmad, 2015). The outcomes of these inadequacies highly influence a student's approach toward the future, determining their chances of employment opportunities and access to higher education, thereby pushing them toward unethical academic practices to achieve the desired grades (Suleman et al., 2015).

Moreover, the traditional pedagogical methods emphasizing information replication rather than critical and innovative thinking are leading students towards plagiarism and unethical conduct to meet performance standards set by the teachers (Jr et al., 2013). These findings are backed up by the study conducted by Ahmad et al., (2020) that the majority of the students reported cheating behaviors as a smart way to get things done and to obtain good grades without giving a proper time to study. The lack of awareness and comprehension of academic integrity codes further adds to the problem (Mansoor & Ameen, 2020). Hussain et al. (2018), highlighted an urgent need for academic ethics education in Pakistan's HEIs as many students do not consider these acts as unethical and inappropriate.

#### **2.5. Dark Triad Personality Traits and Academic Dishonesty**

Personality psychology has observed an increased fascination with determining the role of personalities behind individuals' actions and conduct. Previous research on academic dishonesty and personality traits contends that students who opt business field possess different values as compared to the students in another field, implying that the unethical behaviors displayed by business students are linked to their underlying characteristics or personalities (Frank & Schulze, 2000). The most associated personality with academic misconduct is Dark triad personality traits. The concept of the Dark Triad personalities was introduced by Paulhus and Williams (2002) and consists of three different but overlapping personality traits: narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. All three traits are found to be associated with unethical, problematic, and inappropriate behaviors and mainly against ethical standards (Mutschmann et al., 2022). Therefore, this study aims to shed light on the importance of the Dark triad personality on academic misconduct.

Although distinct, these traits share the common threads of arrogance, self-obsession, manipulative and deceptive behaviors, and a lack of sympathy and sensitivity (A. Cohen, 2016). Narcissist traits are associated with arrogance, entitlement, and a greedy desire for admiration by others (MacDonald, 2014). Machiavellianism is associated with an alluring and strategic mindset that prioritizes personal gains over ethical moral reasoning characterized by an enticing and strategic mindset prioritizing personal gains over moral behavior (Gürlek, 2021). Whereas, psychopathic traits are associated with impulsiveness, lack of empathy, and humanity (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). The interaction of these negative traits may provide an insightful framework for comprehending student's propensity to engage in academic dishonesty. Therefore, we propose that students with dark traits will be more engaged in academically dishonest behavior.

*H1: There is a positive association between Dark Triad Personality traits and academic dishonesty*

#### **2.6. Dark Triad Personality Traits, Moral Disengagement, and Academic Entitlement**

Moral disengagement, a term coined by Bandura (1996), refers to the cognitive mechanisms adopted by an individual to disassociate themselves from moral behaviors. Individuals with a dark triad frequently use moral disengagement to rationalize their unethical conduct and alleviate any associated remorse or distress (Chávez-Ventura et al., 2022). With their exaggerated sense of worth, narcissists may justify their actions as necessary to maintain their superior reputation. With their manipulative tendencies and psychopathic traits, Machiavellians and psychopathic individuals may use moral disengagement to distance their unethical conduct from potential repercussions (Ampuni et al., 2020). Therefore, the researcher predicts, students with dark triad personalities will be morally disengaged.

Academic entitlement is the belief among students that they are entitled to academic accomplishment regardless of their efforts. Academic Entitlement refers to the perspective held by the students that they need special treatment which leads to disagreement and uncivil behaviors within the academic settings (Fletcher et al., 2020). Dark Triad traits have been identified as significantly correlated with academic entitlement (Turnipseed & Cohen, 2015). The dominance aspects of narcissism, malicious intentions with Machiavellianism, and the vicious pursuit of self-interest in psychopathy are key contributors to this connection (Fromuth et al., 2019). Therefore, the researcher predicts, that students with dark triad personalities will display academic entitlement.

