

COALITION FOR AN ETHICAL PSYCHOLOGY

human rights * ethics * social justice

www.ethicalpsychology.org

Coalition Poses Key Questions for Supporters of New APA Policy Proposal

The Coalition for an Ethical Psychology, Psychologists for an Ethical APA, and many other stakeholders have presented [significant reservations](#) about the APA's new policy proposal on psychologists working in national security settings. The Council of Representatives will vote on this proposal ("Action Item #3") at the upcoming APA Convention.

In response, the chair of APA's Board-endorsed "Member-Initiated Task Force" has argued that these concerns reflect misinterpretations of the proposal text. Although not her intention, Dr. Woolf's response demonstrates exactly the point we sought to make: that the new document creates ambiguity rather than clarity and opts for equivocation instead of firm ethical guidance. This raises the obvious and critical question as to which interpretations will prevail when ethical issues arise. Back in 2005, with the infamous PENS Report, APA leaders essentially handed over responsibility for interpreting APA ethics policies to representatives of the U.S. military and intelligence agencies. With so many ambiguities in the new proposal's language, what assurances are there that this will not happen again, the next time around?

The real measure of any policy in this area is whether it clearly prohibits unethical behavior. If the new proposed policy fails in that, then it is worthless, mere words on paper. In that spirit, the Coalition has developed several scenarios to help ascertain whether the new policy indeed constrains unethical behavior. The first three below are based on actual events, the fourth reflects the current responsibilities of Behavioral Science Consultation Team (BSCT) psychologists, and the fifth is a likely scenario under current Department of Defense policies. We encourage Dr. Woolf and her task force, and other APA representatives as well, to publicly weigh in on each of the five cases below, and to explain whether, according to the new policy, these actions would be considered violations of APA ethics or policy:

- 1. A Behavioral Science Consultation Team (BSCT) psychologist picks up three adolescent boys under the age of 16 from Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan and transports them to Guantánamo. During the entire 22-hour flight they are dressed in diapers and orange jumpsuits, and chained to the floor in uncomfortable positions. At Guantánamo, the same psychologist is in charge of the boys' interrogation, and claims this role enables him to protect their health.*
- 2. A Guantánamo interrogator seeks to obtain a confession to justify an adolescent prisoner's detention. Concerned that this juvenile is experiencing severe psychological distress, as indicated by his talking to pictures on the wall and crying for his mother, the interrogator asked a BSCT psychologist to observe the next session. This psychologist recommends that the youth be placed in linguistic isolation, where no one speaks his language, and that he be told his family wants nothing to do with him. "Make him as uncomfortable as possible. Work him as hard as possible," she writes in her recommendations to the interrogator.*
- 3. A psychologist at a military detention center helps to write and implement Standard Operating Procedures mandating that all new prisoners be subjected to 30 days of isolation indefinitely renewable. The purpose of the Behavior Management Plan is "to enhance and exploit the disorientation and disorganization felt by a newly arrived detainee in the interrogation process. It*

concentrates on isolating the detainee and fostering dependence of the detainee on his interrogator." After this SOP is promulgated, other psychologists are involved in the process of deciding when the isolation has been sufficient and the prisoner should be released into the general population.

4. A BSCT psychologist at Guantánamo is asked to evaluate the likelihood that a prisoner who has been imprisoned without evidence for over a decade will "return to the struggle" if given his freedom. If the psychologist concludes that this is more than a trivial possibility, the prisoner may continue to be indefinitely detained, perhaps for the rest of his life.

5. The Army Field Manual allows the following interrogation techniques in certain circumstances:
a. Emotional Fear-Up Approach: "the HUMINT collector identifies a preexisting fear or creates a fear within the source. He then links the elimination or reduction of the fear to cooperation on the part of the source."

b. Emotional Fear-Down Approach: "the HUMINT collector mitigates existing fear in exchange for cooperation on the part of the source."

c. Emotional-Pride and Ego-Up Approach: "It exploits a source's low self-esteem."

d. Emotional-Pride and Ego-Down Approach: "is based on attacking the source's ego or self image."

e. Emotional-Futility Approach: "the HUMINT collector convinces the source that resistance to questioning is futile. This engenders a feeling of hopelessness and helplessness on the part of the source."

A psychologist consults on an interrogation based upon these authorized techniques.

As a final question, in a recent statement about Guantánamo, representatives from the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights noted that "continuing and indefinite detention of individuals without the right to due process is arbitrary and constitutes a clear violation of international law," and that indefinite detention over an extended period of time "in itself constitutes a form of cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment" (<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=13278>). Does the APA's new proposed policy therefore clearly and indisputably prohibit psychologists from working at this site?

If the new proposed policy is indeed clear, comprehensive, and useful – as its advocates claim – then certainly it should provide unambiguous ethical guidance on scenarios and questions such as those we have presented here. If it cannot serve this essential function, then its adoption by APA's Council is unwarranted – and counterproductive to efforts aimed at establishing and safeguarding an ethical framework for psychologists working in national security settings.

Roy Eidelson
Jean Maria Arrigo
Trudy Bond
Brad Olson
Steven Reisner
Stephen Soldz

July 21, 2013