

## The Relationship Between Academic Procrastination and Different Dimensions of Perfectionism: The Role of Self-Critical, Rigid, and Narcissistic Perfectionism in College Students

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to look at the relationship between different characteristics of perfectionism and academic procrastination in college students. The participants were 226 college students (N male = 113, N female = 113) from various colleges across the country. The data was collected using The Big Three Perfectionism Scale-Short Form and Tuckman Procrastination Scale. Pearson's Correlation Coefficient and Stepwise Linear Regression were used to analyse the data in SPSS. The results showed a significant positive correlation between academic perfectionism and total perfectionism, self-critical perfectionism, and narcissistic perfectionism. The stepwise linear regression analysis revealed that self-critical perfectionism was a key predictor of academic procrastination, after controlling for the suppressor variable of rigid perfectionism. The inclusion of rigid perfectionism as a suppressor variable enhanced the predictive power of the model, suggesting that it may be an underlying factor contributing to academic procrastination. The study highlights the importance of considering the multidimensionality of perfectionism when examining its relationship with procrastination. Furthermore, the finding that rigid perfectionism acted as a suppressor variable underscores the need to investigate the distinct contributions of various aspects of perfectionism to psychological outcomes. These results have significant implications for understanding and addressing academic procrastination. Interventions aimed at reducing procrastination should focus on addressing underlying perfectionistic tendencies, specifically those related to self-criticism and narcissism. The present study provides insight into the relationship between perfectionism and academic procrastination and highlights the need for further research to fully understand the complex interplay between these variables.

**Keywords:** *Perfectionism, Academic Procrastination, Self-Criticism, Narcissism, Rigid Perfectionism*

### Academic Procrastination

Procrastination is a prevalent problem and varies according to the age, academic level, and cultural background amongst students. According to researchers Klingsieck (2013); Solomon & Rothblum (1984) 70-95% of college students delay on academic responsibilities, Even Steel (2007) stated that 80-95% college students stall their

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academic work and 50% postpone on non-academic tasks. Academic procrastination is defined as postponing the beginning and end of an academic activity while knowing that it would result in undesirable effects such as lower marks, missed chances, or greater stress. It might create subjective distress such as worry or guilt (Sepehrian, 2012; Klingsieck, 2013). A subtype of procrastination, academic procrastination is exclusive to academic assignments with deadlines and is connected with undesirable effects such as lower academic performance and higher stress. Commonly found among university students and adults, and it has been connected to an individual's personality and behavioural traits in several studies. Procrastination and self-esteem, self-efficacy, and motivation were discovered to have an inverse connection (Pychyl & Flett, 2012; Steel, P., 2007; Tice & Baumeister, 1997; Flett et al., 1992).

According to Lowinger et al (2016) Conducted a meta-analysis and reported less academic procrastination among Asian studies. However other studies have found conflicting outcomes. According to Fentaw, Moges and Ismail (2022) 17.2 percent of university students, 72-77 percent of Golestani students, and 68 percent of college going students procrastinate. Procrastinators prioritise entertaining tasks such as watching television and seeking relief and solace (Akinsola et al., 2007).

The core reasons of procrastination are fear of failing and assignment delay (Solomon & Rothblum, 1984), however there are also various other variables that contribute to academic procrastination. Procrastinators usually feel they perform better under pressure and have a propensity to overestimate their future drive while discounting the time required for a task (Kathleen & Basaria, 2021; Milgram, Sroloff & Rosenbaum 1988). They also have poor time management abilities, as well as a lack of self-discipline and task avoidance (Ferrari, 1995; Schraw, Wadkins, & Olafson, 2007; Steel, 2007). Procrastination can arise due to a lack of personal ambition, perfectionism, or avoiding work (Kim et al., 2017; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984; Ghosh, 2017). Stringent deadlines can exacerbate procrastination (Schraw, Wadkins, & Olafson, 2007).

Highly prevalent issue among university students, Academic procrastination is driven by an array of components, including sensation-seeking, Inefficient time-management, and low motivation. Social pressure, self-control problem, work avoidance, and rigid deadlines are all factors. Procrastinators are typically put to a halt by pleasurable pursuits and may suffer from work avoidance and laziness. Academic procrastination is influenced by both self-criticism and socially inflicted perfectionism. Setting overly high standards, self-criticism, and fear of poor review are all characteristics of self-critical perfectionism. Socially inflicted perfectionism is the notion that others expect perfection from them, which is associated with self-criticism and academic procrastination. In academic environments, fear of failure can cause procrastination or avoidance of necessary tasks.

