

Impact of Self Esteem and Procrastination on Self Handicapping Behavior of College Students

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the role of self-esteem and procrastination in predicting self-handicapping behavior among college students. A sample of 150 undergraduate students (75 males and 75 females) aged 18-25 years from colleges of Hisar completed measures of self-esteem, procrastination, and self-handicapping. The findings reveal significant negative correlations between self esteem and procrastination ($r=-0.45$, $p<0.01$) as well as between self esteem and self handicapping ($r=-0.52$, $p<0.0$), however significant positive correlation was found between procrastination and self handicapping behavior ($r=0.60$, $p<0.0$) of the subjects. Multiple regression analysis revealed significant main effects of both self-esteem and procrastination on self-handicapping behavior. Furthermore, self-esteem moderated the relationship between procrastination and self-handicapping, such that the effect of procrastination was stronger for students with low self-esteem. These findings underscore the importance of addressing both psychological and behavioral factors in academic support interventions.

Keywords: Self-Esteem, Procrastination, Self-Handicapping, Academic Behavior.

Jones and Berglas (1978) asserted that individuals may purposefully, though not necessarily consciously, engage in behavior designed to affect performance attributions. This behavior, labeled "self-handicapping," involves "any action or choice of performance setting that enhances the opportunity to externalize (or excuse) failure and to internalize (reasonably accept credit for) success" (Berglas & Jones, 1978, p. 406). In other words, Self-handicapping is a self-protective strategy where individuals create obstacles or excuses to avoid potential failure, thereby protecting their self-image (Jones & Berglas, 1978). If a self-handicapping person performs poorly, then the failure can be attributed to the performance impediment rather than the person's ability or competence. On the other hand, if the self-handicapping person performs well, then he creates the impression of being especially competent and talented, because success was achieved despite obstacles.

Two psychological factors closely associated with self-handicapping are **self-esteem** and **procrastination**. **Self-esteem** reflects a person's overall sense of self-worth or personal value. Self-esteem, the degree to which individuals evaluate themselves positively or negatively, has been widely associated with self-handicapping behaviors. suggest that individuals with low self-esteem use more claimed self-handicaps because they have lower self-confidence (Gillaume et.al.,2011; Coudevylle et.al., 2011). Students with low self-esteem tend to doubt their competence and are more likely to engage in self-handicapping to externalize failure (Baumeister, 1997; Rhodewalt, 2008). Conversely, students with high self-esteem may have more confidence in their capacity to succeed and thus are less inclined to rely on such maladaptive strategies. Contrary to these studies some researchers found that people with high self-esteem self-handicapped more (e.g., Tice & Baumeister, 1990), while others revealed that people with low self-esteem are more prone to self-handicapping (Prapavessis & Grove, 1998). Martin and Brawley (2002) interpreted these inconsistent findings as that people with both high and low self-esteem use self-handicapping strategies with different purposes. Tice (1991) reported that self-handicapping is driven more often by self enhancement in case of high self-esteem, and self protection in the case of low self-esteem.

Procrastination, a tendency to put off or avoid starting and completing a task (Tuckman, 1991), is not only a time management issue but also a self-regulatory failure. Studies have shown a strong positive correlation between procrastination and self-handicapping, suggesting that procrastination may function as a form of self-sabotage (Ferrari & Tice, 2000). Procrastination allows students to attribute failure to lack of effort or time rather than to an inherent lack of ability (Steel, 2007), thereby protecting self-worth. Both procrastination and self-handicapping serve as self-protective but ultimately self-defeating mechanisms. In a meta-analysis study, van Eerde (2003) examined correlates of procrastination and found that the highest positive correlation was between procrastination and self-handicapping. She inferred that this high correlation may stem from the fact that these constructs are overlapping.

While both self-esteem and procrastination independently predict self-handicapping, the interactive effect between these two variables is less well understood. It is possible that self-esteem moderates the effect of procrastination on self-handicapping, such that procrastination has a stronger impact on self-handicapping among individuals with low self-esteem.

Keeping this in mind present study aims to:

1. To explore the relationship among self-esteem, procrastination and self-handicapping in college students.
2. To investigate the effect of self-esteem and procrastination on self-handicapping behavior of the college students.

METHOD

Research Design:- This study employs a quantitative, correlational research design using multiple linear regression analysis to examine the effects of self-esteem and procrastination on self-handicapping behavior among college students. An interaction term will also be tested to explore whether self-esteem moderates the relationship between procrastination and self-handicapping.

