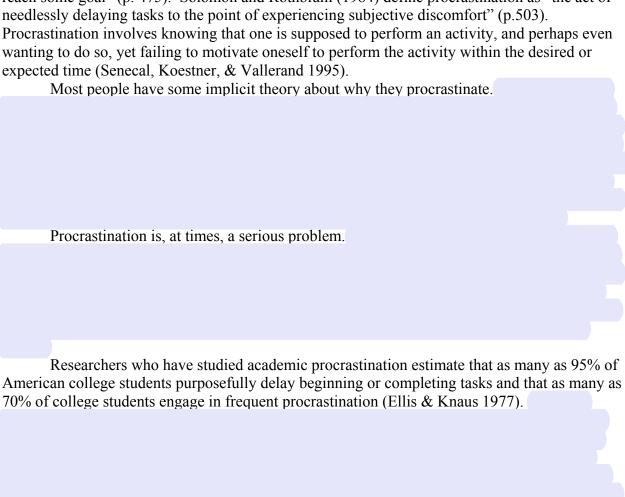# Applying Explanatory Style to Academic Procrastination

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To better understand procrastination, researchers have sought to identify cognitive personality factors associated with it. The study reported here attempts to extend previous research by exploring the application of explanatory style to academic procrastination. Findings of the study are discussed from the perspective of employers of this new generation.

INTRODUCTION

Procrastination is the tendency to delay or completely avoid responsibilities, decisions, or tasks that need to be done (Haycock, McCarthy, & Skay 1998, Tuckman and Sexton 1989). According to Lay (1986) procrastination means "the putting off of that which is necessary to reach some goal" (p. 475). Solomon and Rothblum (1984) define procrastination as "the act of needlessly delaying tasks to the point of experiencing subjective discomfort" (p.503). Procrastination involves knowing that one is supposed to perform an activity, and perhaps even wanting to do so, yet failing to motivate oneself to perform the activity within the desired or expected time (Senecal, Koestner, & Vallerand 1995).

Most people have some implicit theory about why they procrastinate.

Procrastination is, at times, a serious problem.

Researchers who have studied academic procrastination estimate that as many as 95% of American college students purposefully delay beginning or completing tasks and that as many as 70% of college students engage in frequent procrastination (Ellis & Knaus 1977).

The exploratory research project discussed in this paper is oriented toward providing a better understanding of the concept of procrastination and of the effects of explanatory style on

academic procrastinatory behavior among undergraduate business students.

Researchers have begun to examine explanatory style in its own right as a basic individual difference, extending it to questions and topics not explicitly part of the original helplessness model or its revisions (Peterson & Park 1998; Seligman & Schulman, 1986).

To better understand procrastination, researchers have sought to identify cognitive personality factors associated with it (for a review, see Ferrari, Parker & Ware 1992).

METHOD

Eighty students (43 males; 37 females) aged 19-24 who were enrolled in Consumer Behavior during the fall 2003 semester at a large state-supported university in the southeast completed the Academic Attributional Style Questionnaire (AASQ) (Peterson and Barrett 1987).
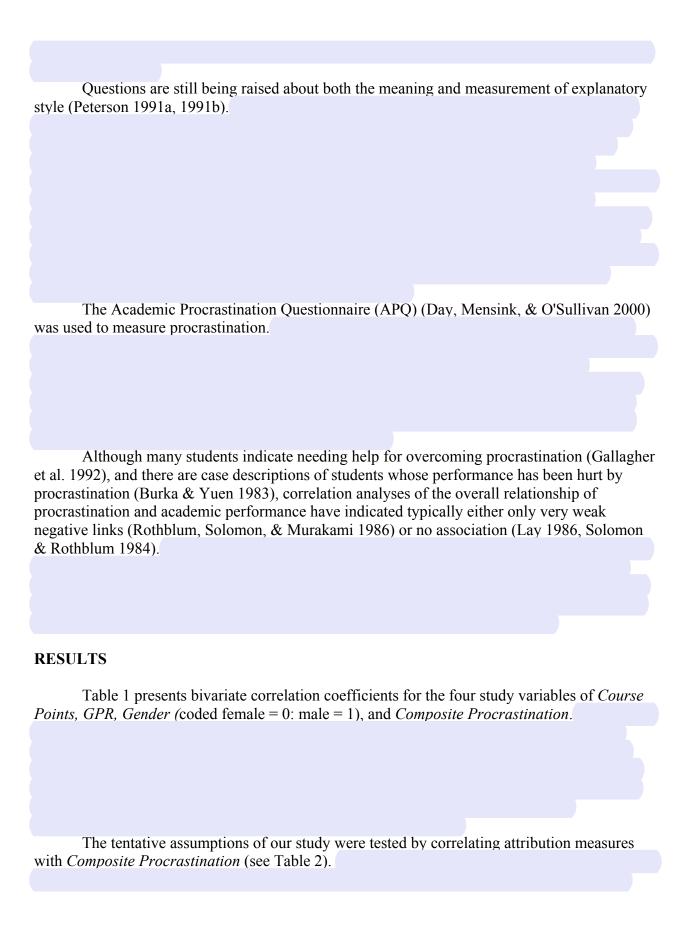
Questions are still being raised about both the meaning and measurement of explanatory style (Peterson 1991a, 1991b).

