



# Moral Injury Recognition and Care

Cohen Veterans Network  
Webinar  
27 July 2017

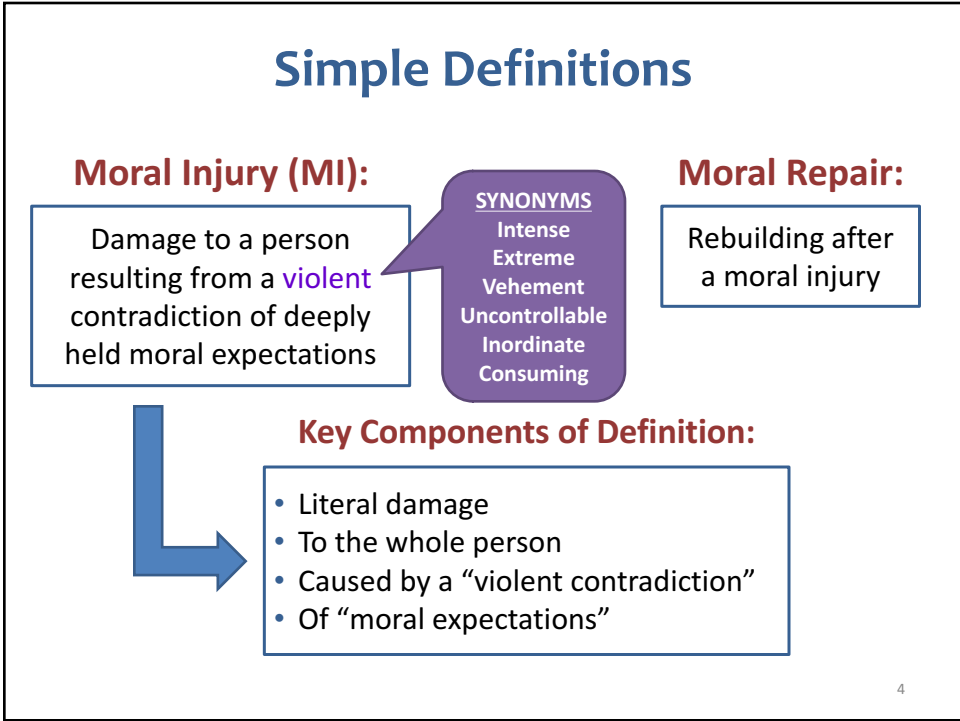
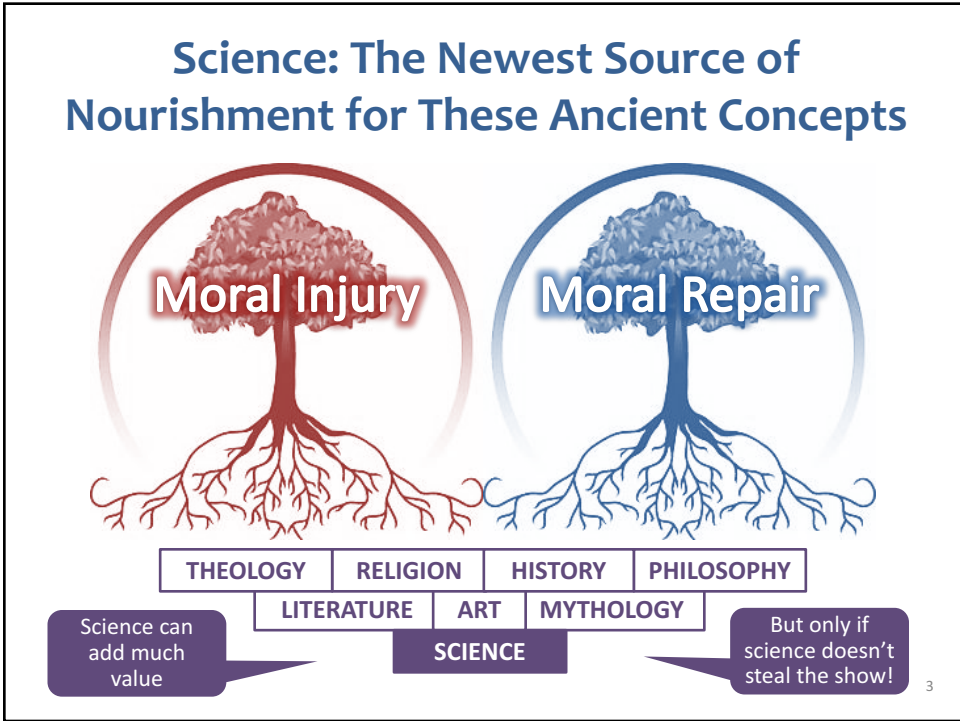
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## Disclaimer

- The opinions expressed herein are those of the author, alone, and do not necessarily represent the official positions of the U.S. Marine Corps, Department of the Navy, or Department of Defense.

