

---

## From the Archives

### Division 19 Themes (1975–1982):

#### *Legitimacy, Ethics, and Applied Military Psychology*

Bri Staley Shumaker

---

A review of Division 19 newsletters from the mid-1970s to 1982 reveal long-standing questions and concerns about identity, ethics, applied science, and professional legitimacy of military psychology. A collection of themes identified in these newsletters spanning from 1975 to 1982 are outlined below.

#### **Legitimacy and Professional Identity**

In the context of a post-Vietnam War era, the leaders and writers of these newsletters raised concerns regarding whether military psychology was fully valued and understood within the American Psychological Association (APA). Specific concerns are raised regarding Division 19's visibility in APA, apportionment, and council representation. Amid concerns about influence, Division 19 leaders encouraged members to remain actively involved in the APA. One effort to address Division 19's influence in the APA was a revision of the Division 19's brochure, intended to correct misconceptions and better represent the field's scope, including "the diversity of professional interests of military psychologists" (*TMP*, 1975, p. 1).

#### **Military Psychology as an Applied Science**

Across the reviewed articles (1975-1982), there is a theme of pride related to the direct operational nature of military psychology. Award citations, conference reports, and publication lists emphasize decision-making, simulation, human factors, and assessment and selection as the hallmarks of military psychology.

One award recognized research that applied psychological principles to "realistic tactical decision-making environments," highlighting the Division 19's long-standing commitment to applied impact (*TMP*, 1976, p. 6). International conference reports similarly focused on vigilance, human performance, and physiology under operational conditions (*TMP*, 1976, p. 2).

#### **Ethics and Professional Responsibility**

A prominent theme of ethical concerns runs throughout these newsletters. Readers are encouraged to remain po-

litically neutral due to an awareness that psychologists are operating within powerful institutions and must tread lightly. Ongoing discussions of credentialing, and APA governance under the notion of professional responsibility are also highlighted.

During one Executive Committee discussion, members debated whether APA should take political positions at all, concluding that, if positions were taken, "the facts bearing on the issue need to be presented" (*TMP*, 1982, p. 2)

#### **Professional Recognition**

A recurring frustration in the newsletters involves professional recognition. The Fellows Committee reported repeated rejections of nominees because candidates were "not being known outside of military circles" or had not published sufficiently in certain academic journals (*TMP*, 1982, p. 4).

#### **Conclusion**

What is most striking about these newsletters is how familiar the discussions seem. While the language is somewhat dated, the concerns are not. Most notably is the reminder that Division 19 has always operated at the intersection of military service, operational practicality, ethics, and science. Conversations continue regarding our identity, boundaries, and roles we play as military psychologists. One concern that seems highly relevant to current day is the call for military psychologists to remain politically neutral. This issue highlights the unique challenge of military psychology: Balancing ethical decision making and personal convictions with the legal and institutional limits of political expression inherent in military service, particularly in an era of heightened polarization. These themes are a helpful reminder that today's challenges are a small part of the longer history of military psychology.