*H2: There is a positive relationship between Dark Triad Personality traits and moral disengagement*

*H3: There is a positive relationship between Dark Triad Personality traits and academic entitlement.*

### 2.7. The intervention of Moral Disengagement and Academic Entitlement to strengthen academic dishonesty

As proposed by Bandura (1996), moral disengagement involves cognitive mechanisms that allow students to justify their actions contrary to acceptable principles without feeling a sense of regret. Several explanations for moral disengagement by students are; tough educational demands, academic pressure, unfavorable circumstances, and the acceptance of academically dishonest behaviors among class friends or peers (Wu & He, 2022). Moral Disengagement as a psychological buffer, allows students to deviate from academic ethical standards without feeling regretful or morally compromised (Moore, 2015). Morally disengaged individuals are likelier to deceive, plagiarize, or engage in academic misconduct, contending that the behaviors are necessary or justifiable given their circumstances (Farhad & Khatoun, 2021).

On the other hand, students' entitlement beliefs to get teachers' appreciation and good grades without manifesting the efforts or the demonstrated competence, entails the notion that success should be granted as opposed to accomplished. This sense of entitlement among students ranges from lenient grading and dissatisfaction with achieved scores to the belief that higher grades are owed for effort alone, regardless of the quality of the work (B. K. Miller, 2013). Therefore, researchers propose that:

*H4: There is a positive relationship between Moral Disengagement and Academic Dishonesty*

*H5: There is a positive relationship between Academic Entitlement and Academic Dishonesty*

### 2.8. Mediating Role of Moral Disengagement and Academic Entitlement

The idea of moral disengagement as a mechanism in this study explains how a student being committed to moral values and beliefs, engages in unethical practice while still professing those values and beliefs, engages in acts that contravene their ethical norms and avoids emotions of disgrace, and regret. This role of moral disengagement as a cognitive process allows a student to execute immoral behaviors and detach oneself from ethical standards, especially those with higher dark triad personality traits. The same is concluded by Erzi (2020) that students with dark triad characteristics are more susceptible to moral disengagement and thus engage in academics. In this way, a Machiavellian student with high self-interest and deception may justify their dishonest behaviors to achieve good grades (Barbaranelli et al., 2018). A narcissist with a lack of empathy, a greater sense of entitlement, and grandiosity may rationalize these behaviors as "bending the rules" rather than fraudulence or trickery (Jones et al., 2017). Similarly, a psychopathic student characterized by manipulation, lack of morality, and rule-breaking, may lie on a test without remorse (Risser & Eckert, 2016). Because personality is related to how an individual gives reason and justifies their behaviors, which is linked to cognitive styles (moral disengagement) may act as a potential factor that underlines the link between the Dark triad and antisocial academic behaviors.

Similarly, students with Dark triad traits have an inflated sense of entitlement. This sense of entitlement and high superiority leads a student towards disregard for academic integrity codes. Previous research has found that this sense of entitlement is determined by Dark triad traits. For instance, a Machiavellian student with high self-interest and deception may feel entitled to high grades and teacher's praise without truly being entitled to it (Curtis et al., 2022). Therefore, this academic entitlement subsequently encourages dishonest behavior.

Both moral disengagement and academic entitlement serve as enabling and rationalizing mechanisms for dishonest behavior, operating as a cognitive bridge between Dark Triad personality traits and academic dishonesty.

*H6: Moral disengagement mediates the relationship between dark triad personality traits and academic dishonesty*

*H7: Academic entitlement mediates the relationship between dark triad personality traits and academic dishonesty*

### 2.9. Moderating role of perceived teacher's approachability

Previous studies have mentioned the influence of parents, teachers, and peers on students' academic behaviors due to cultural distinction (Anderman & Anderman, 1999). Among these, the most prominent is the teacher's role and support and its influence on student's motivation and academic achievement (Goodenow, 1993). While previous studies have mainly focused on the impact of the student-teacher relationship on academic outcomes, there is a dire need to understand students' perceptions of instructor support, pedagogy, and availability on academic misconduct which could further complicate the issue (Tsui & Ngo, 2016).