## Disclosure Statement

- I receive royalties from Guilford Press as a co-author of *Adaptive Disclosure: A New Treatment for Military Trauma, Loss, and Moral Injury*
- All the recommendations involving clinical medicine in this CME activity are based on evidence that is acceptable within the profession of medicine as adequate justification for their indications and contraindications in the care of patients.
- All scientific research referred to, reported or used in support or justification of a patient care recommendation conforms to the generally accepted standards of experimental design, data collection and analysis.



## 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)
- May leave a scar
- Cannot be undone
- Functioning is diminished
- Integrity is diminished

### Stress Continuum

Nash, W.P. (2007). *Combat Stress Adaptations and Injuries*. In C.R. Figley & W.P. Nash (Eds.). *Combat Stress Injury: Theory Research and Management*. New York: Routledge; "Combat and Operational Stress Control" (MCRP 6-11C/NTTP 1-15M), 2011.

READY	REACTING	INJURED	ILL
Total Fitness	Normal stress; "good pain"	Stress injury; "bad pain"	Mental or physical disorder

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## Fear Conditioning, Loss, and Moral Injury<sup>a</sup>

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

a. Nash et al., 2011    b. Prigerson et al., 2009    c. Litz et al., 2009

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## Moral Injury Events Scale (MIES)

### Subscales: Perpetration Other, Perp Self, Betrayal

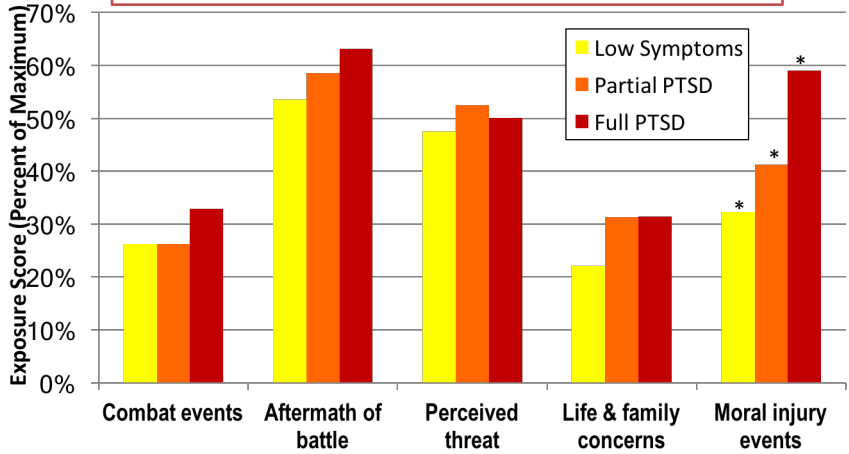
	Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I saw things that were morally wrong.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. I am troubled by having witnessed others' immoral acts.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. I acted in ways that violated my own moral code or values.	1	2	3	4	5	6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

Nash et al., 2013; Bryan et al., 2014; Bryan et al., 2015;

