



ELSEVIER

Psychology of Sport and Exercise 2 (2001) 139–156

**Psychology**  
OF SPORT AND EXERCISE

www.elsevier.com/locate/psychsport

# Self-handicapping strategies in physical education classes: the influence of implicit theories of the nature of ability and achievement goal orientations

Yngvar Ommundsen \*

*The Norwegian University of Sport and Physical Education, PO Box 4014, U.S. N-0806 Oslo, Norway*

Received 8 November 1999; received in revised form 22 May 2000; accepted 15 September 2000

---

## Abstract

**Aim:** To investigate the role of implicit theories of ability and achievement goals on self-handicapping strategies in physical education classes.

**Hypotheses:** It was expected that incremental theories of ability would be negatively associated with self-handicapping strategies, whereas fixed theories of ability would enhance pupils' self-reported use of such strategies. It was also hypothesised that low perceived competence would reinforce self-handicapping among pupils holding fixed theories of ability and an ego goal orientation.

**Method:** A cross-sectional study of 9th graders in Norway ( $N=343$ ; 166 boys and 177 girls) was conducted in which pupils responded to a questionnaire measuring sub-dimensions of fixed and incremental theories of ability, achievement goal orientations, perceived competence and self-handicapping in physical education.

**Results:** Regression-based path analyses revealed that a fixed theory of ability had a direct positive effect on self-handicapping. The effects of an incremental implicit theory of ability on self-handicapping were negative and mediated by a task orientation. High perceived competence was found to buffer the aversive affect of holding a stable theory of ability on self-handicapping.

**Conclusion:** The findings illustrate the importance of studying implicit motivational beliefs in physical education classes in order to provide an understanding of self-handicapping strategies among pupils. © 2001 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

*Keywords:* Children; Motivation; Theories in ability

---

Self-worth theory (Covington, 1992) assumes that the search for self-acceptance is the highest

---

\* Tel.: +47-2218-5601; fax: +47-2218-5718.

*E-mail address:* yngvar@nih.no (Y. Ommundsen).

human priority and that, as applied to schools, one's worth often depends on the ability to achieve competitively. Research has given strong support to the assertion that pupils are concerned with appearing able and worthy to others in school. Some behaviours, for instance self-handicapping, are said to represent a self-presentational strategy in order to protect and enhance self-esteem (Covington, 1992; Tice, 1991). It has been suggested that some pupils deliberately do not try in school, put off studying to the last moment, and use other "self-handicapping" strategies so that if subsequent performance is at a low level, these circumstances, rather than lack of ability, will be seen as the cause. Such handicaps, established by the pupils themselves, allow them to draw attention to other factors than low ability in failure, thus minimising the impact of failure on their self-image and protecting self-esteem. Conversely, if they succeed despite the handicap, that may enhance the credit for success (i.e. high ability) and enhance self-esteem. This accords with results from studies by Tice (1993) who argues that pupils may handicap for both self-enhancement and self-protection.

Self-handicapping is related to, but distinguishable from, attributions. Whereas attributions are invoked in order to explain or to understand an outcome, self-handicapping may be regarded as a proactive, anticipatory attribution strategy (Garcia and Pintrich, 1994; Jones & Berglas, 1978; Prapavessis & Grove, 1998) that precedes success and failure and functions as preparation for possible failure. For example, saying that you did not do well because of lack of effort is an attribution, whereas claiming an injury or not concentrating while practising in Physical Education (PE) in order to use these aspects as excuses in case you would not do well, is a self-handicapping strategy. Attributions and self-handicapping strategies are similar because they both represent attempts to influence others' perceptions regarding the causes of failure. They differ in that handicapping involves a behaviour (self-reported or actual), aimed at avoiding the appearance of incompetence, that precedes performance and can undermine performance (Urda, Midgley & Anderman, 1998).

Self-handicapping constitutes attempts by the individual to select or create those settings for performance that make feedback ambiguous, and thus represents attempts to control the implications for self-esteem of anticipated failure by establishing a non-ability explanation for its cause (Jones & Berglas, 1978).

Self-handicapping presumably occurs because of threats to self-esteem on important, self-relevant dimensions, thus making protection and enhancement of the self personally important (Covington, 1992; Garcia & Pintrich, 1994). According to Self (1990), self-handicapping occurs when the individual's self-concept is under threat, and the uncertainty about one's ability is high (Jones & Berglas, 1978). Further, self-handicapping may be reinforced by self-presentational concerns (Kolditz & Arkin, 1982).

Physical education lessons may be an ideal context to examine self-handicapping and its correlates. The evaluation potential in PE is high, the performance of motor skills (both good ones and not so good ones) are public and difficult to hide, and research has shown that pupils rate being competent in PE as personally important (Skramstad, 1999).

Covington (1992) has played a major role in articulating the role of self-handicapping in the school setting. As one way of self-handicapping he describes pupils' use of procrastination. Procrastinators put themselves in a win-win situation: if they do poorly they can say it was because they did not have enough time for practice (self-protection). If they do well in spite of procrastinating they may gain from others seeing them as particularly able (self-enhancement). According to

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

**ISI**Articles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات