



**Michael  
ZITO**



**Tim  
HERZOG**



**Amber  
SHIPHERD**

# What's in a Name? Some Ins and Outs of Representing Yourself

Michael D. Zito, Ph.D., Montclair State University and private practice, Tim Herzog, Ed.D., National University and Reaching Ahead PLLC, & Amber M. Shipherd, M.S., Texas Tech University

Given the diversity of education and training options in sport and exercise psychology, as well as in kinesiology and sport sciences, there is often confusion about which professional titles are appropriate to use. Currently, a group of colleagues, led by Dr. John Silva, is in the early stages of developing more explicit recommendations for the educational pathways to a practice-oriented career (e.g., CC-AASP; CC-AASP, licensed Master's practitioner; and CC-AASP, licensed psychologist). Despite the above initiative, a survey of current advertisements regarding sport psychology yields an array of terminology used to describe related services, some of which are appropriate and some of which are not. Ethically representing yourself relies on three central factors: your education and training, the licensing laws and regulations in the jurisdiction in which you practice, and applicable Ethics Codes (e.g., AASP, APA, and ACA).

Obtaining appropriate multidisciplinary education and training is essential for proficiency in our sub-discipline. Both APA Division 47 and AASP suggest that ideal training combines traditional psychology, sport sciences, and sport psychology. Furthermore, it is imperative that an individual practices within the boundaries of his or her education and training. If one's education and training does not lead to licensure (or registration) as a psychologist, what one practices cannot legally be labeled 'sport psychology'. Non-licensed, eligible practitioners will

have to represent themselves using unrestricted terms discussed later in this article. This requirement is somewhat controversial because many non-psychologists contend that they conduct similar work to that of licensed psychologists who practice sport psychology. While this contention may be true in some respects, it is most important to understand that the ways in which individuals represent themselves and describe their services are restricted by laws and regulations.

Earning a degree in psychology or sport psychology does not automatically allow you to represent yourself using the terms *psychology*, *psychologist*, *psychological*, or other forms of these words. The use of these terms depends on laws and regulations in your jurisdiction (i.e., state, province, territory, region, and/or country). It is incumbent on each practitioner to know the licensing laws (or 'registration' laws in countries such as Canada and Australia) to determine if these terms, or variations, are allowed. A quick sampling of laws evidenced considerable variability in the acceptable usage of the terms between countries. The U.S. appears to be tightly regulated, where most states restrict use of the three terms for use by licensed psychologists only. Practitioners who are not licensed psychologists must know the laws where they practice to avoid illegal self-representation. Ignorance about the law holds little credibility with a Psychology Board that is pursuing legal action, and breaching these laws

holds the same legal gravity as someone who has received basic medical training who represents him-/herself as a Medical Doctor. Bear in mind, certification as a CC-AASP merely communicates that you have met AASP's seal of approval for minimum industry standards, but this credential does not serve as any form of legal license.

Applicable Ethics Codes dictate that practitioners represent themselves clearly and honestly, especially when reporting their qualifications and services. Practitioners need to be careful to avoid false, misleading, or deceptive statements by using the proper terms allowed in their jurisdiction. Most ethics codes dictate that members have an ethical obligation to take action if they are aware of ethical violations by attempting to contact the practitioner to resolve the matter. If the matter is not resolved, the issue can be reported to the governing body in the jurisdiction where the misrepresentation of services has occurred.

The following are example cases that are frequently reviewed by ethics committees or licensing boards for possible improper representation in jurisdictions that require a license or registration to use the terms *psychology*, *psychologist*, *psychological*, or variations thereof:

- A practitioner has not achieved a license (or proper registration) as a psychologist, calls him or herself a *sport psychology consultant*, *sport psychologist*, or offers *sport psych services*.
- A practitioner who is not a licensed psychologist offers services as a Sport Psychology Practice Consultant to assist early career professionals in building their own sport psychology practices.
- A soon-to-be licensed practitioner prematurely markets sport psychology services before actually obtaining licensure.
- An author writes a book or an article about sport psychology, and believes that gives him or her the right to refer to him-/herself as a sport psychologist.
- A marketing company decides that it would be best to promote someone as a sport psychologist to improve business opportunities.

Competent practitioners working ethically within their domain should not despair. Unlicensed and licensed professionals with sport science backgrounds can use titles such as *mental skills consultant*, or *performance coach*, etc., since these terms are usually not restricted by licensing laws, registration, or certification status. In fact, these titles may represent your services more accurately and could help you build clientele in certain circles (e.g., some athlete populations) where the term 'psychologist' may not be well-received. Masters-level mental health professionals can use these same unrestricted terms. State boards for licensed clinical professional counselors, social workers, and marriage and family therapists, use terms like 'counseling', which are often unrestricted. Conversely, a licensed professional may elect to use non-psychology-related terms in certain contexts. However, according to Eric Harris (APA's legal consultant), it is important to remember you can be held accountable by a licensing board to provide services at the standard of care of your license, regardless of what you call yourself.

In summary, when determining how best to represent yourself, consult the licensing laws and regulations in the jurisdiction in which you practice, as well as applicable Ethics Codes (e.g., AASP, APA, and ACA). Also, consider your educational background and training. Take the responsibility to represent yourself accurately in order to prevent licensing board investigations about misrepresentation. ■

#### Additional Resources:

- AASP Ethics Code: <http://www.appliedsportpsych.org/About/Ethics>
- APA Ethics Code: <http://www.apa.org/ethics/code/index.aspx>
- ACA Ethics Code: <http://www.counseling.org/knowledge-center/ethics>
- Association of State and Provincial Psychology Boards (ASPPB) Directory: <http://www.asppb.org/HandbookPublic/before.aspx>
- EuroPsy Website: <http://www.europsy-efpa.eu/about>
- Ken Pope on licensure across US and Canada: <http://www.kspope.com/licensing/index.php>