



PROCRASTINATION AND SELF-ESTEEM-A GENDER BASED STUDY

Eisha Gohil

Lecturer, Department of Psychology, University of Jammu, Jammu and Kashmir.

Abstract

Procrastination is most often considered to be the irrational delay of behavior. Procrastination not only affects student grades, but also academic performance. It prevents students from reaching their objectives and goals; it inculcates a sense of discomfort, as things start accumulating. The present study aimed to assess how gender effect procrastination and self-esteem in university students. Sample encompassed 101 participants (51 female and 50 male) in the age range of 21-24 years collected from University of Jammu. Lay's General Procrastination scale for student population and Rosenberg's Self-Esteem scale were used as tools. Results indicated no significant difference between male and female on procrastination however significant difference was found on self-esteem across gender. The mean scores indicated that female participants had increased level of self-esteem than male participants.

Keywords- gender, procrastination, self-esteem, impact.

Introduction

Procrastination is a prevalent and pernicious form of self-regulatory failure that is not entirely understood. Procrastination is extremely prevalent. Although virtually all of us have at least dallied with dallying, some have made it a way of life. Estimates indicate that 80% to 95% of college students engage in procrastination (Ellis & Knaus, 1977; O'Brien, 2002), approximately 75% consider themselves procrastinators (Potts, 1987), and almost 50% procrastinate consistently and problematically (Day, Mensink & O'Sullivan, 2000; Haycock, 1993; Micek, 1982; Onwuegbuzie, 2000a; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984). Procrastination also appears to be a troubling phenomenon. People most strongly characterize it as being bad, harmful, and foolish (Briody, 1980), and over 95% of procrastinators wish to reduce it (O'Brien, 2002). Justifying this viewpoint, several studies have linked procrastination to individual performance, with the procrastinator performing more poorly overall (Beswick, Rothblum, & Mann, 1988; Steel, Brothen, & Wambach, 2001; Wesley, 1994), and to individual well-being, with the procrastinator being more miserable in the long term (Knaus, 1973; Lay & Schouwenburg, 1993; Tice & Baumeister, 1997). *Procrastination* is occasionally used in a positive sense. Several writers have mentioned it as a functional delay or as avoiding rush (e.g., Bernstein, 1998; Chu & Choi, 2005; Ferrari, 1993b).

The Bhagavad Gita (Gandhi, Strohmeier, & Nagler, 2000) provides an additional Eastern reference. Written in approximately 500 BC, it is considered the most widely read and influential spiritual text of Hinduism. Within it, Krishna maintains, "Undisciplined, vulgar, stubborn, wicked, malicious, lazy, depressed, and procrastinating; such an agent is called a Taamasika agent". Of special note, Taamasika people are considered so lowly that mortal rebirth is denied to them; rather, they go to hell. A recent study by Arvey, Rotundo, Johnson, and McGue (2003) asked 118 identical and 93 fraternal male twins reared in the same family to indicate the degree to which they were procrastinators. The intra class correlations for this item were .24 for identical twins and .13 for the fraternal twins, suggesting that approximately 22% of the variance on this item was associated with genetic factors. Procrastination has been studied extensively by a variety of social scientists. Past researchers often treated procrastination as a personality trait and some concluded that procrastinators have low self-esteem and attribute their procrastination to character flaws such as laziness or lack of self-control (Burka and Yuen 1983). Several researchers identify "task aversion" as another potential cause (Scher and Ferrari 1999, Steel 2007, Wolters 2003). While sophisticated models can be developed to derive the concept (Fischer 1999), the intuition is straightforward. In general, we are less willing to do something we do not want to do, so we delay taking action. We look for anything to do except the task we should be doing. The oft-repeated statistics are that 95 percent of students procrastinate at least occasionally (Ellis and Knaus 1977) and close to 50 percent do so with some consistency (Solomon and Rothblum 1984). Procrastination prevents students from reaching their objectives and goals; it inculcates a sense of discomfort, as things start accumulating.

According to Lay (1986) procrastination means putting off something which is central to reach some goal. However, the fact is that procrastinating students earn lower scores than the non-procrastinators, perhaps due to underestimating the amount of time needed to perform tasks (Bender, 2006). Psychological repercussions of delaying or putting off something are that it creates anxiety, that in turn can effect attention and concentration. Researches point in the direction that procrastination raises students' anxiety and sinks their self-esteem. The most convincing research in this regard was done by Burka and Yuens (1983). According to their model of procrastination, low self esteem is a central constituent of procrastination. A person who procrastinates starts feeling powerless and hopeless; his confidence suffers and future seems dark. Procrastinators usually avoid revealing information about their abilities, prefer menial tasks, make poor time estimates, tend to focus on the past, and do not act on their intentions. Interestingly, research has confirmed that all these characteristics have been related to low self-esteem. Burka and Yuen (1983) associated low sense of self-esteem as a personality trait most commonly present among procrastinators. Various theoretical approaches endorse that low self-esteem as a concomitant of procrastination. Burka and Yuen (1983) highlight that procrastination is a self induced strategy that guards against a susceptible sense of self-esteem.

