



SELF-FORGIVENESS AND SELF- DECEPTION AS PREDICTORS OF PROCRASTINATION AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

Education

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ABSTRACT

Procrastination a widespread phenomenon that affects everyone's day-to-day life has been associated with negative consequences for performance, physical health, mood, self- esteem and subjective well-being. The current study aims to understand specific factors that predict and help maintain the procrastination cycle. Purposive sampling was used and the sample consisted of 181 respondents within the age range 18-25 years. Standardized questionnaires such as General Procrastination scale, Self- Deception Questionnaire, Self Forgiveness and Positive and Negative Affect Schedule were administered. Pearson's correlation, linear regression and multiple regression analysis were used to analyze the data. Findings revealed a positive correlation between procrastination and self-forgiveness as well as between procrastination and self-deception. Multiple regression analysis revealed that both self-forgiveness and self-deception accounted for 78% variance in procrastination, with self-deception strongly predicting procrastination. Preferences for these self-enhancement strategies such as self-forgiveness and self-deception may lessen the potential for recognition of ways to correct future behaviour.

KEYWORDS

procrastination, self-forgiveness, self-deception and counterfactual thinking.

INTRODUCTION

Procrastination refers to the act of needlessly delaying a task until the point of some discomfort- a behavior that many people experience on a regular basis (Ferrari, Johnson and McCown, 1995). Schouwenburg (1992) was curious as to why students procrastinate in the first place. Some common reasons he found attributing to procrastination behaviour were; fear of failure, feeling overwhelmed, trouble choosing topics to study, waiting for more information to be given in class, waiting for classmates to begin so you can ask them questions, not having enough energy, other assignments demanding the students attention, and, liking the challenge and excitement of waiting until the last possible minute.

Robust research links procrastination to negative mood states such as depression and anxiety (Ferrari, 1991; Lay, Edwards, Parker and Endler, 1989), distress (Flett et al., 2012; Rice, Richardson and Clark, 2012), shame and guilt (Blunt and Pychyl, 2005). Recently researchers have identified procrastinatory cognitions, a particular set of automatic, ruminative thoughts that underlie the negative mood associated with procrastination (Flett, Haghbin and Pychyl, in press; Flett et al., 2012). A key component of these procrastinatory cognitions is a negative evaluation of the self. Self-blame, self-criticism, self-depreciation and self-judgment appear to be a central way in which procrastinators maintain the negative mood that perpetuates their cycle of procrastination and contributes to their poor well-being. Inability to regulate these negative emotional states is a key to understand procrastination (Tice and Bratslavsky, 2000). From this perspective, the fact that people prioritize short-term mood regulation over more instrumental action to reach goals means that not only are long-term goals forfeited, but also that temporary quick fixes to repair negative mood may serve to maintain the cycle of procrastination.

Self-forgiveness

In the last few decades, limited attention has been paid to self-forgiveness and its meaning, its antecedents, and outcomes. When a person acknowledges that they have behaved in a manner that is inconsistent with their principles, they will typically feel a great deal of negative emotions, such as guilt and shame. These emotions can pose a threat to the person's sense of self (Dillon, 2001). According to Hall and Fincham (2005), these negative emotional and physiological effects can be reduced or eliminated through self-forgiveness. Research indicates that evaluating oneself in an unkind, critical and judgmental manner may be one way that procrastinators contribute to the stress they experience. If it is conceptualized that less self-forgiveness is taking a negative stance towards oneself then having less self-forgiveness maybe one quality that explains the negative affect the procrastinator's experience (e.g., guilt, shame etc.). In one study among undergraduates, it was found that procrastination scores were the highest for students who had moderate to low levels of self-compassion (Williams, Stark and Foster, 2008). Self-forgiveness for procrastinating may help people overcome the negative effects of procrastination.

Self-deception

Procrastination is one of the least recognized forms of self-deception. Self-deception is an unconscious tendency to see oneself in a positive light while denying information that threatens one's self. Gur and Sackeim (1978) laid down four conditions to describe self-deception. First, an individual holds contradictory beliefs. Second, these two contradictory beliefs are held simultaneously. However, the third condition provides clarification by stating that the individual must not be aware of holding one of these beliefs. Finally, the fourth condition holds that the individual must be motivated to determine which belief (s) he should be aware of and which (s) he should not notice. Self-deceivers often hold positively biased views of themselves, ignore minor criticisms, discount failures, and avoid negative thoughts.

