

Workshop

Procrastination: Loitering with intent will begin later...

Workshop FEDORA Summer University Leiden 16.-18.06.2008

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What is procrastination?



Procrastination means:

you postpone doing things that you yourself insist have top priority, are urgent or necessary

Instead, you do other things that you yourself regard as having lower priority, being less urgent or less necessary

Afterwards, you lie to yourself about why you did what you did

Commonly acknowledged facts about procrastination:

State and trait procrastination differ

Trait procrastination is common

Trait-procrastination = low values on BIG-5 factor „conscientiousness“

State procrastination is the outcome of a motivational conflict

Schouwenburg, H., 2005, Procrastination, motivation and personality, towards a motivational theory of procrastination. Paper presented at the 4th Biannual Conference on „Researching and counselling the procrastinator – moving towards theoretical understanding.“ London, Roehampton University, 25.-26.07.2005

Prevalence rates for adults worldwide:

14% arousal procrastinators

15% avoidant procrastinators

both are significantly correlated

no sex differences

Ferrari, J., 2005, Chronic procrastination: Is everyone NOT doing it? How to evaluate arousal and avoidant styles. Paper presented at the 4th Biannual Conference on „Researching and counselling the procrastinator – moving towards theoretical understanding.“ London, Roehampton University, 25.-26.07.2005

Also widely acknowledged: Procrastination is

a habit, reinforced by doing things more pleasurable than tasks

Procrastination goes along with:

- (socially prescribed) perfectionism
- exaggerated self-criticism
- paralyzing self-directed attention
- irrational fear of failure/success
- discomfort anxiety
- lack of self-efficacy and self-esteem
- external-variable attribution of success
- avoidance of feedback
- escape from self-awareness

Psychodynamic point of view:

procrastination as a defense mechanism

- designed to protect self-esteem
- slowly, but definitely ruining self-esteem

Procrastination encompasses:

problems of intentions, actions, action-control and self-accessability

at the interface between

- motivation
- personality
- tasks

- volition

relevant factors:

motivation: expecting success vs. failure

personality: action vs. state orientation

tasks: playing golf vs. writing a thesis

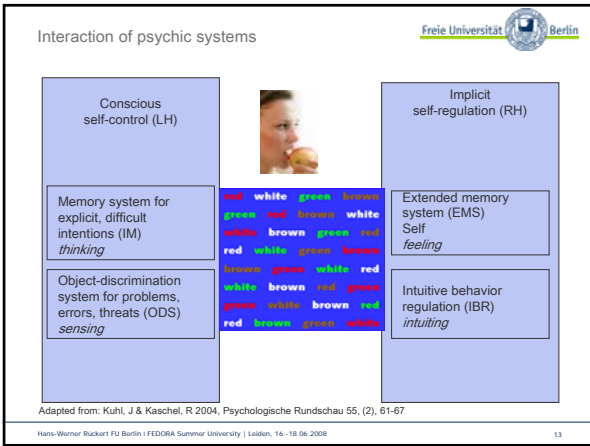
A la Recherche du temps perdu

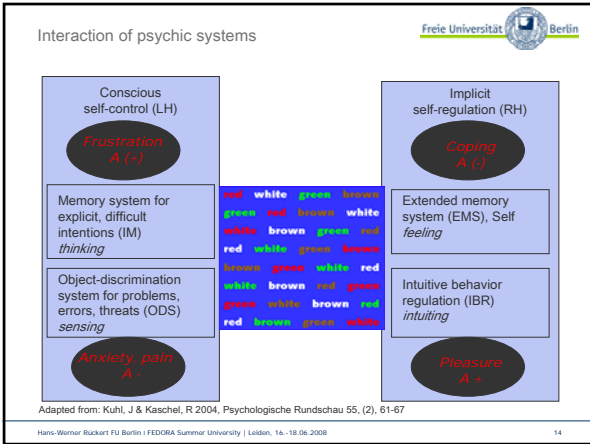


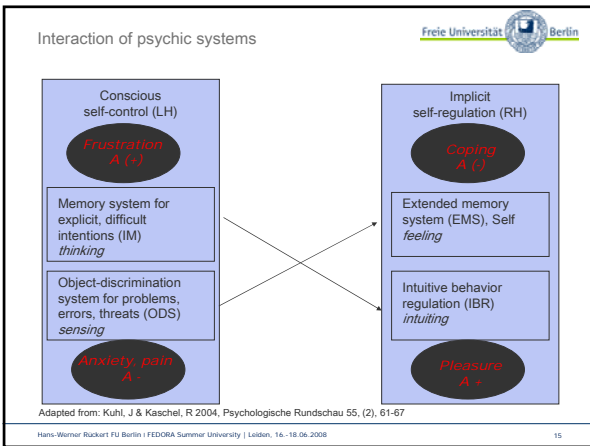
Pro (ust) crastination

"Had I been less firmly resolved upon setting myself definitely to work, I should perhaps have made an effort to begin at once. But since my resolution was explicit, since within twenty-four hours, in the empty frame of that long morrow in which everything was so well arranged because I myself had not yet entered it, my good intentions would be realised without difficulty, it was better not to select an evening on which I was ill-disposed for a beginning for which the following days were not, alas, to show themselves any more propitious."

