INTRODUCTION

Damish, Stoberock, and Mussweiler (2010) investigated the effect of superstition on performance in a golf putting task. Participants were randomly assigned to a lucky condition or a control condition. Results showed that participants in the lucky condition performed better than participants in the control condition. Researchers also found that superstitions improve performance by boosting people’s self-efficacy. Tavani and Losh (2003) investigated the effect of motivation and self-confidence on academic achievement. Results showed that students who performed well in school had higher levels of motivation and self-confidence than students who did not do as well in school.

Both studies imply that superstitions increase self-confidence, also increasing performance and motivation. The purpose of the present study was to extend these findings by examining whether superstition could increase motivation and performance.

METHOD

Participants (N = 31, 20 females) who volunteered to participate in the study were randomly assigned to either the superstition or control condition. Participants in the superstition condition threw what they thought was a “lucky” ball into the trashcan ten times, while the control condition used an ordinary ball. After completing the performance task, participants completed a 4 item questionnaire to measure motivation during the task (e.g. It was very important for me to make the shots). For each item, participants rated their responses on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Compensation was given in the form of research credit.

RESULTS

To assess whether superstition influenced motivation and performance, separate t-test were performed to both the motivation and performance measures. The results showed that participants in the superstition condition (M = 3.95, SD = 0.52) rated their motivation higher than participants in the control condition (M = 3.67, SD = 0.58), t(29) = 1.45, p = .157 (Figure 1).

The results also showed that participants in the superstition condition (M = 5.19, SD = 2.07) made less shots than participants in the control condition (M = 5.53, SD = 1.73), t(29) = -.50, p = .619 (Figure 2). The results did not support the hypothesis.

CONCLUSION

There was no significant difference in motivation scores between the superstition and control conditions and the amount of shots successfully made into the trashcan. Therefore, superstition is not shown to increase motivational performance.

REFERENCES