

To what extent is procrastination an emotion regulation strategy

Summary by: Riddhi Jain

Date: September 2022

Professor: Professor Aimee Knupsky

About the Student: Riddhi is a student at Mayor World School Jalandhar, India

This paper was prepared by Riddhi as a part of her course work for LS190 - Introduction to College Level Research course at Allegheny College during summer 2022.

SUMMARY

The question 'To what extent is procrastination an emotion regulation strategy' has left me wondering how procrastination and emotion regulation are even connected to each other! In this paper we will first discuss what procrastination is, then what we mean by emotion regulation strategy, how it is related to procrastination and, at last we will be talking about how we regulate our emotions with the help of procrastination every day without even knowing.

So, what do we understand by the term **Procrastination**? Not many people understand the exact meaning of procrastination and there are many different definitions of it. In my opinion procrastination means the act of postponing the task in hand because we simply do not wish to do it or are not comfortable in doing it at the moment. Some people procrastinate by Precrastinating(Pre-Crastination David A. Rosenbaum, Lanyon Gong, Cory Adam Potts)

The main reason of procrastinating is that we think that there is always tomorrow to finish the task hence the reason we prolong the said task. The cause of procrastination is classified into three categories.

First, the **emotions class** under which individuals succeed in time constrained situations and interpret such conditions as challenging and exciting. Second, **avoiders** who leave things because of their low self-efficacy to reduce anxiety. Third **decisional procrastinators**, who are unable to make decisions at a specific timeframe and procrastinate due to their limited decision-making skill (Ferrari 2000). Procrastinating causes many health issues related to heart because the result of procrastinating is stress, the stress to complete the task on the due date or the stress to face the consequences of not doing the task.

Now that we have a general idea of what procrastination is, why we procrastinate and what are its affects let us discuss about emotion regulation.

Emotion regulation, as the name suggests is an act of regulating your emotion. Meaning that when you do not wish to feel a certain kind of emotion you practice different kind of techniques to not feel the said emotion such as suppression and repression. People unconsciously use emotion regulation strategies to cope with inconvenient situations many times throughout the day.

Emotion regulation is done through the Process Model by James J. Gross which includes (i)selection of the situation, (ii) modification of the situation, (iii) attention deployment, (iv)cognitive changes, and (v) response modification.

You must be thinking, what is the **connection** between **Procrastination and Emotion regulation**?

Well, Procrastination is associated with experiences of persistent stress and negative emotions, including anxiety, distress, depression, and hopelessness. Procrastination is a form of emotion regulation in my opinion because we regulate our emotions when they are undesirable, and we do not wish to feel those emotions similarly we procrastinate because we do not wish to do the task given to us or we procrastinate because we know the said task is going to bring us undesirable emotions. For example- when you are told to give a presentation you start to feel nervous, or you feel anxiety, you know that when you give the presentation, you are going to start feeling this emotion, so you procrastinate by not giving the presentation and not allowing yourself to feel emotions like anxiety or the fear of failure.

[Steel](#) considers procrastination as a dysfunctional, emotional driven self-regulation. In his view, procrastinators consider themselves unable to change the situation, and thus, instead of focusing on the task, they turn their attention to their emotions and emotional responses. In other words, they choose the emotion-oriented style instead of the task-oriented style which resulted in postponing the aversive tasks. (Steel, P. (2007a)) When an individual confronts a task that is viewed as aversive, difficult, or boring, he/she experiences negative emotions (Solomon And Roth Blum,1984). In such circumstances, the procrastinator tries to get rid of these emotions as soon as possible by avoiding tasks or procrastination. Studies revealed that students' anxiety and emotion can be predictable through their ER strategies, especially during exams (Capa-Aydin, Sungur & Uzuntiryaki, 2009). Failure to successfully regulate emotions are the underlying mechanism of anxiety (Campbell-Sills & Barlow, 2007). Moreover, some researchers believe that negative emotion is an essential antecedent to procrastination; therefore, ER is an effective function of procrastination.

If we want to have a better understanding of how emotion regulation and procrastination are connected to each other, we can do so by using the Gross Model of Emotion Regulation (James J Gross 2015)

The process model given by Gross helps us to understand that each different strategy that we use in a situation where we feel the need to regulate our different emotions have different outcomes of how a person feels thinks, and acts, both immediately and over the longer term. Using different emotion regulation strategies does not just influence the person who is performing emotion regulation, it influences everyone around them.

Now, we will be talking about one of the emotion regulation strategies which is- **situation selection**. Situation selection strategy is an act of not putting ourselves in a situation where we might feel an emotion we wish to not feel, meaning – to not be in a situation or avoid a

situation which brings out an undesirable emotion. Situation selection is one of the most common emotion regulation strategies which are used very often by people. Situation selection

strategies help you to regulate your emotions without feeling it before.

In procrastination, we also change the situation we are in, so we do not feel the emotion just as we do in situation selection. If we take an example of a child who received an email about his collage application he will feel nervous about opening and seeing the said mail. He will procrastinate by doing some other work or putting himself in a different situation all together. From this example we can see how this child has regulated his emotion(nervousness) with the help of procrastination and situation selection strategy.

Now that we have had a little information about both situation selection strategy and procrastination you will be able to see how **procrastination is a form of emotion regulation strategy**. Procrastination is a great example of emotion regulation strategy because we do it without even realising or we do it with another motive. Procrastination is intrinsic emotion regulation but sometimes it can be extrinsic as well because as we have read that situation selection and procrastination not only affect us, but they also effect the people around us. Intrinsic emotion regulation is when you yourself regulate your emotions, also known as self-emotion regulation. We can say that procrastination is an intrinsic emotion regulation strategy because we ourselves are procrastinating and changing the situation we are in so that we can regulate the undesired emotion. In all the above examples we can see that we ourselves are regulating our emotions by procrastinating.

