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Types of Procrastinators: Perfectionists vs. Crisis-Making Procrastinators

Terry McRoberts⁶

The purpose of the study was to see if college students who procrastinate show differences in the different types of procrastination. The two types of procrastination used in the study are perfectionists and crisis-making procrastinators. Perfectionist procrastinators are individuals who have difficulties completing a task due to lack of satisfaction, and Crisis-making procrastinators are individuals who postpone task until there is a short amount of time left. The hypothesis is that college students are more likely to be crisis-making procrastinators rather than perfectionist procrastinators when completing an assignment. The method involved surveying college students in the Lindenwood Participant Pool on their likelihood to procrastinate in various situations. The survey consisted of 14 questions; 7 questions focused towards perfectionists and 7 questions focused towards crisis-making procrastinators. Results showed that college students were more likely to be crisis-making procrastinators than perfectionist procrastinators. Results also showed that there was a difference between gender and type of procrastinator as well as age and level of procrastination.

Procrastination has been a major study in the field of psychology. Procrastination has been defined in many different terms, but an operational definition is the amount of time or number of times an individual postpones during the process of completing a task. For example, a college student who waits two days to complete an assignment assigned three weeks ago is measured to have high levels of procrastination. An example of low levels of procrastination would be a college student who plans ahead and does equal portions of an assignment from the beginning date to the due date. Many researchers have focused on the study of procrastination and identified many topics, such as why people procrastinate, what factors contribute to procrastination, and how procrastination affects individuals in their daily activities.

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Perrin, Miller, Haberlin, Ivy, Meindl and Neff (2011) examined college students' amount of studying when practicing for weekly exams. To do this, there were two scheduled practice quizzes available for students, continuous and scheduled. With the continuous practice quizzes, the set of practice quizzes were available for the students throughout the week up until the day of the quiz. But with the scheduled practice quizzes, students had to complete the first quiz in order to take the second quiz, and so forth. For the continuous practice quizzes, students did not have to complete the first quiz to access the second quiz. Perrin et al. (2011) expected this to decrease the behavior of completing the practice quizzes because the reinforcement of getting access to the next quiz was also available. In other words, students who were given the continuous practice quizzes were more likely to procrastinate because there were no levels of completion. The results showed that a large portion of studying was done toward the end of the week for students who were given the continuous practice quiz schedule (Perrin et al., 2011). For students who were given the scheduled practice quizzes, the study patterns were evenly spaced throughout the week; each day had very similar amounts of studying. The results showed that when there were forced deadlines at each interval of a time period; students were less likely to procrastinate (Perrin et al., 2011). This is helpful but less likely to happen in many institutions because it creates more work for both the students and professors. Researchers have found that procrastination can negatively affect students' grades. Therefore, if professors sense that procrastination is a possible cause for students' bad grades, applying deadlines for rough drafts may help.

Another study focused on perfectionism, procrastination and psychological distress. The study focused on students' grade expectations during a semester. At the beginning of the semester, students would expect to perform well (perfectionism), but toward the end of the semester, they would work hard to receive a grade lower than what they initially expected

(psychological distress). The hypothesis for the study was that procrastination would be the cause of students transferring from high expectations to lower expectations for their overall grades (Rice, Richardson, & Clark, 2012). This is common among many college students who tend to procrastinate. The idea is that students plan to achieve a high grade, but in the process of procrastination, they end up earning a grade that is not as high as their initial expectations, and this results in distress. The results showed that there was no significant effect of distress for students who showed high perfectionism in the early semester. But students who were more likely to procrastinate early in the semester showed more distress at the end of the semester. Rice et al (2012) highlighted the effects of procrastination between perfectionism and distress and how both correlate. It is important that students learn how to improve their time management skills; this will make it less likely for students to procrastinate.

