Perfectionism, Self-Handicapping, and Boredom:
Honors vs. Non-Honors Students

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Background

Perfectionism is defined as striving to be perfect and avoid error (Powers et al., 2011). Slaney et al. (2001) proposed three dimensions of perfectionism: High standards, discrepancy, and order. High standards refers to the extent to which individuals set high expectations for themselves. Discrepancy refers to the extent to which individuals feel as though they cannot meet the standards they set for themselves. Order refers to the extent to which students feel neatness and organization is important.

Self-Handicapping is behavior aimed at avoiding the appearance of incompetence that precedes, and can undermine, performance (Urdan & Midgley, 2001). Examples of self-handicapping are procrastination, lack of effort/practice, drug or alcohol use, and lack of sleep.

Academic Boredom is an unpleasant affective state that consists of a specific component process that can be highly adverse: not simply the absence of positive affect. Academic boredom is negatively correlated with academic achievement (Pekrun et al., 2014).

The purpose of the current study was to examine relationships among perfectionism, self-handicapping, and boredom, as well as group differences in Honors versus non-honors students among these constructs.

Method

Participants

A total of 186 undergraduate college students (36 males; 88 freshmen, 38 sophomores, 21 juniors, 38 seniors) participated in this study.

Materials

Participants completed six questionnaires: A Perfectionism: The Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (Stanley et al., 2001) • Self-Handicapping: The Academic Self-Handicapping Scale (Midgley et al., 1994) • Academic Boredom: The Boredom Scale (Peirn et al., 2014) • Achievement Goal Orientations: The Attitude Toward Learning and Performance in College This Semester (Pekrun et al., 2004) • Academic Self-Worth: Contingencies of Self-Worth Scale – Academic Competence Subscale (Cracke et al., 2003) • Demographics: Assessed gender, age, ethnic background, class level, major, G.P.A., and participation in the University Honors Program. Also assessed perceived interest in courses this semester and perceived challenge of courses this semester.

Procedure

Students completed the questionnaires in an online (Qualtrics) context. Surveys were distributed using the Psychology Department online participation system (SONA). Extra credit was offered as incentive to participate at the discretion of each professor.

Results

Perfectionism Group Differences

- High Standards: \( t(182) = 3.15, p < .001, \text{df} = 0.64, d = 0.37 \)
- Discrepancy: \( t(183) = -2.19, p < .001, \text{df} = 0.37 \)

Self-Handicapping Group Differences

- Discrepancy: \( t(183) = 4.23, p < .016, \text{df} = 0.45 \)

Academic Contingency of Self-Worth Group Differences

- Academic Contingency of Self-Worth: \( t(183) = 4.23, p < .016, \text{df} = 0.45 \)

Boredom Group Differences

- Boredom: \( t(183) = 3.21, p < .001, \text{df} = 0.49 \)

Correlation Matrix

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Conclusions

Group Differences: Honors v. Non-Honors

- Honors students reported lower levels of high standards than did non-honors students.
- Honors students reported lower levels of discrepancy than did non-honors students.
- Honors students reported lower levels of self-handicapping than did non-honors students.
- Honors and non-honors students did not differ in academic contingency of self-worth. Generally, students reported academic performance as an important component of self-worth.

Correlations

- Academic self-handicapping was positively correlated with both mastery avoidance and performance avoidance orientations.
- Boredom was positively correlated with academic self-handicapping.
- Discrepancy was positively correlated with the mastery avoidance orientation.
- Both dimensions of perfectionism were correlated with academic self-handicapping. High standards was negatively correlated with academic self-handicapping, while discrepancy was positively correlated with academic self-handicapping.
- Both dimensions of perfectionism were correlated with academic boredom. High standards was negatively correlated with academic boredom, while discrepancy was positively correlated with academic boredom.

References


Acknowledgments

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