A Reaction to Danish and Hale:  
A Minority Report  

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As sport psychology grows and develops, an inevitable struggle for identity and self-definition will occur. A number of competing models will exist if sport psychology follows the pattern of other fields of inquiry (Kuhn, 1962), unless one paradigm achieves universal acceptance within the field. Even if such unanimity develops, it will come only after the competing alternatives have been evaluated and rejected.  

The article by Danish and Hale (1981) expresses opinions about current directions in sport psychology and proposes what are seen as alternative models. In the previous editorial, the NASPSPA Ethics Committee (Nideffer, Feltz, & Salmela, 1982) responded to this article. As a member of the Ethics Committee, I take issue with the opinions expressed by Danish and Hale as well as Nideffer et al. I believe that the issues presented are complex and cannot be resolved by a simple acceptance or rejection of one stance. In some cases where differences exist, points raised in both articles are valid. It is far too soon to foreclose on one model, and the development of dogma is incompatible with the pursuit of knowledge.  

Since 1979, NASPSPA has struggled over the questions raised by proposals to certify sport psychologists. The Ethics Committee was formed to help in this task. It will not be until this year, however, that the first document from the Ethics Committee will be circulated to NASPSPA members and other interested parties. All other reports were only presented orally at meetings. Therefore, Danish and Hale, and others who might have an interest, would not have had access to this information unless they attended certain meetings.  

Danish and Hale react to references in the sport psychology literature that advance a traditional clinical model utilizing psychiatric jargon and diagnoses, a system that has become known as the "medical model of mental illness" (Szasz, 1961). They suggest another model. Nideffer et al. correctly assume that most sport psychologists would prefer to avoid this medical model. Neither argument cancels the other. A perusal of an early book in sport psychology, Problem Athletes and How to Handle Them (Ogilvie & Tutko, 1966), and literature since then (Tutko, Butt, Pressman, Sünner, Ogilvie, & Nideffer, 1979) show ideas grounded in the medical model. No doubt some sport psychologists will continue to use this model as opposed to educative, motivational, or developmental ones. It is difficult to predict the waxing and waning of support for any model.  

The possibility of some form of certification of sport psychologists by NASPSPA
cannot create a "closed shop" and stifle workers; neither can it eliminate fraud or unscrupulous activity. NASPSPA could only evaluate individuals at their request. An individual not requesting such an evaluation can make any claims not in violation of laws. No agency, group, or individual trying to locate a sport psychologist need ask for, nor abide by, NASPSPA’s recommendations. It will be a completely free market.

Regrettably, if sport psychology holds out promises to a world in which athletic competition has taken on disproportionate nationalistic ends and financial profit possibilities, there will be individuals who will seek to capitalize on personal or monetary opportunities. No actions by NASPSPA nor any set of laws can prevent this. Psychiatry, social work, psychology, and state licensing laws have not prevented psychoemotional hucksters from offering flamboyant, if not worthless, answers and "cures" in response to public demand. What NASPSPA can do is to provide a beacon of light to be used by those who wish clarifications of the issues involved in the practice of sport psychology.

Complicating matters is the interdisciplinary nature of sport psychology. Both Danish and Hale as well as Nideffer et al. cite the problems involved with the use of the term "psychologist." What is not made clear, however, is that this will pose a problem only to individuals selling services in a private practice model. Researchers, academicians, nonsalaried consultants, in essence the largest group of individuals who today are sport psychologists, would not be affected. A system that is equitable to all must be developed.

Where the conflict over the use of the term psychologist is a problem, more than cosmetic name changes or terms to cloak activities will be needed. Such superficialities would do more to discredit sport psychology than to advance it. Cloaking or euphemistic terms would make it seem as though the only requirements for practice were mail order degrees. Meaningful and realistic categories need to be defined.

Danish and Hale see a schism between the researcher and the practitioner, whereas Nideffer et al. cite clear evidence that this is not currently the case. If, however, it is assumed that sport psychology is a growing field, then the described schism remains a possibility for the future. How well the field of sport psychology and organizations such as NASPSPA encourage the participation and communication by all interests will be critical. Landers (1981) cites his work with shooters, in which research indicated that theories and interventions applied to shooters were inaccurate. This is a fine example not only of the needed communication between the researcher and the applied worker, but a basic demonstration of the need for research before the application of interventions. The applied worker not grounded in research-based approaches is likely to make promises on untested and untenable theories. As Landers suggests, a model for sport psychologists should include "training in scientific theory and methodology, as well as psychological skills" (p. 198), along with the knowledge and ability to communicate with individuals in other sport sciences.

The points raised in this article are not meant to be a solution to the differences between Danish and Hale and Nideffer et al. The full scope and depth of the issues they raised will be apparent only as alternative models are developed and debate over the issues has increased. It is unlikely that any definitive answers or monolithic models will be developed in the near future. Rather, an environment conducive to the open and free exchange of ideas, without dogma, polemics, "in-groups," and personalized arguments, will provide the conditions from which true growth and development in sport psychology can occur.