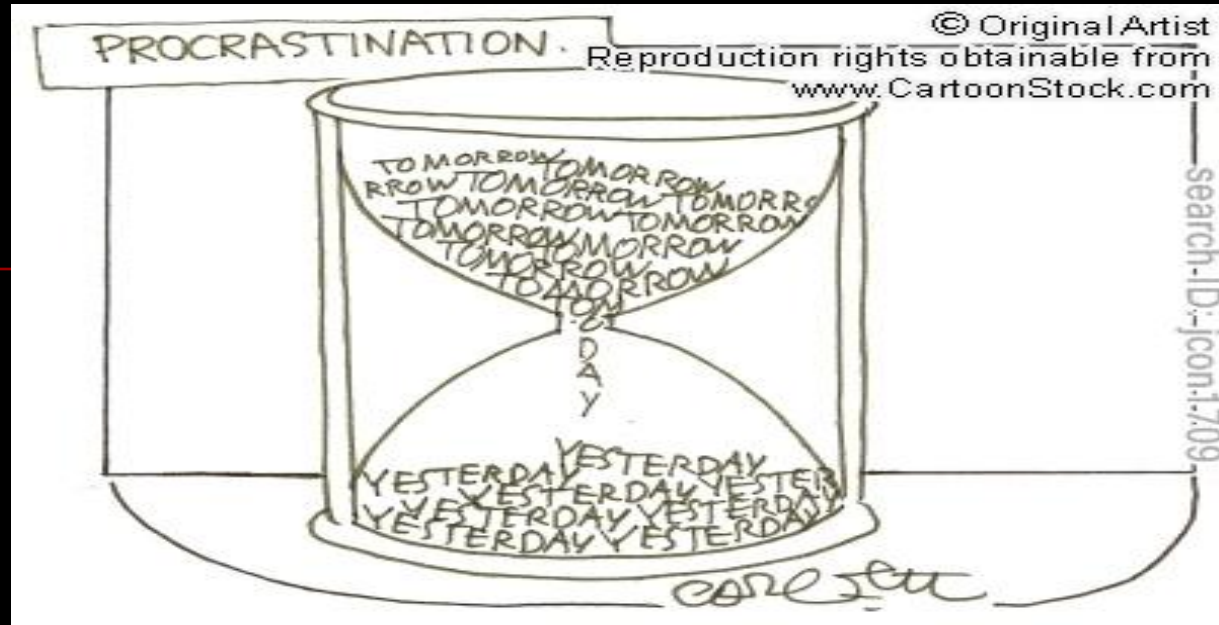




# Therapeutic techniques for procrastinators

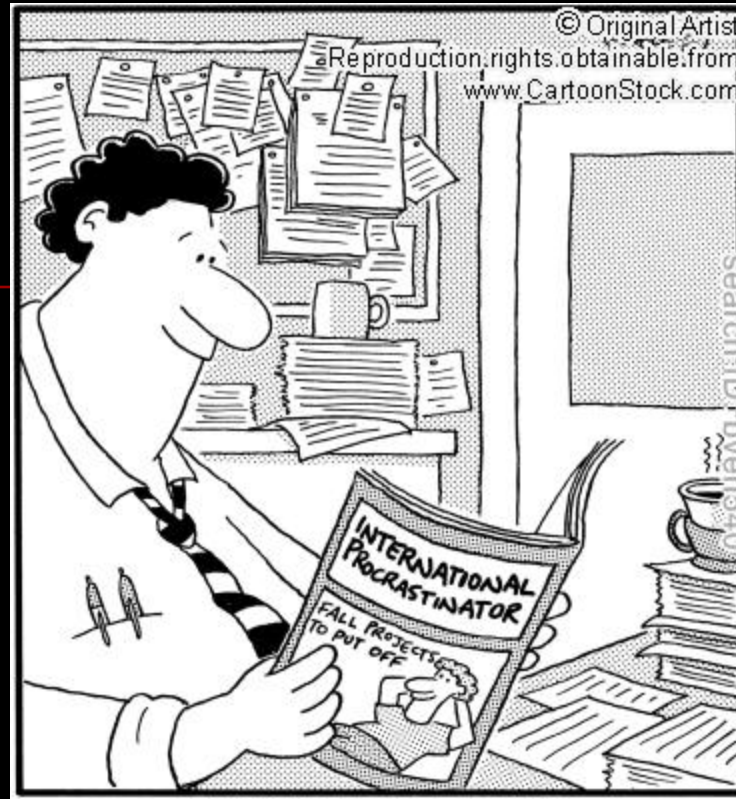
Maria –Ioanna, Argiropoulou  
Myrto, Lemonoudi

