Introduction to Moral Injury and Moral Repair

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Ancient Concepts With Deep Roots, Re-Emerging in the Context of War

Moral Injury

Moral Repair

THEOLOGY  RELIGION  HISTORY  PHILOSOPHY
LITERATURE  ART  MYTHOLOGY
Science: The New Kid on the Block
The Basic Ideas Are Simple

**Moral Injury:**
Damage to a person or group of persons resulting from perceived wrongdoing

**Moral Repair:**
Recovery from moral injury

1. What, exactly, is damaged?
2. How can we recognize it?
3. How can we help it heal?
Milestones

1000 BCE  Judeo-Christian concept of sin
500 BCE  Greek cultural concept of miasma (contagious moral stain)
1992  Janoff-Bulman: trauma as a shattering of assumptions
1992  Herman: complex PTSD as damage to the whole person
1994  Shay: moral injury and the undoing of character
2009  Litz et al.: defined moral injury and a CBT framework
2010  USMC: “inner conflict” one of 4 mechanisms of stress injury
2011  Drescher et al.: survey of chaplains and health professionals
2013  Nash et al.: Moral Injury Events Scale validated in Marines
2014  Farnsworth et al.: Role of moral emotions in moral injury
Sin: Ancient Judeo-Christian Root

Mortal Sin: Judeo-Christian concept of moral transgression, often involving mortal violence

“Cain said to the Lord, ‘My punishment is greater than I can bear! Today you have driven me away from the soil, and I shall be hidden from your face; I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and anyone who meets me may kill me.’”

— Genesis 4:13-14 (NSV)
**Miasma: Ancient Greek Root**

*Miasma:* Ancient Greek concept of moral defilement or pollution, often resulting from unjust killing

“What can I do? Where can I hide from all this and not be found? What wings would take me high enough? How deep a hole would I have to dig? My shame for the evil I have done consumes me... I am soaked in blood-guilt, polluted, contagious... I am a pollutant, an offense to gods above.”

— Herakles in Euripides’ *Herakles* (424 BCE)
Suicide
Poem by
Army Veteran
Noah Pierce

Two tours in Iraq, was it right? Was it wrong? I don't know.

My anger, destined me to hell,
Now I drink, re-live my life when asleep,
So many dead, so many killed.
Now I question god, is it dir before, or is it fear.
I don't know.

Don't want to die.
Don't want to live, but should be dead.
I'm already in hell.
Two tours in Iraq.
Janoff-Bulman: Shattered Assumptions

Three Necessary Assumptions

• The self is worthy
• The world is benevolent
• The world is meaningful

Herman: “Complex PTSD”

Complex PTSD: Herman’s Criteria

1. Prolonged subjugation to totalitarian control
2. Alterations in affect regulation
3. Alterations in consciousness
4. Alterations in self-perception
5. Alterations of perception of perpetrator
6. Alterations in relations with others
7. Alterations in systems of meaning

Shay: Moral Injury & Undoing of Character

However, I shall argue what I’ve come to strongly believe through my work with Vietnam veterans: that moral injury is an essential part of any combat trauma that leads to lifelong psychological injury. Veterans can usually recover from horror, fear, and grief once they return to civilian life, so long as “what’s right” has not also been violated.

Moral injury and moral repair in war veterans: A preliminary model and intervention strategy

Brett T. Litz a,b,1, Nathan Stein a, Eileen Delaney a, Leslie Lebowitz c, William P. Nash c, Caroline Silva a, Shira Maguen d

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2 Boston University, United States
3 Newton, Massachusetts, United States
4 San Francisco VA Medical Center, University of California at San Francisco, United States

Moral Injury: Perpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations
Generic Concept of Stress Injury

Normal Stress
- You choose it (largely)
- Temporary
- Reversible
- Functioning is maintained
- Integrity is maintained

Stress Injury
- It happens to you (largely)
- Leaves a scar
- Cannot be undone
- Functioning is diminished
- Integrity is diminished