The study done by Ferrari, Barnes and Steel (2009) dealt with regret due to procrastination. There were three types of procrastinations used in the study; arousal, avoidant and non-procrastinators (Ferrari et al., 2009). The etiology of arousal procrastination was due to environmental factors (such as traffic or alarm clock), avoidant procrastination was due to internal factors (such as lack of satisfaction) and non-procrastinators would complete the tasks in a timely manner. Ferrari et al. (2009) hypothesized that both arousal and avoidant procrastinators could show more regret than non-procrastinators when reflecting on past events that were delayed. The survey consisted of a variety of variables that involve relationships with others, career decisions, financial history, and so on. The survey results showed that both arousal and avoidant procrastinators should show more regret compared to non-procrastinators (Ferrari et al., 2009). The importance of this study is that procrastination can affect long term decisions that are

very important in life. The less likely individuals are to procrastinate, the more likely they are to make better decisions.

The study done by Cook (2000) dealt with measuring the level of positive outcomes based on counselor's etiology to the patient's procrastination. There were three different attributions made by the counselors; internal factors, external factors, and no additional factors. The internal factors were focused on things that the patient could control. The external factors focused on things that the patient could not control, and the counselors who gave no additional factors would listen to the patient on their reasoning of procrastination. Cook (2000) hypothesized patients that were given additional factors that contributed to their procrastination would perform better than patients who were not given any factors. Cook (2000) incorporated the idea of cognitive dissonance and how the study would support its theory. Cognitive dissonance is the level of inconsistency between two or more variables. For example, someone being told to lie to another person for money would have high cognitive dissonance if they received only one dollar, but would have low cognitive dissonance if they received \$20 or an amount they would feel comfortable with for lying. But, the results of the study showed that patients who received no additional factors outperformed patients who received additional factors (Cook, 2000). One implication was that patients who received no additional factors were able to interact with counselors about their procrastination in a way they usually do not, therefore they were able to identify that it was their responsibility to fix their procrastination instead of placing the cause to additional factors. Cook (2000) used the results of the study to implicate that it may be helpful to alter the goal of therapy from trying to find a cause for patients' issues to helping patients take more responsibility to fixing the issue.

An earlier study focused on the relationship between interpretations of procrastination and the motivation to change (Strong, Wambach, Lopez & Cooper, 1979). Researchers believed that interpreting situational factors to explain procrastination would increase the likelihood to perform better in the future. They hypothesized that people who are given interpretations that they can control (such as lack of confidence) are more likely to perform better than people who are not given any interpretations (Strong et al., 1979). There were three groups that received different types of interpretations: controllable, uncontrollable and reflection. The controllable group was given interpretations that they could control, such as lack of understanding, coming up with excusable explanations, low competence, and the like. The uncontrollable group was given interpretations that were unsolvable. The reflection group did not receive any interpretations; instead, counselors would focus on asking questions to keep the participant talking about their own interpretations. Unlike Cook (2000) the results for this study showed that people who were given controllable interpretations performed better than people who did not receive any interpretations (Strong et al., 1979). There are possible implications on why both studies have different results. In Cook's (2000) study, the confederates that interviewed the control group would ask the participant questions to target self-responsibility. But in Strong et. al (1979) study, confederates would ask questions to help continue the interview, not focusing on a target solution. Another implication is time frame. Both studies were conducted in two different generations, therefore there are many environmental and cultural changes done over time that could affect the way people in society procrastinate or interpret the responsibility of procrastination.

My study focused on two different types of procrastinators (perfectionist and crisis-making procrastinators) and what factors may contribute to each one. The objective was to show

that perfectionist procrastinators have difficulty completing tasks due to lack of satisfaction and crisis-making procrastinators having difficulty completing tasks due to postponing.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited through the Lindenwood Participant Pool (LPP), which included all students enrolled in select courses of Psychology, Sociology, Athletic Training, Anthropology and Exercise Science. He/she earned bonus points for participating in the study. There was a total of 41 participants (25 men and 16 women; $M = 19.83$ years; $SD = 6.15$ range = 17 to 23 years; mode = 20). There were a total of 21 freshman, 10 sophomores, 8 juniors and 2 seniors. When participants ranked their level of procrastination from a scale of 1-5 (1 being the least and 5 being the most) the average was 3.43. When asked what factors contributed to their procrastination, 21% stated school, 6% stated work, 25% stated extracurricular activities, 12% stated friends, 6% stated family, 9% stated sports, 6% stated video games, 9% stated video games, and 3% stated relationship.