Delaying of things has a buffering effect for those with unsteady feelings of self-worth (Burka & Yuen, 1982). Beswick, Rothblumand , Mann (1988) gave psychological explanations for procrastination. The researchers studied 245 students, multiple regression analyses depicted that self-esteem and, to some extent, indecision accounted for significant portion of the variance in procrastination. Ferrari (1991) found that procrastinators report feelings of low self-esteem and greater social anxiety. Significant gender differences were reported by the researchers: female procrastinators had significantly lower self-esteem compared to female non-procrastinators. Ferrari (1994) in his further research on dysfunctional procrastination and its association with self-esteem, interpersonal dependency, and self-defeating behaviors. He found that low self-esteem, dependency and self-defeating acts were significantly associated with procrastination in young adults. Often we try to disguise our avoidance by being very busy doing things that may be interesting, and even useful, but don't contribute towards the main goal - even doing something we normally hate - rather than writing, for example, just before an essay deadline! Past research examining procrastination has tended to focus on explaining procrastination in one of two ways. One view suggests that procrastination is the result of one or more fairly stable personality traits that cause individuals to procrastinate across many different contexts or situations (Lay & Silverman, 1996; Milgram, Dangour, & Raviv, 1992; Saddler & Buley, 1999). For example, researchers have attempted to show links between individual's tendency to procrastinate and underlying traits such as identity style, perfectionism, and self-consciousness (Berzonsky & Ferrari, 1996; Ferrari, 1992; Ferrari, Wolfe, Wesley, Schoff, & Beck, 1995; Saddler & Buley, 1999; Saddler & Sacks, 1993). Academic procrastination can be understood as knowing that one is supposed to, and perhaps even wanting to, complete an academic task but failing to perform the activity within the expected or desired time frame (Senecal, Koestner, & Vallerand, 1995). It can also be described as unnecessarily delaying activities that one ultimately intends to complete, especially when done to the point of creating emotional discomfort (Lay & Schouwenburg, 1993; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984). This behavior is fairly commonplace among adults as well as students at the high school and college levels and may have an important negative impact on learning and achievement (Clark & Hill, 1994; Harriott & Ferrari, 1996; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984; Wesley, 1994). For example, in academic settings, procrastination may contribute to missing or late assignments, cramming, anxiety during tests, giving up studying when more attractive alternatives are available, and overall poor performance on tests and activities assigned for a course (Lay & Schouwenburg, 1993). Procrastination also has been linked with negative affective outcomes such as higher levels of depression and anxiety and lower levels of self-esteem (Lay, 1992; Lay & Schouwenburg, 1993; Lay & Silverman, 1996; Martin, Flett, Hewitt, Krames, & Szanto, 1996; Saddler & Sacks, 1993; Senecal et al., 1995; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984). Procrastination prevents students from reaching their objectives and goals; it inculcates a sense of discomfort, as things start accumulating. Procrastination keeps a student wedged in problems and tasks that prevent them from moving ahead in life; students find it difficult to focus on performing other tasks till they have completed the one in hand, which further effects quality of work in other spheres of life. Frequent academic procrastination has been reported across racial categories and gender, and is associated with claiming test anxiety, writer's block, obtaining low course and semester grades, and earning low cumulative GPA (Beswick et al., 1988; Boice, 1989; Clark and Hill, 1994; Lay and Burns, 1991; Rothblum et al., 1986). Such information, however, may be useful for officials in education when developing effective curriculum and service programs that target an institution's particular population of students. Procrastination is at the center of several societal problems (Critchfield & Kollins, 2001; Ainslie, 2005). From the environment to our health, we put off concerns and allow them to compound with time (Gallagher, 2008; Sirios, 2007). The anticipated influence of gender on procrastination is difficult to predict. Previous investigation into gender differences and the related construct of self-control has found mixed results (Feingold, 1994). Men may score higher, lower, or the same as women depending on the measure. However, meta-analytic results do show that girls score higher on effortful control than boys (Else-Quest, Hyde, Goldsmith, & Van Hulle, 2006). On balance then, one could expect procrastination to be weakly associated with males.

In the following study we wish to test the following hypotheses 1-There would be significant difference between male and female participants on Procrastination. 2-There would be significant difference between male and female participants on Self-esteem.

The sample comprised of 101 individuals (50 male and 51 female) collected from the various departments of University of Jammu. Participants were in the age range of 21-24 years. The data was collected over the period of 2 months.