### **Perfectionism**

As a personality trait perfectionism described by critical self-evaluation, an engrossment with perfection and high standards (Sword & Stoeber, 2014). Though perfectionism can push people to success, it can sometimes have terrible repercussions. According to Hamachek (1978), while all perfectionists establish high standards, neurotic perfectionists are never pleased with their achievements. Conscientiousness can contribute perfectionism development, with higher degrees of conscientiousness being linked to a rise in

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perfectionistic seeking (Stoeber et al., 2009). In a twin study, perfectionism is heritable, ranging from 23% to 54% heritability depending on its qualities (Iranzo-Tatay et al., 2015).

Perfectionism has been characterised and looked at in both a positive and negative context in the literature. The scientific literature on perfectionism shows a dualistic viewpoint, with scholars investigating both the benefits and drawbacks of this trait. Depending on the circumstances, perfectionism can have both beneficial and harmful consequences (Flett et al., 2020). Although perfectionism can be adaptive when it pushes people to work toward excellence (Stoeber & Damian, 2021), it can also lead to undesirable effects such as procrastination, self-doubt, and social isolation (Frost et al., 1990). Perfectionism is linked to high accomplishment and success (Stoeber, 2018), others have discovered that it can lead to anxiety, depression, and burnout which have a negative impact (Flett & Hewitt, 2020; Hewitt & Flett, 2017). According to recent research, the negative features of perfectionism frequently exceed the beneficial (Curran & Hill, 2017). Socially prescribed perfectionism in India's academic setting can lead to anxiousness, fear of failure as well as exhaustion (Carvalho et al., 2018; Ghosh & Roy, 2017), particularly in an education system that prioritises rote learning.

This study examines three higher-order global factors of perfectionism. BTPS-SF (The Big Three Perfectionism Scale- Short Form) is a predominant tool for assessment dispositional perfectionism in individuals (Feher, et al., 2020). It includes three higher-order global factors that give people insight into different facets of perfectionism: - Rigid Perfectionism - an individual's steadfast demand for faultlessness, perfection, and meticulousness; Self-critical Perfectionism- relates to socially prescribed perfectionism and involves concern over mistakes, self-doubt, and self-criticism; Narcissistic Perfectionism- characterizes hypercriticism, entitlement, and grandiosity, is the third factor (Stoeber & Otto, 2006; Hewitt & Flett, 1991 ;Frost et al., 1990).

Perfectionism is a complicated trait that is difficult to explain using a simple model. Individuals who exhibit the trait of perfectionism tend to set exceptionally high standards for their work and display a significant degree of self-criticism. This trait may result in difficulty initiating or completing tasks if they believe that the outcome will not meet their expectations of perfection. Fear of failure generally tends to procrastination as a way of evading the task. Perfectionists may also become preoccupied with little details, dedicating too much time to them and not adequate time to the work at hand, leading to an increase in the already prevalent procrastination. Moreover, perfectionists often struggle with decision-making because they are also concerned with making the perfect choice, which leads to indecision and, eventually, procrastination.

### ***Academic Procrastination, Perfectionism, and their Relationship***

Individuals who exhibit a high degree of perfectionism tend to spend more time and energy on non-academic tasks, resulting in a heavy academic load (Woodrum, 2020; Steel, 2007). (Flett, Hewitt, & Heisel, 2014). Moreover, individuals with perfectionist dispositions may be predisposed to procrastination owing to the comprehensive academic curriculum (Senécal, Julien, & Guay, 2003). (Xie, Yang, & Chen, 2018).

Perfectionists and procrastinators share some resemblances. Among them are unrealistic expectations and preconceptions (Burka & Yuen, 1983), both groups are afraid to make mistakes and place great importance on continued excellence (Flett et al., 1991, 1992).

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According to research, perfectionism increases procrastination because people hold themselves to unachievable standards and may feel they cannot reach them (Burka & Yuen, 1983; Onwuegbuzie, 2000). Owing to their excessive focus on external expectations, procrastinators recurrently worry about how others view them and struggle to finish work (Ferrari, 1989). While there is a correlation between academic procrastination and socially prescribed perfectionism (Flett et al., 1992). As per recent findings there is a multifaceted and nuanced link between perfectionism and procrastination. It was noted that the maladaptive components of perfectionism, such as augmented response to negative feedback, are positively related to procrastination (Rozental et al., 2018). Self-critical perfectionism has also been connected to academic procrastination (Steel & Klingsieck, 2020). Self-compassion has been discovered to mediate perfectionism's harmful influence on procrastination (Sapanc, 2021).

