

# The Effects of Procrastination and Self-Awareness on Emotional Self-Regulation

Lauren Nicholson  
Stephen F. Austin State University

## Background

The first independent variable was Procrastination. Past research has suggested two main reasons for why students procrastinate. First, fear of failure, and second, task aversiveness Solomon and Rothblum (1984, as cited in Ferrari et al; 1995)

The second independent variable was Self-awareness, which is defined as attention focused inward (Scheier & Carver, 1977). An important extension of early self-awareness research by Scheier and Carver (1977) suggested that "self-awareness clarifies internal states such as attitudes, sensations, and emotions. As a result, emotions should be more salient, and subjectively experienced more intensely, when attention is focused on the self."

The dependent variable was Self-regulation which is termed as the process by which people control or alter their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors (Oaten & Cheng, 2005). Oaten and Cheng (2005) found that when people who were under academic stress reported breakdowns in regulatory behavior that were not seen in the control group of the experiment.

The current experiment investigated how a person's emotions were affected by procrastination and being self-aware in a stress (frustration) inducing situation.

## Design and Hypotheses

I implemented a 2 (Procrastination) x 2 (Self-Awareness) between subjects factorial design. Procrastination (IV #1) consisted of two levels: less chronic and chronic as measured using a standardized survey. Self-Awareness (IV #2) also consisted of two levels: high and low. The high self-awareness condition was represented by the presence of a mirror, while in the low self-awareness condition there was no mirror present, only a poster on the wall. The dependent variable was emotional self-regulation.

### Hypothesis #1

Those who were chronic procrastinators in the high self-awareness condition with a mirror present would score most negatively on the Measuring Internal Emotion Questionnaire.

### Hypothesis #2

Regardless of procrastination level, those in the low self-awareness condition without a mirror present would score more positively on the Measuring Internal Emotion Questionnaire.

## References

- Oaten, M., & Cheng, K. (2005). Academic examination stress impairs self control. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 24*(2), 254-279.
- Scheier, M. F., & Carver, C. S. (1977). Self-focused attention and the experience of emotion: Attraction, repulsion, elation, and depression. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 35*(9), 625-636.
- Ferrari, J. R., Johnson, J. L., & McCown, W. (1995). *Procrastination and task avoidance: theory, research, and treatment*. New York: Plenum Press.

## Methods

•Participants = 49 college students recruited from the Psychology Department at Stephen F. Austin State University

•Procrastination was assessed using a modified version of Aitken's Academic Procrastination Scale (APS, 1982). The modified version consisted of 11 of the original 19 questions interspersed among a larger body of 30 other items. Scores falling in the range of 33 to 55 will be an indication of chronic procrastination while scores falling in the range from 11 to 32 signified an individual as being a less chronic procrastinator.

•Self-Awareness was represented by the presence or absence of a mirror.

•High self-awareness = mirror present  
•Low self-awareness = no mirror present, only a poster

Emotional state was assessed using Diener and Emmons' Composite Affect Scale (1985, as cited in Pychyl et al., 2000). This scale consists of nine adjectives which were rated by the participants on a seven-point Likert scale (1=not at all to 7=extremely much). Four adjectives (happy, joyful, pleased and enjoyment/fun) represented a positive affect. The other five adjectives (depressed, unhappy, frustrated, angry/hostile and worried/anxious) represented the negative affect. The difference score was then taken by subtracting the average negative score from the average positive score.

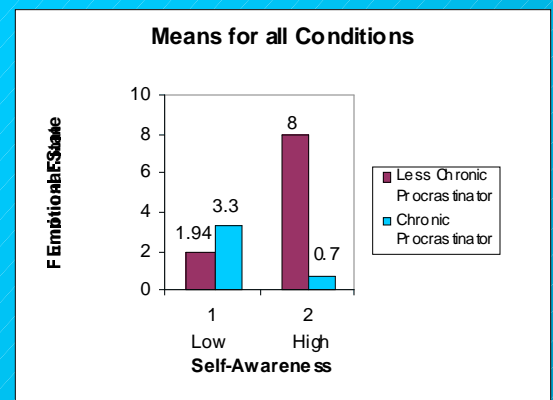
## Procedure

- Participants were given the informed consent
- Participants were given the Student Characteristics questionnaire
- Participants were then given an anagram task in which they were given 8 minutes complete, but told that it usually took only 3 to 4 (Anagrams arranged by increasing difficulty, with one being impossible)
- Participants were also informed that they would be entered into a drawing for a \$50 gas card if they finished the task
- Students were then ushered to their testing room which contained either a poster (low self-awareness condition) or a mirror (high self-awareness condition)
- Participants began to work on the anagram task
- 4 minutes into the 8 minute period a loud and interesting pre-planned conversation took place to allow for distraction
- After the eight minutes ended the researcher came by to pick up the anagram tasks and hand out the Measuring Internal Emotion Questionnaire
- The participants filled out the Measuring Internal Emotion Questionnaire

•They received a debriefing form which informed them of the fictitious conversation and that there was a real drawing that they will be entered into

## Results

- A 2 (procrastination) x 2 (self-awareness) ANOVA showed
- no significant main effects for procrastination or self-awareness
- Gender and emotional self-regulation did not correlate,  $r(48) = 0.06$ ;  $p > 0.05$  so no covariate was included in ANOVA
- A nearly significant interaction was found between procrastination and self-awareness  $F(1,48) = 3.75$ ,  $p = .06$ . A trend was found in the high self-awareness condition. Refer to the graph means for all conditions.



## Discussion

As predicted, chronic procrastinators in the high self-awareness condition with a mirror present reported more negatively. The results may suggest that a chronic procrastinator's mood may be affected negatively when made aware of their emotional state. The results upheld the "salience hypothesis" which states that a person's emotions become more apparent through self-awareness.

Unlike what was predicted, the less chronic procrastinators in the high self-awareness condition, with a mirror present, reported most positively. This possibly suggest that less chronic procrastinators are better at regulating their emotions when under stressful situations.

## Future Research

Future research should investigate different sources/types of self-awareness, the effects on positive or negative emotional salience, and which sources have the largest influence on emotional salience.