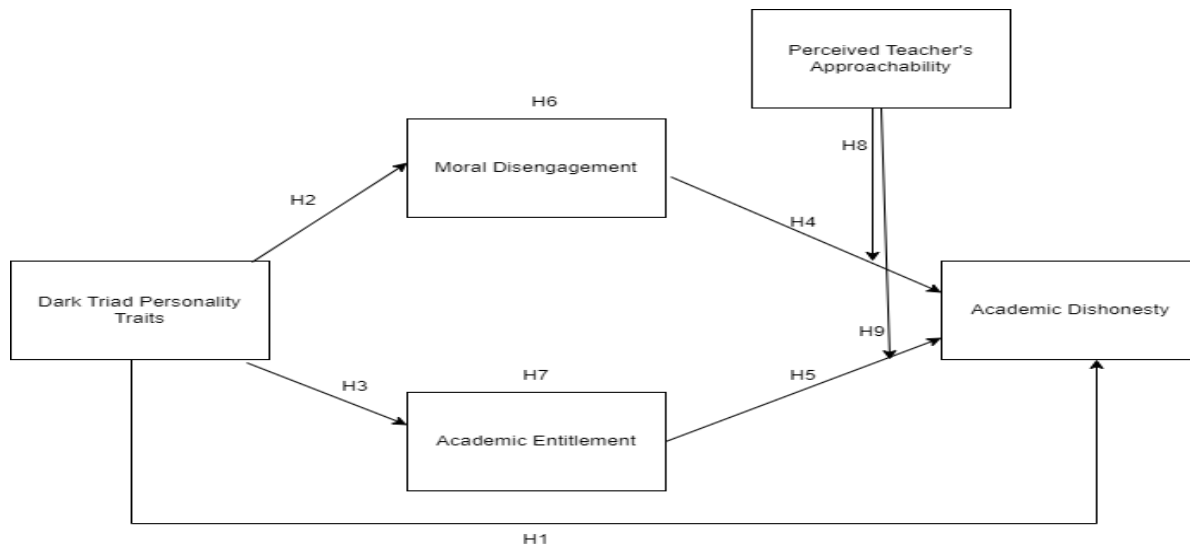
While exploring the reasons behind students' academic dishonest behaviors, Donat et al. (2014) explored students' perceptions of injustice from instructors as a motivating factor for cheating. Bretag et al. (2019) also identified students in misconduct rated their classes as less individualized, enjoying, and task-based compared to honest students. Later, Alif et al. (2020) found that teachers' perceived skill, devotion, and admiration for instructors were negatively associated with plagiarism. In addition, Murdock et al. (2004) also distinguished between perceived teachers' care and pedagogical competency and concluded that cheating was less prevalent when teachers demonstrated pedagogical expertise and concern for students in the classroom and outside.

As a result, the relationship between teacher-student relationships and deceitful behavior among students is multifaceted, especially in high-context cultures. Therefore, the researcher predicts if students perceived their teacher as more approachable and supportive, they would be less inclined to academic dishonesty.

*H8: Perceived teacher's approachability weakens the relationship between moral disengagement and academic dishonesty.*

*H9: Perceived teacher's approachability weakens the relationship between academic entitlement and academic dishonesty.*

**Figure 1 Conceptual Framework**



### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Design

The current study is quantitative and employs a positivist approach. The data were collected from 336 business students, using a purposive sampling technique. Data were collected online through Google Forms. These universities were selected based on their NBEAC accreditation, ensuring representation of both the W and X categories.

#### 3.2. Sample size and selection of sample

For the sample size calculation, the study employed G\*Power software, which calculated a minimum sample size of 129 participants at a 5% significance level (J. Hair et al., 2014b). The sample comprised business schools due to heightened concern that business courses promote the self-interest mentalities that affect students' ethical decision-making (Parks-Leduc et al., 2022; Hühn, 2014), a focus sharpened by international and local scandals that link academic misconduct with future business scandals (Arshad et al., 2021).

#### 3.3. Instruments of Data Collection

The current study used a self-reported questionnaire employing the five-point Likert scale. Ethical standards were adhered to during the survey, with participants providing consent. The survey instrument incorporated items from a previously validated English language scale, using a 5-point Likert scale where 1 denotes strongly disagree, and 5 denotes strongly agree. The questionnaire has no reverse-coded items.

