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FEAR OF MAKING MISTAKES AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL MECHANISM IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERFECTIONISM AND PROCRASTINATION AMONG STUDENTS

Abstract. This paper examines the relationship between perfectionism and academic procrastination among students. Particular attention is paid to the role of fear of making mistakes and to the distinction between high perfectionistic standards and perfectionistic concerns. When mistakes have high psychological significance, striving for a flawless result may be accompanied by fear of failure, emotional tension, and avoidance of starting a task. Based on recent research, a possible psychological cycle that may contribute to procrastination is proposed.
Keywords: perfectionism, procrastination, fear of making mistakes, fear of failure, emotion regulation, students.

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СТРАХ ПОМИЛКИ ЯК ПСИХОЛОГІЧНИЙ МЕХАНІЗМ У ВЗАЄМОЗВ'ЯЗКУ ПЕРФЕКЦІОНІЗМУ ТА ПРОКРАСТИНАЦІЇ СТУДЕНТІВ

Анотація. У роботі розглянуто взаємозв'язок між перфекціонізмом та академічною прокрастинацією у студентів. Особливу увагу приділено ролі страху помилки та відмінностям між високими перфекціоністськими стандартами і перфекціоністськими побоюваннями. За умови високої психологічної значущості помилки прагнення до бездоганного результату може супроводжуватися страхом невдачі, емоційним напруженням та уникненням початку виконання завдання. На основі сучасних досліджень запропоновано можливий психологічний цикл, який може сприяти підтриманню прокрастинації.
Ключові слова: перфекціонізм, прокрастинація, страх помилки, страх невдачі, емоційна регуляція, студенти.

Procrastination in academic settings is often explained by poor organization, ineffective time management, or unwillingness to make an effort. However, these explanations do not fully account for situations in which students want to achieve good results, set high standards for themselves, but still delay starting their work. The relationship between perfectionism and procrastination is particularly interesting in this respect. At first glance, high standards should encourage students to work harder. Under certain conditions, however, the desire to complete a task perfectly may lead to avoidance rather than action. One possible explanation lies in the meaning that a person attaches to making a mistake.

In the multidimensional model proposed by P. Hewitt and G. Flett, perfectionism is not viewed as a single trait. The authors distinguish between self-oriented, other-oriented, and socially prescribed perfectionism [1]. Therefore, setting high standards

does not necessarily have negative consequences. This is consistent with the meta-analysis by F. Sirois, D. Molnar, and J. Hirsch. Their findings showed that perfectionistic strivings were negatively associated with procrastination, whereas perfectionistic concerns were positively associated with it [4]. Thus, to understand procrastination, it is important to consider not only how high a person's standards are, but also how they react when they may fail to meet them.

In this context, a mistake may become more than information about the outcome of a particular task. It can acquire personal significance and be perceived as a failure to meet one's own expectations or those of others. At the same time, "fear of making mistakes" should not be treated as identical to fear of failure, concern over mistakes, or failure sensitivity. These concepts describe related but distinct psychological phenomena. In this paper, fear of making mistakes is understood as a related psychological phenomenon involving negative feelings about the possibility of making a mistake and the expectation of undesirable consequences.

Procrastination is also more than a problem of time management. B. Tuckman described it in terms of a tendency to postpone or avoid necessary activities [2]. P. Steel later described procrastination as a characteristic form of self-regulatory failure in his meta-analytic review [3]. From this perspective, the important question is not only why students fail to start their work on time. It is also necessary to ask what makes starting a task so psychologically uncomfortable that postponing it becomes more attractive than taking action.

Fear of failure may provide part of the answer. M. Cho and Y.-S. Lee examined this issue in a sample of 156 medical students. Self-oriented perfectionism had a negative direct association with academic procrastination. At the same time, the researchers found a positive indirect association through fear of failure [5]. These findings suggest that the relationship between high personal standards and procrastination may differ depending on the role of fear of failure.

L. Yosopov and colleagues examined related processes in a sample of 327 students. Fear of failure mediated some of the relationships between perfectionism and procrastination, while overgeneralization of failure mediated most of the relationships examined. The researchers also found evidence of sequential mediation involving fear of failure followed by overgeneralization of an unsuccessful outcome [6]. These results help explain how the meaning of a mistake can change. A negative result in one particular activity may influence a broader evaluation of oneself. As a result, the possibility of another failure may become more psychologically significant.

Difficulties with emotion regulation may also play an important role. E. Duru, M. Balkis, and S. Duru studied 292 students and found a positive correlation between fear of failure and procrastination. However, the direct path between these variables was not statistically significant in their structural model. Instead, the indirect relationship through difficulties in emotion regulation was supported [7]. This suggests that the problem may involve not only fear itself, but also a person's ability to cope with the emotions associated with it.

Based on these findings, a possible psychological cycle can be proposed. High standards do not necessarily lead to procrastination. Difficulties may arise when a person attaches excessive importance to making a mistake. The expectation of failure increases emotional tension, while postponing the task provides temporary relief from both the task itself and the risk of an unwanted result. However, procrastination leaves less time to complete the work and creates less favourable conditions for doing it well.

This increases the likelihood of being dissatisfied with the result. The self-criticism that follows may make the possibility of another mistake even more significant, and the cycle can begin again.

This sequence should be viewed as a theoretical interpretation rather than an established universal causal mechanism. Nevertheless, it may help explain why high standards can be associated with different patterns of behaviour. In some cases, they encourage students to act and work toward a desired result. In others, high standards combined with fear of failure, excessive concern about mistakes, and difficulties with emotion regulation may contribute to avoidance.

This perspective also has practical implications. Approaches to academic procrastination should not be limited to time-management techniques. If procrastination is associated with fear of possible failure, it may also be useful to consider how students respond to their mistakes and how they regulate negative emotions. Recent findings on the role of emotion regulation in the relationship between fear of failure and procrastination support this view [7].

Thus, fear of making mistakes may be one of the factors that helps explain the complex relationship between perfectionism and procrastination. High personal standards do not necessarily lead to procrastination. Their effects may depend on how students perceive possible mistakes, whether they experience fear of failure, and how they regulate the emotions associated with these experiences. Further empirical research is needed to determine more precisely when high standards support active engagement and when they become associated with avoidance.

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