



# Academic Delay of Gratification, Academic Achievement, and Need for Affiliation of Selected High School Students

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## Abstract

The study looked into the ability of academic delay of gratification (e. g. intentionally miss out a social event such as parties and hanging out in order to be able to focus on their studies) and need for affiliation (e. g. establishing and managing close interpersonal relationships with others) to predict the academic achievement (e. g. average grade of all subjects during the first grading period of the academic year) of high school students. A sample of 1,021 Filipino fourth year high schools students from selected private and public high schools in Metro Manila participated in this study. Results showed that academic achievement was positively predicted by academic delay of gratification but negatively predicted by need for affiliation an indication of the ability of high school students to prioritize goals.

*Keywords:* academic delay of gratification, need for affiliation, academic achievement

## Introduction

In the world of the academe, the everyday life of students is not an easy one. They are often faced with

academic challenges where teachers require them to turn in large amount of schoolwork and at the same time expect them to perform at par within the established standards of their respective schools. Though most of their time is spent in school, one cannot deny the fact that students are also involved in other pursuits or activities that typically involve their friends and other social groups. This is where the challenge comes in, as students must learn to balance their schoolwork, time, and other demands by their friends and other social groups. However, reality dictates that this is easier said than done, as oftentimes students tend to fail at this task resulting in grave consequences in their academic and social lives. Thus the task of trying to maintain a healthy school and social life can result to strife resulting to the need to compromise. The compromise revolves around the perspective of choosing one activity over the other (school work or friends or social groups) based on the subjective perception of which one is considered more important or a priority that is often aligned with their goals. Just like the task of balancing demands, the choice that students need to make is not an easy one. Their choice is often influenced by upbringing, values, personality, and skills like self-regulation.

According to Zimmerman (1994), self-regulation is a process whereby students utilize cognitions, behaviors, and affects that are systematically oriented towards the achievement of goals. Thus it can be used to help students decide on what they would like to do as this process has the capacity to direct and control their actions and emotions (Eggen & Kauchak, 2012), as well as the underlying motives under these overt expressions (Bandura, 1986; Zimmerman, 1989). The application of this process appears wide and students do not only use it in terms of making choices but also to help them in their schoolwork since self-regulation enables them to dynamically and strategically act on their learning and not just passively receive knowledge (Pintrich & Schrauben, 1992). In a general way, students with self-regulated behavior are viewed to pursue long-term goals not only in learning but in other areas of their lives as well. Just like other psychological constructs, self-regulation is seen as

something that is multidimensional and one of its dimensions is what is popularly known as delay of gratification (Zimmerman, 2000; Eggen & Kauchak, 2012).

Delay of gratification refers to the voluntary turn down of immediate gratification and to endure self-imposed delays of reward involving self-control patterns of behavior (Mischel, 1996; Bembenutty & Karabenick, 1998). When applied to the school setting, delay of gratification becomes more specific and is referred to as academic delay of gratification. This involves the students' postponement of immediately available opportunities to satisfy impulses in favor of pursuing important academic rewards, goals, and intentions that are temporally remote but ostensibly more valuable (Bembenutty & Karabenick, 1998). This may mean students declining invites to social gatherings or events in favor of their academic work and students who are able to do this even when faced with high social pressure is said to possess high academic delay of gratification. To understand the construct better, Bembenutty and Karabenick (1998) stressed that academic delay of gratification must be viewed from three specific perspectives. According to them, academic delay of gratification is a positive ability or a sign of competence among students that can be developed over time because of the continuous use learning-delay relevant strategies like controlling one's attention or the use of verbal motivation as a reminder to study. The continuous use of academic delay of gratification among students can also help develop their ability for self-control and will power (Mischel, 1996). Academic delay of gratification is also tied to one's personality and is considered as a stable disposition (Bembenutty, 1999; Zhang, Karabenick, Maruno, & Lauermann, 2011) and its continuous use is also an indication that students are more oriented towards their future and the fulfillment of their goals (Mischel, 1981). Lastly, it can be used as a strategy to achieve long-term goals and are activated by motivational determinants (Bembenutty & Karabenick, 1998; Bembenutty, 2007). This was elaborated further by Arabzadeh, Kadivar, and Dlavar (2012) when they identified specific types of strategies involved when academic delay of gratification is used and that these