##### 3.3.1. Academic Dishonesty

The Academic Dishonesty Scale comprises ten behavioral items adapted from (Bolin, 2004). Sample items included "Copied material and turned it in as your work", demonstrating an internal consistency  $\alpha=0.90$

##### 3.3.2. Dark Triad Personality Traits

Dark Triad Personality Traits were assessed using a 14-item scale developed by (Jonason & Webster, 2010).

##### 3.3.3. Moral Disengagement

To measure moral disengagement, this study used a scale developed by Shu et al. (2011), a more academic-based and shorter measure. It measures moral disengagement through six items.

##### 3.3.4. Academic Entitlement

A nine-item scale developed by (Luckett et al., 2017) is utilized to measure academic entitlement variable.

##### 3.3.5. Perceived Teacher's Approachability

A five-item scale developed by (Rosales, 2004) is utilized to measure perceived teacher's approachability. The sample item is "I felt comfortable discussing grades and classwork with teacher".

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Respondents' Profile

In the current study, the number of female respondents is 219 or 65.2%, and the number of male respondents is 117 or 34.85%, in total the number of respondents for this study is 336. The demographical data of this study revealed that most of the respondents are from the age group 18-22, representing 56.6% of the total sample followed by the age group 23-27. Furthermore, the descriptive analysis also revealed that 37.6% of students obtained a 3.1 and above CGPA, and 31.9% obtained a 2.6-3.0 CGPA. Additional demographics are shown in Table 1.

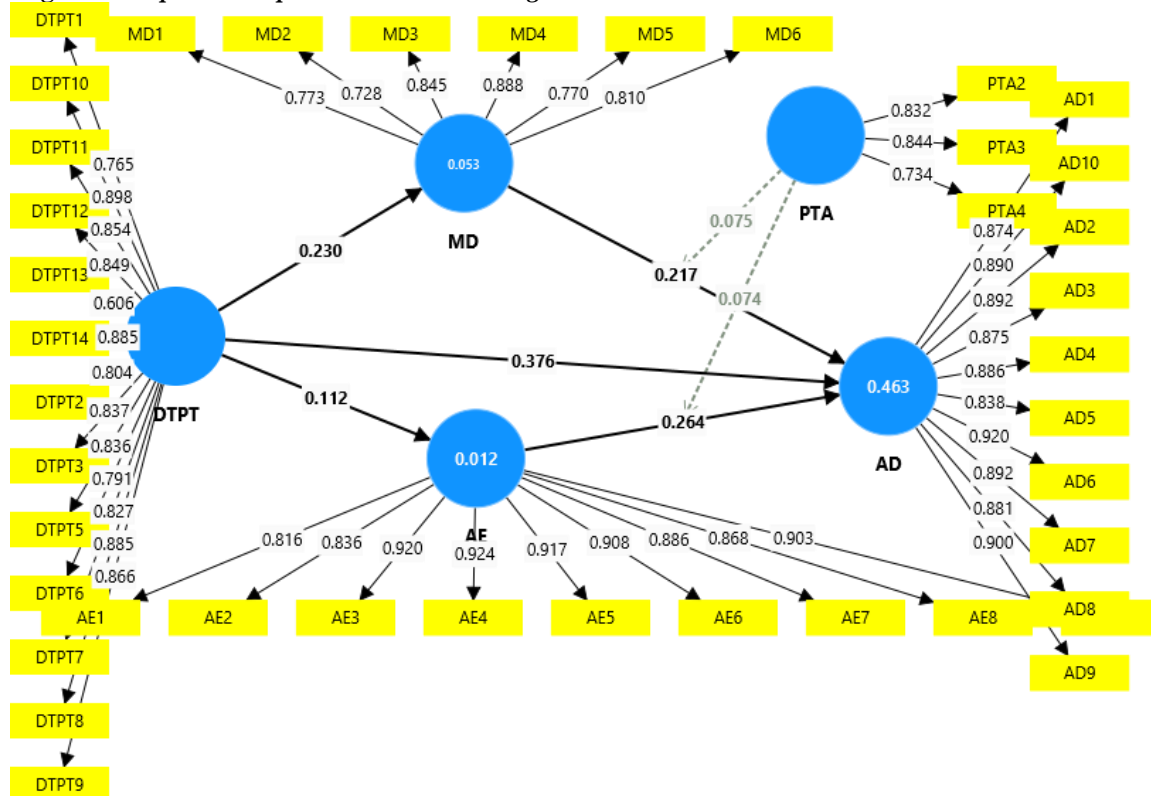
Table 1 Demographical information of participants

