

The American Psychological Association, through its attorneys, has just refused to support our request to have access to the notes of interviews that David Hoffman conducted while preparing the report commissioned by the APA. Why does that matter – not only to those of us named in the report, but to everyone who cares about the transparency with which the APA functions and the reputation of the profession that has been so tarnished by the report?

In the weeks since the report's release, it has become apparent to those who have read the report carefully that it is deeply flawed in many respects. For example, key facts are omitted, such as the existence at the time of the PENS debates of restrictive military guidelines regarding interrogation tactics. Others are grossly misinterpreted on the basis of nothing but guesswork. In addition, and perhaps most damningly, some of those interviewed for the report have told us that they were substantially misquoted.

These flaws enabled David Hoffman, the report's author, to use prosecutorial tactics to build a story – that psychologists in the APA and military “colluded” to enable abusive interrogations – that bears no resemblance to what actually happened: those involved worked actively to report, restrain and then end abuses. His rhetorical tactics are obvious and ham-fisted from the report's first pages, but it has taken several weeks to uncover the multitude of specific omissions, mis-statements, and mistaken inferences that support what is in fact a prosecutorial brief, not an objective investigation.

As four of the individuals primarily named in the report, we have been asked by many for a response to it. We plan to provide that response and are immersed in that task. In order to prepare a comprehensive, fact-based response to Mr. Hoffman's allegations, we have asked for access to Mr. Hoffman's notes and the documents he was provided to conduct his investigation. We are prepared to pay reasonable costs to have them copied, and to discuss the possibility of excluding specific notes if there are very good reasons for doing so. If the report accurately reflects his interviews, there should be no major obstacle to our receiving the notes. Indeed, we would think Mr. Hoffman would welcome the opportunity to demonstrate that his report did not distort the information obtained in the interviews.

We were hopeful that the APA would support our request. In their most recent press release Nadine Kaslow and Susan McDaniel, both members of the APA Special Committee set up to oversee the report, have vowed that they are “...moving forward in a spirit of reconciliation and reform.” “We have much work ahead as we change the culture of APA to be more transparent,” Ms. McDaniel has also said. If that commitment to transparency and reconciliation is to be real, it should include transparency as to how Hoffman used the information he collected, and a full opportunity for those impugned by the report to respond.

The APA, Mr. Hoffman's client, has refused to support our request for its notes. We urge the APA to reconsider its position. If you have been concerned about the rush to judgment of individual psychologists in recent weeks, or would like more transparency about how the investigation was conducted and the report composed, or wish to begin to restore our profession's reputation, we ask you to make your views known.

L. Morgan Banks, Ph.D.
Debra Dunivin, Ph.D., ABPP
Larry C. James, Ph.D., ABPP
Russ Newman, Ph.D., JD