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[Abstract]

PLEASE CITE THE PUBLISHED VERSION

<https://www.bps.org.uk/events/division-sport-exercise-psychology-annual-conference-2019/programme>

PUBLISHER

British Psychological Society (BPS)

VERSION

AM (Accepted Manuscript)

LICENCE

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REPOSITORY RECORD

Warburton, Victoria E, and Christopher Spray. 2019. "Motivated Implicit Beliefs in Physical Education: Is There a Self-serving Bias? [abstract]". figshare. <https://hdl.handle.net/2134/11365991.v1>.

MOTIVATED IMPLICIT BELIEFS IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION: IS THERE A SELF-SERVING BIAS?

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Objectives: To ascertain whether motivated implicit theories can be identified among students in PE and to test for a self-serving bias. Evidence on the malleability of personality characteristics suggests that individuals shape their implicit beliefs in the service of self-enhancement. This proposition has not been tested within the physical domain.

Design: Two cross-sectional studies.

Methods: Data from 318 male and female students (11 to 14 years old) was collected using validated measures of implicit theories of their perceived strengths and weaknesses in PE, direction of expected future change, and desire for change. Study 1 assessed these variables in relation to the self, while study 2 assessed them in relation to other students of their own age.

Results: One-way repeated measures MANOVAs revealed a statistically significant effect for implicit theory ($F_{(1,160)} = 3.76, p = .054, \eta^2 = .023$) and desire for change ($F_{(1,160)} = 4.73, p = .031, \eta^2 = .029$). Students in PE perceived greater stability in their own weaknesses ($M = 2.85$) than their strengths ($M = 2.69$) and a greater desire to change their own strengths ($M = 3.40$) than their weaknesses ($M = 3.25$). However, for other children of the same age there was no statistically significant multivariate effect for trait desirability on the dependent variables ($F_{(3,154)} = 2.42, p = .069, \eta^2 = .045$).

Conclusions: There is evidence of a motivational, self-serving effect since students held different implicit theories of their own strengths and weaknesses but similar implicit theories for other children their age. Counter to previous personality research, students in PE viewed their strengths as more malleable than their weaknesses.