Demographics	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	117	34.8
	Female	219	65.2
Age	18-22	190	56.6
	23-27	118	35.1
	28-32	15	4.4
	33 and above	13	3.9
CGPA	Below 2.0	17	4.9
	2.1-2.5	86	25.5
	2.6-3.0	107	31.9
	3.1 and above	126	37.6

4.2. Assessment of measurement model

To analyze the measurement model, convergent validity (CV), discriminant validity (DV), and composite reliability (CR) are examined (Hair et al., 2014). CV was measured by CR, factor loadings, and average variance extracted (AVE). As per Henseler et al., (2009) outer loading criterion values of 0.7 or greater were considered highly satisfactory, values of 0.5 as acceptable, and values less than 0.5 were removed (W. Chin & Marcoulides, 1998; J. F. Hair et al., 2013). For the current study, all constructs' CR values range from 0.865 to 0.915, and AVE values range from 0.647 to 0.788. Figure 3 shows the graphical output and Factor Loading. Table 2 presents the measurement model which shows deleted items, Cronbach's alpha, Composite Reliability, and Average Variance Extracted.

Figure 2 Graphical Output and Factor Loadings





**Table 2 Measurement Model**

HTMT criterion was used to assess Discriminant validity (DV) and values below 0.85 confirmed the DV of the

Constructs	Loadings Range	Deleted Items	Cronbach's alpha (CA)	Composite reliability (CR)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
AD	0.838-0.920	-	0.871	0.873	0.783
AE	0.816-0.924	-	0.866	0.876	0.788
DTPT	0.606-0.898	1	0.861	0.865	0.686
MD	0.728-0.888	-	0.885	0.917	0.647
PTA	0.734-0.844	2	0.772	0.843	0.649

model (Henseler et al., 2015). Moreover, the variance inflated factor (VIF) was also computed to test multicollinearity among independent variables. The respective VIF values less than five showed the absence of multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2011). The succeeding section provides a detailed explanation of the structural model of the current study.

**Table 3 Discrimination Validity and Multicollinearity**

Construct	AD	AE	DTPT	MD	PTA	PTA x MD	PTA x AE
AD							
AE	0.345						
DTPT	0.561	0.109					
MD	0.329	0.061	0.225				
PTA	0.483	0.101	0.628	0.113			
PTA x MD	0.097	0.048	0.290	0.088	0.132		
PTA x AE	0.050	0.046	0.098	0.047	0.070	0.058	

The respective VIF values less than five showed the absence of multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2011). The succeeding section provides a detailed explanation of the structural model of the current study.

**Table 4 Collinearity Statistics**

Model		Collinearity Statistics	
		Tolerance	VIF
1	DTPT	.555	1.061
	MD	.639	1.057
	AE	.449	1.015
	PTA	.634	1.008

As the data for this study is collected from a single respondent (students) from each university, data needs to be checked for common method bias (CMV), to ensure that data had no major problems of response biases. Herman's Single Factor is employed to test CMV, as suggested by Podsakoff & Organ (1986). *Harman's One-Factor Test* indicates problematic CMV if an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with all study variables produces eigenvalues suggesting the first factor accounts for more than 50% of the variance among variables Podsakoff & Organ (1986). The total percentage of variance as tested is 34.96, which is far less than the 50% threshold. This means CMV is not a significant problem in the data set.