strategies work and act together when it is exercised (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Bembenuddy & Karabenick, 2004). According to them, students make use of strategies that are cognitive (rehearsal, elaboration, organization, critical thinking) and metacognitive (planning, goal-setting, monitoring, self-evaluation) in nature. Resource-management strategies (time management, self-seeking) and motivational strategies (self-efficacy, self-satisfaction) may also be involved when academic delay of gratification is used (Arabzadeh et al., 2012).

One's ability to delay gratification in the academic setting could be affected by factors such as an individual's external environment and needs. Needs could affect the personality and behavioral dynamics since these serve as motivating factors of an individual. The most notable literature on this topic is McClelland's motivational needs. According to his theory, there are three types of motivational needs: need for achievement, need for power, and need for affiliation (Harrell & Stahl, 1983). For the present study, the researchers opted to focus on the students' need for affiliation. This particular need puts emphasis on interpersonal relationships since it motivates individuals to seek and establish warm interpersonal relationships with others within their immediate environment (Harrell & Stahl, 1983). The need for affiliation is tied to personality and those individuals with a high need for affiliation are often driven towards creating and managing close interpersonal relationships driven by their desire for social contact and belongingness with others because this allows them to feel secure and connected (Harrell & Stahl, 1983; Wiesenfeld, Raghuram, & Garud, 2001; Slabbinck, De Houwer, & Kenhove, 2012) and to experience acceptance, friendship, love (Hofer & Busch, 2011) and happiness (Schüler, Job, Fröhlich, & Brandstätter, 2008). Other rewards include experiencing gratification through social communion with others (Wiesenfeld, et al., 2001). This explains why students tend to value more their relationship, the views and opinions of their friends or peers over other people. This type of need is also subjective in nature because its intensity tends to differ from one person

to another (Wiesenfeld et al., 2001; Schüler, et al., 2008). It is also universal because it is felt or experienced by everybody and more often than not people direct or exert more effort in maintaining and enhancing their interpersonal relationships (Mathieu, 1990). When applied to the school setting, this is where the conflict arises particularly when the need for affiliation of students is high resulting to their tendency to prioritize this need over their other needs and goals that are academic in nature.

Both variables are deemed important since studies have shown that both academic delay of gratification and need for affiliation can affect student performance. This is a concern since most of the time, student performance has become a basis for promotion to the next level, access to scholarships, access to universities and as one of the bases for hiring and selection for jobs. Student performance may pertain to their academic achievement, which denotes their knowledge and learning gained over a period of time while they are in school (Russell & Airasian, 2012). Past researches show that academic delay of gratification is positively related to academic achievement (Bembenutty, 2011; Herndon, Bembenutty, & Gill, 2015) and that those skills incorporated within the use of academic delay of gratification like cognitive, metacognitive, and resource management strategies also predict academic achievement (Bembenutty & Karabenick, 1998). This is an indication that these students have successfully resisted temptations that are immediately gratifying in order to increase the likelihood of accomplishing temporally remote and presumably more important goals related to their academics (Bembenutty & Karabenick, 2004).

Studies have also documented the link between need for affiliation and academic performance. A negative relationship was found between the two variables indicating that students with lower affiliation needs tend to achieve more academically since they spend more time studying rather than focusing on their interpersonal relations (Harrell & Stahl, 1983). Thus it would follow that those students with higher affiliation needs would have low academic achievement. This view is in line with an earlier work that

states that people with a high need for affiliation compared to people with a high need for achievement neglect or de-emphasize achievement-related activities in favor of affiliative endeavors (Schneider & Green, 1977). However, Klein and Schnackenberg (2000) emphasized caution in examining the nature of the relationship of the two variables because environmental factors must be taken into account because individuals with high need for affiliation may also have increased performance if the work or task that they are supposed to do involves interaction with people. Related literature supports this since studies show that students whose need for warm and supportive relations tend to achieve better grades or perform better (Chan, 1980; Shu-Ping & Huang, 2016).