Procrastination involves self-deception is actually one of the first findings from the science of procrastination. It not only involves deceiving oneself but also deceiving others. The standard lies are the procrastinator's excuses for delaying work on a task, followed by the empty promise that they will work on it later (Hazard and Nadeau, 2012). Self-deception often happens to preserve one's self-image and it is a mental process that operates unconsciously to reduce painful emotions (Paulhus, 1991).

Need for the study

Numerous problems appear to be associated with procrastination. Steel (2007) discovered that procrastination weakens confidence among students as well as their expectancy of completing a task; Hussain and Sultan (2010) found procrastination to cause higher stress, low self-esteem, and depression. So it is a necessity to understand how procrastination behavior is maintained and to develop interventions to break the cycle of procrastination, especially among the student population.

This study aims to investigate the relationship between self- forgiveness, self -deception, counterfactual thinking and procrastination. Research evidence claims that procrastination is linked to negative affective states such as guilt, shame, anxiety etc. Although procrastinators undergo all these negative states they sustain through it only to indulge in procrastination again. So this study aims to find how procrastinators cope with the negative affect associated with procrastination and also with an aim to understand the factors that maintain this negative behaviour style. Also, there is still a paucity of empirical research on self-forgiveness and self-deception as a predictor of procrastination and so the present study wants to address these existing gaps and contribute to the existing literature of procrastination.

Method of Investigation

Objective of the study

The study aims to find the relationship between procrastination, self-forgiveness, self- deception and counterfactual thinking among the student population.

Hypotheses

- 1) There will be no significant relationship between self-forgiveness, self-deception, counterfactual thinking and procrastination.
- 2) There will be no significant relationship between procrastination, self-forgiveness, self-deception, counterfactual thinking and affect.
- 3) Self-forgiveness and self-deception are not significant predictors of procrastination among the student population.

Research design

This is a non-experimental study using a survey method.

Variables

The independent variables are self-forgiveness, self-deception and counterfactual thinking. The dependent variables are procrastination and affect.

Method of sampling

In this study a non-probability sampling method called purposive sampling was used. A sample of 181 individuals was obtained which included 116 females and 65 males within the age range of 18-25 years and all of the respondents were students. Descriptive analysis of the sample reveals a normal distribution.

Tools used

1. General procrastination scale (Lay, 1986).

Procrastination was assessed as the score on the measure of Procrastination scale authored by Lay in 1986. It is composed of 20 items and it is self-reported five-point Likert scale. The scale takes approximately ten minutes to complete. Cronbach's alpha was reported to be $\alpha=0.85$. Construct and predictive validity has been established for the scale.

2. Self- Deception questionnaire (Gur, R. C and Sackeim, H. A, 1979)

The SDQ consists of 20 items and uses Likert type items. Positive endorsements are judged to be universally true but psychologically threatening. The questionnaire takes about ten minutes to complete. SDQ has a test-retest reliability of 0.81(4 and 10-week intervals).Several studies have attested to SDQ's construct validity (e.g., Gur and Sackeim, 1979; Paulhus, 1982; Winters and Neale, 1985)

3. Self forgiveness (Wohl et al., 2008)

Self-forgiveness for procrastinating was measured with three items. Items were anchored at 1 (strongly disagree) and 7 (strongly agree) and reverse scored so that higher scores indicated greater self-forgiveness. These three items have a reliability co-efficient of $\alpha=0.86$ (Cronbach alpha). This scale demonstrated good psychometric and discriminative properties.

4. Positive and negative affect schedule (Watson, 1988)

PANAS (Watson, 1988) comprises two mood scales, one that measures positive affect and the other which measures negative affect. It consists of 20 items and the participants are required to respond to the items using 5 point Likert scale Reliability and validity reported by Watson (1988) were moderately good.

Procedure of data collection

Standardized scales and questionnaires were used to collect the data. Digital media was used for data collection, wherein the personal data sheet, procrastination scale, self-deception questionnaire, self-forgiveness scale, counterfactual thinking for negative events scale, locus of control scale and self-esteem scale were typed out using Google forms software. The data was collected by posting the Google form on social media sites including Whatsapp Web, Facebook and private messages. The form was available for a period of one month on these digital communication channels.