Within a Budding Grove, Chapter 1







Procrastination treatments generally are:

- using a group format
- focusing on Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT)
- short
- focusing on students
- mostly look at procrastination as a first-order problem

Problems

First order problems

Intensify your efforts (more of the same)

Second order problems

Philosophical change

Treatments generally use two main strategies:

- enhance self-control by improving self-regulation
 - setting goals
 - monitoring progress
 - managing time
- enhance self-efficacy
 - promote success-experiences
 - dispute irrational beliefs
 - protect goals from distraction

Group treatments „Stop procrastinating“, Counseling Center: 13 Groups, N = 164, f = 78, m = 86
Intake interviews, 12 participants per group, 5 two-hour sessions, follow up

Aims:

- getting over usual excuses for chronic postponing and accepting that either poor working habits or conflict account for it (insight into the problem)
- clarifying main causes for procrastination and task avoidance, especially reduction of painful self-awareness and needs for protecting the self (insight into the dynamics)
- identifying dysfunctional self-talk (insight into self-management)
- providing structured help for those who want to overcome deficient working habits (skill training)

Topics taught:

- process orientation vs. product orientation
- planning and prioritizing
- impulse control vs. mindlessness
- self- and contingency management
- role of significant others in procrastination
- role of emotions like shame, anger etc.
- autonomy and guilt

Treatment

...effects shown are not very large and there seems to be little evidence of a long-lasting or stable effect on behavior. Overall this improvement seems to be only partial ... (207)

„Given the personality structure involved, and given the more or less addictive nature of procrastination, tangible change would require much longer periods of treatment“. (205)

Schouwenburg, H.C. (2004). Perspectives on Counseling the Procrastinator. In: H.C. Schouwenburg, C.H. Lay, T.A. Pynchyl & J.R. Ferrari (Eds), Counseling the Procrastinator in Academic Settings, American Psychological Association, Washington

Problems

First order problems
Intensify your efforts

Second order problems
Philosophical change

second order problems



“Having got into the habit, through idleness, of postponing my work from day to day, I doubtless supposed death might deal in the same way with me”.

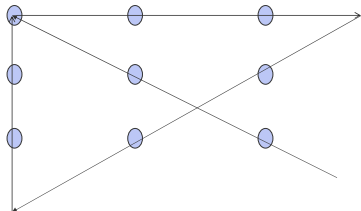
Time regained, Chapter 2

Treatments could aim at:

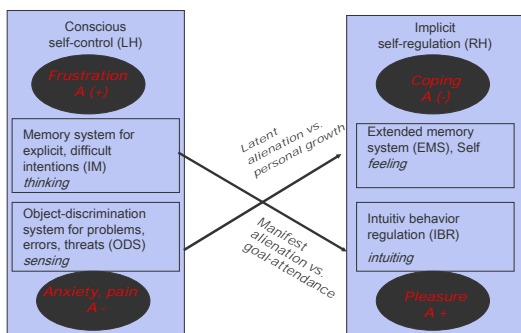
Looking at things with **new eyes** (Proust):

- promote integration of intentions into the self by
- giving up on tasks that are not compatible with the self
- making tasks self-compatible by relating them to genuine personal needs and relevant goals
- generating new perspectives by going beyond the borders

second order problems:



Interaction of psychic systems



“The idea of preliminary suffering is associated with that of work, we dread every fresh undertaking because we are thereby reminded of the pain in store for us before we can conceive it. And, realising that suffering is the best thing life has to offer, we think of death without horror and almost as a deliverance.”

Time regained, Chapter 3

Thanatotherapy?

No, but:

- accept procrastination as a personality trait (BIG 5 Conscientiousness)
- accept procrastination as an addictive habit (that one can fight)
- develop valid goals and self-obligations (that might change over time)
- look for self-infiltration regarding goals (procrastination as reactance)
- look for overidentification with an idealised self-image (unrealism)
- look for a rigid, aggressive super-ego
- admit that procrastination can be fun

Thank you for your time and attention!

Questions? Comments?
SEND EMAIL

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