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Argumentative Synthesis Essay on Enhanced Interrogation Techniques

Cover Page Footnote

I want to acknowledge my English 101 professor, Mary Carroll Leason. She did a great job with teaching me how to write an effective argumentative synthesis essay.

Most people believe that torture and abuse is wrong. However, some people also believe that sometimes morals and ethics need to be put aside to bring forth the greater good: “The ends justify the means” (“What Does the Ends Justify the Means Mean?,” 2019). This belief has been used in interrogations, specifically interrogations involving national security. After the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the United States government defended the usage of torture techniques in interrogations in order to prevent future terrorist attacks (Dee, 2017). In fact, the George W. Bush administration actually devised the word “enhanced interrogation.” For reference, enhanced interrogation techniques are interrogation techniques that involve “physically coercive interventions” (Duke & Puyvelde, 2017). Examples of enhanced interrogation techniques are “sleep deprivation, confinement with insects, waterboarding, sexual humiliation, forcible high-volume IV injections, extreme temperatures,” etc. (Lowth, 2017). Despite what some people may think, this belief is false. Enhanced interrogation techniques should not be used in interrogations because they are unethical, ineffective, and negatively impact the mental health of the interrogators who are using these techniques.

First of all, there is a lot of information and published works on the different viewpoints regarding the ethicality, effectiveness, and psychological impact of enhanced interrogation techniques. For example, Myles Balfe has written an article regarding enhanced interrogation techniques, specifically enhanced interrogation techniques used by the CIA. In “The chiral nature of the enhanced interrogation programme,” Balfe (2018) gives many different examples of how people view the ethicality and effectiveness of enhanced interrogation technique. Also, Balfe (2018) discusses how the enhanced interrogation techniques have negatively impacted the interrogators in the CIA (Balfe, 2018). Additionally, one important study regarding enhanced interrogation techniques is “How Moral Disengagement and Individual Differences Relate to Community Sentiment towards Enhanced Interrogation Techniques” by Monica K. Miller and Lindsay Perez. In this study, Miller and Perez (2019) identify reasons as to why people would support torture. Miller and Perez (2019) define the term moral disengagement and evaluate the correlations between the effectiveness of torture and justification of torture (Miller & Perez, 2019). Moreover, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (2014) released a report, “Committee Study of the Central Intelligence Agency’s Detention and Interrogation Program,” on December 9, 2014 that was about the CIA program that used enhanced interrogation techniques against detainees after the September 11, 2001 attacks. The report (2014) mainly states that the Detention and Interrogation Program of the Central Intelligence Agency was ineffective in getting detainees to give up information; it also talks about the abuse that was imposed onto the detainees in the program (Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, 2014). In summary, these

three articles offered important themes and information on enhanced interrogation techniques.

One of the themes of these articles and documents is the varied perspectives on the ethicality of enhanced interrogation techniques. As stated above, Balfe (2018) shows how intelligence officers, scientists, and politicians believed the techniques used in the Detention and Interrogation of the Central Intelligence Agency were unethical. For example, a CIA memo actually stated that he thought that the psychologists who designed the CIA program “have both shown blatant disregard for the ethics shared by almost all their colleagues” (Balfe, 2018). The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (2014) states in its document on the Detention and Interrogation program of the CIA that the CIA lied about the effectiveness of enhanced interrogation to the media (Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, 2014). To enumerate, lying to the media is an unethical act. On the other hand, Miller and Perez (2019) state that some people believe that enhanced interrogation techniques are ethical. According to the article, one reason that people may support the ethicality of torture is when they believe that hurting one person will save the people of an entire country (Miller & Perez, 2019). For instance, Balfe (2018) mentions that the security officials of the CIA stated that they thought that “they would be morally culpable for the deaths of fellow citizens if they failed to gain information that could stop the next attacks” (Balfe, 2018). This mentality has caused some people to believe that it would be unethical to not do whatever possible to prevent another terrorist attack. To sum up, these three articles show that there are varied viewpoints regarding the ethicality of enhanced interrogation techniques.