Department of Psychology, University of Athens, Greece

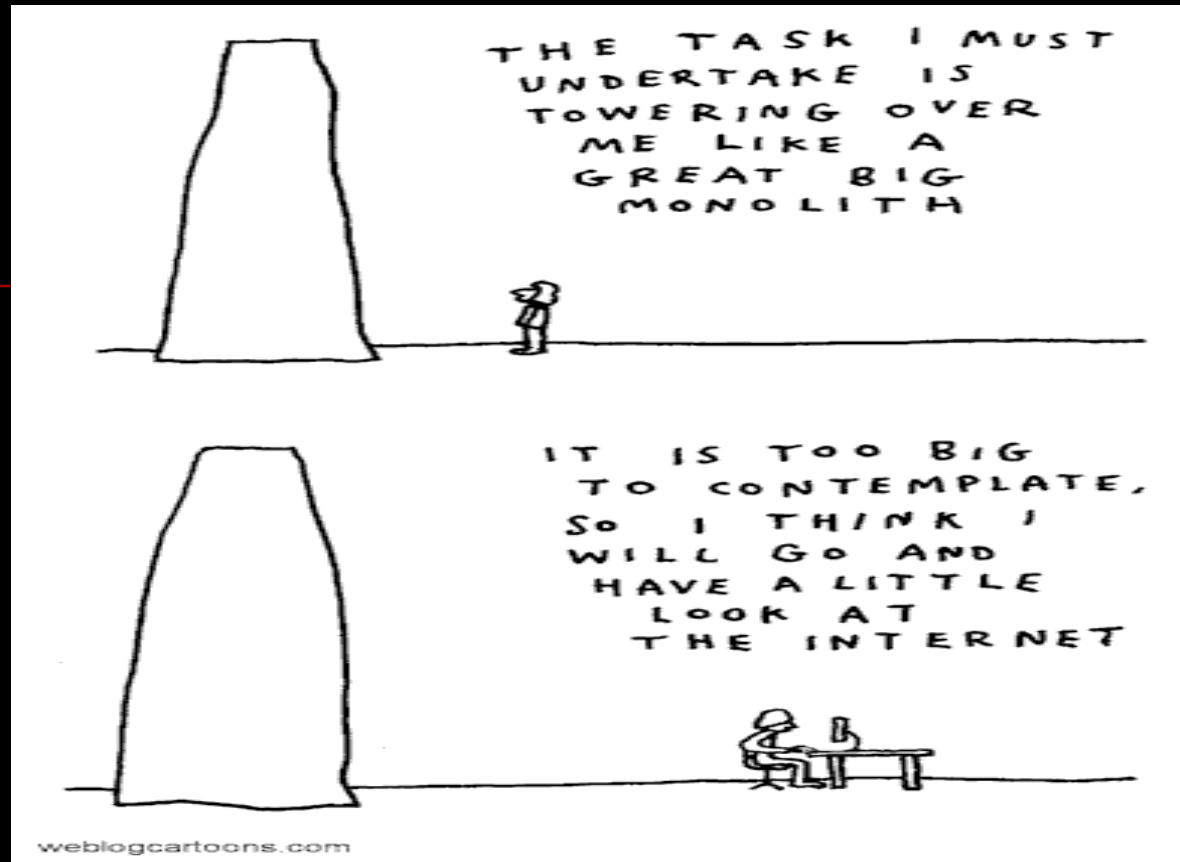


## Aim of the presentation

- Identify and diagnose problematic academic procrastination
- Develop an increased awareness of a range of strategies that are used to deal with dilatory behavior
- Share experiences, thoughts, suggestions and ideas on working with students exhibiting high levels of procrastination



- Procrastination is reported widely in the popular press, with hundreds of books published on the subject and millions of dollars in sales



## **Problematic Academic Procrastination**

It has been reported in a very significant proportion of university students, both in Greece and internationally

