

# EXCLUDING ATHEISTS FROM THE MILITARY JUST AS YOU LET GAYS OPENLY SERVE

Let me try this one out on you. The guy whose “Learned Helplessness” theories made it possible for Bruce Jessen and James Mitchell to make a killing (heh) on torturing detainees has figured out a way to make a killing—\$31 million in sole source funds—himself: with an untested “Learned Optimism” program that claims to make sure those in the military who are on their fourth deployments in the most dangerous parts of the empire are happy being on those deployments.

Or at least don’t kill themselves or others because of PTSD.

But Martin Seligman’s program not only has not been proven to do what it claims to do, but it also has a built-in religious aspect to it, such that atheists have to undergo extra counseling because they didn’t answer affirmatively to the statement, “I am a spiritual person, my life has lasting meaning, I believe that in some way my life is closely connected to all humanity and all the world.”

That’s the story Jason Leopold tells in his latest article.

Soldiers fill out an online survey made up of more than 100 questions, and if the results fall into a red area, they are required to participate in remedial courses in a classroom or online setting to strengthen their resilience in the disciplines in which they received low scores. The test is administered every two years. More than 800,000 Army soldiers have taken it thus far. But for the thousands of “Foxhole Atheists” like 27-year-old Sgt. Justin Griffith, the spiritual component of the test contains

questions written predominantly for soldiers who believe in God or another deity, meaning nonbelievers are guaranteed to score poorly and will be forced to participate in exercises that use religious imagery to “train” soldiers up to a satisfactory level of spirituality.

Griffith, who is based at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, took the test last month and scored well on the emotional, family and social components. But after completing the spiritual portion of the exam, which required him to respond to statements such as, “I am a spiritual person, my life has lasting meaning, I believe that in some way my life is closely connected to all humanity and all the world,” he was found to be spiritually unfit because he responded by choosing the “not like me at all” box.

His test results advised him, “spiritual fitness” is an area “of possible difficulty for you.”

The military, mind you, is trying to avoid admitting it has a First Amendment problem by refusing to say the word “spiritual,” even when that’s one of five core measurements.

Brig. Gen. Rhonda Cornum, the director of the CSF program, has said, “The spiritual strength domain is not related to religiosity, at least not in terms of how we measure it.”

“It measures a person’s core values and beliefs concerning their meaning and purpose in life,” she said. “It’s not religious, although a person’s religion can still affect those things. Spiritual training is entirely optional, unlike the other domains. Every time you say the S-P-I-R word you’re going to get

■ sued.

Now, I'm all in favor of trying to address our PTSD problem—though I'm skeptical that the way to do so is to “teach[] its service members how to be psychologically resilient and resist ‘catastrophizing’ traumatic events.”

But even aside from all the other offensive parts of this story, wouldn't you prefer someone whose meaning and purpose in life was the military (or patriotism)? Doesn't selecting for spirituality conflict, at least in some cases, with the trained abstraction of others that enables you kill someone else?