**Table 5 Herman's One Factor Test for Common Method Variance**

Component	Total Variance Explained			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	Initial Eigenvalues % of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	15.382	34.960	34.960	15.382	34.960	34.960
2	7.276	16.536	51.496			
3	4.209	9.567	61.063			
4	3.281	7.458	68.520			
5	2.030	4.614	73.135			
6	1.284	2.919	76.054			
7	1.229	2.792	78.846			
8	1.121	2.547	81.393			
9	.761	1.729	83.122			
10	.751	1.706	84.829			
11	.600	1.363	86.191			
12	.475	1.080	87.271			
13	.434	.986	88.257			
14	.405	.920	89.177			
15	.374	.851	90.028			



16	.347	.789	90.817		
17	.329	.748	91.564		
18	.314	.715	92.279		
19	.269	.610	92.889		
20	.266	.604	93.494		
21	.251	.570	94.064		
22	.234	.533	94.597		
23	.220	.499	95.096		
24	.202	.459	95.555		
25	.181	.412	95.967		
26	.169	.384	96.351		
27	.157	.358	96.708		
28	.150	.341	97.049		
29	.133	.303	97.352		
30	.130	.296	97.648		
31	.119	.270	97.918		
32	.112	.256	98.174		
33	.109	.247	98.421		
34	.098	.224	98.644		
35	.097	.219	98.864		
36	.090	.205	99.069		
37	.078	.178	99.246		
38	.069	.158	99.404		
39	.065	.148	99.552		
40	.057	.130	99.682		
41	.048	.110	99.792		
42	.038	.086	99.878		
43	.034	.077	99.954		
44	.020	.046	100.000		

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

#### 4.3. Assessment of the structural model

A preliminary assessment was done using SPSS. To measure the structural model of the study, Structural equation modeling (SEM) is used, as it helps in analyzing the structural model and correlation between latent variables (J. Hair et al., 2014a). To evaluate path coefficients and t-values, the bootstrapping approach was utilized using 5000 re-samples (J. Hair et al., 2014). To analyze the direct relationship, a one-tailed test was used (Henseler et al., 2009), and a two-tailed test to examine the indirect relationship (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Furthermore, the SLM-PLS4 product-indicator technique was used to investigate moderation (W. W. Chin et al., 2003).

The results of the study indicated a significant positive association of dark triad traits with academic dishonesty ( $t=7.279$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), and with moral disengagement ( $t=5.243$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), but a non-significant positive association with academic entitlement ( $t=1.916$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). Conclusively, H1 and H2 are supported but H3 is not supported. Moreover, the results of the study showed a positive significant association between moral disengagement and academic dishonesty ( $t=4.734$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and a significant positive relationship between academic entitlement to academic dishonesty ( $t=6.149$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). As a result, both H4 and H5 are supported.

**Table 6 Assessment of Structural Model**

Hyp.	Relationship	Sample mean	SD	T-test	P values	Decision
5	AE -> AD	0.265	0.043	6.149	0	Supported
1	DTPT -> AD	0.376	0.048	7.279	0	Supported
3	DTPT -> AE	0.114	0.055	1.916	0.055	Not Supported
2	DTPT -> MD	0.221	0.041	5.243	0	Supported
4	MD -> AD	0.220	0.042	4.734	0	Supported

The statistics show the mediated effect of moral disengagement between the relationship of dark triad traits and academic dishonesty ( $t=3.593$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), but did not show the mediation effect of academic entitlement between dark triad traits and academic dishonesty ( $t=1.815$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). Therefore, H6 is supported, contrary to H7.

**Table 7 Assessment of Structural Model: Mediation Effect**

		Mediation Effect				
Hyp.		Sample mean	SD	T-test	P values	Decision
6	DTPT -> MD -> AD	0.052	0.014	3.593	0	Supported
7	DTPT -> AE -> AD	0.032	0.014	1.815	0.070	Not Supported

The results also validated the present research's moderating effect. The statistical significance of perceived teacher approachability in weakening the association between academic entitlement and academic dishonesty ( $t=1.996$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) has been validated. But, no significant moderation effect is found on moral disengagement and academic dishonesty ( $t=1.578$ ,  $p<0.05$ ).

**Table 8 Assessment of Structural Model: Moderating Effect**

		Moderating Effect				
Hyp	Construct	Sample mean (M)	SD	T-Test	P values	Decision
7	PTA x MD -> AD	0.076	0.044	1.578	0.112	Not Supported
8	PTA x AE -> AD	0.063	0.036	1.996	0.046	Supported

R2 values of 0.67, 0.33, and 0.19 are described as substantial, moderate, and weak, respectively, by Chin (1998). In the current research, the hypothesized model defines 45.3% of the variance in academic dishonesty.