What is noticeably absent in the literature is the link between academic delay of gratification and need for affiliation. The researchers see this as a gap in the literature that needs to be clarified, hence this study.

## **Research Objectives**

In line with the discussion above, the researchers believe that it is important to take a closer look at the variables and their relationships. The researchers put forth the argument that since literature has already established the relationship between the need for affiliation and academic achievement and academic delay of gratification and academic achievement, it is possible that the academic delay of gratification and need for affiliation are related. Similarly, the researchers put forth the concept that students who delay gratification in favor of academic tasks would have high academic achievement but low need for affiliation since the said students would value their academic goals over their need to connect with other people. In relation to this, the following research questions were formulated and answered.

1. Is academic delay of gratification related and a predictor of academic achievement?
2. Is need for affiliation related and a predictor of academic achievement?

3. Is academic delay of gratification related to need for affiliation?

## Method

### Participants and Design

A total of 1,021 students participated in this cross-sectional predictive study, ranging from 14 to 20 years of age. The participants were selected via convenience sampling, as the researchers were dependent only on the schedule and students assigned by their respective schools. They are fourth year high school students coming from different private and public high schools of selected cities in Metro Manila. All of the participants were Filipino, 602 of which were female (58.96%) and 419 were male (41.04%).

### Measures

**Academic Delay of Gratification Scale.** This is a self-report measure constructed by Bembenuity & Karabenick (1998). The scale is a 4-point Likert scale instrument with ten items on measuring a student's academic delay of gratification. The reliability was established by Herndon (2008) with a Cronbach's alpha of .77.

**Liking People Scale.** This is a 5-point Likert scale instrument developed by Filsinger (1981). This 15-item instrument was developed for the purpose of measuring interpersonal orientation, the general liking of other people (Filsinger, 1981). From two samples of college students, it had an internal consistency of  $\alpha=.85$ , and  $\alpha=.75$ , respectively (Filsinger, 1981). In addition to the internal consistency, a coefficient alpha of .78 from the random sample of adults was established.

### Procedures

The study was conducted in six different cities in the Metro Manila area, which includes the cities of San Juan, Manila, Mandaluyong, Marikina, Makati, and Quezon. The

research instruments were administered to the respondents in their respective classes based on the schedule given by the school principals. Following the general guidelines of ethical research, the researchers oriented and debriefed the participants before and after each administration. Average time for data gathering per class was somewhere between 20 to 30 minutes. All data were then scored and interpreted, sorted and readied for data analysis. During the data analysis phase, there was no attempt to categorize the data into public and private schools, as this is not within the scope of the present investigation. All data gathered were analyzed using descriptive statistics, zero-order correlation and regression analysis. All hypotheses were tested with .05 Alpha.

## Results

Descriptive statistics were computed to determine the level of academic delay of gratification, need for affiliation and academic achievement of the respondents. Results showed that the high school students fall within the average level for all the research variables: academic delay of gratification ( $M = 31.82$ ;  $SD = 4.97$ ); need for affiliation ( $M = 50.01$ ;  $SD = 9.38$ ); and academic achievement ( $M = 85.14$ ;  $SD = 4.61$ ).  $SD$  values are also low indicating the homogeneity of the participants.

### Zero-order correlation of the research variables

Data analysis showed that the academic delay of gratification is significantly and positively correlated with need for affiliation ( $r = 0.06$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Likewise, the relationship between academic delay of gratification and academic achievement is also significant ( $r = 0.26$ ,  $p < .01$ ) whereas the need for affiliation and academic achievement are negatively correlated with each other ( $r = -0.16$ ,  $p < .01$ ) confirming all the hypotheses put forth by the researchers.



