

# Coalition for an Ethical Psychology

human rights – ethics – social justice

www.ethicalpsychology.org

## Coalition for an Ethical Psychology Responds to APA Announcement of Independent Investigation

In response to allegations in James Risen's new book *Pay Any Price: Greed, Power, and Endless War*, the American Psychological Association Board of Directors has [authorized](#) an independent review of purported inappropriate APA involvement providing ethical and legal cover for Bush administration interrogation and detention policies. The Coalition for an Ethical Psychology – along with numerous other organizations – has called for an independent investigation for several years. We therefore cautiously welcome this review. At the same time, serious concerns arising from the recent Board announcement of the review temper our enthusiasm. To ameliorate the concerns, we hope for expeditious modifications in the proposed mandate and procedures as follows.

1. The composition of the Special Committee established to liaise between Mr. David Hoffman, the investigator, and the APA consists of the APA President, President-Elect, and CEO Dr. Norman Anderson. Dr. Anderson's participation on this committee is very worrisome. The allegations in Risen's book include claims of inappropriate activity by two top APA officials, the Ethics Office and Science Policy Directors. These officials reported directly to Dr. Anderson's office, and Dr. Anderson had operational responsibility for APA actions during the entire post-9/11 period under review.

If inappropriate behavior is substantiated by the investigation, then it becomes a serious matter that Dr. Anderson either knew about it or was unaware of it. Either possibility is disturbing. Therefore, the review must include an investigation of Dr. Anderson's office. For this reason, it is entirely inappropriate for Dr. Anderson, or any other APA leader who may be a subject of the investigation, to have any involvement, however tangential, in this process.

Furthermore, in order to ensure the credibility and independence of the review process, we consider it essential that this Special Committee include the participation of an equal number of prominent critics of APA policies regarding relations with national security agencies in general and interrogation and detention operations in particular. Only the involvement of such individuals providing a critical perspective – at every level – can guarantee the legitimacy of the review, whatever the findings may be.

2. The mandate for the investigation is confusing and misses the main point of Risen's and other critics' allegations. The Board announcement frames the review as determining whether APA was directly involved in promoting or supporting "torture." However, the APA leadership knows that problematic interrogation practices go well beyond "torture" and include a wide range of abuses that may not meet the formal definition of "torture." The Board obscured this important issue.

Even more problematically, the main allegations of APA collusion do not involve the direct promotion of torture. Rather, the central concern targets the access and oversight that APA leaders apparently gave to Bush administration, CIA, and Defense Department officials to shape APA policies in a way that would allow continued psychologist involvement in abuses. That is, the primary issue is potential institutional corruption that served the interests of those promoting the enhanced interrogation program, not direct involvement in that program. We strongly recommend that the APA Board issue a revised statement clarifying that the mandate also covers these important issues.

3. Finally, the Board situated its announcement of an independent investigation between a justification of its initial, inadequate October 16th response to Risen's book<sup>1</sup> and a reiteration of its numerous lofty public declarations against torture. It was inappropriate for the APA Board to defend the correctness of their response prior to the investigation.

Further, the relevant section of Risen's book distinguishes between public pronouncements and back-room deals. Any evidence of collusion significantly undermines the value and legitimacy of the APA's public pronouncements.

We ask the APA Board to respond appropriately and in a timely manner to the concerns identified here, so that the independent inquiry we have requested for years can commence without further delay. We invite a constructive dialog between members of the APA Board and the Coalition for an Ethical Psychology and other concerned critics of APA policies in this area.

***The Coalition for an Ethical Psychology is dedicated to putting psychology on a firm ethical foundation in support of social justice and human rights. The Coalition has been in the lead of efforts to remove psychologists from torture and abusive interrogations.***

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

## **Contacts**

Stephen Soldz  
[ssoldz@bgsp.edu](mailto:ssoldz@bgsp.edu)

Steven Reisner  
[stevenjreisner@gmail.com](mailto:stevenjreisner@gmail.com)

---

<sup>1</sup> The APA Board's initial response and the Coalition's analysis of this response (*Questions for the APA Board Regarding Claims in James Risen's Book Pay Any Price*) are available here:  
<http://ethicalpsychology.org/materials/Coalition-Questions-for-APA-Board.pdf>