Academic Procrastination within High School Students

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Abstract

Rising levels of academic procrastination in high school students pose risks beyond academic performance, as they can negatively affect student mental health, wellness, and overall quality of life. Research within the high school student population in the United States remains limited. The existing literature predominantly focuses on university populations mostly outside of the US. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by investigating the contributing factors to academic procrastination among high school students in Calabasas, California. Student participants were asked to complete a survey, along with the 2011 Academic Procrastination Scale--Short Form. Utilizing a mixed-method correlational design, data was collected and analyzed. The objective of the study was to examine the correlation between academic procrastination and four specific variables: perfectionism, self-efficacy, disinterest in topic, and class rigor. Results found academic procrastination present in 95.8% of participants and demonstrated that perfectionism and high levels of disinterest are significant contributors. The findings also found a positive correlation between low self efficacy and delays in academic work. These outcomes reiterate the importance of understanding these factors in order to develop psychoeducational programs that enhance self-efficacy and productivity, as well as strategies to manage perfectionistic tendencies. The findings offer valuable insights for educators, researchers, mental healthcare providers, and students that can help with developing effective strategies that foster greater self-efficacy, encourage resilience, and promote long-term academic success. Future research is recommended to expand beyond Calabasas High School and include diverse populations while exploring other potential variables impacting academic procrastination.

1. Introduction

"Procrastination is the thief of time," as described by English poet Edward Young in 1742. This truly is the case, as Dr. Piers Steel, a professor and researcher at the University of Calgary, states in his 2010 book, The Procrastination Equation, that about 95% of people admit to procrastinating occasionally (Banks, K). Academic procrastination amongst high school students continues to be a growing concern, because it has the potential to negatively impact not only academic performance, but mental health and overall wellbeing. Generally speaking, procrastination could commonly occur for all people throughout the world. However, academic procrastination has a deeper implication on the individuals' lives. Specifically, academic procrastination refers to "a persistent behavior in students' academic development consisting of postponing or delaying the completion of necessary tasks" (González-Brignardello et al., (2023). For instance, a meta-analysis conducted in 2007 by the University of Calgary noted that anywhere from 80 to 90% of college students procrastinate on important assignments (Amy Novotney). The study further explains the negative ties between mental health and academic procrastination. Additionally, a more recent study conducted in 2018 from the Pakistan Journal of Psychological Research found a negative correlation between self esteem and academic procrastination in undergraduate students, concluding that a lack of self efficacy plays a large role (Khurshid,

S., & Batool). Other studies focusing on undergraduate student samples revealed other potential variables correlated to academic procrastination. Even though there has been correlational research done with a focus on academic procrastination, there are currently not enough research studies on academic procrastination within the age group of high students living in the United States. This research will address the lack of studies and findings on academic procrastination amongst high school students in the United States, more specifically in the state of California. Is procrastination an inevitable, innate trait, or is it preventable? Is there a cure for academic procrastination? This research will aim to examine the positive correlation between academic procrastination and four specific variables: perfectionism, self efficacy, and disinterest in topic. The researcher aims to bridge the gap between existing research and new findings, relevant to a more specific sample of US high school students. Another goal is to raise awareness on the importance of learning corrective behaviors through psychoeducation, which will ultimately promote mental wellbeing and increased productivity rates and academic success in high schoolers. To provide a basis for this investigation, it is crucial to first examine existing literature regarding adolescent academic procrastination and its contributing factors.

Procrastination refers to the tendency of delaying the beginning, postponing the execution, and completion of a task. High school students often experience academic procrastination. This research study focuses on identifying potential contributing elements to this matter. Academic procrastination negatively affects teenagers, as it can compromise their academic performance and grades, and potentially lead to mental health problems. Shuai Xu in Academic Procrastination of Adolescents: A Brief Review of the Literature published in *Psychology and Behavioral Sciences* puts it best, stating that "Adolescent students are the ones especially prone to suffer from academic procrastination as they are in a unique stage of rapid development and growth." The researcher shares that "Previous research has demonstrated that adolescent academic procrastination is related to self-regulation, self efficacy, motivation, perfectionism, and parenting" (Shaui Xu 2021). A review of the literature illustrates a positive correlation between academic procrastination and the presence of contributing factors, such as perfectionism, self efficacy, and disinterest in the topic of study in high school students.

