

Scientific Freedom in Peril; Mission Not Accomplished

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Scientific Freedom in Peril

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Beth Loftus [*Observer*, August 2003] correctly identifies the need to defend scientific freedom. However, psychological science is being confronted with a worse threat – namely, manipulations of the scientific process and of research conclusions in order to achieve political ends. Journal Editor Carlos Sluzki has pointed out examples of governmental censorship (see “Censorship Looming,” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 2003, 73, 131-132). As one example, he said, “At the Web site of the National Cancer Institute, the prior assertion that research has shown ‘no association between abortion and breast cancer’ – based on the Danish follow-up study of 1.5 million women, ... exemplary research that has not been contradicted by any other study – has been magically replaced by a statement that ‘the evidence is inconclusive.’ ”

Similarly, the House Committee on Political Reform reported numerous egregious examples of alterations in the freedom of science (www.house.gov/reform/min/politicsandscience). For example, one psychologist being considered for appointment to the National Advisory Council on Drug Abuse was asked by an official from the Department of Health and Human Services whether he was sympathetic to faith-based initiatives, whether he supported abortion rights, and whether he voted for President Bush. He answered negatively to the last question and was never contacted again.

Apparently, the gloves are off, and the threat is overt and intended to intimidate. The issue is not whether one is conservative or liberal in political orientation. The real issue is the manipulation of science to achieve political ends. What should we do as scientists?

Mission Not Accomplished

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An unintended effect of the article, “Psychological Science and the Transformation of the Military” [*Observer*, September 2003], may be to leave the impression that APS is insensitive to all of the many nuances of war. To endorse the role of psychological science in helping warriors to “excel” at war is, I believe, to unwittingly help foster the next preemptive war, and to sully the APS mission to “promote, protect, and advance – the improvement of human welfare.” That’s human welfare, not human warfare, and all humans, not just Americans. While APS probably can’t do much to restrain the politics, business, and craft of war, I contend that it should do nothing intentionally to advance them.