## Regression analysis

Multiple regression was performed to examine the predictive relations among the research variables with academic delay of gratification and need for affiliation serving as independent variables and academic achievement as the outcome variable. Results suggest both academic delay of gratification and need for affiliation significantly predicted the academic achievement of the respondents ( $F(2, 1018) = 55.804$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $R^2 = .099$ ,  $R^2_{Adjusted} = 0.97$ ). Based on the analysis performed, the two independent variables can account for .97% of the variance observed in the academic achievement of the respondents. Looking at their respective beta weights (Table 1), the unique contributions of the predictors (.25 for academic delay of gratification and -.09 for need for affiliation) are all significant.

Table 1  
*Regression for Academic Delay of Gratification and Need for Affiliation on Academic Achievement*

Predictors	Academic Achievement			
	B	SEB	$\beta$	$t$
Academic Delay of Gratification	.25	.03	.27	9.14*
Need for Affiliation	-.09	.02	-.18	-5.86*

\* $p < .001$

## Discussion

The present study looked into how the practice of academic delay of gratification and the one's need for affiliation can influence one's performance in school. Results showed that both variables are indeed a factor of academic performance wherein the more one practice academic delay of gratification the higher his or her chances of getting good grades. This is in line with the framework of Bembenutty and Karabenick (1998) that discussed the positive effects of

academic delay of gratification on grades. The positive effect of academic delay of gratification can be accounted for by its very nature as a dimension of self-regulation (Zimmerman, 1994; Eggen & Kauchak, 2012). When a student self-regulate as a function of his or her academics, all his or her cognitive behavior and affective resources are redirected from non-academic goals to the academic goals. Thus learners who forego immediate satisfying activities for the completion of academic tasks have a greater chance of getting a high grade. For instance, students who complete their homework and review first before watching television will most likely gain a higher score than those who engage first in the immediate gratifying acts.

In addition, since delaying gratification is associated with an orientation towards the future and thorough planning for temporally distant goals, students with a higher academic delay of gratification are more likely to pursue long-term goals, which can help in their academic success (Mischel, 1981). As such, it may then be viewed as a strategic asset by students for the attainment of more valuable rewards (Bembenutty & Karabenick, 1998).

Also consistent with previous literature (Harrell & Stahl, 1983), is the finding that the need for affiliation is negatively related to academic achievement. Similar to the academic delay of gratification, the discussion on the relationship and predictability of the need for affiliation is rooted in the nature of the variable. According to Harrell and Stahl (1983), need for affiliation pertains to the need of people to prioritize and sustain interpersonal relationships resulting to the sacrificing of those things and opportunities that are irrelevant to this need. Relating the above framework to the current results, students acting on their need for affiliation could result to lower academic performance, as they tend to pick socializing over completing their academic tasks. In the age of social media, students may likely contact and chat with their friends rather than complete their homework or review their lessons or students may opt to attend a party or watch a movie over reviewing for an exam schedule the following day or go on vacation rather than prepare for an academic exercise.

The study also looked into the nature of the relationship of academic delay of gratification and the need for affiliation. Initially, the researchers hypothesized a negative relationship between the two variables but the data gathered shows otherwise. An analysis on the positive relationship of the variables would focus on the environmental misfits on a person's affiliation orientation and nature of academic task that was given to him or her (Klein & Schnackenberg, 2000) and this environmental misfit would dictate the motivation to complete a task. An example of an environmental misfit is when students with a high need for affiliation may have high academic delay of gratification due to the better fit that they have in the academic setting. Since the high school setting involves a lot of pair work or group work, students are motivated to perform academic tasks, which positively affect their ability to delay gratification. On the other hand, those with low need for affiliation may have low academic delay of gratification since they will be working in a scenario which they dislike; thus, leading to a lower motivation in fulfilling academic tasks and delaying gratification.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, the present study puts forth the notion that the more a person delays gratification and complete academic tasks, the higher his or her academic score becomes while the more a person needs to affiliate with people, the lower his or her academic score becomes. Finally, the relationship between need for affiliation and academic delay of gratification may be affected by the fit of the person's need for affiliation and the nature of the task given; whether it requires a great amount of socialization or not. The present study is beneficial to the field of educational psychology because of the implications that the research variables have and how it affects students. Finally, the field of educational measurement may benefit based on the concept of environment fit where new measures based on that theoretical perspective maybe created and developed.

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