1.1 Perfectionism

A study published in the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health investigated the correlation between perfectionism and procrastination and how motivation affects self regulation of behavioral tendencies and emotions. 206 undergraduate psychology students complete a series of questionnaires assessing their perfectionistic tendencies, procrastination and ability to self regulate through intrinsic motivation. Findings of the study showed a positive correlation between motivation and self regulation, as well as a positive correlation between perfectionism and low intrinsic motivation, leading to academic procrastination (Sederlund et al., 2020). In a similar fashion, a study exploring the relationship between perfectionism due to fear of failure and procrastination in university students in Iran showed academic procrastination increased with higher levels of fear of failure, while ability to self-regulate negative emotions mitigated this correlation. A sample of 198 students from various universities in Isfahan were asked to complete the Academic Procrastination Scale and self regulation questionnaires. Recommendations were made by the authors to further investigate the sources of fear of failure, such as perfectionistic traits that could be correlated to mental health disorders (Zarrin et al., 2020).

1.2 Self Efficacy

A study conducted among nursing students in China addressed the correlation between perfectionism and academic procrastination. The researchers addressed the mediating impact of self efficacy and the role of resilience in the relationship between procrastination and traits of perfectionism, with a sample of 587 undergraduate nursing students from two Chinese universities. By using a cross sectional survey that included the Chinese Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale and the General Self-Efficacy Scale, the researchers were able to conclude that anxious, maladaptive perfectionism was positively correlated with academic procrastination, and that self efficacy partially arbitrated the relationship between healthy adaptive perfectionism and academic procrastination (Huang et

al., 2023). Similarly, a study published in *Journal Universitas Muhammadiyah Gresik Engineering, Social Science, and Health International Conference* addressed the correlation between self efficacy and academic procrastination among high school students. The findings showed a negative correlation between academic procrastination and self efficacy (Safira et al., 2023). Also researching how self efficacy is a predictor of academic procrastination, Klassen, Krawchuk, and Rajani from Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Alberta, Canada concluded that low self efficacy predicts higher levels of procrastination, within a sample size of 400 university students (Klassen et al., 2008).

1.3 Disinterest in Topic

A study conducted by psychology researchers at the Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada explored the correlation between academic procrastination and the perceived aversiveness towards the task. They administered quantitative questionnaires to a sample (size not specified) of university students in Poland, finding a positive correlation between academic procrastination and higher level of academic task aversiveness. Researchers recommended future studies that will take into account individual differences such as level of intelligence and self efficacy, as these additional variables will provide clearer implications and insight (Blunt et al., 2000). Correspondingly, information was gathered in a study conducted by Sichan He, who researched the contributing factors to academic procrastination among university students in Bristol, United Kingdom. The results showed common contributors to procrastination being distractibility and aversion prompted by task difficulty (He, S., 2017).

1.4 Similar Methodologies

Upon reviewing the relevant literature it was determined that several studies employed the same methodology, more specifically administering the standardized Academic Procrastination Scale Short Form, as well as self-reporting questionnaires. For example, a study conducted at Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania utilized the Academic Procrastination Scale Short Form in order to the relationship between academic procrastination, academic performance, subjective feelings of well being and test anxiety, within 322 undergraduate students (Albulescu et al., 2024). Furthermore, a study analyzing the correlation between academic procrastination stemming from academic anxiety and smartphone distractibility at Soochow University in China also used the Academic Procrastination Scale, as well as the Smartphone Distraction Scale (Jin et al., 2024). Lastly, a study conducted at the University of California, San Diego also used the Academic Procrastination Scale to understand the correlation between academic procrastination among computing students and attending the ClearMind Workshop, which provided them with coping tools for test anxiety (She, Y., et al. 2024).

Overall, academic procrastination amongst high school and university students is a growing issue that needs to be addressed. However, there is no apparent research focusing on this issue within California high school students. Raising awareness is the key in further addressing this matter, and these findings can serve as the basis of educational and informational platforms that can help students gain insight into this problem. Having a clearer understanding of what makes students procrastinate on their assigned school work will hopefully prompt them to engage in healthier behaviors that will positively impact their academic performance and mental health. This research paper will examine the foundational understanding of this issue's baseline within California high school students. To identify where new insights and fresh perspectives are needed, it is necessary to showcase the existing gaps in current research.

