

# Reflections on Transatlantic Perspectives on the Present and Future of Moral Injury



**Shay  
Moral Injury  
Center**  
Volunteers of America

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## History of Terms Before Moral Injury:<sup>1</sup>

1. Suffering of combat veterans as:
  - a. **Nostalgia (homesickness):** 1700s
  - b. **Soldiers heart:** 1800s
  - c. **Shell shock:** WW I
  - d. **Combat fatigue or combat stress reaction:** WW II
  - e. **War neurosis or character disorders:** Vietnam
  - f. **Post-Vietnam Syndrome:** apathy, cynicism, alienation, depression, mistrust, anger, and expectation of betrayal.
  - g. **Gross stress reaction** (< 6 mo. duration): 1952 DSM-I, ~~deleted 1968 DSM-II~~
2. End of conscription: 1973; end of war 1975.
3. **Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD):** 1980 **anxiety diagnosis** in DSM-III, rev. 2013 in DSM-V as **trauma, stressor-related disorder**.
4. **Medicalized model of PTSD** concealed moral suffering of veterans.<sup>2</sup>



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## Relations among PTSD, Trauma, and Moral Injury<sup>3</sup>

### Biomedical cultural system for mental health professionals

**PTSD:** Diagnosis of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is fear and anxiety-based. Symptoms include hypervigilance, startle reactions, triggering events, phobias, loss of memory, dissociative episodes.

**Trauma:** an emotional response to a harmful event with immediate shock and/or denial. Later reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, fear, strained relationships and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea.

**Moral Injury:** Moral emotions, such as guilt, shame, outrage, betrayal, grief, remorse, humiliation, frustration, and despair, are not fear-based, emerge after events, and are based in moral conscience.

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## Moral Injury: Paradigm Change?

## Moral Injury: Cultural Challenge?

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### Truth Commission on Conscience in War

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mCAHWCwmDyM>

### The Soul Repair Center

<https://www.brite.edu/programs/soul-repair/>

### The Shay Moral Injury Center at Volunteers of America

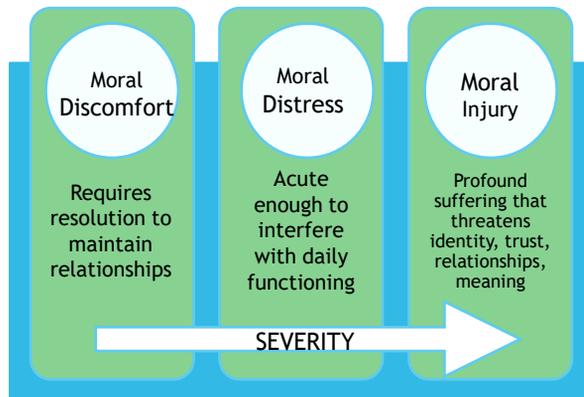
<https://www.voa.org/moralinjury>

[www.voa.org/rest](http://www.voa.org/rest)

[www.rest4firstresponders.org](http://www.rest4firstresponders.org)

## Moral Conflict Spectrum

**MORAL CONFLICT:** A conscience-based, ordinary, post-harm stress response



## Rituals Enable Change<sup>4</sup>

Integrate chaotic forces via emotional arc with sensory-sensual power (death-loss, strangers, sickness, sex, gender, birth, moral failure, violence),

Establish liminal space and time for imagination and empathy,

Aid creative change via permeability to ambiguity and difference,

Override personal sincerity for empathy and relationships,

Use imagined reality—subjunctive mood—“as if” performances to enact change.



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## Shay Center Programs

VOA  
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**VOA | ReST**  
Resilience Strength Time



Online Peer Support for caregivers including those that attend EASE program.

1-hour confidential virtual peer support sessions of up to 10 participants available up to 3 times per week.

**EASE**

Emotional Aftercare for Stressful Events

In-person program that alleviates moral distress and supports resilience for workplaces or organizations.

6-7 hours of peer-facilitated small group time using evidence-based strategies for recovery and resilience building.