**Table 9 R-square**

	R-square	R-square adjusted
AD	0.465	0.453
AE	0.012	0.010
MD	0.053	0.050

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

### 5.1. Discussion

Drawing on Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory of Moral Thoughts and Actions, the present study stresses the significance of teacher support and approachability to mitigate academically dishonest behaviors among business students. In Pakistan's high cultural context, where relationships and social harmony are valued, approachable teachers can help create an environment conducive to ethical behaviors and open communication by providing timely feedback and counseling. As suggested by Bandura, environmental factors influence the moral actions of individuals by creating a supportive environment.

The findings of the study indicated an insignificant association of dark traits with academic entitlement and the role of academic entitlement as a mediator. According to Bandura's theory, behaviors, personal factors, and environment interact dynamically. Cultural values in Pakistan such as reverence for authority, deference to instructors (Islam, 2004), and emphasis on discipline might eliminate entitlement beliefs. These cultural values may prevent students from expressing entitlement attitudes. Students in this cultural milieu attribute their performance to external factors such as luck (Ye & Nylander, 2021), effort (Herpen et al., 2017), or the generosity of their instructors (Ryans, 1960) than to feel entitled. Moreover, HEIs in Pakistan frequently have well-defined rules and regulations due to their accreditation to the local and international bodies that aid in maintaining academic order and merit. In addition to academic-related factors, socialization processes, and parental practices also impact students' entitlement beliefs. Typically, Pakistani parents emphasize discipline in the life of their children, focus on education, respect for authority figures, and diligence (N. E. Hill & Craft, 2003). As a result, these values may create a sense of responsibility in an individual and contribute towards the decrease of such entitlement attitudes.

However, study noted self-regulation and self-reflection influence academic misconduct. If students perceive their approachable teachers as lacking authority and strictness, they may not internalize the academic integrity rules, weakening the teachers' influence as a role model.

The findings also indicated that students with dark triads are prone to academic dishonesty due to presence of high egotism, lack of sympathy and regret, manipulative and exploitative behaviors, and disregard for ethical and moral standards. These dark characteristics correlate with moral disengagement, leading them to morally disengaged strategies to justify their immoral conduct (Egan et al., 2015). Being morally disengaged, students employ cognitive mechanisms to rationalize their deplorable behavior and thus justify academic dishonesty as a reasonable action. Therefore, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to address moral disengagement to reduce academic misconduct.

### 5.2. Practical Contributions

The findings offer several practical implications for educators and HEIs in Pakistan. It underscores the practical importance of creating an environment that offers academic integrity. HEIs should focus on integrating ethics-oriented curricula, promoting fairness and merit, and providing teachers' training to enhance communication and

feedback systems. Clear policies and regulations on academic dishonesty, combined with continuous mentoring and counseling to students can help maintain academic integrity and reduce dishonest behaviors.

### 5.3. Theoretical Contributions

This study aids in the literature on academic misconduct in Pakistani HEIs and explores the interplay between dark triad personalities, moral disengagement, academic entitlement, and perceived teacher approachability. It enriches the literature by linking Bandura's framework with personal, behavioral, and environmental factors, shaping ethical behaviors. Also, focusing on a non-Western culture enriches understanding of cultural nuances that can influence academic misconduct.

### 5.4. Limitations and Future Directions

Despite the study's insights, it has multiple limitations including the self-reported nature of the data, and focus on business schools in a single province. Future studies should focus on other disciplines and contexts to study academic misconduct. Other factors such as classroom environment, institutional policies towards misconduct and comparative studies across developed and developing countries could help understand misconduct behaviors. Lastly, gender-specific studies may provide deeper insights into behavioral differences.

### 5.5. Conclusion of the study

This study provides valuable insights into the dynamics of academic dishonesty, emphasizing the role of personalities, cognitive mechanisms, and environmental factors. It highlights the importance of fostering ethical awareness, productive students-teachers' relationship, and policies on academic integrity. The findings encourage future studies to study diverse aspects and contributing factors to academic misconduct, to better understand the phenomenon.

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