Materials

The assessment consisted of four different forms along with the Procrastination Survey. The first form is the consent form (see Appendix A). The consent form consisted of a description of the study, the expected time to complete the study, the right to withdraw from the project at any time, the confidentiality of all personal information, confirming to be at least 18 years of age, and the researcher's contact. There were two copies of consent forms for each assessment; one for him/her and the other for the researcher. The next form was the demographic survey (see Appendix B), which consisted of four questions, gender, grade level, age and level of

procrastination. Gender was asked to identify if there was a difference between gender regarding perfectionist and crisis making procrastinators. Age was asked to see if younger students were more likely to be crisis-making procrastinators rather than perfectionist procrastinators. He/she was also asked to rate their level of procrastination to see if a specific range correlated with a crisis-making procrastinator or a perfectionist procrastinator.

The next form that was given was the procrastination survey (see Appendix C). This consisted of 14 questions; 7 questions focused on crisis-making procrastinators and 7 questions focused on perfectionist procrastinators. Each question asked participants to rate their level of procrastination in regards to the question. For example, one question asked them to rate how likely they were to procrastinate on starting a new project. The next form given was the feedback letter (see Appendix D), which informed them the purpose of the study, the hypothesis of the study and contact information if they wished to see their results after all participants were assessed. The final form given was a sheet listing tips to help with procrastination for both crisis-making procrastinators and perfectionist procrastinators (see Appendix E). Although participants didn't have the results from the survey, participants may have wanted to apply techniques that felt most helpful to apply in their own lives.

The research was conducted in Pavlov room and the library. The Pavlov and library rooms consisted of table and the researcher sitting directly across from the participant.

Procedure

The first step was booking a location to take the study. After the room was booked, a signup sheet was posted on the LPP Board, in which participants signed up for the available times listed. The night before his/her scheduled appointment; I called him/her with a friendly reminder of the appointment time and location.

Once participants arrived, the first thing done was assuring that he/she was a part of the LPP. If he/she was not a part of the LPP, he/she could not participate in the study. If he/she were a part of the LPP, he/she signed in to confirm his/her presence for the study. Next he/she was given the consent form. Thirdly, he/she was given the demographic survey. Next, the procrastination survey was then given out. After he/she finished the survey, I collected and gathered the forms, then gave him/her the feedback letter, informing him/her of the purpose and hypothesis of the study. The last procedure was filling out the receipt. I was responsible for filling out all of the information on the receipt, only leaving the signature for him/her to sign. He/she was then dismissed.

Results

The hypothesis of the study was that college students were more likely to be crisis-making procrastinators than perfectionist procrastinators. A chi-square test was used to determine the significance between perfectionist procrastinators and crisis-making procrastinators. The results of the study showed that college students were more likely to be crisis-making procrastinators than perfectionist procrastinators (p -value= 3.806 for perfectionist and p -value= 54.033 for crisis-making procrastinators). Results also showed that women were more likely to be perfectionist procrastinators while men were more likely to be crisis-making procrastinators. The third hypothesis stated in the study was that young students would be more likely to procrastinate. Using Pearson's r correlation, there was a positive correlation between age and level of procrastination ($r=0.392931$).

Discussion

I hypothesized that college students were more likely to be crisis-making procrastinators than perfectionist procrastinators. Based on the results, college students were more likely to be

crisis-making procrastinators than perfectionist procrastinators. The results show that college students tend to postpone tasks toward the end of a deadline due to instant positive reinforcement of additional free time. This can have a negative effect on students' academic performance. The importance of the study was to show that college students have a habit of postponing assignments and that this can result in lower academic achievement. In order to solve this, college students should become more proactive with completing tasks. Research shows that the less individuals procrastinate, the better the overall outcome and performance of completing a task.

