

Gender and Age Differences in Academic Procrastination, Task Aversiveness, and Fear of Failure

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INTRODUCTION

Procrastination is defined as the failure to get things done on time (Haycock, McCarthy, & Skay 1998). Going by that definition, we live in a society that highly values norms such as productivity and accomplishment, however, procrastination directly violates those norms. According to Ginetet, (2005) the tendency to delay action may be so ingrained in our psychological fabric that suppressing it would amount to suppressing parts of our humanity. Procrastination is a serious phenomenon that is poorly understood and overlooked. Besides the common definition of procrastination which states that it is the failure to get things done in a timely manner, procrastination can also escalate to a level where it becomes chronic. Chronic procrastination is defined as purposive and frequent delay in a person's start or completion of a task to the point of experiencing subjective discomfort" (Diaz-Morales, Ferrari, Argumedo, & Diaz 2006). The results of a study by Solomon and Rothblum (1984) that focused on academic procrastination indicate that procrastination is not solely a deficit in study habits or time-management, but involves a complex interaction of behavioral, cognitive, and affective components. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of academic procrastination by examining the areas of most frequent procrastination and the reasons for procrastination by focusing on variables such as fear of failure, task aversiveness, perfectionism, gender, and age in a university setting.

Hypotheses

1. There will be gender differences in degree of procrastination reported on the six academic tasks.
2. There will be gender differences in willingness to change the behavior of procrastination on the six academic tasks.
3. There will be gender differences in reasons reported for procrastination.
4. There are differences between perfectionists and non-perfectionists on degree of procrastination.
5. Females are more likely to procrastinate due to fear of failure than males.
6. Males are more likely to procrastinate due to task aversiveness than females.
7. The degree of procrastination is greater among traditional students than nontraditionally aged students.

METHOD

Participants

A nonrandom sample of 94 participants was used for this study. The study consisted of 25% men and 75% women. From the selected sample, 83% were traditional students, and 16% nontraditionally aged students with 9% African American/Black, 2% Asian, 40% Latino/Hispanic, 38% Euro-American/White, 5% Bi/Multiracial and 5% other. The mean age for the mean age for the sample was 23.18 years of age.

Materials and Measures

Demographic Questionnaire. Participants completed a 6-item demographic questionnaire pertaining to their gender, age, ethnicity, class standing, student type, and perfectionism.

The Procrastination Assessment Questionnaire- The Procrastination Assessment Scale—Students (PASS; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984) was developed to measure five areas: degree of procrastination, willingness to change, reasons for procrastination, fear of failure, and task aversiveness. The PASS is divided into two parts. The first part measures the prevalence of procrastination in six academic areas, and the second part assesses reasons for procrastination. The participants were required to respond to each academic task (scores range from 2 to 10) and across the six areas of academic functioning (ranging from 12 to 60) on a 5-point scale (1 = *never procrastinate* to 5 = *always procrastinate*, 1 = *not at all a problem* to 5 = *always a problem*, 1 = *do not want to decrease* to 5 = *definitely want to decrease*). The participants were also required to respond to 19 statements assessing reasons for procrastination using a 5-point, matrix, continuous scale with anchors 1 = *not at all reflects why I procrastinated* to 5 = *definitely reflects why I procrastinated*.

Procedure

Surveys were non-randomly administered to a number of people in classes on the campus. Participants were informed that the survey was for senior thesis and that their data would be used for project analyses purposes only, and all responses would remain confidential. To indicate agreement to participate, a brief paragraph of the consent was stated on the top page of the survey. Once completed, the surveys were returned to the researcher then used to input data.

RESULTS

A *t*-test for independent samples was performed to examine the difference in degree of procrastination between men and women (Table 1). Contrary to prediction, there are no gender differences in degree of procrastination between men ($M = 37.48$, $SD = 6.16$) and women ($M = 35.44$, $SD = 8.84$), $t(92) = 1.03$, $p = .31$.

A *t*-test for independent samples was performed to examine the difference in willingness to change procrastination between men and women (Table 1). Contrary to prediction, there are no gender differences in willingness to change between men ($M = 19.39$, $SD = 4.93$) and women ($M = 19.55$, $SD = 5.95$), $t(92) = .12$, $p = .91$.

