

The Society of Indian Psychologists

Governing Board

Art Blume, President Gayle Morse, President Elect Carolyn Morris, Past President Joanna Shadlow, Secretary Christopher Morris, Treasurer

TO: Cynthia Belar, Acting CEO, APA; Susan McDaniel, President, APA; Antonio Puente, President-Elect, APA

FROM: Art Blume, President, SIP

Melinda Garcia, Council Delegate, SIP

Gayle Morse, Chair, BAPPI; President-elect, SIP

Wendy Peters, CEMA, SIP

DATE: 11/13/2016

We are writing to express deep concern with the way that certain senior APA staff took it upon themselves to quash our efforts to entreat the APA for support in addressing the current circumstances of conflict and state-sanctioned violence against the Water Protectors at the Standing Rock Indian Reservation. The senior staff in question elected to eschew making any kind of statement or to take any responsive action, to include further consultation with any of APA's American Indian experts citing that: 1) it was a State, not a federal, issue (which of course Standing Rock sovereignty elevates such concerns to a federal level); and 2) that the issues raised by the situation at Standing Rock (environmental racism, community violence against an American Indians, health disparities, and historical re-traumatization) were not in line with APA direction and priorities.

When Dr. Blume communicated his rebuttal and dismay about the decision to suppress the issue, he was told that his inclusion on an "internal" communication was inadvertent and unfortunate. No one took responsibility for the distressingly ill-informed "internal" conversation that insinuated a policy recommendation completely beyond the purview of APA senior staff. In fact, the response implied that he shouldn't be upset because he was not supposed to know what had been said. This incident is an example of the same lack of transparency noted in the Independent Review.

The Independent Review was very emphatic in its condemnation regarding the APA's lack of transparency because senior staff, rather than Council, were making key policy decisions about the direction of APA. Regardless of the many criticisms of the Independent Review by members of Council, Council has been very clear that senior staff are not to decide policy for APA. Rather, policy is Council's job. If Council is not in session when a community or national emergency occurs, then it is the job of the Board of Directors. Perhaps if transparency had been a higher priority with the torture issue and the ethics code debacle, things might have turned out differently for staff, governance, and the Association.

Despite the possibility that advocacy statements on behalf of certain populations, such as Native Americans, might trigger antipathy among some Congressional members, the decision about whether or not to take action does not belong to APA staff. That responsibility belongs to Council and the Board. Until now, it has been our understanding that: 1) APA engages with its community partners in analyzing the psychological implications of catastrophic events; and 2) APA staff do not make unilateral policy decisions or even recommendations for APA.

Just a month ago, a number of Council members were amazed and impressed to learn that the Australian Psychological Association issued an apology to Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders. Council members also wondered whether APA could have been complicit regarding similar types of events perpetrated upon American Indian and Alaska Native populations in the U.S. The following quote from the Australian Psychological Society's apology clearly enumerates ways in which Western psychology and colonialist thinking have oppressed indigenous people:

We, as psychologists, have not always listened carefully enough to Aboriginal and Torres Strait people. We have not always respected their skills, expertise, worldviews, and unique wisdom developed over thousands of years. . . . we sincerely and formally apologise to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians for: Our use of diagnostic systems that do not honour cultural belief systems and worldviews; the inappropriate use of assessment techniques and procedures that have conveyed misleading and inaccurate messages about the abilities and capacities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; conducting research that has benefitted the careers of researchers rather than improved the lives of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants; developing and applying treatments that have ignored Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander approaches to healing and that have, both implicitly and explicitly, dismissed the importance of culture in understanding and promoting social and emotional wellbeing; and, our silence and lack of advocacy on important policy matters such as the policy of forced removal which resulted in Stolen Generations.

They further stated:

To demonstrate our genuine commitment to this apology, we intend to pursue a different way of working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that will be characterised by diligently:

- Listening more and talking less;
- Following more and steering less;
- Advocating more and complying less;
- *Including more and ignoring less; and,*
- Collaborating more and commanding less.

These powerful words speak to the importance of this apology. On more than one occasion, President McDaniel has stated that the Australian statement was inspiring and has quoted it, yet it remains unclear whether she views it as a call to action for the APA regarding United States native peoples (American Indians/Alaska Natives/Native Hawaiians). The fact that the APA Council has not responded similarly reflects a serious lack of understanding of the White power and privilege that has dominated APA historically.

The recent email incident referenced in this memo is not only a textbook illustration of the APA's complicity in the continued oppression of American Indians through its passivity and willful disregard of the expertise readily available to APA. It is an excellent example of why ethnic minority populations are losing trust with APA. Lost or compromised trust can have long lasting and unintentional consequences. For example, AAPA has uncoupled its annual convention from that of APA; NLPA recently refused to recognize the APA's anniversary by putting its logo on the NLPA Journal of Latino/a Psychology; ABPsi has not sent a representative to COR for many years now, and even The Alliance has also been dissolved.

In our collective experience with the APA, Native issues have been too easily disregarded or not taken seriously. Not only is this professionally dysfunctional and personally disrespectful, but it is spiritually, emotionally, and physically exhausting for all parties and does not engender good will either way. We request that the APA engage its Native members and advocate for their psychological wellbeing by the doing the following:

- 1. Issue an apology to SIP for the unskillful actions of its senior staffers and the glossing over of that behavior by APA leadership.
- 2. Defer to APA's noted Native experts regarding all aspects and events occurring in Indian Country. Please do not rely on the assumptions of senior staffers who do not possess particular qualifications or thorough knowledge of the circumstances.
- 3. Renew a commitment to consult with community partners regarding the psychological impact of catastrophic events and the needs of vulnerable populations.
- 4. Explain why APA has decided not to start the process to issue an apology letter similar to that of the Australian Psychology Society acknowledging the historical harms, psychological and otherwise, that have long been inflicted against peoples in Indian Country.
- 5. Advocate for social justice and the civil rights of vulnerable populations, especially when circumstances of psychological wellbeing is at stake, irrespective of conflicts with other interests, including economic or other organizational goals. Human welfare takes precedence over other guild-related priorities.
- 6. Commit to lobbying efforts in support of the Standing Rock people and other Native people and communities that have been impacted by the construction of the oil pipeline. To date, the human cost of the oil pipeline has had incalculable ramifications for Native people, not just from an environmental perspective, but also from the standpoint of human welfare and psychological wellbeing. The proximity of the oil pipeline threatens their environment and singular water source, while the changing demographics of the region have seen significant increases in crime, violence, and human trafficking. Just as the APA denounced its complicity in acts of torture, it should similarly realize that circumstances such as these incite the potential for grave physical and psychological harm to Native populations.

Please do not condescend to us as tokens in APA's own agenda by not including or consulting us about our own concerns. That behavior constitutes hypocrisy and deserves our mistrust.

Cc: SIP, COR, NLPA, AAPA, ABPsi, MENAPsy, PsySR, Divisions 18, 27, 35, 45