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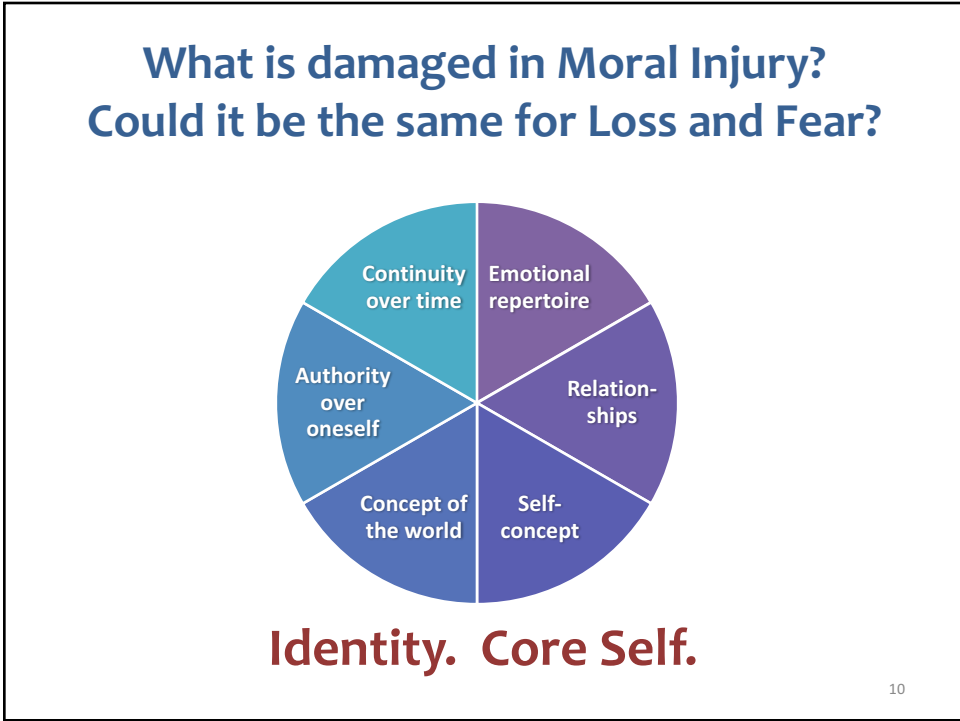
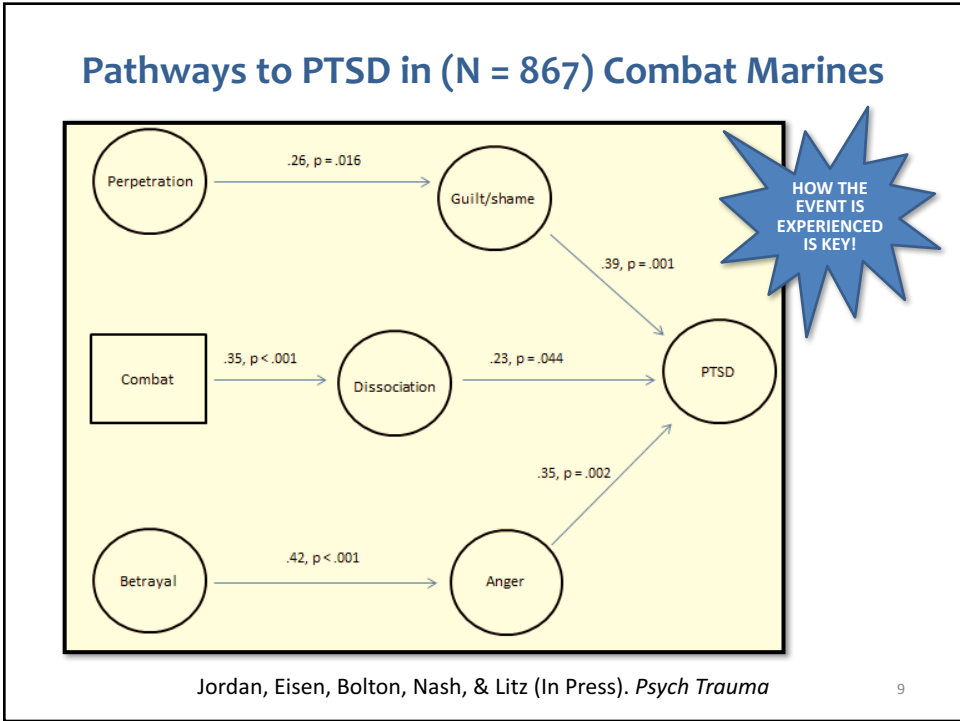
## Moral Injury Event Exposure Best Predicted PTSD Symptom Group Membership in N = 208 OEF Marines

\* 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

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## Sin: Judeo-Christian Root of MI

**Sin:** Judeo-Christian concept of moral transgression

*“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.’” (Emphases mine)*

— Genesis 4:13-14

(NSV)

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## Miasma: Greek Root of Moral Injury

