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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

True to the self or stuck in delay? Authenticity moderates the associations between perfectionism and procrastination

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BACKGROUND
Perfectionism has long been linked to procrastination, yet findings remain mixed, suggesting that high standards may facilitate or hinder action depending on whether they are accompanied by self-critical concerns. Authenticity may be related to how discrepancies between standards and performance are construed. The present study examined whether authenticity moderates the associations of adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism with procrastination and whether maladaptive perfectionism shows a necessary-condition pattern.

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE
The sample consisted of 300 adults who completed an anonymous online survey. Perfectionism was assessed using the Polish Adaptive and Maladaptive Perfectionism Questionnaire, procrastination with the Pure Procrastination Scale, and authenticity with the Authenticity Inventory-3, operationalized as a global manifest score. Data were analyzed using multiple regression models and necessary condition analysis (NCA).

RESULTS
Maladaptive perfectionism was positively associated with procrastination, whereas adaptive perfectionism was negatively associated. NCA yielded moderate but symmetric necessity and sufficiency effects, which did not support a genuine necessary condition. Authenticity moderated both relationships: at higher authenticity, the positive association of maladaptive perfectionism with procrastination was weaker, whereas the negative association of adaptive perfectionism was stronger.

CONCLUSIONS
Maladaptive perfectionism was positively associated with procrastination, whereas adaptive perfectionism was inversely associated with it. The strength of these associations varied with authenticity, although the moderation effects were modest. This pattern is consistent with the discrepancy-processing account. The symmetric NCA pattern indicated a constrained distribution rather than a genuine necessary condition.

KEY WORDS
self-regulation; perfectionism; procrastination; authenticity; necessary condition analysis

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BACKGROUND

People who set high standards for themselves should, in principle, be less likely to delay important tasks – yet many do exactly that. This paradox lies at the core of research on perfectionism and procrastination. Procrastination – defined as the voluntary delay of intended actions despite expected negative consequences – is consistently linked to poorer performance and psychological distress (Sirois, 2014; Steel, 2007). As a self-regulatory failure, it raises a key question: when do high standards facilitate action, and when do they promote avoidance?

Perfectionism is widely conceptualized as a multidimensional construct. Frost et al. (1990) distinguished personal standards from more evaluatively focused dimensions, including concern over mistakes and doubts about actions. Subsequent research broadly organized these dimensions into perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns (Stoeber & Otto, 2006). Strivings reflect high standards; concerns involve self-criticism, fear of failure, and evaluative sensitivity. Meta-analyses show divergent links to procrastination: concerns are positively associated with procrastination, whereas strivings are weakly negatively associated or unrelated (Sirois et al., 2017; Xie et al., 2018). Recent findings similarly link maladaptive perfectionism positively and adaptive perfectionism negatively to general procrastination (Przepiórka et al., 2026). Thus, procrastination is not driven by high standards per se, but by standards embedded in a self-critical, threat-based context.

Building on this, Szczucka's (2010) distinction between adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism emphasizes the functional meaning of standards. Adaptive perfectionism involves high standards with self-acceptance, competence, and flexibility. Maladaptive perfectionism involves unrealistically high standards, interpreting discrepancies as failures, a focus on mistakes, and contingent self-worth, often accompanied by distress. The key difference lies not in standard level but in whether such discrepancies are experienced as manageable aspects of goal pursuit or as threats to self-worth.

This distinction is critical for understanding procrastination as threat-driven avoidance (Steel, 2007). When discrepancies signal global failure, disengagement is more likely. Maladaptive perfectionism has been associated with greater procrastination (Yosopov et al., 2024). However, not all individuals with maladaptive perfectionism necessarily procrastinate, suggesting that the interpretation and regulation of discrepancies may also be important.

Cognitive accounts locate these processes in the self-system. Perfectionists compare current and ideal selves, directing attention to discrepancies and intensifying self-evaluation (Hewitt & Genest, 1990). Maladaptive perfectionism is linked to processes that amplify these discrepancies, including fear of failure and overgeneralization. Overgeneralization extends specific failures to the global self, making them self-defining rather than context-bound (Yosopov et al., 2024). Thus, the perfectionism–procrastination link unfolds within the self-system, where discrepancies may remain contextual or become self-defining.

