Is What You See Really What You Get? Athletes’ Perceptions of Imagery’s Functions

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Imagery in sport has been studied extensively (for a review see Martin, Moritz, & Hall, 1999). Researchers have described the what, why, where, when, and how athletes use imagery (e.g., Martin et al., 1999; Munroe, Giacobbi, Hall, & Weinberg, 2000). Most of the current research in this area has supported Paivio’s (1985) conceptualization of imagery into cognitive and motivational functions that operate on specific and general levels. These functions are Cognitive Specific (CS: imaging skills), Cognitive General (CG: imaging strategies), Motivation Specific (MS: imaging goal oriented responses and activities), and Motivational General (MG: affect and arousal). Based on this framework, the Sport Imagery Questionnaire (SIQ; Hall, Mack, Paivio, & Hausenblas, 1998) was developed to assess the frequency with which athletes use these imagery functions. In contrast to Paivio’s original model, the SIQ contains 5 subscales as a result of the splitting of the MG function into MG-Mastery (MG-M: imaging being confident, for example) and MG-Arousal (MG-A: imaging physiological and emotional arousal).

Researchers have suggested that for imagery to be an effective performance enhancing technique, the imagery content must match the function (cf. Denis, 1985). Martin et al. (1999) also highlighted the importance of using different types of images to achieve different outcomes. In short, the premise behind imagery use...
has always been “what you see is what you get.” For example, Moritz, Hall, Martin, and Vadocz (1996) stated that if one wishes to develop, maintain, or regain sport confidence, then one should image being confident.

For the most part, research using the SIQ has shown relationships among the imagery functions and many psychological variables (e.g., self-confidence, anxiety, motivation) and performance in sport (Martin et al., 1999). For example, MG-M imagery has been shown to discriminate between high and low confident athletes and to predict confidence in multiple regression analyses (Abma, Fry, Li, & Relyea, 2002; Callow & Hardy, 2001; Moritz et al., 1996; Mills, Munroe, & Hall, 2000). Interestingly, however, despite investigating the same variables (confidence and imagery use), some of the results of these studies differ. For example, although all of the above studies found that MG-M imagery was associated with confidence, in some cases MS (e.g., Callow & Hardy, 2001; Mills et al., 2000), CG (e.g., Callow & Hardy, 2001), and MG-A (e.g., Abma et al., 2002; Mills et al., 2000; Moritz et al., 1996), were also related to confidence. In fact, Abma et al. (2002) showed that highly confident athletes compared to their lower confident counterparts used all five functions of imagery more.

One explanation given for these discrepant findings concerns the relationship between image content and function. Callow and Hardy (2001) suggested that a differentiation must be made between the type of imagery (i.e., image content) a performer uses and the function it may have. This is because two performers may image the same content, but this content may have a very different function for each of them. This argument is consistent with Ahsen’s (1984) triple code theory of imagery. According to this theory, the meaning of a particular image is individually specific so that the function of a specific image is unique and personally meaningful to the imager. That is, the content of an image is subject to individual interpretation. Considered together, there are theoretical and empirical reasons to believe that different participants may use the same image for different functions. The purpose of this study was to examine athletes’ perceptions of the functions of imagery.

**Method**

**Participants**

The sample consisted of 275 collegiate athletes from two Midwestern and two Southeastern Division II universities. They represented 12 different sports: football (32.4%), soccer (14.9%), basketball (10.2%), track and field (8.7%), hockey (8.4%), volleyball (7.3%), golf (5.5%), cross country (4.7%), swimming (2.9%), softball (2.9%), tennis (1.1%), baseball (1.7%), and diving (0.4%). There were 158 males and 117 females. The mean age was 20.06 years (SD = 1.52).

**Measure**

The Sport Imagery Questionnaire (SIQ; Hall et al., 1998) is a 30-item questionnaire developed to assess the motivational and cognitive functions of imagery. Athletes rate how often they use 5 different types of images: CS, CG, MS, MG-M, and MG-A on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = rarely and 7 = often). Exploratory (Hall et al., 1998) and confirmatory factor analyses (Hall, Moritz, & Mack, 1997) have supported the 5-factor structure of the SIQ. Its construct validity has also been supported. Past research has showed acceptable internal reliabilities for the SIQ