Sample:-The sample of the study consisted of 150 undergraduate students (75 females and 75 males) from the colleges of Hisar city of Haryana. Inclusion criteria includes

- Age between 18 and 25 years
- Currently enrolled in a college
- Able to provide informed consent

TOOLS

1. Self-Esteem Scale by Rosenberg (1965) : A 10-item scale measuring global self-worth. Responses are rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 4 = Strongly Agree). Higher scores indicate higher self-esteem.

2. General Procrastination Scale by Lay (1986): A 20-item self-report scale assessing tendencies to delay tasks. Rated on a 5-point scale (1 = Extremely uncharacteristic to 5 = Extremely characteristic). Higher scores reflect more frequent procrastination ($\alpha = .82$).

3. Self-Handicapping Scale (Jones & Rhodewalt, 1982): A 25-item measure evaluating behavioral and claimed self-handicapping strategies. Uses a 6-point Likert scale (1 = Disagree very much to 6 = Agree very much). Higher the score higher tendencies of self handicapping.

Procedure:- After establishing the rapport, the purpose of the study was explained to each of the subjects individually. The respondents were asked to fill the questionnaire according to instructions and were assured that their responses would be kept confidential. Participation took approximately 10 minutes. Data were collected securely and anonymously.

Statistical Analysis:- Present study aimed to investigate relationship among self esteem, procrastination and self handicapping behavior of the college students. Data was analyzed using SPSS software. Mean and SD for the variables were calculated, Pearson Correlation was used for assessing correlation among variables and Multiple linear regression analysis was employed for assessing main and interaction effect of the variables.

RESULTS

Initially, the descriptive statistics was checked, which is presented in table I. The mean score of self-esteem was 23.60 with a standard deviation of 5.42. The mean score of the procrastination was 61.30 with a standard deviation of 8.15. The mean score of self handicapping was 76.80 with a standard deviation of 10.21.

Further relationship among variables was assessed with Pearson product moment correlation method, result shows that there exists significant negative correlation ($r=-.45, p<.01$) between self esteem and procrastination, means higher the self esteem lower will be procrastination tendencies. Similarly significantly negative relationship has been found between self esteem and self handicapping ($r=-.52, p<.01$), which denotes a person with high self esteem will demonstrate low self handicapping. In the study significant positive correlation has been found between procrastination and self handicapping behavior ($r=.60, p<.01$).

Table I: Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Self-Esteem	23.60	5.42	—		
2. Procrastination	61.30	8.15	-.45**	—	
3. Self-Handicapping	76.80	10.21	-.52**	.60**	—

**p<.01

For further analysis, multiple regression analysis was done. The regression model predicting self-handicapping was found significant, $F(3, 146) = 32.40$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .40$, indicating that 40% of the variance in self-handicapping behavior was accounted for by the predictors.

Table II: Multiple Regression Analysis

Predictor	B	SE B	B	t	P
Intercept	30.42	3.25	—	9.36	<.001
Self-Esteem (binary: Low = 1)	6.75	1.22	.34	5.53	<.001
Procrastination	0.62	0.09	.48	6.89	<.001
Self-Esteem × Procrastination	0.25	0.09	.18	2.78	.006

The result suggests (table II) that self esteem and procrastination both independently are significant predictor of self handicapping, where low self esteem contributes 34% , procrastination also has 48% role as a predictor variable for self handicapping in this study. The interactional effect is also found significant predictor here as low self esteem and procrastination together contribute 18% for self handicapping.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to examine how well self esteem, procrastination and self handicapping are correlated with each other. The results reveal significant relationship among the variables. The findings of present study support main and interactional effects of self esteem and procrastination on self handicapping behavior of the college students. Both the variables have emerged as significant predictors of self-handicapping behavior, and self-esteem moderated the relationship between procrastination and self-handicapping.

Self esteem and Procrastination

The results indicated a significant negative correlation between self esteem and procrastination. The findings are consistent with many other studies where it has been found that procrastination is related to low self-esteem, either as a determinant or a consequence. However, the negative correlation is assumed to be between self-esteem and procrastination. (van Eerde W,2003; Salim & Rafique, 2012; Jayakumar et. al., 2016; Batool et.al., 2017). Flett et. al. (1991) proposed that procrastinators suffer from low self-esteem that results in a general tendency to engage in behaviors like task delay and avoidance, that protect self-presentation by providing an excuse for poor performance and negative outcomes. Procrastination serves as an ego protecting mechanism, which is used as a defensive device by people with low self-esteem (Burka & Yuen, 1983; Tice, 1991).