One factor shaping this process is authenticity. Authenticity reflects the unobstructed operation of the true self and includes awareness, unbiased processing of self-relevant information, value-congruent behavior, and relational openness (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). Central to this construct is a nondefensive, relatively unbiased stance toward self-relevant information, which may facilitate processing discrepancies without distortion or avoidance (Lakey et al., 2008).

Authenticity is grounded in an integrated, multifaceted self-concept (Kernis & Goldman, 2006), reflecting the capacity to acknowledge and integrate potentially contradictory aspects of the self. Thus, maladaptive tendencies may coexist with authenticity; what differs is how they are processed. Authenticity is expected to moderate the perfectionism–procrastination link by shaping how discrepancies are appraised. Specifically, it may influence whether such discrepancies are construed as threatening signals of global self-failure or as informative, context-bound feedback.

First, authenticity may attenuate the maladaptive pathway by reducing threat-based processing. Individuals high in authenticity are more likely to engage in unbiased, nondefensive processing of self-relevant information (Kernis & Goldman, 2006), which may allow discrepancies to be integrated as one aspect of a broader, multifaceted self-representation rather than construed as global indicators of self-worth. As a result, discrepancies between standards and performance are less likely to signal personal inadequacy and more likely to remain context-bound (Lakey et al., 2008). This may limit overgeneralization, reduces self-critical rigidity and pressure associated with internalized standards, and constrains the escalation from evaluative concern to defensive avoidance, weakening the positive association between maladaptive perfectionism and procrastination.

Second, authenticity may strengthen the adaptive pathway by facilitating self-concordant regulation of high standards. When standards are aligned with one's values, they are more likely to be internalized and autonomously pursued (Ryan & Ryan, 2019; Sedikides & Schlegel, 2024). Authenticity, as the expression of a coherent and value-consistent self, supports this alignment, potentially increasing the likelihood that high standards translate into sustained, goal-directed action rather than disengagement (Moore et al., 2018). Accordingly, authenticity is hypothesized to strengthen the negative association between adaptive perfectionism and procrastination. Importantly, these moderating effects do not imply that authentic-

ity eliminates maladaptive tendencies. Rather, it may alter their functional consequences by shaping the processing of discrepancies. Thus, authenticity may operate not at the level of trait content, but at the level of regulatory dynamics within the self-system.

Beyond moderation, this study examines the structure of the perfectionism–procrastination relationship. Previous work has relied on symmetric models that estimate average effects but do not test necessity. Therefore, this study employs necessary condition analysis (NCA; Dul, 2016) to examine whether variables function as necessary – though not sufficient – conditions.

This study integrates a process account of discrepancy interpretation with a structural perspective on necessity. It examines how adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism relate to procrastination, whether authenticity moderates these relationships, and whether maladaptive perfectionism operates as a necessary condition for higher procrastination. I hypothesize that maladaptive perfectionism is positively associated with procrastination, whereas adaptive perfectionism is negatively associated. I further expect authenticity to moderate these relationships, weakening the maladaptive association and strengthening the adaptive one. Finally, I explore whether maladaptive perfectionism constitutes a necessary – though not sufficient – condition for higher procrastination.

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

PARTICIPANTS

The final sample consisted of 300 adults (76.3% women, n = 229; 23.7% men, n = 71). In terms of education, 2.0% had primary education, 37.0% secondary or vocational education, and 61.0% higher education. A sensitivity power analysis indicated that, assuming α = .05 and power = .80, this sample size was sufficient to detect small interaction effects ($f^2 \approx .027$; $\Delta R^2 \approx .017$-.018). Participants were recruited via convenience sampling through social media and completed an anonymous online survey hosted on Google Forms. No identifying information was collected.

The study was approved by the Committee for the Ethics of Scientific Research at the Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce (Resolution No. 6/2025). Participation was voluntary and anonymous, with no financial incentives. All participants provided informed consent and were informed of their right to withdraw at any time.

MATERIALS

Perfectionism was assessed using the Polish Adaptive and Maladaptive Perfectionism Questionnaire (Szczucka, 2010), a 35-item measure comprising maladaptive (22 items) and adaptive (13 items) subscales. Responses were given on a 7-point Likert scale. Example items include "What I do never seems good enough to me" (maladaptive perfectionism) and "I feel good about setting the bar high for myself" (adaptive perfectionism). Internal consistency was excellent (maladaptive α = .96; adaptive α = .93).