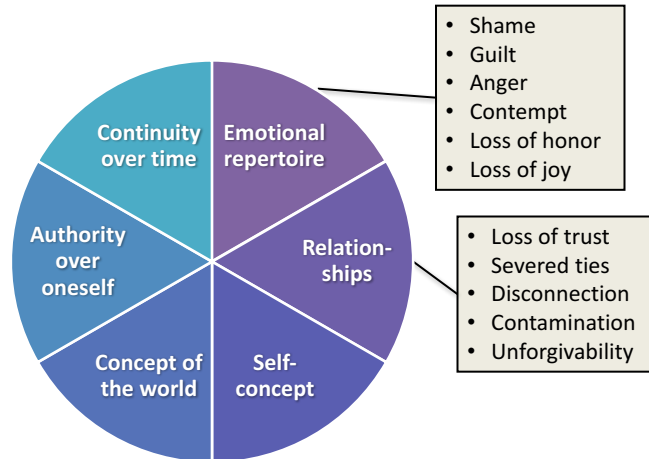
**Miasma:** Ancient Greek concept of moral defilement or pollution, often resulting from unjust killing

*“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.” (Emphases mine)*

— Herakles in Euripedes’ *Herakles* (424 BCE)

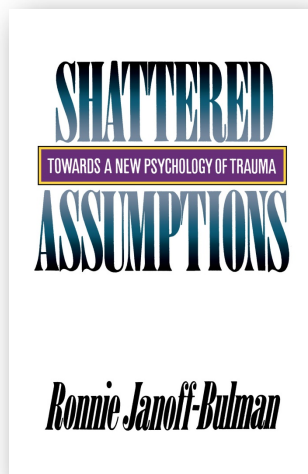
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## Facets of Moral Injury



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## Janoff-Bulman: Shattered Assumptions



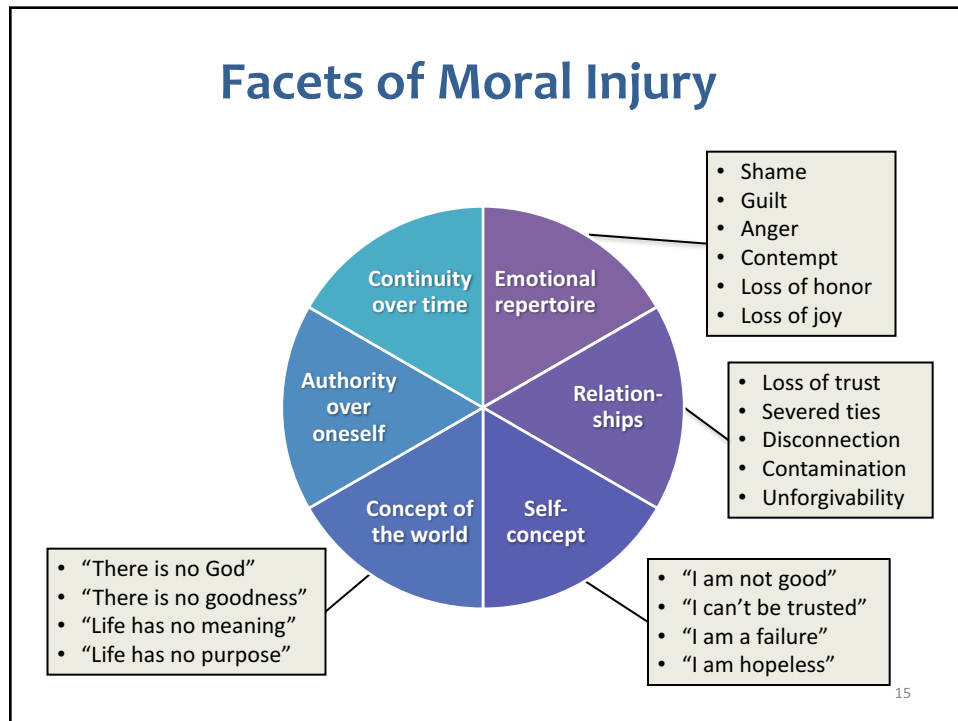
### Three Necessary Assumptions

- The self is worthy
- The world is benevolent
- The world is meaningful

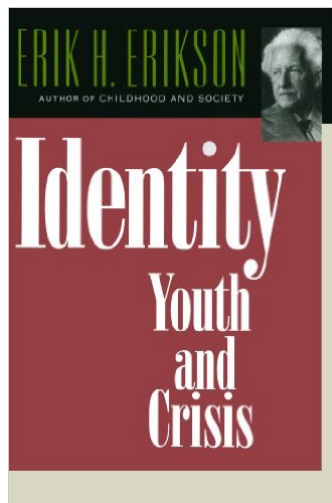
Janoff-Bulman (1992). New York: Free Press.

