

Self-Confidence and Sports Performance

A. Bund

Institute for Sport Science, University of Darmstadt, Germany

Female and male athletes often create a relationship between their performance and their actual self-confidence. Poor performances are explained with a lack of self-confidence and good performances with strong self-confidence. The purpose of this presentation is to elaborate the validity of these common sense explanations based on a literature review. First, we describe the postulates of self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997), which is the most extensively used theory for investigating the relation of self-confidence to sport (or motor) performance. Second, we report some empirical findings and suggest some directions for future research.

Self-Efficacy Theory

Self-efficacy theory, developed within the framework of a social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), poses self-efficacy as a common cognitive mechanism for mediating people's motivation and behavior. Bandura originally proposed the theory to account for the different results achieved by the diverse methods used in clinical psychology for treating anxiety. Self-efficacy is defined as "...beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1997, 3). Thus, self-efficacy is not concerned with the skills an individual has but with the judgments of what an individual can do with the skills he or she possesses and therefore can be considered as a situation-specific form of self-confidence.

In brief, self-efficacy theory states that when the necessary skills and appropriate incentives are given, self-efficacy affects choice of activities, effort expenditure, persistence, and achievement. Compared with persons who doubt their capabilities, those with high self-efficacy for accomplishing a task participate more readily, work harder, persist longer when they encounter difficulties, and finally achieve at a higher level. In turn, self-perceptions of efficacy are based on four principal sources of information: performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional/physiological arousal. Performance accomplishments provide the most influential source of efficacy information because they are based on personal mastery experiences. The relationship is thought to be reciprocal, i.e. efficacy expectations affect performance and are, in turn, altered by the cumulative effects of performance experiences.

Empirical Findings

Much of the self-efficacy research in sport and motor performance has focused on examining (a) the effects of various methods used to create athletic competence in self-efficacy and performance and (b) the relationship between self-efficacy and performance. Taken together, the previous research supported the predictions of self-efficacy theory. In a recent meta-analysis (Moritz, Feltz, Fahrbach & Mack, 2000), based on 45 studies, the average correlation between self-efficacy and performance in sport was .38. The authors notice: "This meta-analysis provides clear evidence for a significant relationship between self-efficacy and performance. The studies included used different tasks and measures. Self-efficacy is both a cause and effect of performance" (Moritz, Feltz, Fahrbach & Mack, 2000, 289). However, the correlational design of the majority of studies has not permitted inferences to be made with regard to causality or direction of the self-efficacy-performance relationship. The few studies that have used path analytic techniques typically report direct effects of self-efficacy and previous performance on future performance.

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