

***Lessons form Guantanamo:
Ethical issues for psychologists working in the military, intelligence and
detention facilities***

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on behalf of Psychologists for Peace and the APS College of Community Psychologists.**

I'm Heather Gridley, and I work for the APS as Manager of Public Interest. But I'm not speaking in that capacity today, because I've been asked to represent the concerns that have been raised by a number of APS members, especially from Psychologists for Peace and the College of Community Psychologists. So I guess there is some tension in my position, being employed by and at the centre of the APS, and speaking today from the margins. Dr. Koocher said yesterday that the voices of opposition to the APA stance were 'loud, but a minority'. I don't apologise for being in the minority, nor for speaking from the margins – sometimes the view is much clearer from the edge than from the inside. I think of myself as a critical friend to the psychology profession and to APS as an institution.

I was prompted by a former APS President, Clive Williams, to draw your attention to the precedents for debates like this in the history of the APS. Simon Cooke's 2000 book *A Meeting of Minds* has an excellent chapter on the Society's treatment of social and political issues over the years, and there's an account of psychologists' campaign in the late 1960s for humane treatment of prisoners in the criminal justice system, and also of the APS urging the International Union of Psychological Science to take a stance condemning abuses of psychiatry in the gulags of the then Soviet Union.

The APS *Code of Ethics* as it currently stands seems pretty clear on the subject of whose interests take priority. From the general principles of Responsibility, Competence and Propriety, the Code goes on to state: "The welfare of clients and the public, and the integrity of the profession, shall take precedence over a member's self interest and over the interests of the member's employer and colleagues." Furthermore, "Members must refrain from any act which would tend to bring the profession into public disrepute". But who is the client is a more complex question – is it the detainee? The general public? The contracting agency, in this case, the Government? And who brings the profession into disrepute, the perpetrator of torture, or the whistleblower who makes the disreputable behaviour public? As a community psychologist, I'm open to the argument that the collective good might take precedence over the individual, but I do wonder how we have been led to believe that 'we' are under such threat from 'them' that we are prepared to surrender 'our' civil liberties and violate 'their' human rights. And how did psychologists' long-standing involvement with the military shift from treating shell-shock to being used as 'weapons', according to US Admiral Harris?

Agreement on what constitute core human rights has been hard won, and is most sorely tested under conditions of perceived threat. Psychologists for Peace was founded on the principle that in order to reduce the global quotient of hatred, we need (and can learn) to avoid cyclic patterns of violence. 'An eye for an eye' just leaves everyone blind. The creation of climates of fear is an age-old means to political, not peaceful, ends.

What behaviours are we talking about when discussing the subject of psychologists and torture? The US 'biscuit' teams reportedly advised the military on how to "break" detainees to make them more cooperative. The techniques they devised included sleep deprivation, 'waterboarding', and playing on detainees' fears and cultural vulnerabilities to extract information. Recent evidence has

confirmed that psychological torture is at least as destructive as physical torture. The APA insists that it is vehemently opposed to torture, and cruel, degrading treatment. But it could be argued that any form of interrogation in the context of places like Guantanamo Bay constitutes torture. Through a process of linguistic detoxification, torture tactics are minimised as Donald Rumsfeld's 'enhanced techniques', while the climate of fear is amplified by terms like 'national security', 'illegals', 'enemy combatants' (in a war that remains unnamed so that the Geneva Convention can't be applied).

How did we get to be 'discussing' torture at all? Deakin University law academic Mirko Bargaric raised the issue not long ago of what might constitute 'acceptable' degrees of torture in extreme circumstances. That was the same academic who argued that a community's distaste for abortion might be balanced against individual women's rights by 'allowing' women one abortion per lifetime – but no more! He also argued that lawyers' personal ethics are not important to clients, who just want them to be good at their job. Last I heard he was in Greece offering advice to [convicted drug baron] Tony Mokbel on how to avoid extradition, so I guess that's where ethical relativism takes you.

Some people argue against torture on the grounds that it doesn't work anyway – people will say anything under that kind of pressure. Do we have any evidence that torture (or 'enhanced techniques') have prevented World War 3, or averted any other global crisis? When has compromising ethics ever led to a better, safer, less violent world? But even if it were 'effective', would the ends justify the means, or are we not all diminished, and all our values-based stances disqualified, when we head down that road? And if torture is ineffective in its stated purpose, what then is its real purpose? To make everyone more fearful? It was Hermann Goering who said:

The people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same way in any country.

Closer to home, we can ask whether Australian psychologists, or the APS, would have acted any differently from our US counterparts, in the same circumstances. Immigration detention centres are not quite the same as Guantanamo Bay, and perhaps there is a case for the provision of psychological services in either context, as opposed to participating at first or second hand in interrogation or torture. But many would argue that it is impossible to promote someone's mental health amid conditions that are demonstrably oppressive and destructive to health and human dignity. The likelihood that individual psychologists could take on a monitoring role in such circumstances seems far outweighed by the probability of their co-option to collude with oppressive practices.

If professional codes of ethics are not equal to the task of dealing with the complexities Dr. Koocher described yesterday, then perhaps we need to be promoting a critical reflective practice that takes us beyond rule books to personal and collective accountability throughout our professional lives.

I would now like to present Amanda Gordon as APS President with a petition that was signed online by more than 60 people in a matter of days, from around the world and locally, within and beyond the APS. The petition urges the APS to clarify its position on torture and its members' involvement in any activity that could be classified as such; and then to resolve how APS should respond to the APA's actions on this matter.

Australian Psychological Society. (2003). *Code of Ethics*. Melbourne APS.

Cooke, S. (2000). *A meeting of minds: The Australian Psychological Society and Australian Psychologists 1944-1994*. Melbourne: The Australian Psychological Society.