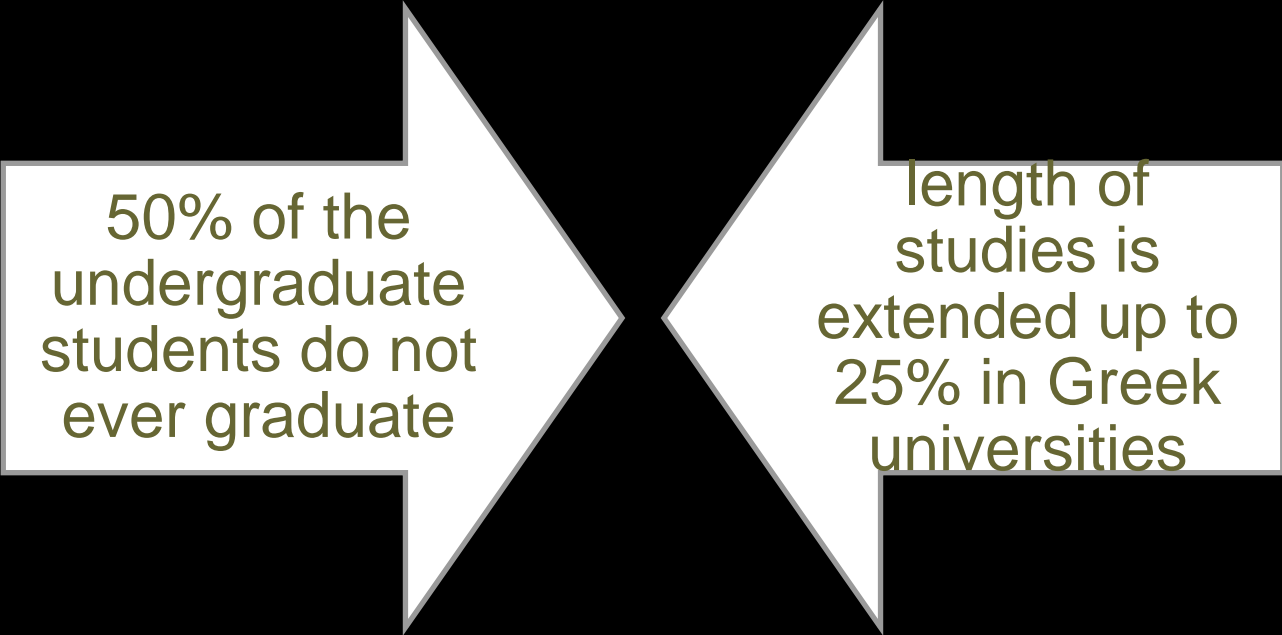
# International situation

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- 80-95% of the students procrastinate at some point of their lives
- 75% of them believe that they procrastinate towards meeting their study obligations
- 50% systematically procrastinates
- ❖ 20- 40% of the student report having very serious difficulties

# Situation in Greece

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50% of the undergraduate students do not ever graduate

length of studies is extended up to 25% in Greek universities

## ■ Definitions



# What Procrastination means ?

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- “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.