Procrastination was measured using the 12-item Pure Procrastination Scale (Steel, 2010; Polish adaptation: Stępień & Topolewska, 2014), treated as a unidimensional indicator of general procrastination. A sample item is: "I delay starting things even when I know they are important." Higher scores indicate greater procrastination. Internal consistency in the present sample was excellent (α = .92).

Authenticity was assessed using the Authenticity Inventory-3 (AI-3; Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Polish adaptation: Kutnik, 2014), a 45-item measure reflecting Awareness, Unbiased Processing, Behavior, and Relational Orientation. Responses were given on a 5-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater authenticity. A sample item is: "For better or for worse I am aware of who I truly am." Internal consistency was high for the global score (α = .89) and acceptable to good for the subscales (αs = .72-.82).

To examine factorial validity, three confirmatory factor models (four-factor, second-order, and bifactor) were tested, all showing poor fit (CFIs ≤ .67; RMSEAs ≥ .085). However, composite reliability was high (ω_total = .91), and bifactor indices indicated a substantial general factor (ω_h = .77; ECV ≈ .45). Given the lack of a well-fitting latent structure, prior evidence from Polish samples indicating lower subscale reliability (Borawski, 2021; Puchalska-Wasyl, 2022), and the sensitivity of moderation analyses to measurement error, authenticity was operationalized as a manifest global score (mean of all items after reverse coding). This approach prioritizes reliable estimation of interaction effects while remaining consistent with the conceptualization of authenticity as an integrated construct (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). Exploratory analyses using subscales are reported in Supplementary materials (Tables S1-S4 and Figures S2-S6).

DATA ANALYSIS

All analyses were conducted in R, beginning with descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations. Common method bias was assessed using Harman's single-factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003), implemented as an exploratory factor analysis with a single unrotated factor, with a parallel principal component analysis (PCA) as a robustness check.

Hypotheses were tested using two multiple regression models examining procrastination. In each

model, one dimension of perfectionism (maladaptive or adaptive) served as the focal predictor, authenticity as the moderator, and the other perfectionism dimension as a covariate. Predictors were standardized, and interaction terms were computed as product terms. Significant interactions were probed using simple slopes at −1 *SD*, mean, and +1 *SD* levels of authenticity. Bootstrap confidence intervals (5,000 resamples) were used to assess the stability of the estimates. Effect sizes were evaluated using ΔR^2 and Cohen's f^2, with changes in simple slopes used to characterize practical magnitude.

To complement these analyses, NCA (Dul, 2016) was used to test whether maladaptive perfectionism constrains higher levels of procrastination. NCA assesses whether high outcome levels are unlikely when the predictor is low. Effect sizes were estimated using ceiling envelopment, and significance was tested via permutation. Both necessity and sufficiency effects were examined, and their difference was used to assess asymmetry. The dataset and analysis script are available on the Open Science Framework (OSF) at: https://osf.io/ya63d/overview

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations are presented in Table 1. Maladaptive perfectionism was positively associated with procrastination, whereas adaptive perfectionism was negatively associated. Authenticity was negatively related to maladaptive perfectionism and procrastination, and positively to adaptive perfectionism.

Because all variables were assessed via self-report, I examined common method bias using Harman's single-factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The first unrotated factor accounted for 19.22% of the variance (19.93% in a parallel PCA), indicating that no single factor dominated the covariance structure. However, this result does not rule out common method bias.

NCA yielded significant necessity and sufficiency effects for maladaptive perfectionism (both $d = .14$, $ps < .001$), which are classified as moderate according to Dul's (2016) benchmarks. However, the effects were symmetric ($\Delta = -.01$, $p = .843$), and the upper-left region was not empty (see Figure S1 in Supplementary materials); thus, they did not support a genuine necessary condition. Adaptive perfectionism showed no significant necessity ($d = .07$, $p = .616$) or sufficiency ($d = .01$, $p = .863$) effects.