Statistical analysis

Pearson's Product Moment Correlation will be used to find the strength of the relationship between procrastination, self-forgiveness, self-deception and affect.

Simple linear regression was used to identify the causal effect of self-forgiveness on positive affect.

Multiple regression will be used to find the degree of variance caused

by the independent variables such as self-forgiveness and self-deception on the dependent variable such as procrastination and affect.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Pearson's coefficient of correlation between procrastination and self-forgiveness.

Variables	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	r
Procrastination	181	61.10	10.898	0.246**
Self-forgiveness		11.64	4.78	

** $p < .01$, significant at the 0.01 level, two-tailed.

Table 2: Pearson's coefficient of correlation between procrastination and self-deception.

Variables	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	r
Procrastination	181	61.10	10.898	0.881**
Self-forgiveness		60.75	10.883	

** $p < .01$, significant at the 0.01 level, two-tailed.

Table 3: Pearson's coefficient of correlation between procrastination and positive affect.

Variables	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	r
Procrastination	181	61.10	10.898	0.072 ^{NS}
Positive affect		25.24	8.268	

NS- Not significant

Table 4: Pearson's coefficient of correlation between procrastination and negative affect.

Variables	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	r
Procrastination	181	61.10	10.898	-0.173 [*]
Negative affect		35.88	7.183	

*. $p < .05$, significant at the 0.05 level, two-tailed.

Table 5: Pearson's coefficient of correlation between self forgiveness and positive affect.

Variables	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	r
Self forgiveness	181	11.64	4.780	0.249**
Positive affect		25.24	8.268	

** $p < .01$, significant at the 0.01 level, two-tailed.

Table 6: Pearson's coefficient of correlation between self-forgiveness and negative affect.

Variables	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	r
Self forgiveness	181	11.64	4.780	-0.060 ^{NS}
Negative affect		35.88	7.183	

NS- Not significant

Table 7: Pearson's coefficient of correlation between self deception and positive affect.

Variables	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	r
Self forgiveness	181	60.75	10.883	0.042 ^{NS}
Positive affect		25.24	8.268	

NS- Not significant

Table 8: Pearson's coefficient of correlation between self deception and negative affect.

Variables	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	r
Self forgiveness	181	60.75	10.883	-0.127 [*]
Negative affect		35.88	7.183	

*. $p < .05$, significant at the 0.05 level, two-tailed.

Table 9: Summary of Simple Regression Analysis for Variable Predicting Positive affect (N=181)

Dependent variable	R ²	ANOVA	Variables loading significantly and Beta value
Positive affect	0.062	11.84**	Self-forgiveness ($\beta = 0.249$)

** $p < .01$, significant at the 0.01 level, two tailed.

A simple linear regression was calculated predicting participants degree of positive affect based on their levels of self-reported self forgiveness ($R^2 = .062$, $p < 0.01$). This model indicates that self-

forgiveness is a predictor of positive affect, with self forgiveness accounting for 6.2% of the variance in positive affect.

Table 10: Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Procrastination (N=181)

Step	Variables	β	t	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²
1	Constant			.881 ^a	.776	.775
	Self-deception	.881	24.92***			
2	Constant			.886 ^b	.784	.782
	Self-deception	.865	24.45***			
	Self-forgiveness	.092	2.603*			

* $p < 0.05$ *** $p < .001$

A stepwise regression was run to predict procrastination from self-forgiveness and self-deception. These variables significantly predicted procrastination, $F(2, 178) = 323.984$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .784$. VIF did not exceed 10 and Tolerance was not less than 0.1 for all the variables in regression. Hence multicollinearity was not present. Autocorrelation was checked for through the Durbin Watson statistic and for all the variables concerned, it was centred around a value of 2. Hence autocorrelation was not present.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed at understanding the relationship between self forgiveness, self deception, counterfactual thinking, affect and procrastination among student population.

Robust research links procrastination to negative mood states such as depression and anxiety distress), shame and guilt (Blunt and Pychyl, 2005). The current study has established a significant relationship between procrastination and negative affect. There is increasing evidence that shame and guilt were most often accompanied by chronic procrastination. The negative states associated with procrastination are linked to the negative self evaluative thoughts that procrastinators engage in. Negative ruminative thoughts which include self blame, self depreciation, brooding about past procrastination and failures emerges when there is difficulty in performing instrumental behaviors that would help complete their goals. Recalling past procrastination behavior can alone increase the feelings of anxiety, shame, guilt as well as trying to follow through with previously delayed tasks can contribute to worry and negative self evaluations. So it appears that these self evaluative thoughts are one central way through which procrastinators maintain negative mood.