Research in the field suggests that perfectionism and academic procrastination have a bidirectional association. The BTPS-SF model identifies rigidity, self-criticism, and narcissism as the key aspects of perfectionism. Studies have shown that both rigid and self-critical perfectionism are associated with academic procrastination. (Woodrum, 2020; Fong et al., 2018; Garca-Matilla, Ramrez, & Baos, 2011; Madigan, 2019; Hill & Curran, 2016; Rice, Richardson, & Clark, 2012). There has been little research on narcissistic perfectionism and academic procrastination, although one study reveals a link (Zhu & Liu, 2018). Overall, data suggests that rigid, self-critical, or narcissistic perfectionism can result in academic procrastination, which can harm academic progress and well-being (Hewitt & Flett, 2017).

A limited amount of research has examined the subject of academic procrastination and perfectionism with respect to their dispositions specifically among the culturally diverse population of India. Studies worldwide are present, though India stands out for the distinctive curriculum and the increased degree of socially prescribed perfectionism prevalent in the population. The data collection for the study was undertaken during the months of January-February of 2022, when the Omicron variant of COVID-19 was prevalent. Major universities conducted classes online. The sample population is 226 students pursuing their master's and undergraduate degrees online from various parts of the subcontinent. This study tries to bridge gaps between the past studies on the subject to make it more diverse and understand how the relationship was affected in an online setup. Also, further it has attempted to establish a model and assess the effect of perfectionism on academic procrastination.

### **METHODOLOGY**

*Aim* - To illustrate the relationship& impact of narcissistic, rigid& self-critical perfectionism on academic procrastination.

#### *Objective*

1. To study the relationship between Rigid perfectionism, Self- Critical Perfectionism Narcissistic perfectionism and Academic procrastination.
2. To study the impact of Rigid perfectionism, Self- Critical Perfectionism& Narcissistic perfectionism on Academic procrastination

#### *Hypotheses:*

H<sub>1</sub>- There is a significant relationship between Rigid perfectionism, Self- Critical Perfectionism, Narcissistic perfectionism, and Academic procrastination.

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H<sub>2</sub>- There is a significant impact of Rigid perfectionism, Self- Critical Perfectionism, Narcissistic perfectionism on Academic procrastination

### ***Study design and participants***

To investigate the relationship and impact of rigid perfectionism, self-critical perfectionism, and narcissistic perfectionism on academic procrastination, a Correlational Research Design was used. Using a non-probability Convenient sampling strategy, (N= 226) individuals were identified across India, encompassing both males (N = 113) and females (N = 113). The data was collected throughout the months of January and February 2022, when the country was under lockdown. Participants had to be Indian citizens who were studying in an online at the time of data collection.

- **Exclusion criteria:** students who were attending offline classes, above the age of 25, not pursuing masters or undergraduates.
- **Inclusion criteria:** Participants between the age range of 18-25, Participants currently in enrolled in courses other than masters or undergraduates, Participants are either male or female in gender, Participants are Indian nationals, Participants were studying in an online setup at the point of data collection.

### ***Procedure***

The survey was done during in the months of January - February 2022 (COVID-19) via an online (Google Forms) self-report measure after obtaining informed permission from the participants. Prior to participating in the study and allowing for publication of results, the 226 participants were presented with an informed consent form outlining the study aims and methods. The data collected was coded in Microsoft Excel 2019, and then transferred to Statistical Software for Social Sciences (SPSS) 20 for analysis using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation coefficient, and step-wise linear regression to test the hypotheses.

### ***Variables***

- **Independent Variables** – Self-critical Perfectionism, Rigid perfectionism, Narcissistic perfectionism
- **Dependent Variable** – Academic procrastination

### ***Measures***

- **Personal Information-** The questionnaire gathered general socio-demographic information, such as the participant's name, age, gender, current highest level of education, present area of residence, and nationality.

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**Table 1: Tools Used**

Measure	Items	Author and Year	Variables Assessed	Reliability & Validity	Model
The Tuckman Procrastination Scale (TPS)	15	Furlan et al, 2012	Academic Procrastination	Content validity- exceeding an Aiken coefficient of 0.80, Internal consistency- $\alpha = .885$ , Test-retest reliability- $r = .90$ and $.85$ for the first and second samples, respectively	Single factor Model
The Big Three Perfectionism Scale-Short Form (BTPS-SF)	16	Feher, et.al, 2020	Rigid Perfectionism, Self-critical, Perfectionism, Narcissistic Perfectionism	Test-retest reliability- Ranging - $r = .71$ to $r = .79$ (Each factor) Confirmatory factor analysis- ranging from $.49$ to $.92$ (Factor loadings)	Three-Factor Model

The measures were administered online, and participants were asked to respond honestly and to the best of their ability. The measures were chosen for their established social desirability validity and reliability, as well as their relevance to the research question.

