REVISED PROGRAM DESCRIPTION
Proposal ID: sym19951


Chair: Scott D. Churchill, PhD

[NOTE: *PSYOPS (Psychological operations) are “operations to convey selected information and indicators to audiences to influence their emotions, motives, and objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of governments, organizations, groups, and individuals.” –Wikipedia]

Within a year after the 157-1 Council Vote for the 2015 Resolution to Amend and Clarify the Roles of Psychologists Related to Interrogation and Detainee Welfare in National Security Settings […], in which provision was made for independent psychologists to provide treatment for detainees held at black sites - while limiting military psychologists to providing treatment only for military personnel at these same black sites – military and operational psychologists were petitioning APA Council to return to black sites to provide psychological treatment for detainees, notwithstanding universal rejection of this by virtually all human rights activists and ethicists worldwide.

Representatives of “Veterans for Peace” have called this a move in the interest of “strategic placement” of the military at sites where they have been replaced by psychiatrists and nurses. In order to build support for this initiative, the role of the military psychologist has been reframed to emphasize humane concerns rather than acknowledging the necessarily adversarial role of anyone working at black sites in relation to those who are held captive and who have been subjected to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment (CIDTP).

Participants on this panel will present their assessment of what has transpired, both within the military and within the APA, with regard to the debate regarding the presence of military psychologists at black sites. The first presenter is a Veteran Gulf War veteran and co-organizer of Veterans for Peace; she will present “a view from the inside” of how the military utilizes psychologists and PsyOps to achieve their strategic goals. Our second presenter was a co-author of the 2008 Membership Referendum to remove psychologists from GTMO, as well as co-author of the 2015 Policy Revision 23B passed in Toronto. He will present on the theme of “denialism” in the campaigns to discredit the Hoffman report in the weeks and years after its being issued. The third presenter, also a co-author of 23B and an activist with years of involvement within the APA, will speak to the techniques of persuasion being used to try to convince new members of APA Council that we made a mistake when we restricted the role of military psychologists in “national security settings.”

Two discussants will comment on the presentations and open the floor to discussion. The first, representing Div 39, has been involved over the past two decades in the fight to keep psychologists out of illegal interrogations. The second, representing Div 32, was co-author and principal mover of 23B in Toronto in 2015, and was a presenter of the “con” statement in regards to Div 19’s motion last year to return military psychologists to GTMO.
The World is Watching: Next Steps Toward Eradicating the Unethical Use of Psychology in Warfare

Monisha Rios, M.S.W. and PhD Candidate (Saybrook University)

Beginning with an overview of the American Psychological Association's formal relationship with war from 1917 to now, I place the most recently revealed U.S. torture program into its larger context as one of many war-related inhumanities made worse by the adaptation of the U.S. psychological industry for military use. As the controversial debate surrounding the ethicality of psychologists in national security/military settings continues to intensify within the industry's leading institution, a global movement to address the harmful outcomes of militarized psychology does as well.

I am a co-organizer in the movement mentioned above and present an analysis of the use of psychology in U.S. warfare that is not readily welcomed or accepted by the dominant decision-makers in the industry. I center the perspectives of those most adversely and often horrifically impacted by it, whose voices are typically left out of these conversations. I am also a Persian Gulf Era veteran of the U.S. Army who, together with other veterans and active duty personnel, challenges the heroic idealization of military psychologists in any setting - clinical or otherwise - just as we challenge the glorification of psychology as an industry that thrives on our war economy while innocent lives are destroyed as a result of our increased lethality from human factor engineering. We trace the flow of profits from defense contracts and take particular notice of how people are exploited in the name of psychological science and national security. We point to patterns of moral inconsistencies and toxic leadership present in military culture as well as our industry's culture, that lead to such atrocities as the torture program.

Finally, we offer recommendations for next steps toward addressing the tendency of psychologists to insulate themselves from these realities through bystander apathy, coupled with the tendency to prioritize profit, power, and prestige above ethics.

Ways of Not-knowing: Social denial, Denialism and the Campaign Against the Hoffman Report.
Dan Aalbers, M.A.

Independent Reviewer David Hoffman found that key members of the APA leadership were guilty of willful blindness. In the face of credible reports of abuse of prisoners by the U.S. military and strong indications that psychologists were involved with said abuse, the APA declined to seriously investigate allegations that psychologists were involved with individual acts of torture and/or in constructing systems tantamount to torture. Even though the APA leadership had good contacts inside the Department of Defense it declined to use those relationships to investigate charges of psychologist involvement with torture and maintained a see-no evil attitude even in the face of strong pressure from the membership to uncover the truth. Instead of investigating, the APA leadership engaged in a public relations campaign designed to convey the false impression that the ethics office was closely monitoring events and using every opportunity to discover what could be known.
Sadly, the motivated denial that characterized the APA leadership’s approach to abusive interrogations has metastasized. Figures that came off badly in the report are suing the association and David Hoffman himself. These efforts have been combined with a scholarly denialist campaign against conclusions of the Hoffman Report.

In this talk I will examine the denialist campaign against the Hoffman Report and explore the similarities of that campaign to that of other campaigns such as HIV denial and the efforts to deny the connection between tobacco use and cancer. Drawing on the work of Zerubavel and Cohen, I will argue that the torture scandal was a foundational trauma and will place this denialist campaign in the context of a larger pattern of social denial. The work of Robert Proctor and Harry Frankfurt will also be mentioned and evaluated.

(3) Bringing the war home: When PSYOPS strategies are used to influence APA policy
Steven Reisner, PhD

Over a period of ten years, a small group of psychologists and human rights investigators worked to expose the central role of operational psychologists in the Bush Administration’s torture program. This effort, along with reporting by numerous journalists, revealed not only that psychologists designed and oversaw the CIA and DoD torture programs, but that a number of these psychologists colluded with APA officials to ensure that neither the APA ethics code nor any APA policy would interfere with these activities. An independent reviewer, hired by APA to investigate the allegations, corroborated these revelations and exposed additional corruption. Following these reports, APA Council voted 157-1 to prohibit operational psychologists from involvement in national security interrogations and from working for commands that violated the United Nations Convention Against Torture.

Since that historic vote, a group of operational psychologists has directed their operational skills on the Council, using PSYOPS* strategies in an attempt to overturn those changes. To accomplish these ends, this group created a campaign of distortions and fabrications against those who investigated their operations, those who oversaw APA’s independent review process, and against the independent reviewer. They have initiated lawsuits and ethics complaints against their opponents, apparently as means of silencing and intimidating them, and they have sued APA itself as an attempt to influence its policy. In essence, the group has weaponized ethics and Council processes as part of a stepwise strategy to return operational psychologists to national security interrogations and illegal national security detention centers.

This presentation will discuss several examples of such strategies and their implications for the independence and ethical practice of the profession.

Discussants: Stephen Soldz, PhD and Scott D. Churchill, PhD