1.5 Gap

Primarily, the existing literature surrounding research focusing on contributing factors to academic procrastination used college students as subjects, and not high school students. Furthermore, most of the studies available for review were predominantly conducted at research and academic institutions outside the US.

In observing the themes of perfectionism, self-efficacy, and interest or aversion towards the topic of study and how they impact academic procrastination, a gap can be identified in the lack of existing research connecting these possible variables, especially across more precise sample populations, such as high school students in the US.

This paper aims to accomplish the research analysis deriving from collecting and interpreting the data across these demographics, revealing trends that have yet to be discerned. Moreover, the specific data collection from high school students in Calabasas, California, allows delving deeper into these age groups. Ultimately, identification of the connections between academic procrastination and factors such as perfectionism, self-efficacy, and liking/disliking the topic of schoolwork are essential in understanding this phenomenon.

Finally, a recommendation for programs to educate high school students about the relationship between academic procrastination and these variables will serve as an educational platform for ultimately helping them overcome academic procrastination. There is a need in the adolescent student community for programs that teach tools for increasing self-efficacy. It is also recommended that adolescents who score high on perfectionistic tendencies to access professional mental health assessments, as this trait could be an underlying symptom of anxious avoidance, a condition that can be treated successfully by professional clinicians. Keeping these recommendations in mind, the following section outlines the methodological approach used to explore and examine these variables within a California high school sample.

2. Materials and Methods

This study utilizes a mixed method correlation design approach in order to discover the contributing factors to academic procrastination in high school students. This research's goal was to address the pre-existing gaps in the literature and to test four main hypotheses. The data collection for this study involved student surveys distributed through Google Forms, along with information gathered from an optional free-response question. The Google Form also consisted of the 2011 Academic Procrastination Scale--Short Form (McCloskey, J. D.). The researcher chose to include this scale in order to align with a successful previous research and to ensure credibility and reliability of the findings. The design model ensured that both statistical trends and student perspectives were captured. This provided a detailed and comprehensive understanding of academic procrastination within this population.

In order to guide this research, four primary hypotheses were tested. The first proposed how perfectionism is a significant contributing factor to academic procrastination. The second proposed that levels of self-efficacy in participants are a significant contributing factor to academic procrastination. The third hypothesis proposed that disinterest in the academic topic is a significant contributing factor to academic procrastination. Finally, the fourth hypothesis suggested that higher-achieving students (defined as students enrolled in three or more AP or Honors courses) procrastinate more than lower-achieving students.

2.1 Population & Sample Section

All data was collected from Calabasas High School, a large, high-performing public high school in Calabasas, California. CHS is considered a high-income school, with only 23.4% of the student population being socioeconomically disadvantaged in some way. The student population at Calabasas High School consists of 73.4% White students, 11.3% Hispanic students, 5.6% Asian students, 3.1% African American students, 5% of students who identify as two or more races, and 1.6% of students classified as coming from another racial background. The population of this study in particular consisted of 70 participants: 27 who identified as male and 43 as female. Of this group, participants were are predominantly White (70%), followed by North African/Middle Eastern (11.4%) and Asian/Pacific Islander (11.4%), with smaller representations of Mixed Race (4.3%) and Hispanic (2.9%), while there are no African American individuals (0%). The participant pool generally mirrors the previously mentioned broader demographics of Calabasas High School, though there is a noticeable overrepresentation of North African/Middle Eastern students, as well as an underrepresentation of Hispanic and African American students, which may limit the overall generalizability of the study's findings.

2.2 Instruments

The data of this study was collected entirely from a survey distributed via Google Forms. The survey opens with a digital signature to signify informed consent, and basic demographic data inquiries. The survey then went on to ask

questions extracted from the Academic Procrastination Scale—Short Form (McCloskey, J. D. (2011) which is done in a Likert scale format. The researcher specifically chose to include this scale to provide a reliable benchmark for assessing academic procrastination levels, considering the credibility of McCloskey, and his publications in other research conducted in countries such as Turkey, Spain, and Peru. The final section of the survey included 24 self-developed questions—8 per hypothesis—designed to examine the relationship between procrastination and the three factors of perfectionism, self-efficacy, and disinterest in the topic. Finally, an optional free-response section gathered additional qualitative insights and personal anecdotes of student participants.