**RESULTS**

This study aimed to examine the relationship between perfectionism, specifically three higher-order global factors (rigid perfectionism, self-critical perfectionism, and narcissistic perfectionism), and academic procrastination among college students. The sample included 226 college students aged between 18 and 25 years, residing in India. Data were collected using Google Forms, with the TPS and BTPS-SF as the assessment tools. The collected data were then entered into Microsoft Excel and exported to SPSS 20 for statistical analysis.

**Table 2: Measures of central tendencies and Dispersion – Perfectionism, Rigid Perfectionism, Self- Critical Perfectionism, Narcissistic Perfectionism, Academic Procrastination**

	Academic Procrastination	Rigid Perfectionism	Self- Critical Perfectionism	Narcissistic Perfectionism
Mean	36.85	14.71	19.49	15.19
Std. Deviation	8.966	3.90	5.970	5.547

Note-  $N = 226$

Descriptive statistics for five variables were computed based on a sample size of  $N = 226$  participants. The variables included Academic Procrastination ( $M = 36.85$ ,  $SD = 8.97$ ), Rigid Perfectionism ( $M = 14.71$ ,  $SD = 3.91$ ), Self-Critical Perfectionism ( $M = 19.49$ ,  $SD = 5.97$ ), Narcissistic Perfectionism ( $M = 15.19$ ,  $SD = 5.55$ ), and Total Perfectionism ( $M = 49.39$ ,  $SD = 12.38$ ). Overall, the sample demonstrated a moderate level of academic procrastination, with average scores on TPS. The sample also exhibited moderate levels of self-critical and narcissistic perfectionism; low levels of rigid perfectionism as measured by the BTPS-SF.

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**Table 3: Coefficients for Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Academic procrastination and Rigid Perfectionism, Self-Critical Perfectionism, Narcissistic Perfectionism.**

	Academic Procrastination	Rigid Perfectionism	Self- Critical Perfectionism	Narcissistic Perfectionism
Academic Procrastination	1	.039	.405**	.210**
Rigid Perfectionism		1	.434**	.416**
Self- Critical Perfectionism			1	.503**
Narcissistic Perfectionism				1

Note: \*\* $p < 0.01$

Table 3 presents the correlation coefficients between academic procrastination and the three types of perfectionism. The results indicated that self-critical and narcissistic perfectionism were positively and significantly correlated with academic procrastination ( $r = .210$  and  $r = .302$ , respectively, both  $p < .01$ ). However, there was no statistically significant correlation between academic procrastination and rigid perfectionism ( $r = .039$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

**Table 4: Stepwise Linear Regression to assess the impact of self-critical perfectionism on academic procrastination**

Model	Predictor Variable	$\beta$	SE	t-value	$R^2$	Adjusted $R^2$	F
1	Step 1				.164	.161	44.050
	Constant	-	1.869	13.369			
	Self-Critical Perfectionism	.405**	.092	6.637			
2	Step 2				.187	.180	25.717
	Constant	-	2.235	12.275			
	Self-critical perfectionism	.479**	.101	.101			
	Rigid Perfectionism	-.169**	.154	-2.517			

Note:  $p < 0.01$ \*\*, Dependant Variable- Academic Procrastination

Note: Excluded Variables- Model 1(Rigid Perfectionism, Narcissistic Perfectionism), Model 2(Narcissistic Perfectionism)

Stepwise regression is a statistical technique that helps identify the subset of predictor variables that significantly contribute to the variance in the outcome variable. By selecting only significant predictors, the model can be simplified and more parsimonious, which is important when the sample size is limited. In addition, stepwise regression analysis can identify any multicollinearity or redundant predictors in the model, which can improve the accuracy and interpretability of the results. Overall, stepwise regression analysis can help identify the most important predictors of academic procrastination in relation to perfectionism.

Table 4 displays the results of a stepwise linear regression analysis examining the dependent variable academic procrastination, and the predictor variables self-critical perfectionism and rigid perfectionism. For each step in the regression model Table 4 reports the standardized beta coefficients ( $\beta$ ), standard errors (SE), t-values, and  $R^2$  values.