Another theme that is in all of these articles is that people tend to support torture when it appears to be effective in getting intelligence information. On the other hand, people do not support torture when it appears to be ineffective in getting intelligence information. Balfe (2018) states that some people believe that the Detention and Interrogation Program of the CIA led to the arrests of powerful terrorists. However, a CIA official stated that the Detention and Interrogation Program in the CIA was actually ineffective. According to this CIA official, many of the people that worked in the program were untrained and unskilled in managing the interrogations (Balfe, 2018). In addition, Miller and Perez claims that their study found that there is an association between the justification and effectiveness of torture (Miller & Perez, 2019). Diane Feinstein, the chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, has asserted that it is important that the United States does not excuse cruelty and maltreatment in order to stop terrorist attacks. To emphasize, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (2014) has stated that the CIA inflicted torture onto seven of their 39 detainees; none of detainees that were tortured gave up viable information. Consequently, this is the reason why Feinstein and the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence

has insisted that the United States cannot participate in enhanced interrogation techniques (Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, 2014). Generally, people support enhanced interrogation techniques if they believe that they work and do not support enhanced interrogation techniques if they do not believe that they work.

Moreover, a theme that these articles present is that enhanced interrogation techniques negatively impact the interrogators who use these techniques. Balfe (2018) says that even some of the psychologists who came up with the Detention and Interrogation Program felt incredibly guilty about their actions: “[we] didn’t want to continue what we were doing... we even tried to get out several times” (Balfe, 2018). In addition, Miller and Perez (2019) mentions the ideology of the “belief in a just world.” This is an ideology where people think that good things should happen to good people and bad things should happen to bad people; possibly, this ideology can cause people to support torturing terrorists and criminals in enhanced interrogations (Miller & Perez, 2019). While the report from the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence does not talk a lot about the impact that the enhanced interrogations had on interrogators, it does bring up that many of the CIA officers, such as interrogators, analysts, psychologists, and others were greatly concerned about the effectiveness and the ethicality of the interrogations in the Detention and Interrogation Program of the CIA (Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, 2014). To some extent, all three of these articles discuss the negative impact that enhanced interrogation techniques have had on the interrogators of these techniques.

Beyond the many themes that are presented in this topic, it is important to understand that enhanced interrogation techniques are incredibly unethical. These techniques encourage people to be inhumane and cruel. For instance, when people participate in enhanced interrogations, they are violating the human health rights and human rights against abuse and torture (Chan, 2019). Human rights violations are unethical and immoral. Also, the detainees, who are subjected to enhanced interrogation techniques, develop major psychological issues. For example, Hussein al-Marfadi, a man who was detained and tortured under interrogation in a CIA prison, has stated that he has headaches and insomnia because he is “plagued by the memories of dogs inside a blackened jail” (Apuzzo, Fink, & Risen, 2016). Apparently, interrogators used to use dogs to terrorize detainees. Another detainee named Lutfi bin Ali has claimed that he has nightmares of drowning in a well; to infer, this inmate has been waterboarded (Apuzzo, Fink, & Risen, 2016). To enumerate, it is unethical and immoral to participate in actions that will cause a person to have mental health problems.

Enhanced interrogation techniques can lead to death, too. At one of the CIA “black sites,” which is where enhanced interrogations took place, one of the detainees died from hypothermia (The Editorial Board, 2017). Obviously, it is

unethical to torture someone to death. More importantly, there is a greater chance that interrogators may torture someone who is actually innocent. The New York Times (2016) states that while some of the victims of enhanced interrogation have been terrorists, specifically terrorists who are responsible for organizing the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, other victims have not been terrorists (Apuzzo, Fink, & Risen, 2016). In other words, the CIA has tortured innocent people through interrogations; it is morally-wrong to torture innocent people. In brief, enhanced interrogation techniques are unethical and inhumane interrogation techniques.

Not only are enhanced interrogation techniques unethical, but they are ineffective as well. Generally, people will say anything when they are under torture. Shane O'Mara, a professor of experimental brain research at Trinity College, claims that torture causes people to lie, not to tell the truth (Lowth, 2017). Needless to say, interrogators cannot get accurate information from the lies of detainees, showing that enhanced interrogation techniques are useless. Additionally, Lasana T. Harris (2015) references Shane O'Mara in her article on the scientific ineffectiveness of enhanced interrogations. O'Mara states that stress hormones are released when people are afraid and pained. When these stress hormones are released, the hippocampus, which is a function in the brain that is important obtaining and retaining memories, is damaged. O'Mara says that sleep deprivation damages the memory-recall of a detainee, too (Harris, 2015). As stated before, sleep deprivation is a technique that has been used in enhanced interrogations (Lowth, 2017). Hence, torture actually negatively impacts the validity of the detainee's memory.

