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# Psychologist, Author Mary Pipher Returns APA Award Over Interrogation Policy

- Archives - Archives Générales 2006 - 2022 - 2007 - NÂ° 9 Septembre/September 2007 - International - USA -

Date de mise en ligne : lundi 17 septembre 2007

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**"I think that the APA has long been a clan," said Mary Pipher, a clinical psychologist and author of "Reviving Ophelia" among several other books. She returned her Presidential Citation award from the American Psychological Association in protest over the group's policy on military and CIA interrogations. "The top leadership, the people on the council have been there for decades. It's a very ingrown group of people and I think we probably need some new leadership in APA."**

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Renowned psychologist and author Mary Pipher gained headlines last week when she returned her Presidential Citation award from the American Psychological Association in protest over the group's policy on military and CIA interrogations.

At its annual convention just over a week ago, the APA's policymaking council voted overwhelmingly to reject a measure that would have banned its members from participating in interrogations at Guantanamo Bay and other US detention centers.

Mary Pipher rose to national acclaim with the publication of her book, "Reviving Ophelia" which remained on the New York Times bestseller list for over 150 weeks. She has written several other books, her latest is titled "Writing to Change the World." I began by asking Mary Pipher why she decided to return her award from the APA.

MARY PIPHER : I've been following this issue as a psychologist for a couple years, mostly on your show, Amy. But last Sunday, August 19, APA, American Psychological Association, passed what they call Substitute Motion Three, which essentially allows psychologists to continue in their roles supervising and in some ways overseeing, planning the interrogations at places like Guantanamo and perhaps black sites, as well. I was very upset by this.

I also watched your show on Monday. I had read the Vanity Fair piece by Katherine Eban, a wonderful piece, the Jane Mayer piece in The New Yorker. And it all came together. And I just decided I really don't want our organization to go this way. I've had a very good long-term relationship with APA. I'm very proud of my profession, but I was so aware that we were making a terrible mistake, and I felt it was my "it was really a moral imperative that I act.

I thought my act would be of small import, and no doubt it will be of small import, but I hoped two things would happen as a result of it. One would be that American Psychological Association once again join the other helping professions : American Medical Association, American Psychiatric Association, American Nursing Association, all professions that do not permit their members to be in Guantanamo or the CIA sites. The other thing is, I realized that if psychologists weren't in those sites, they could not exist, because we give those sites legitimacy. And the only thing that allows President Bush and the CIA to have a sort of veneer over what's happening there and pretend as if they are different places than, say, the bowels of prisons in the Congo or Egypt, is that we supposedly have medical supervision. And psychologists are those medical overseers. So I think that if enough people were interested in this, if enough psychologists stood up, it wouldn't just be a matter of our organization passing a better vote, stopping our members from being involved in enhanced interrogations, it would be a matter of really having the whole structure fall. So that's very much my hope, and I'll be a small part of it.

It's amazing to me, this last week I've heard from so many people, including, of course, you, Amy, on your show, who have been following this issue very closely and working hard at it. In fact, I don't think I deserve too much glory, because I'm a really relatively latecomer to this compared to so many other people who have been in the trenches for

a long time.

AMY GOODMAN : Dr. Pipher, what do you say to those who resisted the moratorium on psychologist participation in these interrogations, saying if psychologists aren't there, they can't make it better, that psychologists who are there could protest if they see torture taking place ?

MARY PIPHER : Well, first of all, psychologists designed much of the torture. We were involved with the SERE project at Fort Bragg. We developed the protocols. And what our field has actually done is create through reverse-engineering, actually, some of the earlier methods for our captured [POWs]. We reverse-engineered them into a very rapid and heinous process by which almost anyone could be broken down and hallucinating and psychotic and, in a sense, destroying their mind within about twenty-four hours, forty-eight hours. And so, we've been very, very much a part of this.

If we leave, first of all, it can't happen anymore. But secondly, if we leave, what we're really saying is psychologists are not involved as interrogators. You know, this goes back. My mother was a doctor in a small town. And first of all, she was a very good person. And she was one of these people that she told me a lot of stories, and all of her stories had a strong moral crux. But she took her work very seriously. She worked very hard. And one of the things that I remember her saying was parts of the Hippocratic Oath. Here's one of them : never do harm to someone for someone else's benefit. That's what we're claiming to do. That violates the most basic of standards for caregivers. The other thing is, make your patient your highest priority. Psychologists, doctors, we are about helping people. That is our mission. And so, anytime we do something else, we become something else. And it's very important to me that I am defined not by the APA's current recent behavior, not by the APA's Substitute Motion Three, but that I'm defined as my mother was defined, by a way of thinking about human beings that in a sense insists I treat all human beings as people of worth and dignity.

