

Perceptions of Procrastination among In-group and Out-group College Majors¹

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The present study focused on perceptions of procrastination and how they relate to stereotypes of procrastination according to academic major; specifically, how students viewed procrastination of psychology majors versus non-psychology majors. Psychology and non-psychology students from a small college in Western Pennsylvania volunteered to respond to the survey. Participants rated themselves and people outside their major on levels of procrastination. It was predicted that psychology majors, who should be more knowledgeable about human behavior, would rate procrastination equally regardless of major. Non-psychology majors who are likely to lack the same insights into human nature should show the typical in-group/out-group effect.

Introduction

Ackerman and Gross (2005) wrote that all studies that have been performed have found that procrastination results in lowered grades, the capacity to learn diminishes, and even the outlook on life can diminish. Researchers have been unable to agree on a definition of procrastination, but they have been able to agree that all definitions share a delaying of a task (Ozer, Demir, & Ferrari, 2009). Procrastination in classroom settings seems to be a problem among college students, and close to seventy percent of college students procrastinate (Ozer et al., 2009).

Diaz-Morales, Ferrair, and Cohen (2008) experimented with time-orientation in their study in 2008. Time-orientation is bested explained by Diaz-Morales et al; whether the person is in the morning, evening, past, present, or future. Diaz-Morales et al. (2008) used three different types of Likert scales to conduct their research; they added questions that contained similar meanings. A Likert scale is a five to seven point survey that associates a number value with a word based meaning. These questionnaires were designed to test procrastination. Diaz-Morales et al. also administered an evaluation designed for time orientation to test if the participants were more or less likely to participate at certain times of the day. They found that men procrastinate more than women and that time-orientation has a relationship with this finding.

Bui (2007) conducted a study with seventy-two students on the topic of academic procrastination. This is the same topic that Daiz-Morales et al. (2008) were trying to find support for. Bui used three different tests, including a Likert and procrastination scale to record his test results. Bui (2007) used three levels for his experiment, one group was placed in a high stress conditions, the second in low stress conditions and the third were placed under neutral conditions. Interestingly Bui (2007) discovered that they high trait procrastinators in the high stress condition took the longest to complete the assigned paper. Bui believes that this is because this group chose to self-preserve themselves in the eyes of the examiners.

Ackerman and Gross (2005) both tested classes during the normal scheduled time, because of this they received one-hundred percent participation. Ackerman and Gross (2005) found that students with lower levels of procrastination find more interest in school work than students with higher levels of procrastination. It should also be noted that there was not a noticeably important change in the difficulty of the assignment and the how often the participant self-reported their procrastination (Ackerman & Gross, 2005). Lee (2005) created a study specifically focusing on motivation and procrastination. Lee worked with college kids from South Korea, and sampled enough to fill all the majors at the university. Lee translated the procrastination scale from English to

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Korean and used the Likert scales to rate procrastination. Lee found data to support the hypotheses that motivation can be linked to procrastination; higher motivation can decrease procrastination whereas lower motivation can increase procrastination. Lee (2005) defined higher motivation as someone who has plotted goals and is not self-conscious and lower motivation as someone who does not have clear goals, could not concentrate, and was self-conscious. Lee continued to say that this effect can be used by teachers to help decrease the amount of procrastination in their classrooms.

Group relations are an important aspect in human life. We tend to group ourselves in different groups based on characteristics and traits that we have in common, Baumeister and Bushman (2008) refer to this as social categorization. Baumeister and Bushman define two types of groups, out-group and in-group. The out-group is people who do not belong to our category and the in-group is those individuals that belong to our characteristics, Baumeister and Bushman (2008). This study will be testing to see if out-group homogeneity bias will be attributed to procrastination. Out-group homogeneity bias is as defined by Baumeister and Bushman (2008) when members of an in-group assume that the members that belong to an out-group are more similar to one another than they really are. This can relate to procrastination because procrastination can be one of those categories that individuals identify with. An individual it is possible for an individual to attribute their own procrastination to their in-group.

The present study will examine views of procrastination toward other majors from the perspective of comparing in-groups and out-groups. It is hypothesized that because the psychology students know that procrastination is a universal trait they will self-report that there is no difference between the amount of time that they procrastinate and the amount of time that non-psychology students procrastinate. It is also hypothesized that non-psychology majors will report that individuals in their major procrastinate less than psychology majors because the psychology majors are outside of their in-group.

Method

Participants

In this study 99 college-aged students enrolled in a General Psychology class at a small university in south western Pennsylvania participated for bonus points. Because General Psychology is a university core course, volunteers represented multiple different majors.

Design

This was a mixed design study because major (psychology; other) was manipulated between subjects while groups represented in the procrastination survey were equivalent for all subjects (my major, myself, psychology major). Procrastination was measured by how students rated their responses to the survey items using a five-point Likert scale.

Materials

The procrastination survey contained twenty questions that related to the view of the test taker on procrastination and three questions to categorize the participants into groups by major (see appendix). Two of these questions are specifically about psychology students and will be used to compare to see where the majors view psychology students on the continuum. To improve the likelihood that participants would be honest, eight of the questions were reverse scored.

Procedure

Participants were presented with the procrastination survey in class-sized groups. The students were instructed not to place their names on the survey so that their responses would remain anonymous. Participants were then instructed to place their major on the paper and answer the questions as honestly as possible. The survey took about five minutes to complete and was administered at the beginning of class.

Results

As may be seen in Table 1, the data demonstrated that psychology majors were very consistent in their ratings of procrastination habits (no significant differences among the means). However, non-psychology majors showed a significant difference in procrastination ratings between themselves and others in their major, $t(97) = 3.36$, $p < .01$, as well as themselves and

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psychology majors, $t(97) = 3.56, p < .01$. No other differences were significant.

Table 1. Procrastination means for all conditions.

<u>Group</u>	Psychology Major	Self	My Major
Psychology Major	40.2	40.0	43.0
Other Major	40.1	35.1	41.5

Discussion

There was a significant difference between mean procrastination scores of self and own major as well as self and psychology major for the non-psychology participants. These particular outcomes were not predicted for this group. The non-psychology participants reported that they procrastinated significantly less than students in their own major. This demonstrates a self-serving bias. No differences occurred between the self-reports of psychology participants compared with their own major (regardless of how that was asked: “own major” vs. “psychology major”). This outcome was predicted and supports the consistency with which psychology majors responded to the questions.

No in-group or out-group differences were observed between non-psychology and psychology groups. This outcome is surprising; however it could be explained as partially due to survey bias because the survey was clearly created to measure aspects of the psychology major. Participants may have felt pressure to respond favorably to questions about psychology majors despite the anonymity of the survey. Psychology major results supported the prediction that they would show no difference in the levels of procrastination. This outcome is attributed to the likelihood that psychology major’s are more sensitive to issue of

behavior such as procrastination and in-group/out-group bias.

The present study does not support the idea that out-group homogeneity bias has any effect on perceptions of procrastination. However, the limitations of the survey may have prevented the research to clearly rule out possible effects. Future studies should take greater care to mask the intentions of the study in the survey. This could be done either by introducing filler items, as well as providing more balance to all majors among the procrastination items.

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