



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

Hannah Geis

Faculty Mentor: Mary Beth Leibham, Ph.D.  
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Department of Psychology



## 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 aversive; 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:

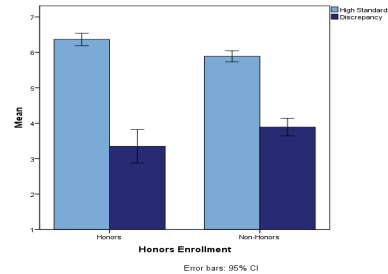
- Perfectionism:** The *Almost Perfect Scale-Revised* (Slaney et al., 2001)
- Self-Handicapping:** The *Academic Self-Handicapping Scale* (Midgley et al., 1996)
- Academic Boredom:** The *Boredom Scale* (Pekrun et al., 2014)
- Achievement Goal Orientations:** The *Attitude Toward Learning and Performance in College This Semester* (Finney et al., 2004)
- Academic Self-Worth:** *Contingencies of Self-Worth Scale - Academic Competence Subscales* (Crocker 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.

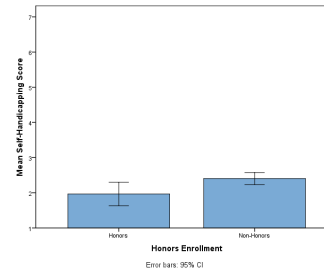
## Results

**Perfectionism Group Differences**



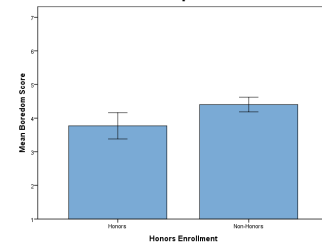
High Standards:  $f(182) = 3.15, p = .030, d = 0.61$   
Discrepancy:  $f(183) = -2.19, p = .002, d = 0.37$

**Self-Handicapping Group Differences**



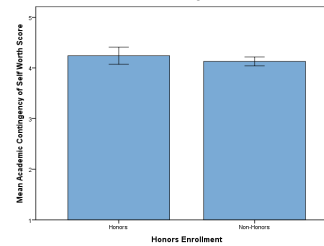
$f(183) = -2.43, p = .016, d = 0.41$

**Boredom Group Differences**



$f(180) = -2.81, p = .005, d = 0.49$

**Academic Contingency of Self-Worth Group Differences**



$f(183) = 1.23, p = .222$

**Correlation Matrix**

|                       | HS     | D     | SH     | B      | ASW   | MApp   | MAv   | PApp  | PAv   |
|-----------------------|--------|-------|--------|--------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|
| High Standards        |        | .02   | -.30** | -.28** | .31** | .22*   | -.02  | .28** | .03   |
| Discrepancy           | .02    |       | .36**  | .44**  | .27** | -.14   | .35*  | .10   | .18*  |
| Self-Handicapping     | -.30** | .36** |        | .48**  | .06   | -.12   | .24** | -.02  | .20** |
| Boredom               | -.28** | .44** | .48**  |        | -.01  | -.27** | .11   | .003  | .27** |
| Academic Self-Worth   | .31**  | .27** | .06    | -.01   |       | .23**  | .19** | .37** | .22** |
| Mastery Approach      | .22**  | -.14  | -.12   | -.27** | .23** |        | .38** | .15*  | .10   |
| Mastery Avoidance     | -.02   | .35** | .24**  | .11    | .19** | .38**  |       | .04   | .28** |
| Performance Approach  | .28**  | .10   | -.02   | .003   | .37** | .15*   | .04   |       | .51** |
| Performance Avoidance | .03    | .18*  | .20**  | .27**  | .22** | .10    | .28** | .51** |       |

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

## Conclusions

### Group Differences: Honors v. Non-Honors

- Honors students reported greater 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 students reported lower levels of academic boredom 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

- Crocker, J., Luhtanen, R. K., Cooper, M. L., & Bouvrette, A. (2003). Contingencies of Self-Worth Scale. *Psychtests*, doi:10.1037/00082-000
- Elliot, A. J., & McGregor, H. A. (2001). A 2 x 2 achievement goal framework. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 80, 501-519. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.80.3.501
- Finney, S. J., Pieper, S. L., & Barron, K. E. (2004). Examining the psychometric properties of the achievement goal questionnaire in a general academic context. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 64, 365-382. doi:10.1177/0013164403258465
- Midgley, C., Arunkumar, R., & Urdan, T. C. (1996). 'If I don't do well tomorrow, there's a reason': Predictors of adolescents' use of academic self-handicapping strategies. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 88(3), 423-434. doi:10.1037/0022-0663.88.3.423
- Pekrun, R., Holl, N. C., Goetz, T., & Perry, R. P. (2014). Boredom and academic achievement: Testing a model of reciprocal causation. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 106(3), 696-710. doi:10.1037/a0036006
- Powers, T. A., Koestner, R., Zuroff, D. C., Milyavskaya, M., & Gain, A. A. (2011). The effects of self-criticism and self-oriented perfectionism on goal pursuit. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 37, 964-975. doi:10.1177/0146167211410246
- Slaney, R. B., Rice, K. G., Mobley, M., Trippi, J., & Ashby, J. S. (2001). The revised almost perfect scale. *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development*, 34, 130-145.
- Urdan, T., & Midgley, C. (2001). Academic self-handicapping: What we know, what more there is to learn. *Educational Psychology Review*, 13(2), 115-138. doi:10.1023/A:1009061303214

## Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP) for supporting this study, the Learning and Technology Services (LTS) for printing this poster, and Dr. Ivy Bohlein Gebos of the University Honors Program at UWEC for distributing the survey link to the honors population.