You know, I remember one thing that happened a lot. I lived out in rural Nebraska. My mom had to do everything. I mean, she was the doctor at football games. She did all the physicals. She sat with old farmers while they were dying. But she always carried her little black doctor bag. And if we stopped along a road because there was a car wreck " we did that all the time " she and my dad " had been a medic in the war " would jump out and run for that accident victim. And they didn't ask that person if they had a criminal history. They didn't ask that person if they were a Republican or a Democrat or paying their taxes or had the proper identification. They took care of that person. And that's what I think is our job as psychologists, just as my mother thought it was her job as a doctor.

AMY GOODMAN : Dr. Mary Pipher, you have worked with torture victims. Explain when you worked with them, where you did and what you learned.

MARY PIPHER : Well, I've worked in two capacities. First of all, I've always been someone deeply interested in human rights " again, I think, from my mother. But I was marching in 1965 in Kansas City to desegregate. I was a long-term member of Amnesty International. I was writing, ironically " today I was writing urgent action messages all over the world to protest the torture of specific people who are being held in facilities, sadly not unlike some of the facilities where we're holding, in quotes, "enemy combatants." The other thing, though, is I've long worked with Physicians for Human Rights. I've done Asylum. I wrote a book, Middle of Everywhere, in which I immersed myself in our refugee community for about three years, and I have always worked with refugees in our poverty programs, and so on.

The other thing, though, is just as a therapist I've spent my entire life helping traumatized people. I listen to the damage that people talk about when they've been " for example, someone whose child has been murdered. One time we worked with a policeman who had accidentally killed someone, someone who's been raped or had a child who was sexually assaulted, someone who's been abandoned by their long-term mate. I understand trauma very

well.

And two things I know about torture victims, Amy. One is many of them are innocent of any wrongdoing. They were tortured for purely political reasons. The other thing is there is always lasting harm. There is always lasting harm. I could tell you stories of specific people, if we had the time, but what I know for sure is if you have been locked up and treated as an animal, you're never the same person again. It's like you have a chronic disease like diabetes or schizophrenia or Parkinson's : you're forever compromised. Your mind indeed has been very changed by those experiences.

So I think because of my empathy and my understanding and my moral education, I was someone who was perhaps more aware of these issues than many other issues. The other thing, too, and I'm very lucky in this, is I'm not in a bad position. I don't have to make my living participating in behavior that's questionable. I've always tried to arrange my life that way, and I'm proud that I've been able to. But I'm someone who can speak on these issues and probably not be terribly hurt by it.

There was a young woman in our town recently, Alex Svoboda. You did a story on her, I believe. She was badly beaten by the police in North Providence when she was protesting for some workers who weren't receiving their human rights. And I'm actually friends of her parents. They live here in Lincoln. And I saw the pictures of her, you know, sitting on the ground with her leg twisted behind her. And I know how long she's been in the hospital in the ICU and have heard wrenching stories from her parents. And it reminded me of this story "I don't know if you remember it" that James Baldwin told. But he had left this country, didn't care for America. It wasn't good to blacks, and it wasn't good to gay men. And he had moved to Paris, where he was having a great time, very respected, very admired. He never planned to come back to the States. And then the Birmingham bombing occurred, and he said he would return to the States and work for civil rights. And his line, which I remember very well, is "I will not let the Civil Rights Movement be carried on the back of four-year-old girls." And so, another influence for me in the last couple weeks, thinking about my decision, was I was thinking about Alex Svoboda, this young idealistic girl who's trying to protect workers from working a hundred hours a week for less than minimum wage and about her lying in a hospital all broken up. And I was thinking it's not fair that we ask our twenty-year-olds to do all the fighting. We sixty-year-olds, we people who have a little authority, we should be on the front lines with these issues. So I'm just very lucky I was in a position I could do something. There's thousands of people

AMY GOODMAN : Dr. Mary Pipher, are you encouraging other psychologists to "what are you urging other psychologists to do ? I was going to say to return their awards, but you're unique, or you're one of the few who have received such a high honor.

MARY PIPHER : I'm very unique because of that. Well, I think in a matter of conscience it's better not to encourage people to do a specific action, beyond, I think, every psychologist in the country who is in accord with my thinking should do something to let APA know how deeply upset they are. Now, I actually know some things people are doing, like resigning, for example. I wouldn't recommend that. That's a very complicated question.

