PsySR Responds to Hoffman Report about APA Collusion

In unmistakable terms, the long-awaited Hoffman Report has confirmed longstanding allegations that the American Psychological Association (APA) curried favor with the US Department of Defense (DoD) by colluding to preserve unethical detention and interrogation practices – practices that involved psychologists in torture and abuse. The lengthy and detailed report delineates how APA staff and prominent Association leaders deceived and subverted the will of the membership to adopt and maintain ethics rules for psychologists "that were as closely aligned as possible with DoD policies, guidelines, practices, or preferences, as articulated to APA by these DoD officials." These "highly permissive" ethics policies, the report unequivocally concludes, were "based on strategy and PR, not ethics analysis."

So, as we face the repercussions from the worst scandal in our profession's history, where do we go from here? Tragically, many APA insiders spent the past decade obstructing and discrediting good-faith efforts to redirect the Association away from the disturbing path chosen by its leadership, a path that compromised fundamentals such as human rights and the core principle of "do no harm." Clearly, individual psychologists whose documented actions have violated APA's Ethics Code should face loss of license and other professional sanctions. Even more crucially, our profession faces existential and systemic concerns that need to be dealt with in an active manner. With controversy over crucial facts finally behind us, Psychologists for Social Responsibility (PsySR) hopes that the large and diverse community of psychologists can now begin to move forward together on the difficult journey of repairing and rebuilding.

The APA's loss of legitimacy and credibility will remain a disturbing reality as long as the Association fails to fully confront and address the betrayal by its leadership and the harm it has caused. Valuable guideposts for action to address this betrayal include: criminal prosecutions or restorative justice processes to hold accountable the perpetrators most responsible; material and symbolic reparations; changes to ethical and other policies so as to meet standards appropriate for a profession of scientists, health professionals, and educators rather than the priorities of the Department of Defense or CIA; institutional reform to dismantle the structures that facilitated misconduct, including an organizational analysis explicating networks of influence; and truth commissions to illuminate the causes and consequences of the grave ethical lapses. We draw many of these recommendations from the field of transitional justice.

But psychologists should not wait for the APA to decide on its next steps before embracing and mobilizing around a profound course correction that can help to reclaim and reinvigorate our profession. Reflecting on the damage that has been done, especially to the victims of torture and abuse, PsySR rejects the status quo as untenable and continues its commitment to a progressive vision for psychology, one that prizes human rights and human dignity. We believe Mr. Hoffman is absolutely

correct in his conclusion that "The profession of psychology must also define for itself whether it is ethical and legitimate for psychologists to use their special skill to intentionally inflict psychological or physical harm on individuals."

The transformation we seek depends upon a much higher level of engagement from many more members of our profession. It requires participation from those who have stood on the sidelines, those who have closed their eyes to disturbing reports, and those who have considered it unseemly to discuss "politics" among colleagues. As should now be clear to everyone, silence is also a political choice. In light of the evidence compiled by the Hoffman investigative team, psychologists have a duty to recognize and examine how decades of dependency on the military and intelligence agencies for employment, funding, and stature have influenced our entire profession, in ways that have never been adequately examined.

In the weeks and months ahead, PsySR will offer more detailed recommendations, commentary, and action strategies related to what lies ahead for the APA. But at this moment when the world is watching and wondering, we implore all of our members and colleagues to stand up and speak out for what our profession's fundamental principles should be. Now that the facts are on the table, we can finally begin a respectful and broad-based discussion about what our profession should really stand for.

-- The Steering Committee of Psychologists for Social Responsibility
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