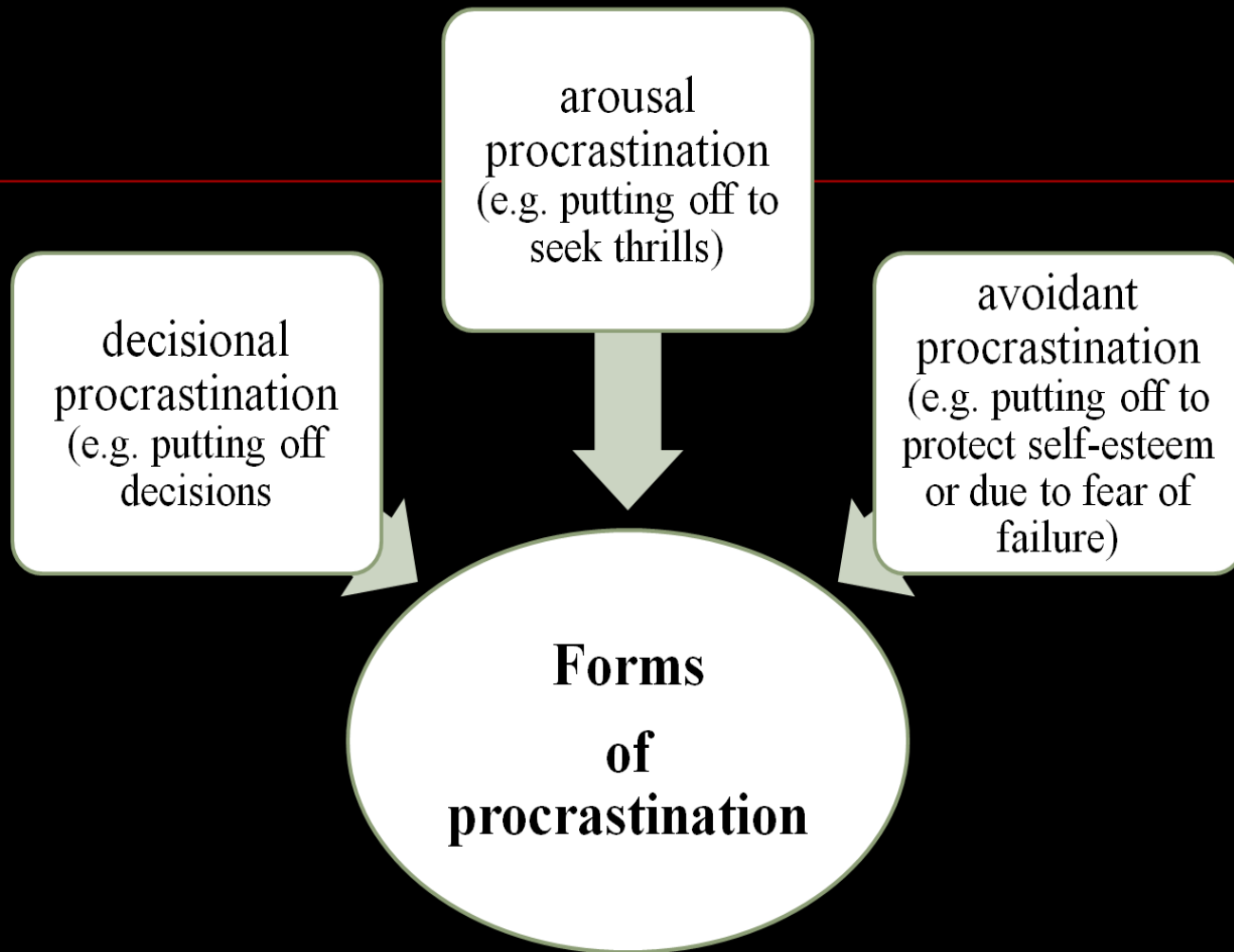
*Afterwards, you lie to yourself about why you did what you did” (Rueckert, H. W., 2010)*



# Not all delay is procrastination...

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- Delay is part of making priorities
- Procrastination is a needless voluntary delay, namely the voluntary delay of an intended action despite the knowledge that this delay may harm the individual in terms of the task performance at hand or even just how the individual feels about the task or him- or herself



# The puzzling aspect of Procrastination

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- Why are we reluctant to act ?
- Why is it we become our “own worst enemy” ?
- ❖ We undermine our own goal pursuit needlessly.  
Why? How can we solve this procrastination puzzle?

