



MORAL INJURY: A PRIMER

I created this for and presented it during a SMEE (with Psychologists, Chaplains, and other Medical personnel) in the Philippines during BK19. I borrowed 7 slides from the CHC's 2018/19 PDTC to introduce existing concepts and definitions. These notes are not exhaustive but will provide an outline to begin preparations. My Classics studies as an undergrad informed much of the improvisation for this lecture. A thorough reading of the books below and a careful viewing of the films would be a great starting place for anyone interested in presenting this material.

Resources:

Books

Shannon French Code of the Warrior (primarily the chapter on The Homeric Warrior).

Jonathan Shay Achilles in Vietnam

Homer The Iliad; The Odyssey

Movie Film Clips

American Sniper

Braveheart

Thank You for Your Service



MORAL INJURY DEFINITION

Damage to a person resulting from a **violent** contradiction of deeply held expectations.

Nash, William P. (2017), *Moral Injury Recognition and Care*, Cohen Veterans Network Webinar.

Begin with questions gauging students' familiarity with the concept of Moral Injury. Explain this definition, especially highlighting the phrase, "deeply held expectations."



BRETT LITZ ET AL CONCEPT

Moral Injury causes:

- Perpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations.

Litz, Brett (2009). Moral Injury and Moral Repair in War Veterans. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 29, 700.

- The key precondition for moral injury is an act of transgression, which shatters moral and ethical expectations that are rooted in religious or spiritual beliefs, or culture-based, organizational, and group-based rules about fairness, the value of life and so forth.

Mageun, Shira and Brett Litz. Moral Injury and the Context of War, National Center for PTSD, www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/co-occurring/moral_injury_at_war.asp

This definition focuses a little closer. “Perpetrating” suggests that this is not necessarily a passive injury. Again, highlight “deeply held moral beliefs and expectations” as you prepare students for the first video clip.



This clip gives us a glimpse into the major influences that shaped “Chris Kyle’s” moral beliefs and expectations. Three key agents will surface from the students if you prompt them before showing the clip - Family, school, and church. (It might be necessary to prepare audience for the language in this clip and those that follow.)



In this clip, “Kyle” demonstrates how this first kill went deeply against all his moral beliefs and expectations.



JONATHAN SHAY MODEL

Moral Injury is:

- A betrayal of what's right
- By someone who holds legitimate authority (e.g., in the military—a leader)
- In a high stakes situation

All three

Shay, Jonathan (2014). Moral Injury. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 31, 183.

Introduce the Jonathan Shay model and explain the many ways leaders can betray those under their charge.

Here is the best place to introduce the story of Achilles' character disintegration. His character before the war was solid but things happen to him (and by him) that lead to the undoing of his character.

Describe the pre-story with Paris, Menelaus, Helen, and the suitors pledging their allegiance to Menelaus. Achilles has no real interest in this fight, but Odysseus goes to find him (etc.) He comes to the fight as the greatest warrior for the Greeks with his Myrmidons, but is soon betrayed by his commander. He withdraws. Achilles and the Myrmidons disengage. Patroklos is killed. This leads to guilt and wrongful substitution, "berserking", dehumanizing the enemy, etc.

Hector is not a flat character but is really highlighted as the contrasting noble warrior.



This clip sets us up for the betrayal. Begin to make the connections between the ways these warriors experienced moral injury and the ways today's warriors have. Do this throughout the talk.



There is no dialogue in this clip, but the expressions on “Wallace’s” face, and his reaction to the discovery of his betrayal, say everything.



FACETS OF MORAL INJURY



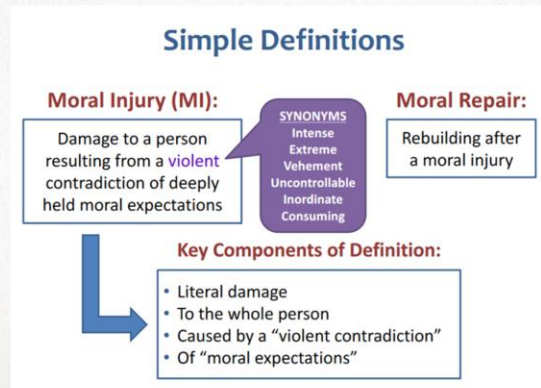
Demonstrate how every facet of ourselves is affected.



This is the culminating scene in the film, Thank You for Your Service. It explains all of “Adam’s” struggles visible from the beginning of the film. Explain (using the death of Patroklos) the concept of *Wrongful Substitution*.



A SIMPLE DEFINITION



Use this to review, pointing back to all that you have explained.



TREATING MORAL INJURY



ADAPTIVE DISCLOSURE THERAPY

Adaptive Disclosure Therapy treats Moral Injury

Developed specifically to address needs of combat military and veterans

Includes an imaginative dialogue with a *compassionate and forgiving moral authority*

Assumes sadness, guilt, shame and self-loathing from personal or others' moral transgression cannot be healed by repeated intensive processing

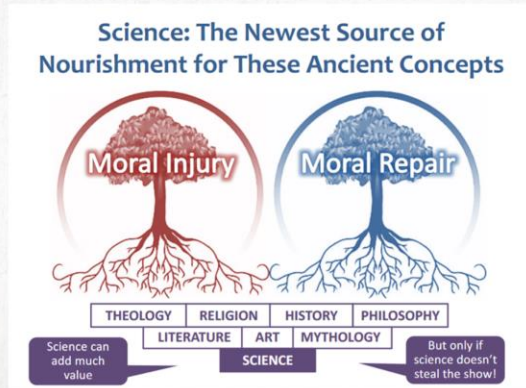
- Seeks to unearth the meaning dimensions of the moral injury-causing experience and acknowledge them
- Self-blame or blame of others is not entirely inaccurate
- Recognizes persons don't easily feel forgiven for bad acts, and doesn't contest this
- Goal is to challenge extremity and rigidity, and to encourage awareness, that despite the immoral act, a person still can move forward and create a life of goodness, values and making amends

Trauma gets healed primarily through the very persistent practice of certain behaviors and ways of thinking to promote positive shifts in the meaning and implications of war-related harms

I gave this as an intro to some of the credible treatments currently being used.



THE ROLE OF SCIENCE IN MORAL REPAIR



Stress that many resources are necessary for repair.