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Frontline Quotes Mischkowski on ‘What You Call Torture Matters’

April 6, 2019

Categories: Faculty in the News, In the News

Tags: Dominik Mischkowski, faculty in the news, in the news, Kimberly Rios, psychology news, research



Dr. Kimberly Rios

Frontline Safety & Security referenced research by [Dr. Kimberly Rios](#), Associate Professor of Psychology, and [Dr. Dominik Mischkowski](#), Visiting Assistant Professor of Psychology, in an article headlined “[Transparency: what you call torture matters.](#)”

A new study from Ohio University faculty shows that people are less supportive of practices to extract information from terrorist suspects when these practices are framed as “torture” rather than the more ambiguous term of “enhanced interrogation.”

The study, titled “**Shaping Responses to Torture: What You Call It Matters**” was conducted by Associate Professor and Director of Experimental Training **Kimberly Rios** and Visiting Assistant Professor **Dominik Mischkowski**....

“We both were struck by how accepted these seemingly ineffective methods in the U.S. still were,” Mischkowski said. “Also, we wondered whether the labelling of these practices (torture vs. enhanced interrogation) would make a difference in how people view these practices.”

[Read more in Frontline.](#)



Dr. Dominik Mischkowski

Abstract for “[Shaping Responses to Torture: What You Call It Matters](#)” in the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*: Although torture is largely ineffective for gaining information from terrorism suspects, nearly half of Americans support its use. Building upon previous work examining predictors of responses to such tactics and willingness to label them as “torture,” this research tested whether the “torture” label itself can influence attitudes. Across five experiments using two different populations, both politically liberal and conservative participants showed more negative attitudes toward “torture” than “enhanced interrogation,” even given identical descriptions of the tactics. This greater negativity in response to “torture” extended to actual behavior (signing a petition) and was driven by cognitive appraisals of severity as well as feelings of personal distress and other-directed empathic concern. Furthermore, there was a small but significant effect for such effects to be stronger among conservatives than liberals. These findings have implications for the underpinnings of attitudes toward torture, potential ways to shift such attitudes, and the psychological consequences of labels.