# ■ Theory



# Theoretical Background

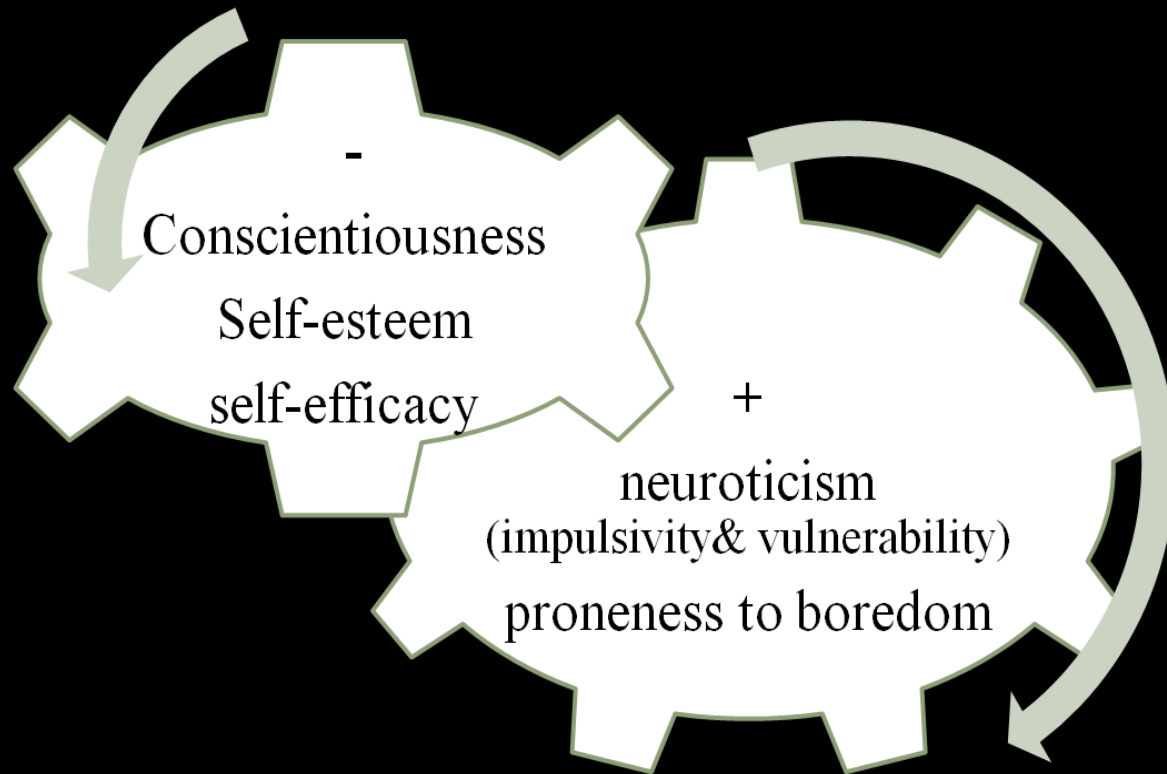
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There are two main traditions in studying procrastination:

- Some researchers view procrastination as a **stable personality trait**
- Others study procrastination as a behavior closely related to **the characteristics of a given task or situation**

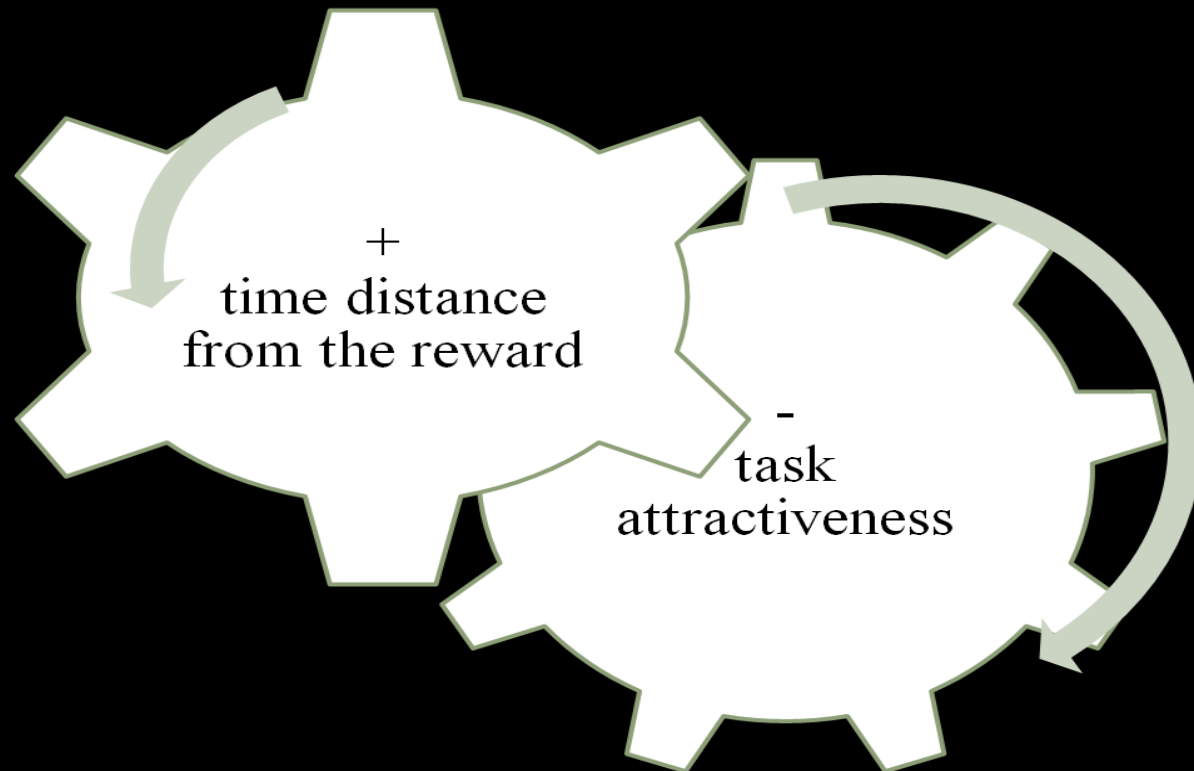
# Correlates of procrastination

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# Situational correlates of procrastination