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## Facets of Moral Injury



## Erik Erikson: “Identity Crisis”



‘The term “**identity crisis**” was first used, if I remember correctly, for a specific clinical purpose in the Mt. Zion Veterans’ Rehabilitation Clinic during the Second World War... Most of our patients, so we concluded at that time, had neither been “shellshocked” nor become malingerers, but had through the exigencies of war **lost a sense of personal sameness and historical continuity**. They were **impaired in that central control over themselves** for which, in the psychoanalytic scheme, only the “inner agency” of the ego could be held responsible. Therefore, I spoke of **a loss of “ego identity.”**’

Erikson, Erik H. (1994-05-17). Identity: Youth and Crisis (Austen Riggs Monograph) (Kindle Locations 142-147). W. W. Norton & Company. Kindle Edition.

Erikson (1968). New York: Basic Books.

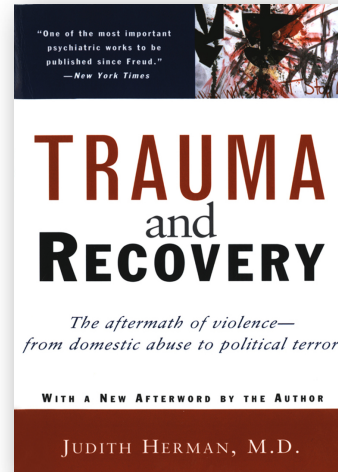
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## Herman: “Complex PTSD”

### Complex PTSD: Herman’s Criteria

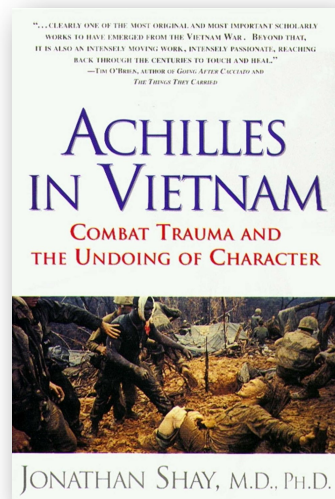
1. Prolonged subjugation to totalitarian control
2. Alterations in affect regulation
3. Alterations in consciousness
4. Alterations in self-perception
5. Alterations of perception of perpetrator
6. Alterations in relations with others
7. Alterations in systems of meaning



Herman (1992). New York: Basic Books.

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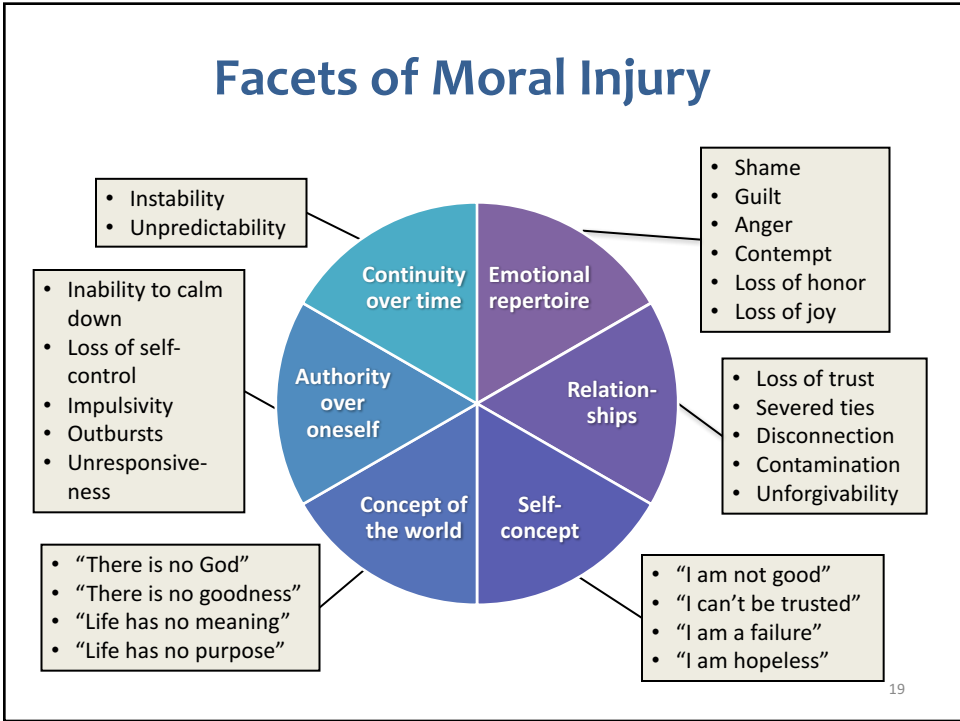
## Shay: Moral Injury & Undoing of Character