*Moral Injury Recovery in the Aftermath of COVID*



Shay Moral Injury Center  
At Volunteers of America

A trauma-informed, interfaith and interactive one day online course that includes firsthand experience in recovery strategies and extensive information on moral injury and recovery strategies.

Designed for chaplains, clergy, caregivers, and service providers.

**MORAL INJURY**  
CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

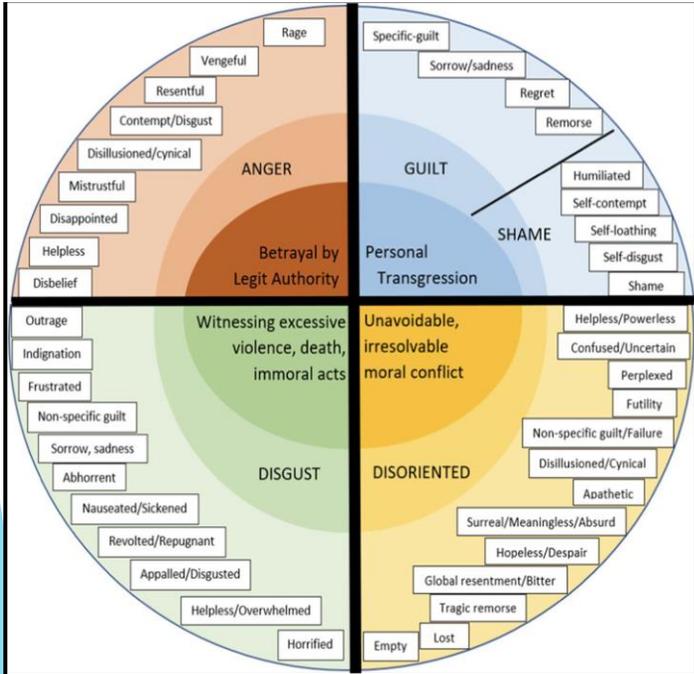
10-week online course for spiritual caregivers, chaplains, social workers, clinicians, and educators seeking to integrate moral injury-informed care in their work and communities.

Service and Supports

Education and Capacity Building

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## Moral Injury Experience Wheel

Caveats:

- The wheel awaits predictive criterion validity testing
- Tool is not a statement of fact about particular moral emotions and their association with specific event types
- It's a useful tool, not a scale

Used with permission of author, W. H. Fleming (2022). The Moral Injury Experience Wheel: An Instrument for Identifying Moral Emotions and Conceptualizing the Mechanisms of Moral Injury. *Journal of Religion and Health*. Sept. 16. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-022-01676-5>

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## MUSTER OUT: A PROGRAM FOR TRANSITIONING FROM MILITARY TO CIVILIAN LIFE

A PROJECT OF VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA'S RESILIENCE STRENGTH TRAINING PROGRAM AND VA INTEGRATIVE MENTAL HEALTH

Project Leadership:

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## Resources

For a comprehensive list, go to <https://www.voa.org/moralinjury-resources>

1. <https://minnesota.publicradio.org/projects/2010/02/beyond-deployment/ptsd-timeline/index.shtml>
2. Christopher M. Webb, The Wounds That Never Heal: Transgression, Liminality, and Ethical Ruin in Battlefield Thresholds. *ETHNOS*, 2021, VOL. 86, NO. 3, 552-569, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2019.1665568>; and Webb, C. How Sweat Lodge Ceremonies Heal War's Wounds. *Sapiens-blog*. Dec. 10, 2020. <https://www.sapiens.org/culture/ptsd-sweat-lodge/>
3. H. A. Barnes, R. A. Hurley, K. H. Taber. (2019) Moral Injury and PTSD: Often Co-Occurring Yet Mechanistically Different. *The Journal of Neuropsychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences*. Vol. 31: 2, April 23. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.neuropsych.19020036>.
4. See Adam B. Seligman, Robert P. Weller, Michael Puett, and Bennett Simon (2008) *Ritual and Its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity*. Oxford.