

Middle School Students' Goal Orientation and Effort in Learning Swimming

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary achievement motivation theorists and researchers argue that an emphasis on task orientation fosters feelings of competence and greater effort (Williams and Gill, 1995). Correlational support for the relationships among goal orientations, intrinsic motivation, and effort has been demonstrated in the physical domain (Duda, Chi, & Newton, 1990; Duda et al., 1993; Duda et al., 1995). We predict that middle-school students' goal orientation in learning swimming is directly linked to effort. Figure 1 (according to Williams and Gill, 1995) illustrates the proposed relationships among goal orientations, perceived competence, intrinsic interest and effort. A direct line from task goal orientation to effort is included.

METHODS

Participants:

Participants were 82 middle school students (48 boys, 34 girls; M age= 12.7 years) enrolled in an urban public school in New York City. They also represented some diversity in regard to race: Hispanic (n = 53), African American (n=23), Asian (n = 4) and White (n = 2). The vast majority of them are from low socio-economic backgrounds and receive free lunch.

Method:

Students completed the following three self-report questionnaires:

A) The background questionnaire asked students to respond to items gender, age, grade, water skills level (1-6) and whether they competed on a swimming team.

B) GOAL ORIENTATIONS

The students' goal orientations were assessed by The Task and Ego Orientation in Sport Questionnaire (TEOSQ; Duda, 1992). The TEOSQ is a 13-item scale that measures the degree to which individuals identify with ego and task goal orientations in the sport setting. Seven items reflect task goal orientation (e.g., I feel most successful in physical games and sport when I work really hard) while six items reflect ego goal orientation. Students indicated the degree to which they agree with each situation on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Mean scores on the Task and Ego subscales range from 1 to 5.

C) PERCEIVED EFFORT

A self-report questionnaire modified after Williams and Gill (1995) was used to assess students' perceptions of their effort when engaged in learning swimming. The scale measures two components of effort: behavioral intensity (how hard students try) and persistence (how long they persist in physical activity). The Behavioral Intensity and Persistence subscales each consisted of three items. Students respond to bipolar statements (e.g., really true for me or sort of true for me) scored on a 4-point scale. Items on the Behavioral Intensity subscale included the following:

1. Some kids don't try hard in swimming games when they aren't playing well, but other kids try hard in swimming games even when they aren't playing well.
2. Some kids like to practice and work hard at swimming and games, but others do not like to practice a lot or work hard at swimming and games.
3. Some kids like to wait until teacher tells them to practice, but others will practice to improve their skills in swimming and games even when nobody tells them to practice.

RESULTS

A simple regression analysis was used to investigate the relationship between task goal orientation and effort in learning swimming. Results revealed that boys and girls differed in their perception of effort, but not their goal orientations. In addition was also examined how gender impacts this relationship. Results indicated that approximately 19% of the variance in effort, $R = .41$, $F(1, 81) = 37.72$, $p < .01$, was accounted for by task goal orientation. Exploratory analyses revealed that for boys approximately 8% of the variance in effort, $R = .25$, $F(1, 46) = 5.24$, $p < .05$, was associated with task orientation, whereas approximately 26% of the variance, $R = .51$, $F(1, 32) = 38.32$, $p < .05$, was explained for girls.

CONCLUSIONS

These results show that task orientation explains a statistically significant amount of variance in effort to learn swimming for both boys and girls. However, more variance is explained for girls than for boys. Therefore, task goal orientation is a stronger predictor of effort in learning swimming for girls than boys. Similar to the results of a number of studies, this study demonstrated a positive relationship between task goal orientation and effort. Task goal orientation directly fosters middle school students' effort in learning swimming.

SELECTED REFERENCES

Williams, L. & Gill, D.L. (1995). The role of perceived competence in the motivation of physical activity. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 17, 363-378.

Duda, J.L., Chi, L., Newton, M.L., Walling, M.D., & Catley, D. (1995). Task and ego orientation and intrinsic motivation in sport. *International Journal of Sport Psychology*, 26, 40-63.