Regarding regression analyses (Table 2) in Model 1, maladaptive perfectionism was positively associated with procrastination, $B = 0.51$, $SE = 0.05$, $t = 10.08$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.41, 0.61], while adaptive perfectionism (covariate) was negatively associated, $B = -0.30$, $SE = 0.05$, $t = -5.73$, $p < .001$. The main effect of authenticity was nonsignificant, $B = 0.01$, $SE = 0.05$, $t = 0.17$, $p = .866$. Importantly, the interaction between maladaptive perfectionism and authenticity was significant, $B = -0.13$, $SE = 0.04$, $t = -3.06$, $p = .002$, 95% CI [−0.21, −0.05], and was confirmed by bootstrapping (95% CI [−0.21, −0.05]). Simple slopes showed that the positive association between maladaptive perfectionism and procrastination weakened with increasing authenticity (Figure 1): low ($B = 0.64$), mean ($B = 0.51$), and high ($B = 0.38$) authenticity (all $ps < .001$).

In Model 2, adaptive perfectionism was negatively associated with procrastination, $B = -0.28$, $SE = 0.05$, $t = -5.46$, $p < .001$, controlling for maladaptive perfectionism ($B = 0.50$, $SE = 0.05$, $t = 9.69$, $p < .001$). Authenticity again showed no main effect, $B = -0.00$, $SE = 0.05$, $t = -0.03$, $p = .974$. The interaction between adaptive perfectionism and authenticity was also significant, although weaker, $B = -0.10$, $SE = 0.05$, $t = -2.00$, $p = .047$, 95% CI [−0.19, −0.00], and was supported by bootstrapping (95% CI [−0.19, −0.00]). Simple slopes indicated that the negative association between adaptive perfectionism and procrastination strengthened with authenticity (Figure 2): low ($B = -0.19$, $p = .003$), mean ($B = -0.28$, $p < .001$), and high ($B = -0.38$, $p < .001$).

The magnitude of moderation differed across models. For maladaptive perfectionism, the interaction explained $\Delta R^2 = .02$ ($f^2 = .03$), a small effect, but reduced the slope by approximately 40% from low to high authenticity. For adaptive perfectionism, the in-

Table 1

Means, standard deviations, skewness, kurtosis, internal consistencies, and zero-order correlations among study variables

Variable	*M*	*SD*	Skewness	Kurtosis	α	1	2	3	4
1. Maladaptive perfectionism	3.74	1.35	0.20	−0.65	.96	–			
2. Adaptive perfectionism	4.79	1.27	−0.75	0.25	.93	.22***	–		
3. Procrastination	2.89	0.92	0.13	−0.72	.92	.50***	−.16**	–	
4. Authenticity	3.46	0.47	0.02	−0.39	.89	−.35***	.35***	−.30***	–

Note. $N = 300$. Values are Pearson correlations. $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$.

Table 2

Moderation of the association between perfectionism and procrastination by authenticity

Model	Predictor	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*p*	95% CI
Maladaptive model	Intercept	2.85	0.05	62.27	< .001	[2.76, 2.93]
	Maladaptive perfectionism	0.51	0.05	10.08	< .001	[0.41, 0.61]
	Authenticity	0.01	0.05	0.17	.866	[−0.09, 0.11]
	Adaptive perfectionism	−0.30	0.05	−5.73	< .001	[−0.40, −0.19]
	Maladaptive × Authenticity	−0.13	0.04	−3.06	.002	[−0.21, −0.05]
Adaptive model	Intercept	2.92	0.05	62.48	< .001	[2.83, 3.01]
	Adaptive perfectionism	−0.28	0.05	−5.46	< .001	[−0.39, −0.18]
	Authenticity	−0.00	0.05	−0.03	.974	[−0.11, 0.10]
	Maladaptive perfectionism	0.50	0.05	9.69	< .001	[0.40, 0.61]
	Adaptive × Authenticity	−0.10	0.05	−2.00	.047	[−0.19, −0.00]

Note. Unstandardized coefficients are reported. Predictor variables and the moderator were standardized prior to analysis.

Figure 1

Simple slopes of the association between maladaptive perfectionism and procrastination at low, moderate, and high levels of authenticity