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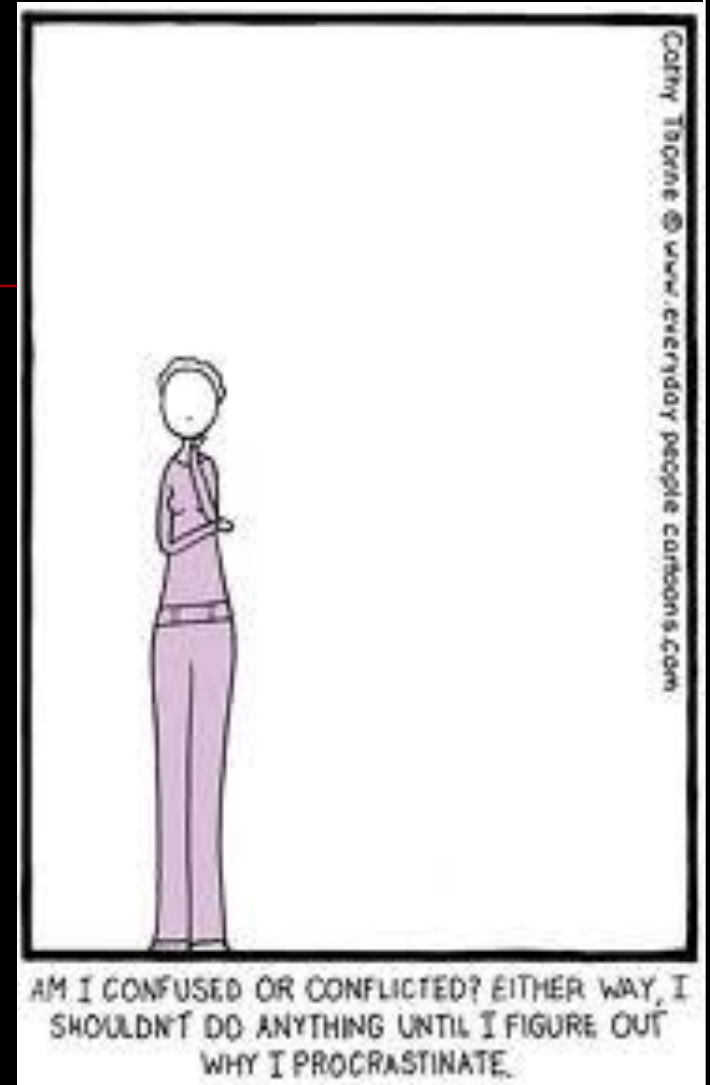
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■ **Mediating factors :**

- intention
- self-efficacy expectations
- self-regulatory processes

□ **Demographics :**

- Age (younger)
- Gender (men)
- Year of study (increase during the last years)





# Temporal Motivation Theory (Steel & König, 2006)

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$$\text{Utility} = \frac{\text{Expectancy} \times \text{Value}}{\Gamma \times \text{Delay}}$$

Expectancy: Self-efficacy

Value: Task attractiveness, Need for achievement, Boredom proneness

Sensitivity to delay ( $\Gamma$ ): Distractibility, impulsiveness, lack of self-control, age

Delay: timing of rewards and punishments, organized, intention-action gap

# The role of Volition

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- ❑ The failure to implement intentions and the intention - action gap is actually significantly more often among procrastinators than people who don't often exhibit dilatory behaviors
- ❑ This demonstrates the importance of volition in explaining self-regulation failures
- ❑ Why do we fail to self – regulate?
- ❖ “We may voluntarily delay our action, because we are *unable* or *unwilling* to self – regulate our behavior to act now”  
(Pychyl, 2010)

# Kuhl's Personality Systems Interaction Theory (PSI)

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- Procrastination is characterized by :
  - Problems of intentions, actions, action-control and self-accessability at the interface between
    - Motivational – Volitional Phenomena
    - Personality
    - Tasks

# Relevant factors

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- Motivation: values x expectancy + crucial role of time/discounting effect
- Personality: action vs state orientation; impulse control
- Tasks

# Future Perspectives

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- Despite the constantly expanding literature on procrastination internationally, an integrated model explaining how social & personality factors along with situational factors relate to motivation leading to procrastination is missing.