The Academic Procrastination Questionnaire (APQ) (Day, Mensink, & O'Sullivan 2000) was used to measure procrastination.

Although many students indicate needing help for overcoming procrastination (Gallagher et al. 1992), and there are case descriptions of students whose performance has been hurt by procrastination (Burka & Yuen 1983), correlation analyses of the overall relationship of procrastination and academic performance have indicated typically either only very weak negative links (Rothblum, Solomon, & Murakami 1986) or no association (Lay 1986, Solomon & Rothblum 1984).

RESULTS

Table 1 presents bivariate correlation coefficients for the four study variables of *Course Points, GPR, Gender (*coded female = 0: male = 1), and *Composite Procrastination*.

The tentative assumptions of our study were tested by correlating attribution measures with *Composite Procrastination* (see Table 2).

Table1
Correlations* of Composite Procrastination with Descriptor Variables

		1	*2*	*3*	*4*
1.	Course Points	--	.52[a]	-.37[a]	-.15
2.	GPR		--	-.37[a]	-.01
3.	Gender			--	.17
4.	Composite Procrastination				--

* Pearson product-moment correlations
[a]p<.001

Table 2
Correlations* of Attribution Scores with Composite Procrastination, Performance Measures, and Gender

	Composite Procrastination	*Course Points*	*GPR*	*Gender*
Locus	.28[b]	.02	-.17	.25[c]
Stability	-.03	.06	-.01	.15
Globality	.02	.04	-.05	.07
Composite Style	.13	.06	-.10	-.21[d]
Importance	-.42[a]	.23[c]	.16	-.28[b]
Controllability	.37[a]	-.03	-.12	.25[c]

* Pearson product-moment correlations
[a]p<.001
[b]p<.01
[c]p<.05
[d]p<.10

In order to examine the relationship between procrastination and all of the predictor variables of interest, a simultaneous multiple linear regression was conducted.

Table3
Summary of Simultaneous Multiple Linear Regression Model for Variables Predicting Procrastination

Variable	*B*	*SE B*	*ß*	*t*	*p*
Gender	-.413	.963	-.055	-.429	.669
GPR	1.122	.878	.173	1.278	.206
Course Points	-.018	.017	-.138	-1.039	.303
Locus	.009	.085	.019	.105	.916
Stability	.018	.056	.044	.330	.743
Globality	.016	.040	.048	.396	.694
Importance	-.170	.048	-.419	-3.568	.001
Controllability	.142	.072	.340	1.967	.054

Note: N = 67. R^2 = .317, F(8, 59) = 3.42, p = .003

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Van Eerde (2003) writes that "procrastination is not necessarily dysfunctional" (p. 421) arguing that the outcome of procrastination may only lead to time pressure and that for easy, boring, or routine tasks, time pressure may simply create a challenge and may lead to finishing a task faster.

Contrary to expectations, a pessimistic cognitive style that includes internal, stable, and global attributions for bad outcomes was not found in this study to play a role in procrastination.

In the past, most of us have been told that procrastination is a bad habit. According to Chase (2003), a management skills consultant, this assumption has always been based on the idea that people who put things off are lazy and unfocused, and assumes, mistakenly, that there is enough time in our world today to complete everything that needs to be completed. Chase goes on to say that this is not practical and that the assumption that procrastination is a bad habit is out-of-date and irrelevant in today's world. He notes that there is a difference between putting off doing something because one does not want to do it, and putting off doing something because it is not important right now, the latter he says "is a highly desirable time management skill" in today's business climate (p, 60). Chase (2003) tells business professionals "if you are going to be a successful business person, you are going to have to learn to put some things off" because you cannot do everything" (p. 61). He goes on to say that business professionals must become "skilled procrastinators" -- that procrastination is the "new master skill of time management" (p.60). "Skilled" means, he says, making sure that the right items are procrastinated knowing how to select between what gets "put off" and what must be done "on time." Results of our exploratory study suggest that today's business undergraduates may already possess those skills.

In conclusion, findings of this study hint that a characteristically internal cognitive style of self-reflection and judgments of control and importance may be critical to understanding the nature of the relationship between explanatory style and procrastination.

REFERENCES

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