We as students perform the act of procrastination more often than we think, this term is known as **Academic Procrastination**. We practice academic procrastination when we have to give a presentation or complete our homework. Procrastination factors are situational and personal. A high volume of homework and inappropriate time management are among the

major situational factors of academic procrastination (Hussain & Sultan, 2010); fear of failure, depression, and anxiety are among the relevant personal factors. If we talk about **anxiety**, it is directly related to procrastination, which provides a detrimental effect on students' mental health and academic performance; such an impact is created by negative cognitive evaluation and severe physiological reactions (Afshari & Hashemi, 2019). Students with anxiety experience unpleasant moods, physiological arousals, and anxious thoughts (Pekran, Frenzel, Goetz & Perry, 2006) before giving a presentation; therefore, they tend to leave the situation and are more prone to present procrastination. From this we can also see that students with anxiety are practicing procrastination as an emotion regulation strategy, as they did not want to feel these unpleasant moods, so they left the situation they are in letting them regulate their emotions by procrastinating and situation selection strategy. Case with different emotions such as nervousness, fear of failure, fear of disappointment is quite similar to this. Many of these emotions are regulated while giving a presentation or while doing something you are not sure about.

So, we have all understood that 'To what level is Procrastination an ER strategy.' We have concluded that procrastination is a form of situation selection which is one of the five ways by which we can regulate our emotions. Procrastinating is only temporary and so is emotion regulation because in the end you do have to face the said situation and that is inevitable. Procrastination as well as emotion regulation are both boon and a bane, it is necessary sometimes to regulate your emotions and procrastinate whereas sometimes it is just because of unpleasant habits.

There has not been any research, yet which says that procrastination really is an ER strategy. This research can go further into finding more factual statements proving how they are both connected to each other by conducting some experiments where they are provided with situations where they have to both procrastinate as well as regulate their emotions, in my opinion that will provide a better and a cleared idea on how procrastination is a form of emotion regulation strategy.

REFERENCES

Rosenbaum DA, Gong L, Potts CA. Pre-Crastination: Hastening Subgoal Completion at the Expense of Extra Physical Effort. *Psychological Science*. 2014;25(7):1487-1496. doi:10.1177/0956797614532657

Mohammadi Bytamar, J., Saed, O., & Khakpoor, S. (2020). Emotion regulation difficulties and academic procrastination. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 9. doi:https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.524588

Nouri, N. P., Asheghi, M., Asheghi, M., & Hesari, M. (2021). Mediation role of emotion regulation between procrastination, psychological wellbeing, and life satisfaction in the elderly. *Journal of Practice in Clinical Psychology*, 9(2), 111-119. Retrieved from <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/mediation-role-emotion-regulation-between/docview/2674429410/se-2>

Rezaei, S., & Zebardast, A. (2021). The mediating role of cognitive emotion regulation strategies on mindfulness, anxiety, and academic procrastination in high schoolers. *Journal of Practice in Clinical Psychology*, 9(2), 133-142. doi:https://doi.org/10.32598/jpcp.9.2.731.1

Ferrari, J. R. (2000). Procrastination and attention: Factor analysis of attention deficit, boredomness, intelligence, selfesteem, and task delay frequencies. *Journal of Social Behavior & Personality*, 15(5), 185-96

Steel, P. (2007a). The nature of procrastination: a meta-analytic and theoretical review of quintessential self-regulatory failure. *Psychol. Bull.* 133:65. doi: 10. 1037/0033-2909.133.1.65

Solomon, L. J., & Rothblum, E. D. (1984). Academic procrastination: Frequency and cognitive-behavioral correlates. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 31(4), 503–509. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.31.4.503>

[Sirois, F. and Pychyl, T. \(2013\), Procrastination and the Priority of Short-Term Mood Regulation: Consequences for Future Self. Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 7: 115-127. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12011>](#)

[Campbell-Sills, L., & Barlow, D. H. \(2007\). Incorporating emotion regulation into conceptualizations and treatments of anxiety and mood disorders. In J. J. Gross \(Ed.\), Handbook of emotion regulation \(pp. 542-559\). New York: Guilford Press.](#)

[Capa-Aydin, Y., Sungur, S., & Uzuntiryaki, E. \(2009\). Teacher self-regulation: Examining a multidimensional construct. Educational Psychology, 29\(3\), 345-56.](#)

[James J. Gross \(1999\) Emotion Regulation: Past, Present, Future, Cognition & Emotion, 13:5, 551-573, DOI: 10.1080/026999399379186](#)

[James J. Gross \(2015\) Emotion Regulation: Current Status and Future Prospects, Psychological Inquiry, 26:1, 1-26, DOI: 10.1080/1047840X.2014.940781](#)

[Hussain, I., & Sultan, S. \(2010\). Analysis of procrastination among university students. Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 5, 1897-904](#)

[Afshari, A., & Hashemi, Z. \(2019\). \[The relationship between anxiety sensitivity and metacognitive beliefs and test anxiety among students \(Persian\)\]. Journal of School Psychology, 8\(1\), 7-25](#)

[Pekrun, R., Frenzel, A. C., Goetz, T., & Perry, R. P. \(2007\). The control-value theory of achievement emotions: An integrative approach to emotions in education. In P. A. Schutz, & R. Pekrun \(Eds.\), Emotion in education: Educational psychology \(pp. 13-36\). Cambridge, MA: Academic Press.](#)