The results of the current study indicate that there is a relationship between procrastination and self forgiveness. The direction of this relationship is said to be positive and from this it can be inferred that as self forgiveness increases procrastination also increases or vice versa. This study also found that self forgiveness predicts positive affect 6.2 percent of the time. So procrastinators who self forgave would experience increased positive affect. One possibility is that because self forgiveness is contingent upon recognition that harm has been done to the self, due to procrastination and so it is entitled to increase the positive affect. Since self forgiveness fosters a positive self-referent attitudinal shift, positive affect might be increased.

It has been established from this study that there is a strong relationship between procrastination and self deception. So far research has not been carried out to investigate the relationship between two factors. Procrastination involves self deception is one of the earliest findings in the field of procrastination. Lying to oneself as well as giving rational excuses for delaying work all involves self deception. Although researchers have claimed that self handicapping, a self protective strategy that procrastinators often indulge in involves self deception. So self deception entirely stems from an individual's drive to sustain positive self views, which in turn operates to reduce the negative affect linked with procrastination.

The pattern of results from the study supports that proposal that self forgiveness and self deception maybe associated with negative behavior style such as procrastination. Overall, procrastination was associated with indulgence in self deception and self forgiving oneself for delaying tasks. Procrastinators often give rationalizations or engage in lying to themselves or to others intentionally (or unintentionally) like 'I work very well under pressure' or 'Last minute work brings out the best in me' or they self forgive themselves for delaying the tasks without judging themselves harshly. Often both

these processes help procrastinators to lessen the negative affect (shame & guilt) that is most often associated with procrastination. Both self forgiveness and self deception can serve a self-enhancement function. Further, self enhancement involves the search for favorable information about the self, can occur through repairing, maintaining or protecting one's self concept. So individuals who recognize the negative consequences of failing to act in a timely manner by making perfect rationalizations (I didn't have enough time to prepare) and by forgiving themselves may have restored a positive sense of self.

Individual's preference for these self-enhancement strategies such as self forgiveness and self deception may lessen the potential for recognition of ways to correct future behavior (i.e. not delaying and taking timely action to deal with a problem). So this might maintain the cycle of procrastination, as the individuals indulge in self forgiveness and self deception that serves to maintain a positive sense of self. Both of these factors has some mood regulating trade-offs associated with procrastination as the negative affect that manifests as a result of failure to complete a task is buffered by forgiving and deceiving oneself, which in turn helps restore positive affect and prevents damage to the self image. So this will result in less thought about how to act in a timelier manner in the future. So utilization of both these strategies hinders the preparative insights for future behavior and decreases the motivation to change in turn maintaining procrastination.

Implications

The present study will help the educators, instructors, counsellors as well as the individuals who procrastinate themselves to understand the processes that maintain the procrastination behaviour as well as help the professionals to develop interventions and strategies' to overcome procrastination.

The current study will add to an emerging body of research that investigates how procrastinators cope with the negative affect which they experience from time to time. Therefore this study has implications for understanding the coping and adjustment processes of the procrastinators.

This study offers a preliminary glimpse of the outcomes that might be associated with engaging in self forgiveness, self deception, and counterfactual thinking patterns and how these processes may be linked to the negative self defeating behavior style, procrastination.

Limitations

The study has a few limitations which are discussed below.

The sample size employed in this study was limited to 181 respondents. So the sample size and composition could be increased for more reliable results. It should also be noted that the three items which were used to measure self forgiveness were negatively worded. Although, the scale has high internal consistency and face validity, the research would benefit from an item that directly asks respondents if they self forgive for their procrastination behaviour.

Future Directions

The study could be done as an intervention research. The at risk students identified could be exposed to intervention programs like workshops, psycho-education programs and CBT that provides insight into how self forgiving and well as self deceiving themselves help maintain procrastination. The study can include qualitative data' such as interviews and record observations in order to understand the how exactly these specific factors contribute to the maintenance of procrastination.

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