# Case study

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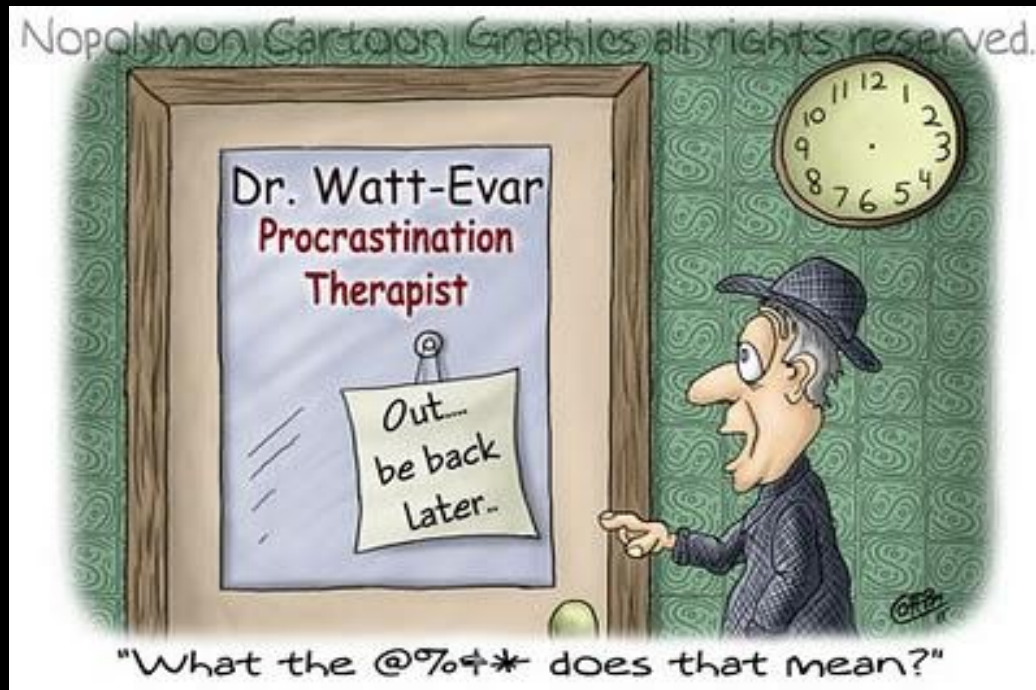
- Exercise: Please study in couples the following case study. Allocate at each member of the couple either the role of Anna or the role of the counselor and discuss her difficulties in the form of a role playing.
- Therapist's task:
  - Which dysfunctional patterns does Anna display?
  - What therapeutic techniques could be proposed to help Anna improve her study habits?

# Assessment

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- General Procrastination Scale (GP; Lay, 1986)
- Adult Inventory of Procrastination (AIP; McCown & Johnson, 1989)
- Decisional Procrastination Scale (DP; Mann, 1982)
- Tuckman Procrastination Scale (Tuckman, 1991)
- Irrational Procrastination Scale (Steel, 2002)
- Procrastination Assessment Scale-Students (Solomon & Rothblum, 1984)
- Tel-Aviv Procrastination Inventory (Milgram, Sroloff, & Rosenbaum, 1988)
- Aitken Procrastination Inventory (Aitken, 1982)

# Intervention





# Psychoeducation for Procrastination

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## ■ *Topic taught :*

- What Procrastination is and what it isn't
  - Procrastination for many people is a “habit”
  - When “delay” is a necessary part of our lives?
- Difference between “procrastination” and delay

## ❖ Homework :

Find out which of your delays are procrastination and write them down

What emotions and thoughts emerge from the tasks you are procrastinating?