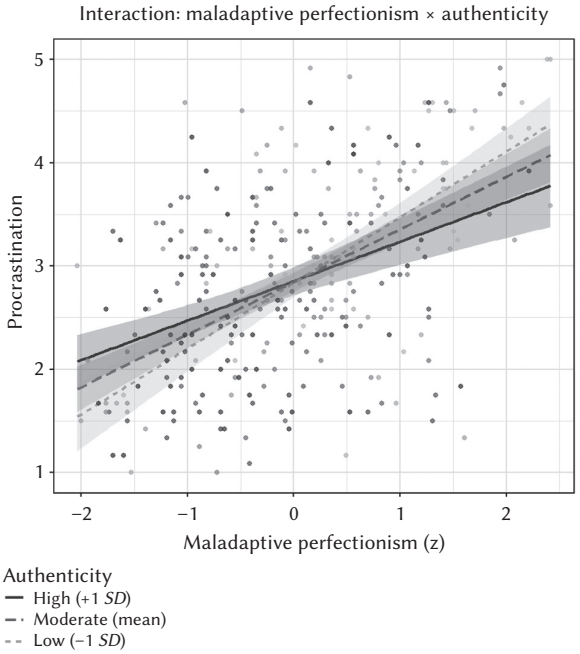
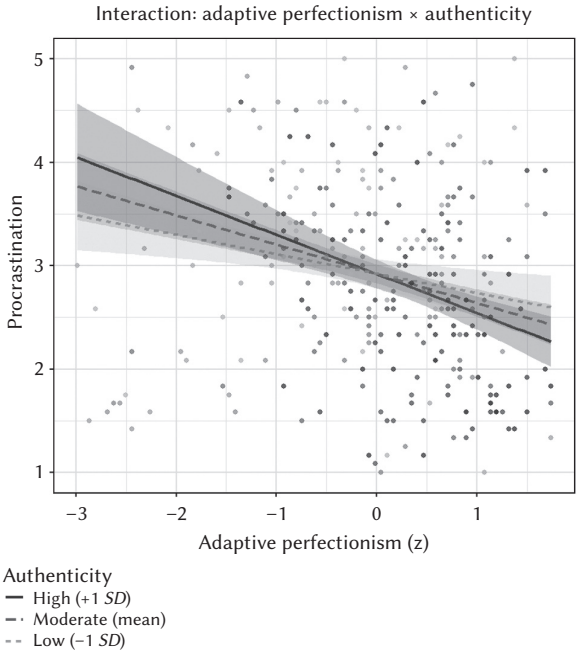


Figure 2

Simple slopes of the association between adaptive perfectionism and procrastination at low, moderate, and high levels of authenticity



teraction was smaller (ΔR^2 = .01, f^2 = .01), yet the slope approximately doubled (an increase of ~101%). Thus, although the conditional slopes differed, both interactions explained little additional variance and were small. Overall, authenticity moderated both relationships: weakening the positive link between maladaptive perfectionism and procrastination and strengthening the negative link for adaptive perfectionism.

Supplementary analyses of authenticity components showed partially divergent patterns (see Table S4 in Supplementary materials). Awareness and relational orientation mirrored the pattern observed for the global authenticity score, whereas unbiased processing showed a distinct pattern, weakening the negative association between adaptive perfectionism and procrastination. No significant moderation effects were observed for the behavioral component (see Table S2 in Supplementary materials). However, given the lack of a well-fitting latent structure, these facet-level findings warrant cautious interpretation.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined when perfectionistic standards are associated with action versus delay by testing the distinct effects of adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism on procrastination, the moderating role of authenticity, and the potential constraint imposed by maladaptive perfectionism. Three key patterns emerged. Maladaptive perfectionism was positively associated with procrastination, whereas adaptive perfectionism was negatively associated with procrastination. Authenticity moderated both relationships in the predicted directions, although the interactions were small (ΔR^2 = .01-.02). Finally, maladaptive perfectionism exhibited a moderate but symmetric NCA constraint rather than a genuine necessary condition (Sorjonen & Melin, 2022).

These findings align with meta-analytic evidence showing that perfectionistic concerns are positively associated with procrastination, whereas perfectionistic strivings tend to show weak negative associations (Sirois et al., 2017). Extending this literature, the present results suggest that this pattern also emerges within the adaptive–maladaptive framework (Szczucka, 2010), highlighting that the functional meaning of discrepancies, rather than their absolute level, is important for understanding procrastination.

The NCA results provide a complementary perspective. Although the NCA effect for maladaptive perfectionism was moderate according to Dul's (2016) benchmarks, the necessity and sufficiency effects were virtually identical and the upper-left region was not empty. This symmetric constraint does not support a genuine necessary condition and may reflect the overall association rather than an asymmetric bottleneck (Sorjonen & Melin, 2022). Maladaptive perfectionism therefore may mark a vulnerability rather than a necessary condition for procrastination.