A *t*-test for independent samples was performed to examine gender difference in reasons for procrastination (Table 1). Contrary to prediction there are no gender differences in reasons for procrastination between men ($M = 43.35$, $SD = 13.82$) and women ($M = 44.32$, $SD = 10.39$), $t(92) = .36$, $p = .72$.

Table 1

Means and standard deviations on degree of procrastination, willingness to change, and reasons for procrastination for men and women

Dependent Variable	Gender				t	p
	Male n = 23		Female n = 71			
	M	SD	M	SD		
Degree	37.48	6.16	35.44	8.84	1.03	.31
Change	19.39	4.93	19.55	5.95	.12	.91
Reasons	43.35	13.82	44.32	10.39	.36	.72

A *t*-test for independent samples was performed to examine differences on degree of procrastination between perfectionists and nonperfectionists (Table 2). Contrary to prediction there are no differences on degree of procrastination between perfectionists ($M = 34.0$, $SD = 8.67$) and nonperfectionists ($M = 37.38$, $SD = 7.74$), $t(90) = 1.92$, $p = .06$.

Table 2

Means and standard deviations on degree of procrastination for perfectionists and nonperfectionists

Dependent Variable	Perfectionist				t	p
	Yes n = 44		No n = 48			
	M	SD	M	SD		
Degree	34.09	8.67	37.38	7.74	1.92	.06

A *t*-test for independent samples was performed to examine gender differences in fear of failure as the primary reason for procrastination (Table 3). Contrary to prediction, women do not report fear of failure as the primary reason for procrastination ($M = 8.52$, $SD = 3.55$) when compared to men ($M = 8.22$, $SD = 3.91$), $t(92) = .35$, $p = .73$.

A *t*-test for independent samples was performed to examine gender differences in task aversiveness as the primary reason of procrastination (Table 3). Contrary to prediction men do not report task aversiveness as the primary reason for procrastination ($M = 11.35$, $SD = 4.35$) when compared to women ($M = 11.39$, $SD = 3.59$), $t(92) = .05$, $p = .96$.

Table 3

Means and standard deviations on fear of failure or task aversiveness as the primary reason for procrastination

Dependent Variable	Gender				t	p
	Male n = 23		Female n = 71			
	M	SD	M	SD		
Fear of Failure	8.22	3.91	8.52	3.55	.35	.73
Task Aversiveness	11.35	4.35	11.39	3.59	.05	.96

A *t*-test for independent samples was performed to examine differences between traditional and nontraditionally aged students on degree of procrastination. (Table 4). Contrary to prediction traditional students do not report higher degree of procrastination ($M = 36.32$, $SD = 8.31$), when compared to nontraditional students ($M = 34.40$, $SD = 8.30$), $t(91) = .82$, $p = .41$.

Table 4

Means and standard deviations on degree of procrastination for traditional and nontraditional students

Dependent Variable	Student Type				t	p
	Traditional n = 78		Nontraditional n = 15			
	M	SD	M	SD		
Degree	36.32	8.31	34.40	8.30	.82	.41

DISCUSSION

All of the findings failed to support previous research, however it allows for future research to expand on the areas that influence academic procrastination in this study. Since procrastination is a serious phenomenon that is poorly understood and overlooked, future research on the topic needs to examine the various areas in more depth. Each of the variables presented in this research can be expanded to ensure significant results. Future research is needed to establish firm results about which gender is more likely to procrastinate and the individual variables that contribute to the differences. Because procrastination has been identified as an extensive and harmful phenomenon, in looking at gender differences, future research may focus on determining the causes behind it.

In addition to gender differences, when examining perfectionism and procrastination, future studies can look into the various types of perfectionism to examine whether self-oriented perfectionism, or socially prescribed perfectionism is more correlated with procrastination.

Furthermore, in looking at reasons for procrastination, further research needs to focus on reasons such as fear of failure and task aversiveness to establish which ones are most prominent among procrastinators in order to work towards the foundation of treatment. Regarding age, future studies need to include this variable more frequently in order to present a stabilized view, and find ways to assist the age group that is struggling most with this phenomenon. A variable that was not examined in this study, but may be one to consider in future research is