

EVALUATING RESEARCH INTO MOTIVATION AND SELF CONFIDENCE IN SPORT

Sampling

The sample used in the Lerner and Locke study were male students. This could be considered to be a biased sample as students are typically different to the rest of the population in many ways eg. they may be more used to competition and setting personal goals. They also volunteered in order to gain course credits which is likely to make them more cooperative and helpful than the rest of the population. The sample in the Lepper and Greene study were 4-5 year old children. The problems with this sample are that they are of a specific age group which makes generalization to other age groups difficult. They are also from the same nursery school and particular features of this nursery may have contributed to the behaviour of the children eg if the carers frequently used rewards as a way of encouraging the children.

Reinforcement

A reinforcer is something that increases the likelihood of a behaviour occurring again. Reinforcers can be used to encourage or improve behaviour or performance. In the Lerner and Locke study an explanation for the superior performance of the 'goal-setting' groups could be that they received reinforcement in the form of achieving their goal. The 'do-best' group had no such reinforcement. However, in the Lepper and Greene study they found that the expectation and receipt of reinforcement in the form of extrinsic rewards reduced intrinsic interest in the activity.

Data

One of the most common methods of measuring motivation and self-confidence is through questionnaires. A range of questionnaires have been used in the studies described, all of which produce quantitative data. Such numerical data have the advantage of being easily compared and statistically analysed. However, what they do not provide is any qualitative, or descriptive, data. For example the study by Lerner and Locke tells us that the 'goal-setting' groups outperformed the 'do best' group but does not provide any descriptions of their performance. Similarly the Gill and Dzwaltowski study tells us that males score higher than females on competitiveness and win orientation but does not provide any data which could explain this gender difference. The focus on quantitative data in these studies leads to the problem of reductionism where the complex psychological phenomena of motivation and self-confidence are reduced to a much simpler level, focusing on a single factor ie. score on a questionnaire.

Usefulness/Practical Applications

Motivation and self-confidence are very important aspects of sports performance. Hence, any research which tells us more about how to improve motivation and increase self confidence is likely to be useful to both sports performers and sports coaches. The Gill and Dzwaltowski study tells us about differences in motivation and self-confidence between different groups. The Lerner and Locke study suggests goal-setting as a strategy for improving motivation and performance. The Lepper and Greene study warns us of the dangers of the overuse of extrinsic rewards, particularly with children.