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■ *Topic taught :*

➤ Characteristics of procrastination :

- Self – regulation failure
- Impulsivity – Immediate mood repair vs long-term goals
  - “we give in to feel good in the present”
- Avoidance of negative feelings
- As a result... Reinforcement of Procrastination

❖ Homework :

Recognize our emotions

Use techniques to regulate our feelings

- Be persistent, stay put, do not avoid → Make an action plan for the tasks you avoid

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■ *Topic taught :*

➤ Cognitive Distortions : “I’ll do it tomorrow”

- Predicting future
- Affective forecasting : The intention of doing a future action is affected by our present affective state

❖ Homework :

Projection in the future

Recognize the cognitive distortion

The emotion can’t always match with the intention

Suggestion : “Start acting according to your intentions, and you’ll see that your motivation and your mood will change”

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■ *Topic taught :*

- Biases in our thinking → Thoughts mediate through our emotions and actions
- Irrational Beliefs → Challenge and Reconstruction

❖ Homework :

Recognize the thoughts that “deceive you”

Search for your usual “excuses”

Have a fixed answer for your “excuses”

Use the excuses as “signs for change”

# Why Procrastination is really a problem ?

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## ■ *Topic taught :*

- *“We become the enemy to ourselves, when we procrastinate our goals”*
- *Procrastination → Poor performance → Lower achievement → Negative feelings*
- *Mixture of feelings including “guilt”*
- *Affect Health :*
  - *Causes stress*
  - *Neglecting health behaviors*

## Treatment strategy

“Recognizing the cost of procrastination, may enhance the commitment to change”

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### ■ Cost – Benefit Technique

#### ❖ Ways to succeed it :

By strengthening goal intention

#### ❖ Homework :

Enlist the task and activities for completion

Find the costs associated with procrastination for each task

Find the benefits of acting now

# Treatment Strategies in general..

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- Learned Industriousness : Classical conditioning occurs when an event or an action dependably leads to a pleasing outcome. After many repetitions, the preceding event or action starts to be conditioned and is perceived as rewarding in itself. New tasks should be structured so that the earlier efforts lead to success
- Increase task completion : self-efficacy , modeling (Bandura),
- Stimulus chaining: a stimulus that predicts the reward
- Stimulus control (cues that confirm their goals, banish signs of temptation , e.g. study in the same place, cut- off internet access)
- Occasional indulge in short – range impulses
- Fusing: different needs may be satisfied through a single action (e.g. study groups for those who prefer socializing)

# Treatment strategy

## “Goal setting and Implementation Intention”

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### ■ *Topic taught :*

- Goal setting: taking some larger goal and breaking it down into a series of smaller tasks.
- For optimum effectiveness, these goals should have four properties:
  - Specificity
  - Challenge
  - Proximity
  - Routine
- Objective : Initiation of action

### ❖ Homework :

Write down your priorities

Divide the task to smaller tasks



# Treatment strategy

## “Preparation for current obstacles and difficulties”

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- *Topic taught :*
- Distractions :
  - Changes in our moods
  - Disappointments
  - Other activities that can distract our attention. For example: Checking e-mails or surfing in the internet

- Homework :

Recognition and enlisting the possible distractions

Reducing the number of distractions by dealing with the obstacles. For example : shutting down the cell phone

Making a plan of action when distractions arise

# Energy Regulation, the meaning of “Willpower” and the Role of Motivation

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## ■ *Topic taught :*

- Ego energy is used in many impulse restraining or delaying acts, such as thought suppression or even just volition itself
- This energy is quite limited, and as it depletes, the ability to self-control diminishes
- It is renewable, and perhaps expandable with continued use (i.e., stretching it). Consequently, as we get tired, stressed, or frustrated, our ability to suppress or redirect our needs is hampered and thus so is our aptitude at preventing procrastination

# Treatment strategy

## “Strengthening the willpower”

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- ❖ Ways to succeed it :
  - Adequate sleep - rest and food
  - Testing and treating allergies
  - Regular exercise
  - Schedule most aversive tasks during energy peak and most pleasant tasks during the slump.
  - Be strategic : “a plan for action”
  - Motivation
  - Enhance Self – Discipline
  - Positive Emotions – Social Interactions

# Treatment strategy

## “Personality and Procrastination”

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### ■ *Topic taught :*

- Personality and Self-regulation
- Personality and Behavior
- Personality Traits and Procrastination
- Personality as a protective factor or risk factor

### ❖ Homework :

Recognition of the personality traits

Prevention of the learned answer for current situations

Challenge the irrational beliefs

# “Last but not least” directions for the procrastinators...

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- Change cannot be achieved at once
  - The process of change is unequal due to obstacles and disappointments..
  - Self – forgiveness for the mistakes
  - **PERSISTENCE**
- 
- ❖ The techniques should be adapted to the needs of the procrastinator !!

# Exercise:

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- Your excuses for procrastination
- Create your own **MANTRA**

# Final Discussion

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