

Society for Community Research & Action

The Division of Community Psychology (27) of the American Psychological Association

April 18, 2008

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CEO, APA

Alan Kazdin, PhD
President, APA

Stephen Behnke, PhD
Director, Ethics Board, APA

Gentlemen:

We, the Executive Committee of Division 27 [Society for Community Research and Action (SCRA)], are writing to you with the purpose of opening a dialogue regarding the involvement of psychologists in interrogations at military detention centers and CIA black sites. We appreciate the steps that APA has taken of late, including the closing of the loopholes in the 2007 resolution, the banning of psychologists' participation in specific interrogation techniques as well as their involvement in setting up detention conditions for interrogation purposes, and the writing of letters to the White House.

We propose 3 steps that APA can take to put its values more closely in line with those of its members:

- (1) Do not allow psychologists to work for a governing legal authority in settings that violate basic human rights. That is, affirm the referendum sponsored by Withholddues.com.
- (2) Follow up on reports of ethical violations by psychologists who participated in interrogations in the military detention centers and CIA black sites.
- (3) Change Standard 1.02 of the Ethics Code to be consistent with human rights as well as to be enforceable by APA.

Members of our division are quite concerned about APA's position on psychologists involved in interrogations. Several prominent, lifelong members of our division have resigned from APA over this issue. We are sure that you have followed these resignations closely. However, we want to emphasize that many members have joined the dues withholding movement, many more are thinking of resigning, and, most importantly, our student members are deeply disturbed by APA's policy and wonder if they will join or remain within the APA. As you look to recruit graduate student members of APA and retain them as they become early career professionals, we would encourage you to act in ways that resonate with these young people, who are the future of our profession.

The values of Division 27 and community psychology are consonant with many of the positive initiatives with which APA has been involved. We are a group that has at the heart of its mission to act in support of social justice-related issues. We are interested, from a psychological perspective, in the individual, but we do not believe that a focus on the individual is superordinate to a consideration of the organizations, communities, and societies within which the individual operates. We value context, multi-culturalism, and human rights.

(1) Affirm the referendum sponsored by WithholdAPAdues.com: “Be it resolved that psychologists may not work in settings where persons are held outside of, or in violation of, either International Law (e.g., the UN Convention Against Torture and the Geneva Conventions) or the US constitution (where appropriate), unless they are working directly for the persons being detained or for an independent third party working to protect human rights.”

It is difficult for us to understand a role more diametrically opposed to the values and mission of community psychology than one that exists in settings where foreign prisoners have been detained in violation of international law, human rights, and the U.S. Constitution. We believe anything other than a client-protective role for psychologists in such settings goes against all widely-held psychological knowledge, research, and ethics. The detention centers and CIA black sites are settings that violate human rights, international law, and the constitution in respect to indefinite detention. *There should be no setting that widely violates these principles, on or off of the U.S. mainland, where psychologists engage in strategizing to create individual interrogation plans.* We are deeply troubled that psychologists assist in planning methods of interrogation that involve escalating fear and anxiety in the prisoner (e.g., "fear up harsh" in the Army Field Manual, the guide for military interrogations) or to further increase depression (e.g., the technique of "ego down" also in the Army Field Manual). That the battery of interrogation techniques used by the CIA is sufficiently harsher than the Army Field Manual only adds to the problematic nature of the involvement of psychologists.

Given that the American Medical Association (AMA) and the American Psychiatric Association (ApA) has prohibited its members from engaging directly in such interrogations, we would like the American Psychological Association to further consider making a decision to do the same. However, we believe that the APA could and should take a stronger moral stand by supporting the referendum sponsored by WithholdAPAdues.com (stated above).

(2) Follow up on reports of ethical violations by psychologists committed in military detention centers and CIA black sites.

We understand that formal reports regarding the actions within military detention centers, of some APA-member psychologists, have been made as early as the Fall of 2006. Several were bolstered by official Department of Defense logs of interrogations that have made their way through the media to the public. We would appreciate an update on the status of these reports. We understand that steps may be required to protect anonymity; our greater concern is finding out the progress the committee has made on these cases up to the current date, and that those submitting the reports feel their concerns have been thoroughly investigated and acted upon.

Our desire to ensure the follow-up on these reports is not so much to see a psychologist charged with violations as to see APA demonstrate a willingness to investigate possible misconduct to the furthest extent possible. We believe following-up on ethics code violations demonstrates APA's sincere intention to investigate possible misconduct to the fullest extent possible. It also shows that all psychologists should be accountable for violations and that the APA will acknowledge these violations when they occur. The Department of Defense has admitted activities including psychologists' participation in the reverse-engineering of harsh SERE tactics for the use on detainees in interrogations. By following through on reports of ethics violations, the APA can ensure that it will acknowledge possible harm caused by psychologists.

(3) Change Standard 1.02 of the Ethics Code to be consistent with human rights as well as to be more easily enforceable by the APA Ethics Board.

In 2005, the Council of Representatives (COR), specifically members associated with Divisions for Social Justice (DSJ)—a group to which SCRA belongs—requested that the APA Ethics Board change the language of 1.02 and its potential loopholes, as they relate to interrogations in military situations. Language in the APA 2007 resolution helps make clear that psychologists may not violate the restrictions in that particular resolution by appealing to a “I was following orders” Nuremberg-type defense. Nevertheless, Standard 1.02 itself must be changed. Our understanding is that recommendations have been provided to add language to 1.02 that would be consistent with and anchored in human rights documents. Suggestions have also been provided to recognize “civil disobedience” as is included in equivalent sections of the ethics code of the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA). Moreover, language was recommended suggesting the APA could provide support for members in resolving such conflicts and even provide informational support for certain justified cases of whistle blowing. Yet regardless of COR, DSJ, and member recommendations in 2005 and 2006, we are aware of no progress that has occurred to make the suggested changes to the Code itself. Our division is quite concerned by this. We would like to discuss how the necessary changes can be facilitated by the Ethics Committee and how our division can assist in this work.

As the current Ethics Code stands, there is an inherent contradiction between *Principle A: Beneficence and Nonmaleficence* and *Standard 1.02* when psychologists are involved in the interrogation situations cited above. How do APA psychologists “do good and avoid harm” when they are confronted with certain military regulations asking them to work against the mental health and well-being of foreign prisoners of war? But, equally important, the inherent contradiction in our current ethics code might result in problems similar to those we are currently confronting, but which we cannot now imagine. For example, the average psychologist would not have predicted that our current government would create illegal detention centers and CIA black sites. We need an Ethics Code that pre-empts government policies that we have not and could not have imagined. We need an Ethics Code that all psychologists can consult with pride—an Ethics Code that makes clear that the protection of well-being for all people is paramount in the work we undertake.

In conclusion, we want to emphasize that we are pleased that APA has taken positive steps to address members' concerns about psychologists' participation in military detention centers and CIA black sites. Again, as community psychologists, we value collaboration. Thus, we propose collaboration and dialogue—among the APA, the military, human rights groups, protesters and other stakeholders, including individuals who have survived abusive conditions by governments throughout the world—in order to move forward the agenda addressed in this letter.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

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Signing on behalf of the Division 27 Executive Committee
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