But I think that the APA has long been a clan ; the top leadership, the people on the council have been there for decades. It's a very ingrown group of people. And I think we probably need some new leadership in APA. I'm not even a member of APA at this point. I closed my office in 2000, and I allowed all of my memberships to lapse. But I think for the members, it would be an excellent thing to really look not only at this specific decision, but the whole way that APA at this point is functioning.

For everyone in America, I have a different agenda, and that is, at some point in this country we all started to feel hopeless, and we all started to think that there was really nothing we could do, that we were too weak and we were too small and we just had to lie down and let the government and the different forces that were knocking us down just

roll right over us. And my own feeling about that is, the best antidote to that kind of despair is get to work. And I believe everybody in America has something important they can do that will make a difference. And so, that's what I really want to see happen.

I've had a lot of young people come up to me – in fact, I've had calls from all over the world by now, and everybody is saying, "What you did gave me hope." And I think what every one of us does gives other people hope. And we can all do that. And we can start to regain our belief in this country as a competent country, as a decent country, as the beacon on the hill that it's been historically now for 300 years.

AMY GOODMAN : Mary Pipher, clinical psychologist and acclaimed author. I asked her to talk about her latest book, *Writing to Change the World*.

MARY PIPHER : You know, how Pete Seeger always said about music : it isn't whether or not it's good, it's what it's good for. And I didn't come at writing as an academic or as a poet or a creative writer. I came at writing as a social activist, and I want every one of my books to have a very powerful effect in changing the culture. And so, I have spent a lot of time figuring out how to do it. And the way to do it is have a deeply personal voice, my own authentic voice that comes from deep within myself, and my writing and speaking voice are virtually identical. And then, the other way to do it is through stories, because you can't argue with a story. You know, people can argue with you if you stand up and say what you believe or don't believe, but if you tell them a story and tell them a story that opens their heart, they will change. So that's what the book is about, is writing in a way that we can effect change.

And I talk about this idea that the point of my kind of writing is to empower the powerless, to give voice to people who have no voice, but also to educate readers in what I call the moral imagination. And that is the ability to understand the world from other people's points of view. And that's an extremely big problem in America right now, is people don't have much moral imagination, so that when they talk about, say, "illegal aliens," they don't have a story, they don't have a face, they don't have a picture of a real person. They have almost no empathy with the person they're talking about.

I remember when Sensenbrenner was talking about gaming the asylum system and how we had to go after those terrorists gaming the asylum system. At that point I had just happened to have been back to Bellevue in New York City to visit their unit for victims of torture. The people on that unit that were seeking asylum were Buddhist monks from Tibet. And I just thought, "Man, Sensenbrenner hasn't been here. You know, he hasn't been to Center for Victims of Torture in Minneapolis."

And so, the job of the change writer, from my point of view, is to say I respect you as a reader, and I know if I tell you the truth, as I see it, having spent some time listening to people and asking them – you know, Simone Weil had that question, "What is your experience ?" – asking people, "What is your experience ?" which I did when I wrote *Middle of Everywhere*, my book on refugees. I spent three years asking people that. And it greatly enhanced my own moral imagination to listen to all those stories. You also have a good job for enhancing your moral imagination. But that's the job of the writer : to help other people's moral imagination grow, basically.

AMY GOODMAN : Dr. Mary Pipher, finally, can you explain what you won the APA award for, the Presidential Citation ? It was given to you by the previous president of the American Psychological Association, Dr. Gerald Koocher, who was on our program debating this issue of torture, debating against -

MARY PIPHER : Yes.

AMY GOODMAN : – Dr. Reisner, who is a psychologist who has really helped to lead the movement for a

moratorium.

MARY PIPHER : Right. I have respect for him.

AMY GOODMAN : And Dr. Koocher was debating him, was opposed to him in that view.

MARY PIPHER : Right. Well, in fact, I received two presidential awards : one from Dr. Martin Seligman in 1998 and then one in 2006 from Dr. Gerald Koocher. And, ironically, the one I received from Dr. Koocher was for my compassionate guidance of psychologists and for my work helping educate our field about refugees and immigrants. It really was for the Middle of Everywhere book.

And so, it's kind of ironic at this point that I'm on a radio show, a TV show. In a sense, I feel like I'm betraying a friend. I mean, I feel like APA has been my friend, and Dr. Koocher, when I met him, was a very kind person to me, and he had personally written this award. He had flown down to San Antonio to give it to me and introduce me. So it's been a very difficult decision to " I'm a total conflict avoider. I hate very much to hurt people's feelings, but I felt like, especially in view of what I was given the award for, I needed to be a compassionate guider of our field at this moment in time.

AMY GOODMAN : Psychologist and author Mary Pipher. She returned her award to the American Psychological Association in protest of psychologists' involvement in interrogations.