There are three implications found in the study. The first implication was that a small portion of the participants did not know the definition of procrastination. This could be due to the fact that a good portion of participants were from countries other than the United States. Furthermore, procrastination may not be as big of an issue in the homeland, and thus the topic may rarely come up, resulting in misunderstanding of the meaning. The second implication involved the time duration of data collection. The goal was for the study to have at least 100 participants. But due to a limited amount of time, the study only had 41 participants. This affects the sample size of the study, which also influences the validity of the study. The third implication of the study was location. Location became an issue when the study was conducted in the library. Many of the participants could not find the location of the study due to the room being in the basement of the library, and as a result there were 6 no-shows. Future research should consider a more effective way or time to conduct the study in order to increase the sample size and validity. For example, extending the length of data collection time or scheduling the studies for more convenient times for participants can help increase the sample size. To help validity, the study

can be conducted in another university to see if the participants showed a difference between the types of procrastinators.

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Appendix B
Demographic Questionnaire:

You may choose to decline to answer any of the following questions.

- 1) Are you MALE FEMALE
- 2) How old are you? _____ years
- 3) What year are you at Lindenwood University? (please circle)
 - a. Freshman
 - b. Sophomore
 - c. Junior
 - d. Senior
 - e. Other _____
- 4) Rate your overall level of procrastination

1=never procrastinate, 2=rarely procrastinates, 3=generally procrastinates, 4=mainly procrastinates, 5=always procrastinate.

1 2 3 4 5

Appendix C

Procrastination Survey

Rate from 1 to 5 (1=never procrastinate, 2=rarely procrastinates, 3=generally procrastinates, 4=mainly procrastinates, 5=always procrastinate) on how likely you are to procrastinate.

1. Making decisions about your future
1 2 3 4 5
2. Studying for an exam
1 2 3 4 5
3. Thinking about creative ideas for a big event
1 2 3 4 5
4. Starting a new project
1 2 3 4 5
5. Picking a good restaurant for a date
1 2 3 4 5
6. Paying bills
1 2 3 4 5
7. Picking out an outfit
1 2 3 4 5
8. Choosing the best idea for a party theme
1 2 3 4 5
9. Choosing a good birthday gift for a friend or family member
1 2 3 4 5
10. Going to exercise
1 2 3 4 5
11. Refilling gas
1 2 3 4 5
12. Doing laundry
1 2 3 4 5
13. Getting ready for work
1 2 3 4 5
14. Waking up for work
1 2 3 4 5

Appendix D
Feedback Letter

Thank you for participating in my study. The present study was conducted in order to determine which type of procrastinator college students tend to be categorized under. I hypothesized that college students are more likely to be crisis-maker procrastinators rather than perfectionist procrastinators when completing tasks. Crisis-making procrastinators are individuals who postpone task until there is a short amount of time left. Perfectionist procrastinators are individuals who have difficulties completing a task due to lack of satisfaction. The survey consists of questions that are equally divided to categorize the level of a crisis maker or perfectionist procrastinator. Please note that I am not interested in your individual results; rather, we are only interested in the overall findings based on aggregate data. No identifying information about you will be associated with any of the findings, nor will it be possible for us to trace your responses on an individual basis.

If you are interested in obtaining the final results of this study based on aggregate data, or if you have any questions or concerns regarding any portion of this study, please do not hesitate to let me know now or in the future. The contact information is found at the bottom of this letter.

Thank you again for your valuable contribution to this study.

Sincerely,

Principal Investigator:

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Appendix E

Tips to help with Procrastination

Perfectionist procrastinators

- Focus on what's realistic rather than what's ideal; work toward excellence rather than perfection
- Seek support from others before you're under too much pressure
- Deliberately make one mistake each day
- Make daily to-do lists with small, broken down tasks that you can complete on a given day
- Commit to rewarding yourself for setting and achieving realistic goals
- Admit that you choose what you do with your time, work on self-acceptance skills.

Crisis-maker procrastinators

- Strive for moderation; avoid speaking and thinking in dramatic, emotional language
- Remind yourself; you may not be interested in a task until you start
- Identify motivators for a task and use them rather than using stress as a motivator
- Keep a record of your "crises"; what triggered them, how you reacted
- Create deadlines for yourself as a way to use your natural adrenaline rush to complete tasks earlier
- Regularly engage in activities that will give you an adrenaline rush- play competitive sports, hang out with friends or take up a new hobby