"HERO IMAGERY"

ARE THERE PERFORMANCE ADVANTAGES ASSOCIATED WITH IMAGINING YOURSELF AS YOUR FAVOURITE ATHLETE?

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INTRODUCTION:

Coaches and sport psychologists suggest that imagining performing "like an expert" may help performance (e.g., Karageorghis & Terry, 2011).

Individuals can "walk in others' shoes", that is to imagine "thinking, feeling and being" another person (cf. Markman et al., 2009).

Yet, observational studies suggest that the most compelling benefits are derived when the "model" is similar to oneself (McCullagh & Weiss, 2001) and most imagery research typically invites the participant to imagine *themselves* in a certain scenario.

Because practitioners often encounter brief-contact, solution-focussed situations (e.g., Pitt et al., 2015) this study examined the following research question:

RESEARCH QUESTION:

Are there performance advantages associated with a single bout of imagery when imagining *yourself as your favourite athlete*, or imagining *yourself* performing a strength-based task compared to a *control* condition?

METHOD:

Participants (n = 17 male; M_{age} = 19.7 ± 2.7) undergraduate physical education, sport science, and sport psychology students.

1. **Sport Imagery Ability Questionnaire**
2. **Standardised Video of Grip Strength (GS) Task**

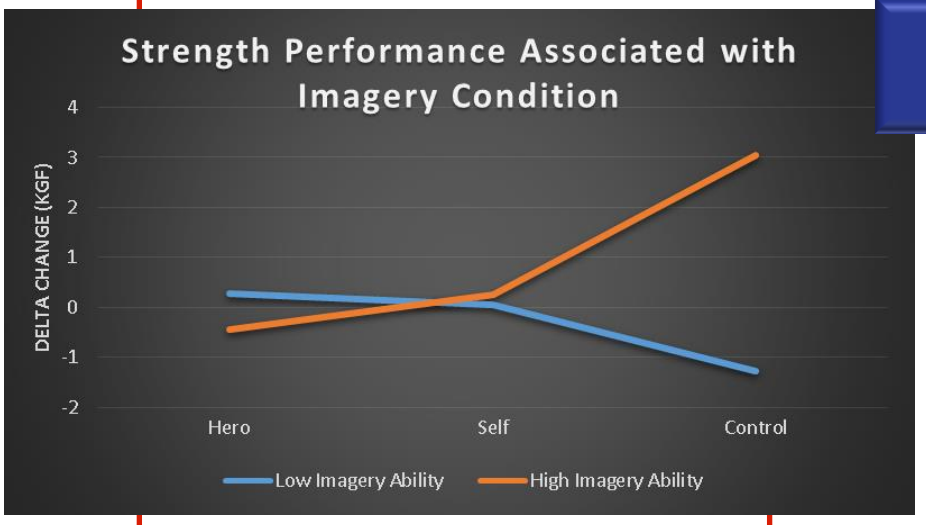
3. **3 x GS Trials (Baseline)**
4. **Hero** | **Self** | **Control**

   Counterbalanced (Script on MP3 player)
5. **GS + 1 min interval**

For each condition, delta change scores (Imagery Condition – Baseline Average) were computed (Kilograms of force – kgf).

RESULTS:

No main effects were present but there was a group x condition interaction ($F(2,28) = 4.27$, $p = .02$. $\eta_p^2 = .23$). The interaction suggests that for individuals with high imagery ability, simply "doing the imagery that they already do" is preferable compared to a scripted self- or hero-imagery condition. For individuals with a low imagery ability, a simple script whether that is self- or hero-based may enhance strength performance, compared to "what they already do".



Discussion:

There is much to be learned about the consequences of imagining "walking in others' shoes", not just for performance.

A "fun" study that would benefit from a more systematic series of related investigations.

Understanding the what, why, when, where, and how of "Hero" imagery may add considerably to current understanding.

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