2.3 Student Survey Questions

The survey began with a demographic and baseline section consisting of six categorical items designed to contextualize the sample. Students reported their grade level (9th–12th), gender identity (male, female, other), and race/ethnicity using categories aligned with the U.S. Census Bureau (White, Black, Hispanic/Latino, American Indian or Alaska Native, North African or Middle Eastern, Native Hawaiian, Asian or Pacific Islander, Mixed Race, or Other). Participants also reported the number of Honors/AP courses they were enrolled in for the 2024–2025 academic year, selecting from options ranging from zero to "more than six." Two baseline questions assessed general attitudes toward procrastination ("Have you ever procrastinated before?" and "Do you think procrastination is curable?"), both measured using yes/no response options.

Part One measured academic procrastination using five items from the Academic Procrastination Scale–Short Form, each rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). For example, one item read, "I put off projects until the last minute." Part Two assessed perfectionism through eight researcher-generated items scored on a five-point frequency scale (1 = All the time to 5 = Never), including items such as, "Do you find yourself erasing and rewriting homework until it feels 'just right'?" Part Three measured self-efficacy using eight self-designed statements rated on the same five-point Likert scale, such as, "I am confident that I can achieve the academic goals I set for myself." Part Four examined disinterest in academic content through eight items also using the five-point Likert format; for example, "If I am not interested in a subject, I tend to procrastinate doing the schoolwork." The survey concluded with an optional open-ended question allowing students to provide additional insights or comments.

2.4 Implementation

This survey was distributed to high school students at Calabasas High School through their Social Studies/History classes. The researcher chose to do this in order to ensure a diverse sample; all Calabasas High School students are required to take these courses. The survey was promoted via colorful and engaging flyers that were placed around campus, containing a QR code link of the questionnaire. Furthermore, multiple professors at the high school were asked to share the survey information with their classes, and were contacted via email and in person meetings.

3. Results

The research found that out of the 70 participants, 95.8% claimed to have procrastinated before. This overwhelmingly significant majority demonstrates just how common procrastination is amongst high school students. This section showcases and explains the findings of students' reports pertaining to the different variables associated with academic procrastination. The purpose of examining this data was to determine the significance and impact of different contributing factors to academic procrastination, as well as to cross reference them with elements such as gender and class rigor. The findings have been separated based on the four hypotheses that have been previously defined. Two questions out of the eight per hypothesis were chosen by the researcher to convey the most significant results to the readers. This was done in order to maximize the results and to share the most consistent patterns in the results.

Hypothesis 1. Perfectionism is a significant contributing factor to academic procrastination.

Do you find yourself thinking you are a procrastinator because often you wait until the very last hour to work on a school assignment just because you are afraid you will fail or not submit the perfect homework?
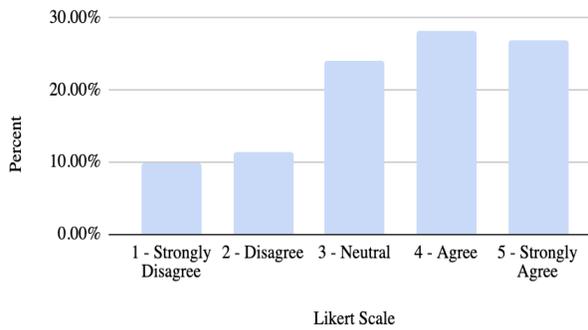
Do you find yourself checking your homework repeatedly to make sure things are correct and perfect, ending up postponing the submission of your work and waiting until the last minute to hit "submit"?
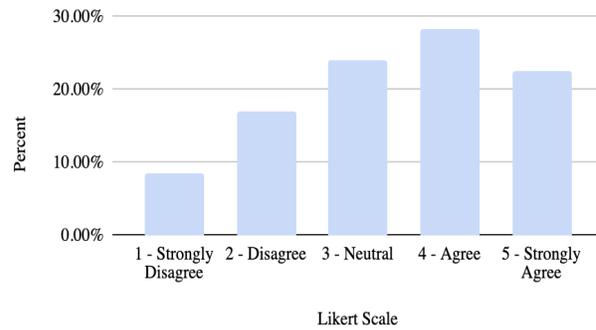
Histogram 1.1

Histogram 1.2

Hypothesis 2. Self efficacy is a significant contributing factor to academic procrastination.

