Division 19 Membership,

I wanted to ensure each of you is aware that APA has now released the Hoffman report and it is now available along with some supplemental materials on the APA website:

<http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2015/07/independent-review-release.aspx>

As you know, APA had commissioned Sidley law firm to conduct an independent review of APA's Ethics Guidelines, National Security Interrogations and Torture.   Apparently someone whom APA had entrusted with an advanced copy of the Hoffman report defied their non-disclosure agreement and released the report to the New York Times which then in turn, released the report to the public this past Friday. It is difficult to see how breaching that trust could be justified as promoting the interests of our profession.  It denied APA leadership, and importantly, those mentioned in the report, an opportunity to review it before its release. This premature release has contributed to what can only be described as a crisis for APA since both the findings and reactions to them have contributed to uncertainty for both members and leadership within APA.

The APA website also includes a link to a July 10, 2015 APA press release and recommended actions that APA will take as a follow up to the report.  Professions can grow when they are challenged by a crisis and this reportcertainly has generated a crisis for psychology.  However, what is critical is that APA leadership not just accept the findings at face value but carefully assess the validity and reliability of information generated by theHoffman report.  That is especially important since the APA leadership has now reportedly formed a Leadership Team to work in concert with the APA Council and Board of Directors to determine what actions are needed given some of the findings of the report.

Again, this is early in the aftermath of this report.  I have learned over a long career that the first reports are not always the most accurate and this report strongly adheres to my earlier experiences.   That said, I encourage you to carefully read the report but do so as members of a profession where the science and methods we use to reach judgments do matter (and do impact on the lives of those within our profession who are mentioned in thereport).

I fear a great opportunity was lost.  Regrettably, several members of the APA leadership and many other honorable individuals are maligned (once again).  There are far too many attributions of “true” motivations when more straightforward and less damaging explanations were just as plausible. That is truly regrettable.  In too many parts of the report, it makes attributions that require one to suspend belief and therefore it does not come across as a truly objective representation of events, actions, and motives.  To say that I had hoped for a truly objective and unbiased report is an understatement.

Given my observations, I wanted to share with you my perspective on this report and its aftermath for the profession of psychology. It is important for all who read the Hoffman report to recognize that Military Psychology involves a great many specialties and the Hoffman report addresses only one area of the rich, valued, and diverse contributions of military psychology to our profession.

What is desperately needed is for everyone to evaluate the findings of the Hoffman report with deliberative rationality (cf., John Rawls).  We need careful reflection on all the relevant facts, taking care to ensure we’re under no misconceptions and that all the relevant circumstances are correctly assessed and reasoned through.

It is worth repeating that I had high hopes for the objectivity of this independent review.  However, I will admit that its findings are disturbing on two levels: for what they purport to portray and more importantly, for the far too often lack of objectivity in the portrayals.  I think it is important to take at the investigators at their word that they started this review admitting they didn't understand psychology, APA, and as is made evident in thereport, DoD.  Every tragedy typically has a hero and a flawed character: this report seems to personify both, but which personification you see depends on whether a week ago you were an APA critic or not.

To the critics of APA, the Hoffman report will most likely appear as if it is a vessel into which every suspicion, suggestion, fear, and thread of doubt has been poured into an admixture of imagination that "seems" plausible. However, for far too many of these findings, it appears too often that the evidence that was poured into this vessel was filtered through a skein held by the critics or potentially colored by political leanings of investigators. That reality is revealed when one attempts to pick this ethereal container up and hold most of its contents up to the light of reasoned judgment.  A truly informed and independent review demanded "true independence."  Only then could "anyone", critic or supporter, read the report and feel confident that the investigators were informed enough by the facts to carefully weigh them. Only then would the findings make evident that reasoned judgment was needed to then inform their conclusions and findings.  While that may have been what the investigators "aspired" to achieve, that is not what the report reflects in principle.