Self Esteem and Self Handicapping

The results of the present study show negative correlation between self esteem and self handicapping behavior . Self esteem has been found strong predictor for handicapping behavior in this study, which may be explained as individuals with a low self-esteem have higher expectations of failure than those with high self-esteem, they are more likely to adopt self-handicapping strategies as a defense mechanism (Baumeister, 1997). Accordingly, the former will use self-handicapping strategies more often with the aim of justifying their potential failures (Tice & Baumeister, 1990;Prapavessis & Grove, 1998). In addition, they need to receive more positive criticism or become more motivated so as to avoid negative criticism. In this way, they employ self-handicapping strategies more often in order to protect or boost their self-esteem levels (Tice & Baumeister, 1990) where individuals with high self-esteem tend to take responsibility for success and failure alike, reducing the need to self-handicap (Rhodewalt, 2008). Yavuzer (2015) also found that cognitive distortions (self-criticism, self-blame, hopelessness, and preoccupation with danger) and self-esteem significantly predicted self-handicapping tendencies. Though self esteem did not have a mediator role on the relationship but high levels of cognitive distortions (self-criticism, self-blame, hopelessness, and preoccupation with danger) were related to a high self-handicapping tendency for teacher candidates with low self-esteem.

Procrastination and Self Handicapping

In the study procrastination also has been found significantly correlated with self handicapping behavior of the college students and found to be a strong positive predictor of self-handicapping. Students who reported higher procrastination tendencies were more likely to engage in self-handicapping behaviors. This supports earlier findings (e.g., Ferrari & Tice, 2000; Steel, 2007) that identify procrastination as both a behavioral form of self-handicapping and a manifestation of self-regulation failure. Delaying tasks allows individuals to attribute poor performance to lack of time rather than lack of ability, thus safeguarding self-worth. In a study conducted by Akca (2012) a positively significant relationship was determined between self-handicapping, the external locus of control and academic procrastination. Similarly Zandieh and Jafariharandi (2020) found that academic procrastination has a direct and significant relationship with self-handicapping and neuroticism and extraversion.

Interaction effect of Self Esteem and Procrastination

Regression analysis of the data reveals that self esteem and procrastination together account for self handicapping behavior . The significant interaction between self-esteem and procrastination indicates that the effect of procrastination on self-handicapping is stronger among students with low self-esteem. In other words, procrastination may be particularly damaging — or more likely to be used as a self-handicapping strategy — when self-esteem is low. This suggests that self-esteem acts as a buffer, reducing the likelihood that procrastinators will also self-handicap if their self-worth is intact. This finding is supported by the study of Barutçu and Demir (2019) where the procrastination, test anxiety, self-esteem, and self-compassion, all of the predictor variables significantly contributed in explaining self-handicapping in university students. This finding contributes to the literature by emphasizing the moderating role of self-esteem, supporting the Self-Worth Theory (Covington, 1984) indicating that procrastination may be used more defensively when self-worth is already threatened. Theoretically, students with low self-esteem who also procrastinate are especially vulnerable to self-handicapping, using procrastination not just as a time management issue but as a psychological buffer. High self-esteem may moderate the negative effects of procrastination by fostering resilience and internal motivation. In his study Ferrari (1991) assumed that possibly procrastinators self handicap their performance to protect social and self-esteems, under certain conditions. Also, procrastinators may try to protect their social-esteem by not handicapping in a situation of public performance on highly diagnostic tasks. Furthermore, self-esteem seemed to be an important variable for procrastination and self-handicapping.

CONCLUSION

The following conclusions have been extracted from the findings of study: self esteem has significant inverse correlation with procrastination and self handicapping behavior of college students whereas procrastination and self handicapping behavior are found positively correlated . Further self esteem and procrastination has been found as significant predictors of self handicapping behavior of an individual in present study, interaction effect of both variables is also found significant where low self esteem along with procrastination predict handicapping behavior.

Implications

This study highlights the crucial role of self-esteem and procrastination in predicting self-handicapping behavior among college students. Importantly, the interaction between these two variables underscores the need for holistic interventions that address both time management and self-worth to foster healthier academic behaviors and outcomes. Programs that target procrastination and promote self-esteem may reduce self-handicapping behavior and improve academic success.

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