

Coalition for an Ethical Psychology

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Coalition for an Ethical Psychology Calls for Investigation of Allegations Concerning Martin Seligman, Denounces APA Inaction

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Today, Mark Benjamin in *Salon.com* [reports](#) that former American Psychological Association (APA) President Martin Seligman received a no-bid, \$31 million contract from the Department of Defense (DOD) for “resilience training” of soldiers.

Dr. Seligman is known to have presented his research on learned helplessness to a group of CIA interrogators and psychologists, including James Mitchell and Bruce Jessen, who were developing the CIA’s torture program at the time of the presentation. Mitchell and Jessen have acknowledged incorporating Seligman’s ideas, including forcing at least one detainee into a “dog box” to induce helplessness.

The Coalition for an Ethical Psychology calls for an immediate independent investigation into the awarding of this contract without a standard and usually required bidding process. We are especially concerned that a psychologist who apparently instructed CIA interrogators is alleged to have received special treatment from the Defense Department.

And in a separate [article](#), also released today, Jason Leopold and Jeffrey Kaye allege that another former APA President, Patrick DeLeon, was part of a Pentagon briefing on a highly classified Special Access Program involving detainee interrogations that centered on “deception detection.” They also report that such a program was implemented at Guantanamo, experimenting on detainees to improve “deception detection” methods.

Seligman and DeLeon are only the latest psychologists alleged to have connections to what became the government’s “enhanced interrogation” programs. Previously, a third former APA President, Joseph Matarazzo, was revealed to be a board member of the contractor firm that designed and implemented the CIA’s torture program, Mitchell Jessen & Associates (Matarazzo has also been reported by the *New Yorker’s* Jane Mayer to have been on the CIA’s Professional Standards Board.) Today’s revelations raise the question of ongoing involvement of the APA leadership at its highest levels.

The APA, the world’s largest professional organization of psychologists, has consistently failed to exercise vigilance regarding possible participation of its members and other psychologists in torture and other unethical treatment of detainees. While abstractly denouncing torture, the organization has adopted policies protecting and systematically deflecting attention from the complicit roles of psychologists (see accompanying [Fact Sheet](#)). Concerns were first raised in 2008 about Seligman’s potential involvement in the interrogation program. The APA immediately issued an unequivocal denial of Seligman’s role: “Dr. Martin Seligman has confirmed to the APA that the allegation surfacing on various blogs that he provided assistance in the process of torture is completely false.” Common sense alone should preclude the acceptance of unsubstantiated denials by people accused of abuses as “confirmation.”

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For several years the Coalition for an Ethical Psychology and other psychological and human rights organizations have called for the APA to confront the role of psychologists and the Association itself in the torture program, and to reform the Association in a manner that provides transparency and accountability. But the APA continues to stonewall such efforts. It has failed to act in good faith when confronted with credible evidence of abuses by psychologists and of irregularities in APA's own actions.

We call upon all psychologists to forcefully express their concerns to the American Psychological Association regarding its accommodation of a state-sanctioned program of abuse, as well as the role of its leadership in supporting the programs of abuse. We also call upon the Defense Department Inspector General to investigate allegations that Martin Seligman was given special treatment in the no-bid award of \$31 million for resilience training.

The Coalition for an Ethical Psychology is dedicated to putting psychology on a firm ethical foundation in support of social justice and human rights. The Coalition has been in the lead of efforts to remove psychologists from torture and abusive interrogations.

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