While as I related above, we all had great hopes for this "independent review" from the beginning, the challenge for true independence could only be maintained if those conducting the review strictly adhered to overarching ethical principles that established the foundation and credibility for this review.

-A report of this nature needs to completely represent unquestioned credibility and "independence." That is only achieved if the review's findings are truly objective and without bias.  To anyone reading the reportwho truly understands psychology, APA, and DoD, they, I fear, will too often find themselves disappointed.

-The investigators acknowledge in the report they had limited to no understanding of APA, of psychology, and certainly not of DoD (which is sweepingly portrayed when they try to paint DoD as the rich, demanding, coercive uncle who gets his/her way).  Part of the loss of objectivity and bias is also portrayed when rendering negative evaluative comments about Bush administration policies and describing Department of Justice legal opinions as "bizarre."  That's unfortunate for the purpose of conducting an "independent review" but helpful in revealing one of the threats to that independence as "bias" (i.e., political, ideological, or other convictions that undermine and/or call into question the reviewer's objectivity).

-A lack of understanding of the DoD, and it's processing of payments, also reveals another threat to the objectivity of this review (i.e., it reveals both a "self-interest bias" and a "self-review bias" wherein the reviewers are not knowledgeable of the processes and therefore cannot appropriately and objectively evaluate the results).

                -What is disturbing is the representations of innuendo, suspicions, and at times, direct assertions that objective evidence was certainly available "if only" someone had looked...presumably it is more important to suggest something is true than to independently demonstrate its truth.

                -What is amazing is the lack of perspective of the following fact:  Psychologists "who happened to be within the DoD" came to APA to seek help, just as the APA Ethics Code requires, when they, yes, "they" assessed they needed additional guidelines to ensure psychologists were "staying in the ethical lane."   The PENS Task Force guidelines reinforced the need to absolutely adhere to the ethics code regardless of the setting or situation.  It is fascinating to read throughout the report how APA was attempting to "curry favor" with DoD...but the report is woefully short, in fact silent on just how "DoD writ large" benefitted.  Regardless of speculation otherwise, the fact remains: strict adherence to the ethical code was affirmed and reinforced.  Are we to conclude that a reinforcement and affirmation that the ethics code definitely applied to DoD psychologists was the favor gained?

                -What is sad is that this independent review does not represent the highest standards of “independence.” The most important criterion for this, or any independent review of this nature to have credibility and usefulness, is for it to reveal unquestionable objectivity.  It absolutely should not reflect any vested interest that is expressed or supported in the outcome of the review.  To that end, the independent review's conclusions and judgments should not reveal any partiality and needs to withstand scrutiny from any third party for all issues addressed within it.  While this report attempts to cloak itself in that standard, that cloak is too often rent by the lack of objectivity, by inaccuracies, and by its apparent efforts to faithfully represent the critics of APA without maintaining its overall independence.  It is important to note that “independent” does not equate to unbiased or objective.  The report rendered by this independent review cannot credibly make that claim, it must demonstrate it on its own merit.

As you read the report, I encourage you to carefully consider it for what it was intended to achieve by the APA leadership.  Also carefully consider it from the perspective of how it represents the profession of psychology and one of the foundations of psychology as a profession, military psychology.  This is the beginning of a process of discovery.  We need to ensure that process is objective, credible, and accurate. I trust each of you to help ensure we achieve that in all that we do.

I ask that you help represent the facts that Military Psychology and our members provide a proud and long history of contributions to our profession and to our society.  I have asked a group of distinguished senior leaders within our Division to carefully document lessons learned and importantly, to document all the discrepancies and misrepresentations within the report.  We cannot proactively help resolve a crisis by standing on a foundation of inaccuracies, misconceptions, and misguided efforts that seemed too focused on assuaging critics.  Our profession deserves better.  We need careful reflection on the relevant facts.  Only then can we ascertain the most appropriate course of action to move psychology forward.

I look forward to your comments and observations.

V/r,

Tom

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President

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Society for Military Psychology

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