Furthermore, there is historical evidence of the ineffectiveness of enhanced interrogation techniques. In the "Committee Study of the Central Intelligence Agency's Detention and Interrogation Program," the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence claims that Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, a CIA detainee, actually took back intelligence information when he underwent enhanced interrogations. Almost two months after the CIA had stopped inflicting enhanced interrogations techniques against this Mohammed, a CIA analyst stated that he had told three different stories that were connected to the Heathrow Terrorist Plot on May 20, 2003 (Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, 2014). For reference, the Heathrow terrorist plot was a terrorist plot where al Qaeda operatives were planning on blowing up transatlantic planes that were departing from Heathrow Airport in the United Kingdom (Cruickshank, Lister, & Robertson, 2012, April 30). In addition, Mohammed had recanted a lot of the information that he gave to the CIA about the Heathrow terrorist plot by June 2004. In fact, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed himself claims that "he may have given false information" when he was being tortured in March 2003 (Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, 2014). Since there is historical evidence of detainees

actually giving false information under torture, people can conclude that enhanced interrogation techniques are ineffective in getting information. In short, enhanced interrogation techniques are an ineffective way of obtaining intelligence information from detainees.

While enhanced interrogation techniques greatly negatively impact the mental health of the detainees, these techniques negatively impact the mental health of the interrogators who are using these techniques against detainees as well. For instance, many interrogators who use enhanced interrogation techniques experience moral disengagement. Moral disengagement is where people accept and embrace deeds that they would usually see as unethical. One of the reasons as to why interrogators can justify immoral actions, such as torture, is because they believe the victims of these immoral acts have committed acts that are worse than the abuse that they receive in enhanced interrogations (Miller & Perez, 2019). Because interrogators can morally disengage, they can disassociate and disengage from the cruelty of their actions. However, this disassociation and moral disengagement does not always last forever. Melinda Dee (2017) states that one psychological impact that enhanced interrogations have on interrogators is “burnout.” The symptoms for burnout are “difficulty managing emotions, feeling emotionally numb or shutting down, and... feeling hopeless” (Dee, 2017). To cope with the terrible task of inflicting torture, interrogators may feel that they have to become desensitized to their actions. Also, Dee claims (2017) that some of the interrogators who use enhanced interrogation techniques against detainees suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD. The main symptoms for PTSD for interrogators who use enhanced interrogation techniques are shame and guilt. Moreover, PTSD can result in substance abuse, nightmares, and major trust issues (Dee, 2017). Consequently, enhanced interrogation techniques negatively impact interrogators because they feel guilty for abusing and torturing people, which causes them a lot of psychological problems.

Additionally, interrogators may worry about being criminally indicted for participating in these interrogations. When it was revealed that the CIA was using enhanced interrogation techniques against detainees, many interrogators were afraid that they were going to face criminal charges: “Many individuals who worked for the security services... expected to be ‘thrown under the bus’” (Balfe, 2018). Since the interrogators were committing serious crimes when using these enhanced interrogation techniques, it makes sense that they thought they were going to be in serious legal trouble. Furthermore, there is a greater risk that interrogators of enhanced interrogation techniques may become perpetrators of domestic violence, and participate in other abusive behavior (Dee, 2017). To explain, interrogators of enhanced interrogation techniques may have issues with abuse because they have been conditioned to be cruel and abusive when conducting interrogations; presumably, it is hard to get out of that mentality.

Overall, enhanced interrogation techniques have a negative psychological impact on the interrogators.