This interpretation is consistent with self-regulation accounts, which conceptualize procrastination as the outcome of interacting cognitive and affective processes rather than as a direct consequence of personality traits (Borawski et al., 2026; Sirois & Pychyl, 2013).

The moderation findings further contextualize this pattern. The weaker association between maladaptive perfectionism and procrastination at higher authenticity is consistent with the possibility that authenticity relates to differences in how self-critical discrepancies are processed. Rather than implying the absence of internal conflict, authenticity may reflect the capacity to integrate diverse and potentially contradictory self-aspects within a multifaceted and coherent self-structure (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). Accordingly, maladaptive tendencies may be experienced as one component of the self rather than as globally self-defining.

This shift has important consequences. Among individuals low in authenticity, discrepancies may become self-defining, increasing perceived threat and promoting avoidance. In contrast, individuals high in authenticity may process the same discrepancies within a broader self-context, reducing the tendency to equate performance failures with the global self and thereby weakening defensive disengagement. In this way, authenticity may support task engagement despite the presence of self-critical thoughts.

For adaptive perfectionism, the negative association was stronger at higher authenticity, consistent with the possibility that authenticity strengthens the motivational benefits of self-concordant standards. When standards are experienced as self-concordant, they are more likely to be pursued with autonomous motivation, supporting persistence and effective self-regulation (Ryan & Ryan, 2019; Sheldon, 2014). Authenticity may therefore amplify the extent to which adaptive perfectionism is associated with sustained action. Taken together, these findings suggest that, at higher levels of authenticity, discrepancies may be less likely to function as self-defining threats and more likely to remain manageable aspects of goal pursuit, potentially favoring engagement over delay.

Supplementary analyses suggested that these effects may not be uniform across authenticity components. Awareness and relational orientation showed patterns consistent with those observed for the global authenticity score, whereas unbiased processing yielded a more complex effect, potentially reflecting increased salience of imperfections alongside reduced defensiveness. This interpretation aligns with prior evidence indicating that authenticity may amplify affective responses to self-discrepancies rather than attenuate them (Franzese, 2010). In the present study, however, these component-level differences should be interpreted cautiously, as they likely reflect partially overlapping processes rather than distinct mechanisms and are subject to measurement limitations.

These considerations provide a natural point of entry for the study's limitations. First, interpretation of authenticity is limited by the AI-3's poor factorial fit. Although the global score was reliable and a general factor was evident, the moderation effects concern only the broad composite and cannot be attributed to specific components. Measurement error may also have attenuated these small interactions. Future research should use measures with clearer structural validity, such as the Authenticity Scale (Wood et al., 2008) and its Polish adaptation (Jastrzębski et al., 2025). Second, the cross-sectional results do not establish directionality or a causal regulatory mechanism. Longitudinal studies could test whether authenticity prospectively moderates the associations of perfectionistic discrepancies with subsequent threat appraisal or autonomous motivation, whereas experimental designs manipulating

state self-congruence could examine whether these processes account for behavioral delay.

Third, the symmetric NCA constraint should not be interpreted as a genuine necessary condition; future research should test multivariable or configurational constraints. Fourth, the predominance of women and online convenience sampling may limit generalizability and introduce self-selection bias; replication in more gender-balanced samples recruited through alternative channels is warranted. Despite these limitations, the findings are consistent with self-regulation accounts of discrepancy processing (cf. Yosopov et al., 2024) and suggest that authenticity may be a relevant moderator (Li et al., 2023; Sedikides & Schlegel, 2024). Rather than eliminating maladaptive tendencies, authenticity may shape how they are integrated and translated into action. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that interventions targeting how individuals relate to their standards and self-evaluations – such as strengthening authenticity and reducing defensive processing – may be promising, rather than focusing solely on lowering standards.

In conclusion, perfectionistic standards do not inherently translate into procrastination. Rather, their associations with delay appear to depend on how discrepancies are processed within the self-system. Maladaptive perfectionism may reflect a vulnerability to delay, but this vulnerability is not deterministic. Authenticity may shape whether high standards are associated with avoidance or sustained action, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of procrastination as a context-dependent self-regulatory outcome.

Supplementary materials are available on the journal's website.

Disclosures

This research received no external funding.
The study was approved by the Committee for the Ethics of Scientific Research at the Faculty of Education and Psychology, Jan Kochanowski University of Kielce (Resolution No. 6/2025).
The author declares no conflict of interest.

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