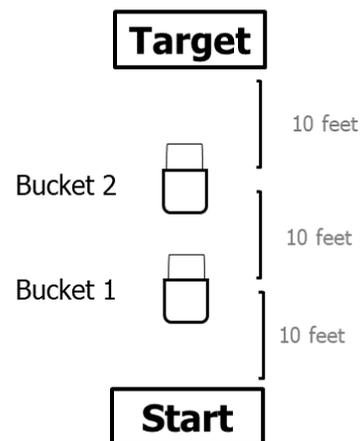


Background

Recent experimental evidence suggests that people tend to begin tasks as soon as possible, even when this comes at the expense of extra physical effort (Fournier et al., 2019; Patterson, & Kahan, 2020; Rosenbaum et al., 2014; 2019).

This tendency to **precrastinate** (Rosenbaum et al., 2014, 2019) is reliably observed in the “bucket task”. In this task, participants are asked to carry a bucket containing a small amount of weight (~5 lbs) to a target. Participants are given the option to carry either a bucket that is close to them but farther from the target (bucket 1) or a bucket that is farther from them but closer to the target (bucket 2) and both buckets contain the same amount of weight.



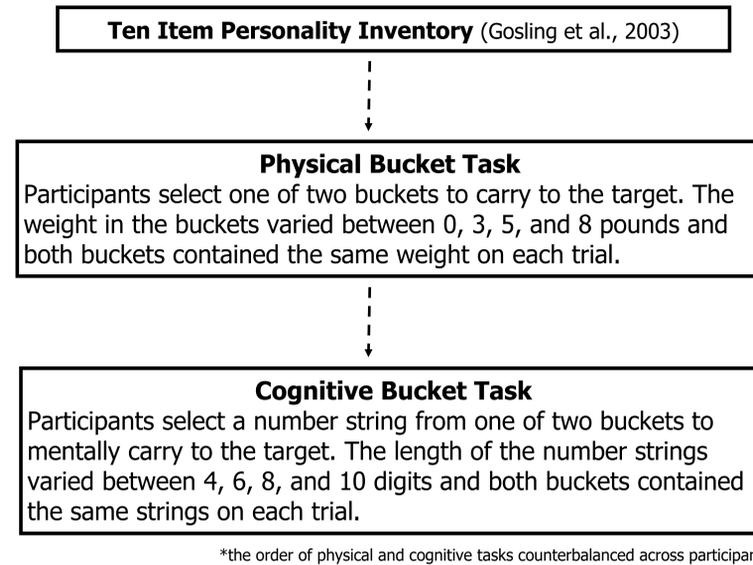
Counterintuitively, participants prefer to pick up bucket 1 and carry it a farther distance rather than picking up bucket 2 and carrying it a shorter distance. These results suggest that individuals avoid cognitive effort (remembering to pick up the bucket) at the expense of additional physical effort (carrying the bucket for a longer distance).

The current study sought to extend this research by asking the following questions.

1. Does precrastination extend to tasks in which participants are asked to carry a cognitive load?
2. Are people who precrastinate on a physical task also more likely to precrastinate on a cognitive task?
3. Are any of the Big-Five personality traits predictive of an individual's tendency to precrastinate?

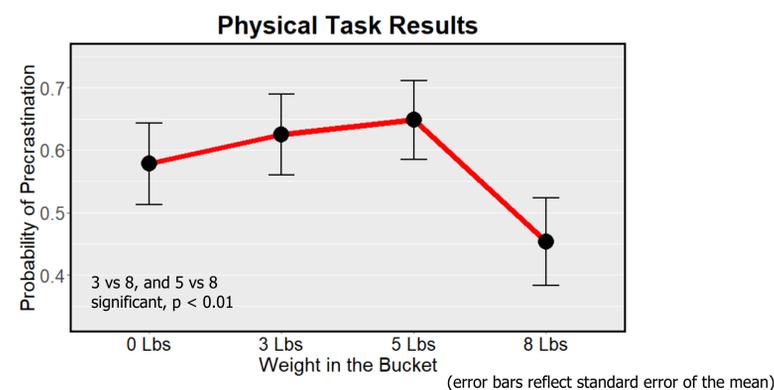
Experimental Design

32 participants (Mean age = 20.19, 19 females, 12 males, and 1 genderqueer) were drawn from the Bard College population.

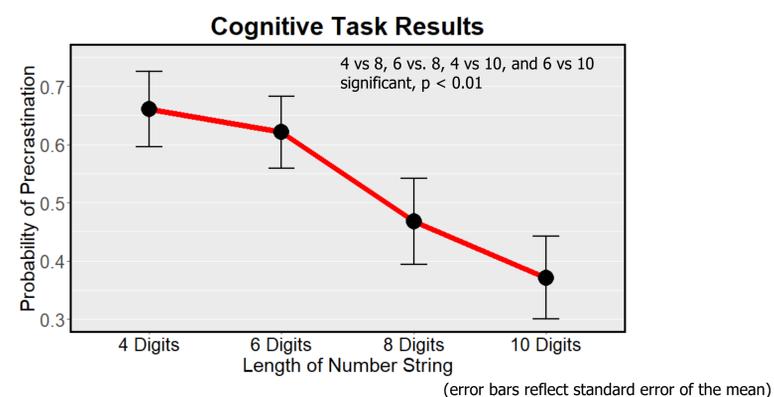


Precrastination in Physical and Cognitive Tasks

Replicating previous work (Rosenbaum et al., 2014), participants precrastinated on the physical task. However, the tendency to precrastinate decreased as the weight of the bucket increased, $F(3,93) = 3.25, p = 0.025$.

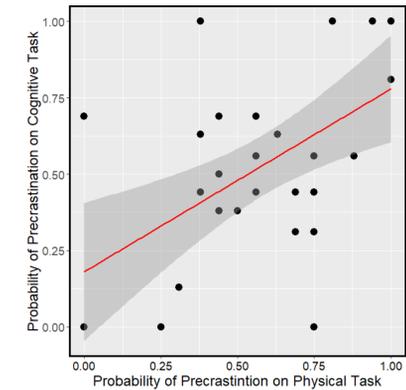


Participants also precrastinated in the cognitive task. Paralleling the results of the physical task, the tendency to precrastinate decreased as the number of digits to remember increased, $F(3,90) = 8.55, p < 0.001$.



Individual Differences in Precrastination

The probability of precrastinating on the physical task was positively correlated with probability of precrastinating on the cognitive task, $r(30) = 0.548, p < 0.05$.



In contrast, only conscientiousness was found to be (marginally) associated with the probability of precrastinating, $r(30) = 0.348, p = 0.059$. No other correlations between personality traits and precrastination approached significance.

Conclusions and Future Directions

Extending previous work, we find that individuals precrastinate on both physical and cognitive tasks. However, in both tasks, this tendency decreased when the task was sufficiently demanding.

We found that the likelihood of precrastination was consistent across our two tasks. Individuals who precrastinated on the physical task tended to precrastinate on the cognitive task.

Additional studies are required to determine what individual differences are important. Our results tentatively point to the importance of conscientiousness in precrastination.

Future work in our lab will focus on whether precrastination can be beneficial. For example, does precrastination increase task commitment?

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