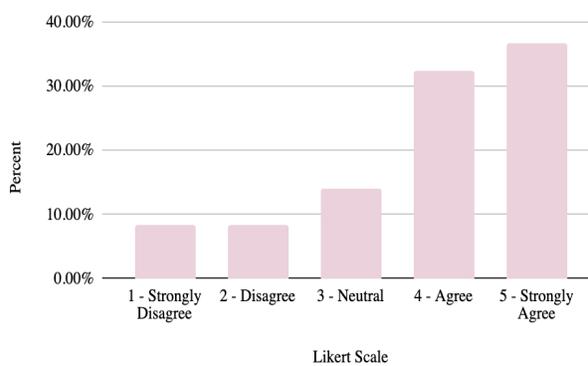I am confident that I can achieve the academic goals I set up for myself.
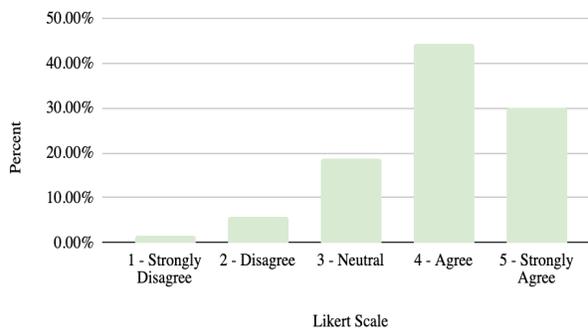
If I get stuck with homework, with some effort I can resolve it.
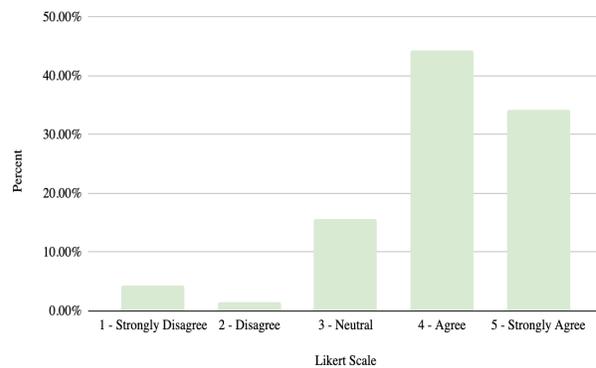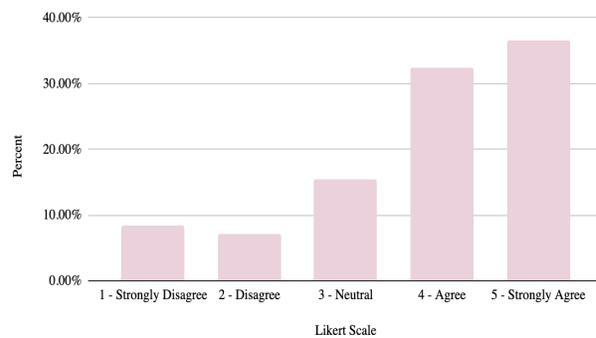
Histogram 2.1

Histogram 2.2

Hypothesis 3. Disinterest in the topic is a significant contributing factor to academic procrastination.

It is hard to work on school assignments that I don't like.

If I am not interested in a subject matter, I tend to procrastinate doing the schoolwork.
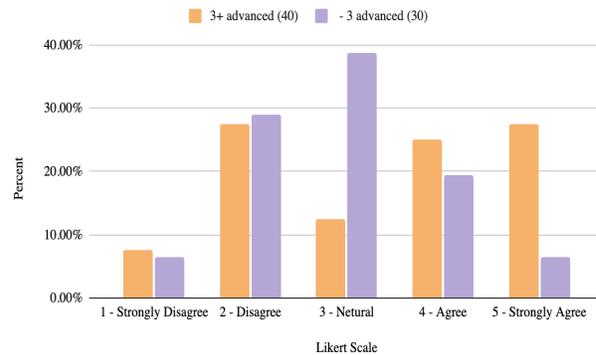
Histogram 3.1

Histogram 3.2

Hypothesis 4. Higher achievers procrastinate more than lower achievers. (A higher achiever was categorized as someone who takes over 3 or more Advanced Placement (AP) or Honors courses)