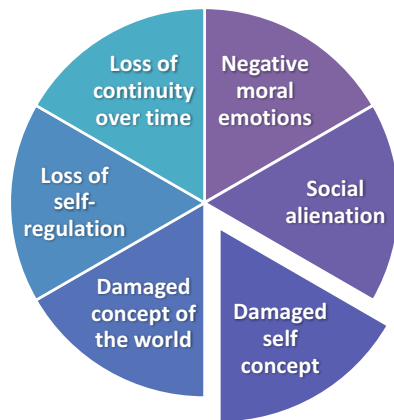
“However, I shall argue what I’ve come to strongly believe through my work with Vietnam veterans: that **moral injury is an essential part of any combat trauma that leads to lifelong psychological injury.** Veterans can usually recover from horror, fear, and grief once they return to civilian life, so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

Shay, Jonathan (1994). *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (p. 20). Scribner. Kindle Edition.

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## Targeting Self-Concept: Competence and Self-Confidence



- **Competence before confidence**
- Do, create, atone, become
- Identify and correct cognitive distortions
  - Over-generalizations
  - Black-and-white thinking
- Align with a benevolent moral authority
- Avoid hollow moral reassurance

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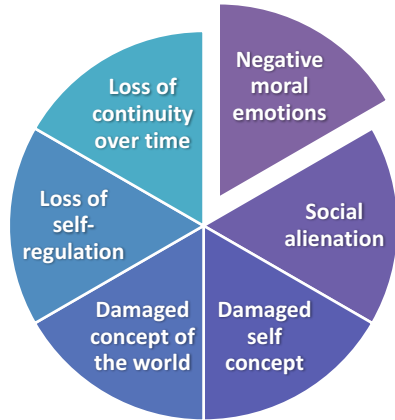
## Targeting Concept of the World: Social Justice, Spirituality



- Return to the world
- Give or seek amends
- Seek organizations or entities that still deserve respect and idealization
- Make the world a better place
- Religious practice
- Art, journaling

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## Targeting Moral Emotions: Mindfulness, Exposure Therapy

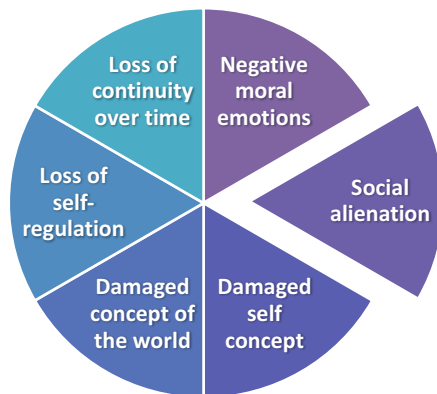


- Learn to tolerate intense negative moral emotions
- Mindfulness meditation
- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)
- Accelerated Resolution Therapy (ART)?
- Adaptive Disclosure\*
- Practice positive moral emotions like **joy** and **awe**

\*Litz, Lebowitz, Gray, & Nash (2015). *Adaptive Disclosure: A New Treatment for Military Trauma, Loss, and Moral Injury*. New York: Guilford Press.

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## Targeting Social Alienation: Peers, Family, Community



- Overcome barriers to trust
- Repair relationships
- Build new relationships
- Sharing stories in a trusting relationship
- Mentorship
- Peer support
- Mirroring

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