USMC–USN Stress Continuum

### Fear Conditioning, Loss, and Moral Injury

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Triggering Event</th>
<th>Impact</th>
<th>Loss</th>
<th>Moral Injury</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actual or threatened</td>
<td></td>
<td>Persistent separation from that which is cherished</td>
<td>Acts that violate deeply held moral values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>death or serious injury</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role at time of event</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim or witness</td>
<td>Victim</td>
<td></td>
<td>Perpetrator, victim, or witness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predominant painful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emotions</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sadness, longing</td>
<td>Shame, guilt, anger, outrage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear, disgust, horror,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>helplessness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-experiencing</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive/mood changes</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physiological arousal</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td></td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is lost?</td>
<td>Safety</td>
<td></td>
<td>Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is needed?</td>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Relearn the world</td>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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a. MCRP 6-11C/NTTP 1-15M  
b. Prigerson et al., 2009  
c. Litz et al., 2009
Qualitative Study of Moral Injury

- Structured interviews of 23 professionals with experience working with OIF/OEF service members and veterans
- Four domains of questions:
  - How do professionals view the construct of moral injury?
  - What war-zone experiences are associated with moral injury?
  - What are the signs and symptoms of moral injury?
  - What intervention strategies might be most helpful?
Drescher and Colleagues’ Findings

• All respondents endorsed the validity of moral injury as a construct distinct from PTSD and other disorders
• Two thirds agreed with the term “moral injury”
• Contributing events:
  – Betrayals by leaders, trusted peers, or oneself
  – Disproportionate violence or revenge
  – Harming civilians or civilian property
• Signs and symptoms:
  – Misconduct, violence, and other disciplinary problems
  – Social alienation, alienation from self
  – Loss of faith, loss of meaning
• Intervention approaches: diverse psychological, social, and spiritual recommendations
### Moral Injury Events Scale (MIES)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Moderately Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Moderately Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I saw things that were morally wrong.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I am troubled by having witnessed others' immoral acts.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I acted in ways that violated my own moral code or values.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I am troubled by having acted in ways that violated my own morals or values.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I violated my own morals by failing to do something that I felt I should have done.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I am troubled because I violated my morals by failing to do something I felt I should have done.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I feel betrayed by leaders who I once trusted.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I feel betrayed by fellow service members who I once trusted.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I feel betrayed by others outside the U.S. military who I once trusted.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nash et al., 2013
MIES Scores Best Predicted PTSD Symptom Group Membership in 208 OEF Marines

* Only Moral Injury Events Scale scores were significantly different ($p < .01$) across all three PTSD symptom-level groups.

Nash & Litz: Unpublished data from Marine Resiliency Study
The Role of Moral Emotions in Military Trauma: Implications for the Study and Treatment of Moral Injury

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National Center for PTSD, Menlo Park, California; and University of California, Berkeley

Joseph M. Currier
University of South Alabama
Moral Emotions Are Signals

- Field of moral psychology has investigated what it terms moral emotions (Haidt, 2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative Moral Emotions</th>
<th>Positive Moral Emotions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Towards Oneself</td>
<td>Towards Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilt</td>
<td>Contempt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regret</td>
<td>Anger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shame</td>
<td>Disgust</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Pride</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Awe</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elevation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Moral emotions are signals of **moral dissonance** from ancient parts of our brains
- They are not “truth” but merely signals
Facets of Identity (Core Self): Target of Moral Injury and Moral Repair

- Authority over the self
- Self-concept
- Concept of the world
- Emotional repertoire
- Trusting relationships
Cpl Barnes, USMC
Interviewed for VA/DoD Military Culture Training

To view the video clip, go to
http://deploymentpsych.org/face-of-military-culture

Select “On Military Culture and Healthcare” from Section 4
(Treatment, Resources, and Tools).

Scroll through the list and select “LCpl Ronald Barnes, USMC”
Thank you