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In Step 1, self-critical perfectionism was entered as the only predictor variable. The results showed a significant positive association between self-critical perfectionism and academic procrastination ( $\beta = .405$ ,  $SE = .061$ ,  $t = 6.637$ ,  $p < .01$ ), accounting for 16.1% of the variance in academic procrastination. Therefore, with every level increase in Self-Critical Perfectionism levels of academic procrastination increased by .405.

In Step 2, rigid perfectionism was added as a suppressor variable. The results showed that both self-critical perfectionism ( $\beta = .479$ ,  $SE = .095$ ,  $t = 5.036$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and rigid perfectionism ( $\beta = -.169$ ,  $SE = .067$ ,  $t = -2.517$ ,  $p < .01$ ) were significantly associated with academic procrastination. The suppressor variable, rigid perfectionism, showed a negative association with academic procrastination, which was in contrast to the positive association observed in the initial bivariate correlation ( $r = .039$ ,  $p > .05$ ). However, the suppressor variable accounted for only a small amount of additional variance in academic procrastination ( $R^2$  change = .020), while self-critical perfectionism remained the stronger predictor variable, explaining 18% of the variance in academic procrastination. In the final model it was noted that with every unit increase in Rigid Perfectionism unit Academic Procrastination was decreased by .164, whereas with every unit increase of Self-critical Perfectionism units of Academic procrastination increase by .479.

The final model presented 18.7% variance in academic procrastination ( $F(2,223) = 27.123$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The adjusted  $R^2$  was .176, indicating that the model is a good fit for the data. The constant term and excluded variables in each step are also reported in table 4.

### DISCUSSION

The primary aim of the study was to assess the links between academic procrastination and various aspects of perfectionism (self-critical perfectionism, narcissistic perfectionism, and rigid perfectionism). The research outcomes revealed that academic procrastination was significantly and positively related to self-critical perfectionism and narcissistic perfectionism, but not with rigid perfectionism. This finding is in line with earlier research, which has established a connection between procrastination and perfectionism (Ferrari et al., 2018; Flett, Hewitt, & Heisel, 2014; Steel, 2007). However, unlike previous studies, no significant association between academic procrastination and rigid perfectionism was found in this study. Shafran, et.al in 2002 explained in their study that rigid perfectionism is a subtype of perfectionism identified by high standards and orderliness, but not invariably by procrastination, which in turn explains the inconsistency.

The stepwise linear regression analysis showed that a key predictor of academic procrastination is self-critical, after controlling for the suppressor variable of rigid perfectionism. From the data self-critical perfectionism accounted for 16.1% of variance in academic procrastination, consistent with previous studies that identified it as a significant predictor of procrastination (Blouin et al., 2015; Sirois & Pychyl, 2013). The inclusion of rigid perfectionism as a suppressor variable enhanced the predictive power of the model. While the additional variance in academic procrastination by inclusion of rigid perfectionism was small, it may indicate that it is among the underlying factors and thus requires further in-depth investigation.

Results of this study are supported by previous research demonstrating a positive association between perfectionism and procrastination (Steel, 2007; Steel & Klingsieck, 2020). This study expands on these findings by examining the unique contributions of various dimensions



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of perfectionism to academic procrastination. Specifically, highlighting the significant role of self-critical perfectionism as a predictor of academic procrastination while also demonstrating the suppressive effect of rigid perfectionism on this relationship. It was noted that the results for this study are consistent with previous studies that have emphasized the complex nature of perfectionism and the need to examine its subtypes in detail to understand its impact on different outcomes (Hewitt & Flett, 1991; Stoeber & Otto, 2006).

### CONCLUSION

This study offers insights in the association between perfectionism and academic procrastination, highlighting the significant role of self-critical as a predictor of procrastination. In addition, the study indicates that rigid perfectionism plays the role of a suppressor. These findings have important implications for developing interventions to alleviate procrastination and emphasize the importance of conducting further research to fully comprehend the intricate nature of perfectionism and its relationship with procrastination.

The present study has significant implications for understanding and addressing academic procrastination. The results suggest that interventions aimed at reducing procrastination should focus on addressing underlying perfectionistic tendencies, specifically those related to self-criticism and narcissism. The findings of this study have implications for both research and practice. In terms of research, the study highlights the importance of considering the multidimensionality of perfectionism when examining its relationship with procrastination. Moreover, the finding that rigid perfectionism acted as a suppressor variable emphasizes the need to examine the distinct contributions of various aspects of perfectionism to psychological outcomes. The suppressor effect suggests that rigid perfectionism may have a protective role concerning academic procrastination, despite its negative impact on well-being (Hill & Curran, 2016).

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