Instruments

General Procrastination Scale - It was developed by Lay in 1986 for student population. Procrastination was assessed as the score on the measure of Procrastination scale authored by (Lay, 1986). It is self-reported five point Likert scale (Extremely uncharacteristic= 1, moderately uncharacteristic= 2, Neutral=3, Moderately uncharacteristic =4 and Extremely uncharacteristic= 5). It comprises of 20 statements. 10 items are reversed-keyed items: (3, 4, 6, 8, 11, 13, 14, 15, 18, and 20). Total score on this measure ranges between 20-100. The scale had high reliability. Cronbach's alpha for the local study sample was reported to be α .85. Score was computed by summing the ratings allocated to all the items, after reverse coding of the 10 items that were positively worded. Higher score revealed greater use of procrastination by the students.

The Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale - It was given by Rosenberg in 1989. It is a 10 item scale with 4 point options from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The scale has a high reliability: test-retest correlations are in the age range of .82 to .88, and Cronbach's alpha for various samples are in the age range .77 to .88 (Blascovich and Tomaka, 1993). The Rosenberg Scale has previously been validated in other studies (Fleming & Courtney, 1984; Harborg, 1993). It is most widely used scale to measure global self-esteem in research studies.

Procedure

In the beginning of the data collection phase, confidentiality procedures and purpose of the research were explained verbally to the participants as well as mentioned in the written consent form. Data was then collected individually. Care

was taken that doubling of data does not take place. Demographic form was constructed to collect demographic information from these participants regarding their age, gender, age, department and students academic status. After filling in the demographic information participants were asked to complete the General Procrastination scale and Rosenberg Self-esteem scale. English versions of both these scales were used. Later both of these questionnaires were quantitatively configured and scores were obtained. Results were generated through the application of SPSS version 20.

Statistical Method

Coding of the one categorical variable i.e gender was carried (male-1, female-2). SPSS version 20 was used for analysis. Mean, SD and t-test was calculated. The independent variable under consideration was Gender (male and female).

Results and Discussion

The obtained data was analyzed using mean, standard deviation and t-test. Mean, standard deviations and the value of t are presented across gender in the Table. Results indicated no difference between male and female participants on procrastination ($t=1.64$, $p>0.05$) however a significant difference was found between male and female participants on self-esteem ($t=2.18$, $p<0.05$). The study revealed no difference between male and female university students on procrastination. The results did not support the first hypothesis which stated a significant difference between males and females on procrastination. These research findings are consistent with that of Effert and Ferrari (1989). These researchers also did not find significant gender differences on procrastination, but were able to find a significant gender difference on self-esteem.

In view of the second hypothesis, results of the study supported the second hypothesis which stated a significant gender difference on self-esteem. However this research finding is inconsistent with that of Maria and Yolanda (2003) who examined the relationship of self-esteem with regard to gender and age for 660 Spanish students. Results endorsed no significant gender differences in general self-esteem. Briody (1980) found 8% of respondents stating that low self-confidence was a cause of procrastination. Micek (1982) found that procrastinators were more likely to give up on their efforts when encountering an obstacle. Finally, Froehlich (1987) and Haycock (1993) asked students retrospectively how they felt after procrastinating, with over 80% of the responses categorized as negative. Similarly, an online poll by the Procrastination Research Group (2005) that surveyed over 9,000 respondents indicated that 94% find that procrastination has some negative effect on their happiness, with 18% indicating that the effect is extremely negative. Only a weak relationship was expected between gender and procrastination, and the results bear this out. After correction for uneven splits, men do appear to procrastinate only slightly more than women. We want to resolve all uncertainty before making important, possibly life-altering decisions, but the pressure to make the best possible choice causes many of us to delay making any choice at all. Indeed, we more often procrastinate in the pursuit of important goals than in the pursuit of less-important ones (O'Donoghue and Rabin 2001).

Table showing mean, SD and the value of t

VARIABLES	GROUPS	N	Mean	SD	t
PROCRASTINATION	MALE	50	57.16	6.43	1.65
	FEMALE	51	54.72	8.28	
SELF-ESTEEM	MALE	50	27.76	3.39	2.18*
	FEMALE	51	29.35	3.92	

Limitations of the Study

The present study had small sample size hence limited generalizability and in order that more valid and reliable conclusion could be drawn, the study needs to be replicated with a larger sample size. It would be better to include other variables like anxiety, self-efficacy, perfectionism and depression to know about their correlates of procrastination.

Conclusion

Procrastination impacts almost everyone. Although countless students repeatedly swear they will never procrastinate again, they inevitably do. They fall prey to salience, task aversion, and uncertainty that raise the cost of starting a project. This creates delays that cause lower quality papers and projects, lower exam scores and, to a lesser extent, late or missing assignments. Procrastination has both positive and negative consequences. For example, you might feel less stressed in the short term, you could enjoy the distractions you pursue and you don't have to change or challenge old rules or assumptions. Some negative consequences could be feelings of guilt or anxiety, self criticism can take hold, a back log of tasks could pile up or you might, for example, receive lower marks for an assessment or poor feedback on a job. Sometimes there can be a snowball effect whereby it's harder to persist in the face of setbacks. What are some of the consequences for you? How do these consequences contribute to your procrastination habit? Once you can notice how the procrastination cycle works for you then you can challenge it if you wish.

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