Two Cheers for Rainer

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In the editorial contained in Volume 1, Issue 2 of this journal ("About Smocks and Jocks") Rainer Martens clearly articulated some views about sport psychology that have needed to be said for a long time. That these views were forcefully presented by one of the best among us not only lends credibility to them but underscores their urgency. I am in complete accord with two of Rainer's major points, namely that the "field" is the proper place to conduct sport psychology research and that useful "theories" of sport are more likely to grow from an inductive rather than a deductive approach ("I think there is a greater probability that the best theories of sport psychology will grow from field research on applied problems," Martens, 1979, p. 98). Unfortunately, I am in rather complete disagreement with another of his major points, namely that overt behavior is determined by thoughts ("Much of what man does is determined by his thoughts," Martens, 1979, p. 96). Thus, two cheers for Rainer rather than three. I would like to underscore and reinforce Rainer's notions about field research, elaborate a bit on a very necessary feature of the inductive process, and quarrel a bit with the notion of an autonomous inner person determining overt behavior.

Sport psychology will become much more accepted in the "field" if it adopts a more client-centered approach. Acceptance by the field is, of course, a fundamental prerequisite to the establishment of a research program in sport psychology simply because those who control the field also control our access to it for purposes of research. A programmatic approach to sport psychology in the field will have at least two major benefits. First, it will, perhaps for the first time, provide our research with some ecological validity, which, as Urie Bronfenbrenner (1976) argued so well, is essential for educational and para-educational research ventures. Second, it will force us more into a research paradigm more dominated by Type I errors, one in which powerful and generalizable variables are uncovered and systematically replicated.

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The term "applied" has been greatly misunderstood and misused in psychology. The conventional notion is that an applied study is one that takes a laboratory finding or hypothesis drawn from theory and tests its applicability in the real world. In behavior analysis, the term applied has had a long and rather distinct history.

The label applied is not determined by the research procedures used but by the interest which society shows in the problems being studied. In behavioral application, the behavior, stimuli, and/or organism under study are chosen because of their importance to man and society, rather than their importance to theory. The non-applied researcher may study eating behavior, for example, because it relates directly to metabolism, and there are hypotheses about the interaction between behavior and metabolism. The non-applied researcher also may study bar-pressing because it is a convenient response for study; easy for the subject, and simple to record and integrate with theoretically significant environmental events. By contrast, the applied researcher is likely to study eating because there are children who eat too little and adults who eat too much, and he will study eating in exactly those individuals rather than in more convenient ones. (Baer, Wolf, & Risely, 1968, p. 12)

It is in this sense that applied research must meet a criterion of social significance as well as a criterion of experimental significance. Social significance is a multidimensional judgment contributed to by a number of client groups. In our work in schools, for example, the value of an experimentally induced change in student or teacher behavior has been judged not only by the university experimenters but also by the subjects (students or teachers), the professional peer group, the curriculum or research coordinator, the principal, and even the parents. Each of these client groups uses somewhat different standards when judging the value of an experimentally induced change in behavior; it is in the mixing and sifting of these views that an overall judgment of social significance is made.

The notion that useful theories of sport behavior may some day be generated from results of field-based research will depend almost totally on the degree to which the specific techniques making up a particular intervention are identified and described and then related to the most relevant psychological principles. The need for precise description relates, of course, to the ability of other researchers to replicate the procedures. Replication is not only the first canon of science and the best evidence of the generality of a principle, but also is the cornerstone of an eventual behavioral technology.

Would that I could give three cheers for Rainer, for he has said well so much that needs to be said. Alas, his new freedom has allowed him to fall into a trap that seems to have captured many able scientists across the years. Rainer says that he has rediscovered "that much of what man does is determined by his thoughts"! In his haste to retreat from positivism, he has moved the causal explanation of human behavior from the environment back into the "inner man," where, unfortunately, it has had a long and thoroughly unproductive history. Having lost his faith in one approach to an environmental determinism, he has converted to a cognitive framework and in so doing, has resurrected