Even though there is evidence that enhanced interrogation techniques are extremely ineffective and destructive, some people still support these techniques. One of the main reasons that people support enhanced interrogation techniques is because they feel like the detainees deserve to be tortured and punished. As stated previously, some people can justify torturing detainees because the detainees have done worse acts. Subsequently, the interrogators dehumanize and blame the detainees (Miller & Perez, 2019). Because they think that the detainee is more inhumane than them, some interrogators feel entitled to punish them through torture. Despite evidence of ineffectiveness, some people still believe that enhanced interrogation techniques are effective. It was previously stated that one study (2019) shows that there is a correlation between the justification of torture and belief on the effectiveness of torture (Miller & Perez, 2019). Thus, people are more likely to support enhanced interrogation techniques if they think that it actually works.

Politicians and other officials have stated that terrorists have been stopped because of information that was obtained from enhanced interrogations. For instance, some politicians stated that the program involving enhanced interrogation techniques prevented terrorist attacks by al-Qaeda: “It was felt that ‘were it not for this program...al-Qaeda and its allies would have succeeded’” (Balfe, 2018). Considering that some politicians have claimed that programs involving enhanced interrogation techniques have prevented terrorist attacks, it makes sense why some people would still support these techniques. Although there is scientific evidence that explains the ineffectiveness of torture in interrogations, psychologists have used enhanced interrogation techniques in the Detention and Interrogation Program of the Central Intelligence Agency. To clarify, psychologists from a company called Mitchell Jenson and Associates were contracted by the CIA to guide and operate enhanced interrogation techniques (Marks, 2018). A reason that people may believe that enhanced interrogation techniques are effective is because psychologists have used these techniques in interrogations. To summarize, people support enhanced interrogation techniques because they feel that detainees deserve to be tortured as well as believe that important and vital information can be acquired from these interrogations.

Nevertheless, it is essential to remember that torture is actually very unethical, ineffective, and destructive. Even if the detainee is a terrible and person, it is still unethical and inhumane to torture him or her. Torture is a cruel act that goes against human rights (Chan, 2019). Everyone is human and deserves human rights, including criminals and terrorists. More importantly, torture really is ineffective. As previously mentioned, torture damages memory processes

(Lowth, 2017). The truth cannot be obtained by false memories. All things considered, it seems that politicians have lied about the effectiveness of torture. The CIA has come out to say that enhanced interrogation techniques are ineffective (Balfe, 2018). To infer, politicians must have been lying about the effectiveness of torture in enhanced interrogation techniques because operatives of the CIA as well as many other professionals who have actually used these techniques have stated that they have been ineffective in getting intelligence. Moreover, psychologists in the Detention and Interrogation Program of the CIA were using techniques that were not based on scientific evidence. One psychiatrist, who was affiliated with the Detention and Interrogation Program of the Central Intelligence Agency stated that these techniques were “simply made up” and there was not any scientific evidence that supported these techniques (Balfe, 2018). In other words, the psychologists that participated in the CIA program were not using authentic scientific methods. Corruption and dishonesty can arise in all professions. Unfortunately, psychology is no exception. All in all, there are more reasons to reject enhanced interrogation techniques than there are to support them.

Enhanced interrogation techniques should not be used in interrogations because they are unethical and ineffective and negatively effects the interrogators. Interrogators commit acts that can be deemed as unethical and inhumane when using enhanced interrogation techniques. Interrogators are unable to obtain reliable importation from detainees through enhanced interrogation techniques. Additionally, interrogators can acquire major psychological problems. In order to preserve morals as well as obtain reliable information from detainees, interrogators should use nonviolent interrogation techniques. For example, “information gathering” techniques are nonviolent techniques where the interrogators maintain a positive and direct meeting with the detainee as well as use “open-ended” questions when getting information from the detainees. In this interrogation technique, interrogators first listen to the stories of detainees; then, the interrogators question the detainees on sections of their stories that are skeptical and illogical. As a result, people tend to talk more when interrogators use this strategy. Furthermore, “rapport-building” is an interrogation technique where interrogators emotionally connect with the detainee. “Rapport-building” not only gets reliable information out of the detainee, but the detainee seems to be more corporative. To emphasize, it is less likely that a detainee will not avoid certain subjects or refuse to give the interrogators information in this type of interrogation (Duke & Puyvelde, 2017). Hence, these interrogation techniques are more effective and ethical than enhanced interrogation techniques. Ultimately, violence and cruelty only bring forth more injustice and peril to the world.

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