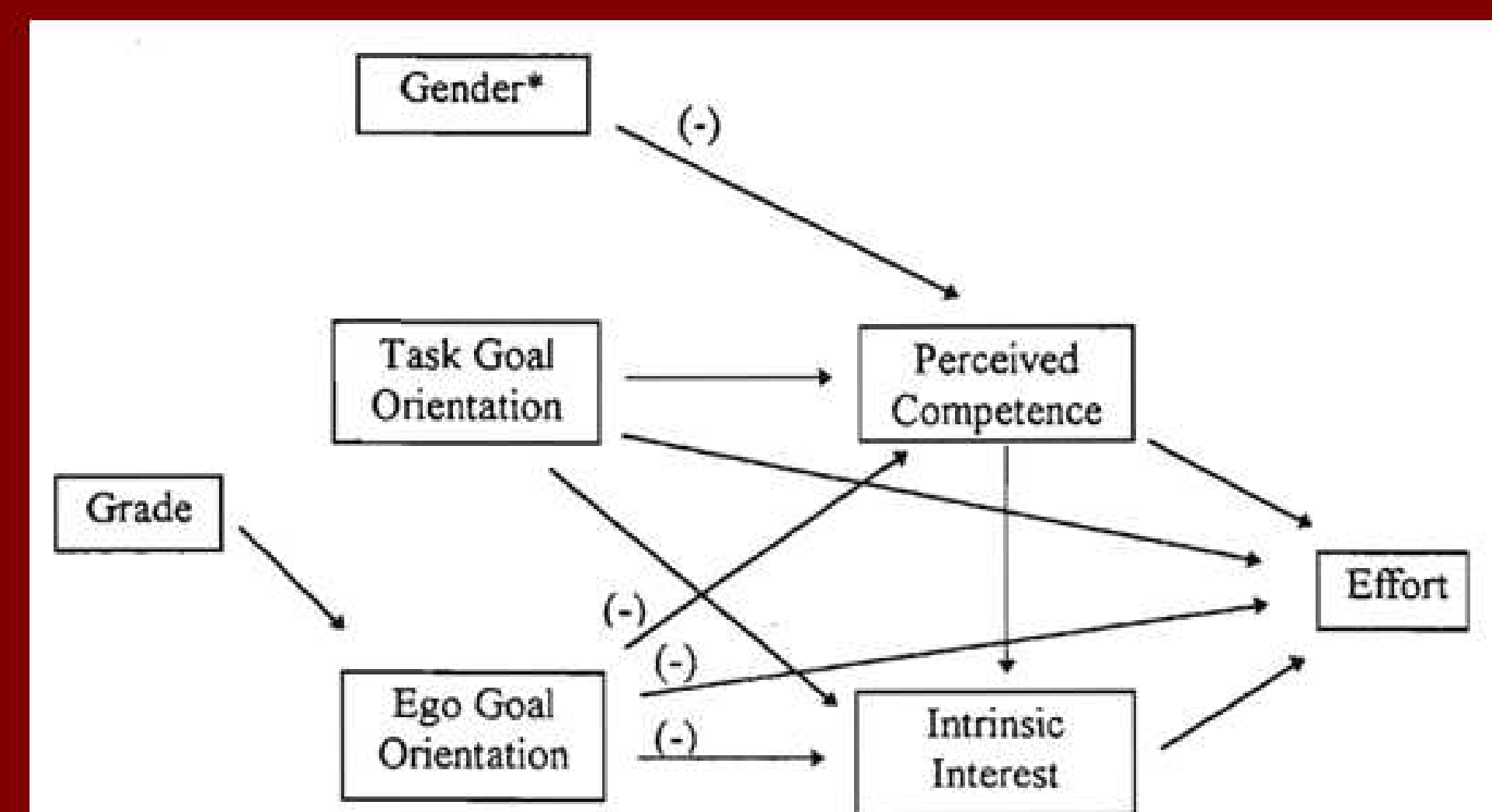


Figure 1 — Proposed model of the relationships among goal orientations, perceived competence, intrinsic interest, and effort. Negative causal pathways are indicated by a negative sign (-), and positive causal paths are devoid of notation. *The negative sign indicates that the association between gender and perceived competence is expected to reflect that males are typically higher in perceived competence than females.



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PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships among task goal orientations and effort of middle-school students in learning swimming according to ARC Learn-To-Swim program. Specifically, our hypothesis is that task goal orientation is positively related to effort.