I get distracted by other, more fun, things when I am supposed to work on schoolwork.
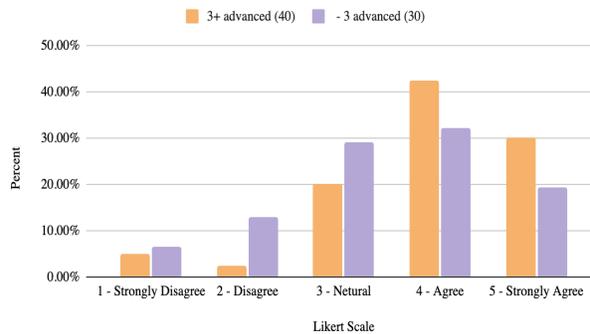
Histogram 4.1



I put off projects until the last minute.
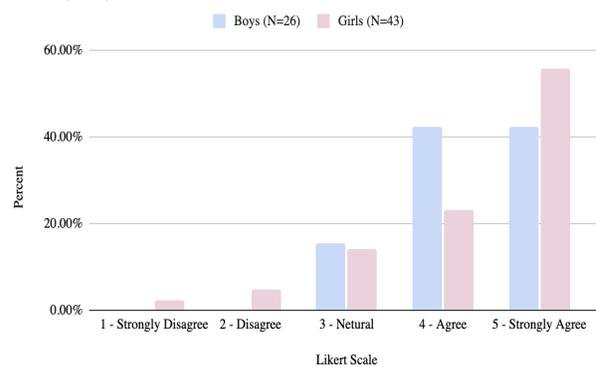
Histogram 4.2

3.1 Gender Findings

Although gender is not expected to play a significant role in the academic procrastination levels of participants, the researcher chose to examine gender-based patterns within the findings, in order to explore any unexpected trends or disparities.

Do you find yourself spending hours slowly reading and rereading every sentence to make sure you really understand every detail?
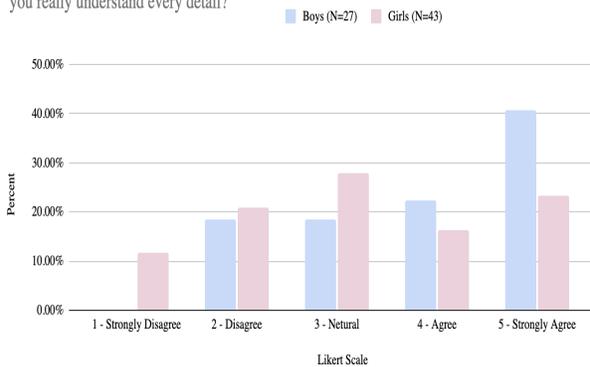
Histogram 5.1

If I try my best, I believe I can succeed.

Histogram 5.2

The following chart showcases four additional comments shared by four different student participants:

Quote	Analysis
"I procrastinate a lot but I eventually get the work done in the end" "I procrastinate, but always get it done"	The researcher also noted two student responses that shared similar perspectives: both students acknowledged that while they do procrastinate, they ultimately complete their work. This attitude likely reflects a broader mindset that downplays the seriousness of procrastination, contributing to a perception that it is a harmless behavior rather than a problematic and overly normalized habit deserving of greater attention.
"I believe the constant wanting to go on social media is a big factor. That along with the way you were raised and the amount of screen time/other hobbies you have."	One participant also identified social media, particularly in today's digital age, as a significant factor contributing to academic procrastination. The researcher suggests that future studies should incorporate questions related to social media usage to more thoroughly examine its influence on procrastination behaviors.
"I would say that the main reason I can't procrastinate on big projects/assignments is because I have a fear of failing when I know I could have succeeded"	This response suggests that fear of failure can push students to avoid procrastination. It highlights how personal expectations and a desire to succeed motivate timely work.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that academic procrastination among high school students is shaped by a combination of variables such as perfectionism, self-efficacy, disinterest in topic, and course rigor, rather than by any standalone factor. While each hypothesis is supported by specifically-individual data, patterns suggest that these variables operate together.

As supported by Histogram 1.1, 54.93% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they consider themselves procrastinators, due to perfectionistic tendencies revolving around homework submission. As supported by Histogram 1.2, 50.71% of participants agreed or strongly agreed to having the perfectionistic tendencies of repeatedly checking homework somewhat compulsively, and therefore postponing, prolonging, and procrastinating the time of submission. The results of these questions directly support Hypothesis 1. Similarly to Zarrin et al., 2020, this study implemented the Academic Procrastination Scale in order to test perfectionistic qualities in participants.

As demonstrated by Histogram 2.1, 78.8% of participants agreed or strongly agreed to having confidence when it comes to academic goals and achievement. This question was asked in order to provide the researcher with foundational information regarding the overall self efficacy levels of the students. Only 5.72% of participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with this. Overall, this set up a preface that the vast majority of participants have strong levels of self efficacy. Additionally, as shown in Histogram 2.2, 75.58% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that with some effort, they can resolve and complete difficult homework assignments. This result demonstrates high levels of self efficacy and confidence amongst the sample size. The results of these questions directly support Hypothesis 2. Research by Klassen, Krawchuk, and Rajani (2008) also found that lower self-efficacy predicts higher academic procrastination.

It was found that 69.01% of participants agreed or strongly agreed to the idea that it is difficult to work on school assignments they do not like, as shown in Histogram 3.1. This supports the hypothesis that not having an interest in the academic topic at hand leads to a lack of motivation when doing the work, and ultimately, procrastination. Similarly, 69.01% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they procrastinate doing homework when the topic does not interest them, as demonstrated in Histogram 3.2. These findings align with Hypothesis 3, and also mirror prior, previously-mentioned research showing that procrastination often stems from task-related aversion when work feels difficult or even simplify unappealing (He, 2017).

When comparing high achieving students to their counterparts, it was found that 72.5% of students taking 3 or more high level courses claimed to get distracted by more fun things when they need to focus on schoolwork, compared to the 51.61% of academically less advanced students. (Histogram 4.1) Furthermore, Histogram 4.2 demonstrates that 52% of students taking 3 or more high level courses put off projects until the last minute, while only 25.8% of less academically advanced students procrastinate in this way. Overall, these specific questions seemingly prove Hypothesis 4 correct.

It was found that males (62.96% agreeing) had a higher inclination to have perfectionistic tendencies, in comparison to their female (39.94% agreeing) counterparts, as portrayed in Histogram 5.1. Males (84.62% agreeing) also were found to have slightly higher levels of self efficacy than their female (78.17% agreeing) counterparts.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Limitations

Even though this study was conducted in a manner to maximize accurate results, there were some inevitable limitations throughout the course of data collection. This study contained questions that can be interpreted as being personally and individually specific. Because of this, reporting bias and self-desirability bias could have occurred for students while they were taking the survey. Self-desirability bias refers to the tendency for some participants to answer certain questions in a way in which they think will be viewed favorably by others, making their self image more desirable. This leads to a lack of responding with full honesty. Pride often can get in the way of sharing accurate data, more so when reporting about procrastination habits.

Furthermore, due to the fact that a multitude of surveys were being conducted and promoted on the researcher's

high school campus at this time, survey fatigue was common among the student body. It is possible that the study would have received more participation if there were fewer surveys circulating campus at the time. Therefore, due to the relatively small sample size, (38.57% boys and 61.43% girls) the specific findings of this study might not be applicable to a national demographic of high school students in the United States. However, because participants were selected in a manner that gives every student an equal chance of being included, also known as random sampling, was done to ensure diverse participation, the research still holds value to the academic community.

5.2 Further Research and Implications

Despite minimal limitations, this research provides a strong foundation for future researchers to delve deeper into the topic of academic procrastination within high school students. For instance, expanding beyond the specific institution of Calabasas High School would provide more applicable data. Furthermore, a recommendation for programs to educate high school students about the positive trend between academic procrastination and these variables will serve as an educational platform for ultimately helping them overcome academic procrastination. It is evident that there is also a need in the adolescent student community for programs that teach tools for increasing self-efficacy. It is also highly recommended that adolescents who score high on perfectionistic tendencies to access professional mental health assessments, as this trait could be an underlying symptom of anxious avoidance, a condition that can be treated successfully by professional mental healthcare clinicians. By recognizing the many complex factors that contribute to academic procrastination in high school students, educators, researchers, mental healthcare providers, and even students themselves can develop effective strategies that foster greater self-efficacy, encourage resilience, and promote long-term academic success.

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