

MORAL INJURY

Presenters: Chaplains Carol Carr, David McElwain & Donald Blomberg

Definitions:

Moral injury is: A betrayal of what's right, by someone who holds legitimate authority, in a high stakes situation.¹

Moral injury is the damage done to one's conscience or moral compass when that person perpetrates, bears witness, or fails to prevent acts that transgress one's deeply held moral and ethical beliefs or codes of conduct.²

These issues all can be causes of shame or guilt as a result of violating the warrior code:

- Failing to act
- Surviving when others did not
- Failing to save or protect others
- Killing or injuring others³
- Helplessness
- Loss of control
- Stress symptoms of any kind

Emotions Involved in Moral Injury

- Anger, Outrage—J. Shay refers to berserk rage at betrayal by authorities
- Guilt—survivor's guilt, guilt at not deploying, competency guilt
- Failure—unable to save friend or complete mission
- Shame—comprehensive self-condemnation, isolating, self-loathing
- Alienation—hiding inner self, feeling unworthy of love or fearing that others will judge, feeling divided within oneself
- Regret/Remorse—urge to make amends
- Doubt—questioning God, self, and others
- Grief—inability to process massive losses, can present as anger
- Despair—no way to become decent self again, depression⁴

PTSD
Fear-Based

BOTH

MORAL INJURY
Guilt/Shame-Based

“Startle” Reflect
Memory Loss
Fear
Flashbacks
Hypervigilance
Avoidance
Night Sweats
Lack of Feeling

Anger
Nightmares
Anxiety
Insomnia
Depression
Avoidance
Panic Attacks
Self-medication

Sorrow
Grief
Regret
Shame
Alienation
Doubt
Hopelessness⁵

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Recovery of Moral Injury—Therapeutic & Spiritual Approaches

Effects of Moral Injury	Therapeutic Approaches/Tools
Isolation, Alienation & Withdrawal	Reconnection with estranged others, especially family and faith community
Guilt/Shame	Self-Forgiveness; Compassion
Anger	Constructive Expressions of Hurt Suffered; Forgiveness as Movement Away from Hostility
Anxiety	Meditation; Prayer
Doubt	Freedom to Question God
Grief; Sadness	Rituals of Mourning; Lament Writing
Hopelessness	Encouragement; Confession; Forgiving Self; Finding Meaning in Service ⁶

- Writing personal narratives; externalizing inner struggle
- Integrating memory/story into larger picture
- Reconnection with others; Veteran support system
- Long-term support and accountability community
- Reparation and forgiveness
- Dialogue with benevolent moral authority
- Offer opportunities for service to others and ways to make a positive contribution to the lives of others
- Model self-forgiveness and repair of harm—making amends
- Lamentation for losses/Liturgies and rituals; Open doors to healing
- Reconstruct moral core values and self-worth
- Absolution—Letting go and moving on⁷

A community which accepts its complicity in sending our warriors to war and shares the moral burden they carry aids in healing moral injury.

Ceremonies and rituals which welcome the warriors back and recognize the community's responsibility for sending them facilitates reconciliation with self, others and God.

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Footnotes:

¹“Moral injury”, Jonathan Shay. (2014). *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 31(2), 182–191.

²“Moral injury and moral repairs in war Veterans,” B.T. Litz, N. Stein, E. Delaney, I. Lebowittz, W.P. Nash, C. Silva, and S. Maguen, (Dec. 2009) *Clinical Psychology Review*, 29, 695-706.

³Ibid.

⁴“Moral injury, soul repair, and congregations,” Rita N. Brock, (May, 2016) Retrieved from <http://www.fccminneapolis.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Moral-Injury-Handout-May-2016-MN.pdf>

⁵Ibid.

⁶“Developing a Theological response for returning combat Veterans,” Rev. Dr. John P. Oliver, (Nov. 2011) MIRECC, Durham, NC.

⁷“Helping Veterans suffering moral injury after war,” Rita N. Brock and Herman Keizer, Jr., (May, 2016) Retrieved from www.britesoulrepair.org

Resources/Bibliography:

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Websites:

<http://militaryoutreachusa.org/what-is-moral-injury/>

<http://moralinjuryproject.syr.edu/resources/>

<http://projects.huffingtonpost.com/moral-injury>.

<http://www.ptsd.va.gov/>

www.britesoulrepair.org

www.conscienceinwar.org

www.ivaw.org/operation-recovery

www.moralinjury.info

Films:

Almost Sunrise

Lioness

Soldiers of Conscience

Restrepo

The Ground Truth

Stop-Loss

The Invisible War

Taxi to the Dark Side

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f3B5m6OUXCA&nohtml5=False>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ORBf73HiJns&nohtml5=False>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R9ltThTYvms&nohtml5=False>

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<http://militaryoutreachusa.org/what-is-moral-injury/>

http://www.ihc.ucsb.edu/downloads/AUDIO/fallout/Jonathan_Shay.mp3.