

Moral Injury As an Identity Wound: In Families As In War

STRESS, TRAUMA, AND RESILIENCE (STAR) SEMINAR
NATHANSON FAMILY RESILIENCE CENTER
UCLA HEALTH
SEPTEMBER 30, 2016

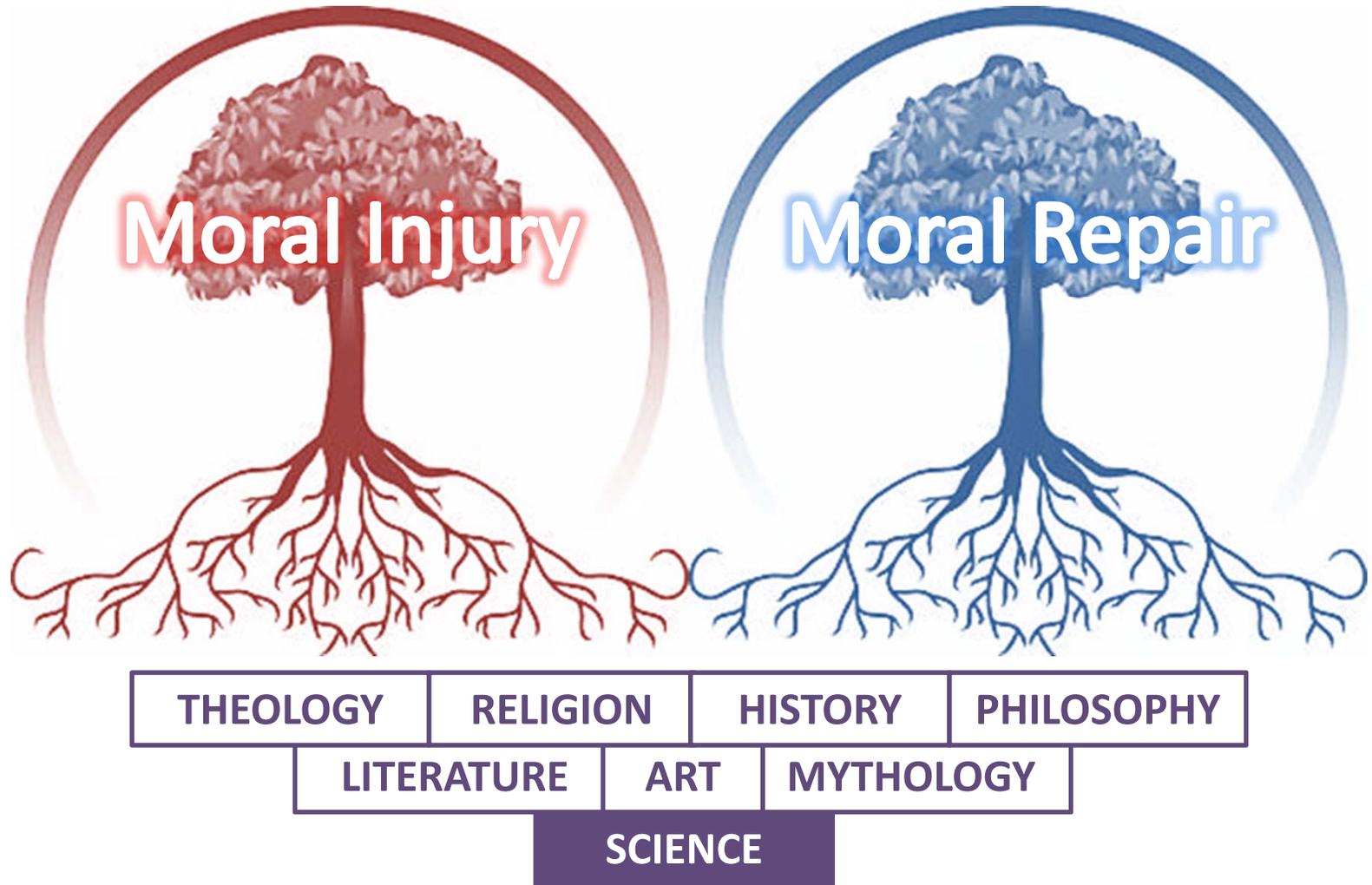


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Ancient Concepts With Deep Roots, Re-Emerging in the Context of War



Definitions

Moral Injury (MI):

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

Moral Repair:

Rebuilding after a moral injury

- **Violent contradiction:** abrupt intrusion of information about the self or others that is irreconcilable with existing schemas
- **Deeply held moral expectations:** non-negotiable requirements for behavior of the self or others in high-stakes social situations

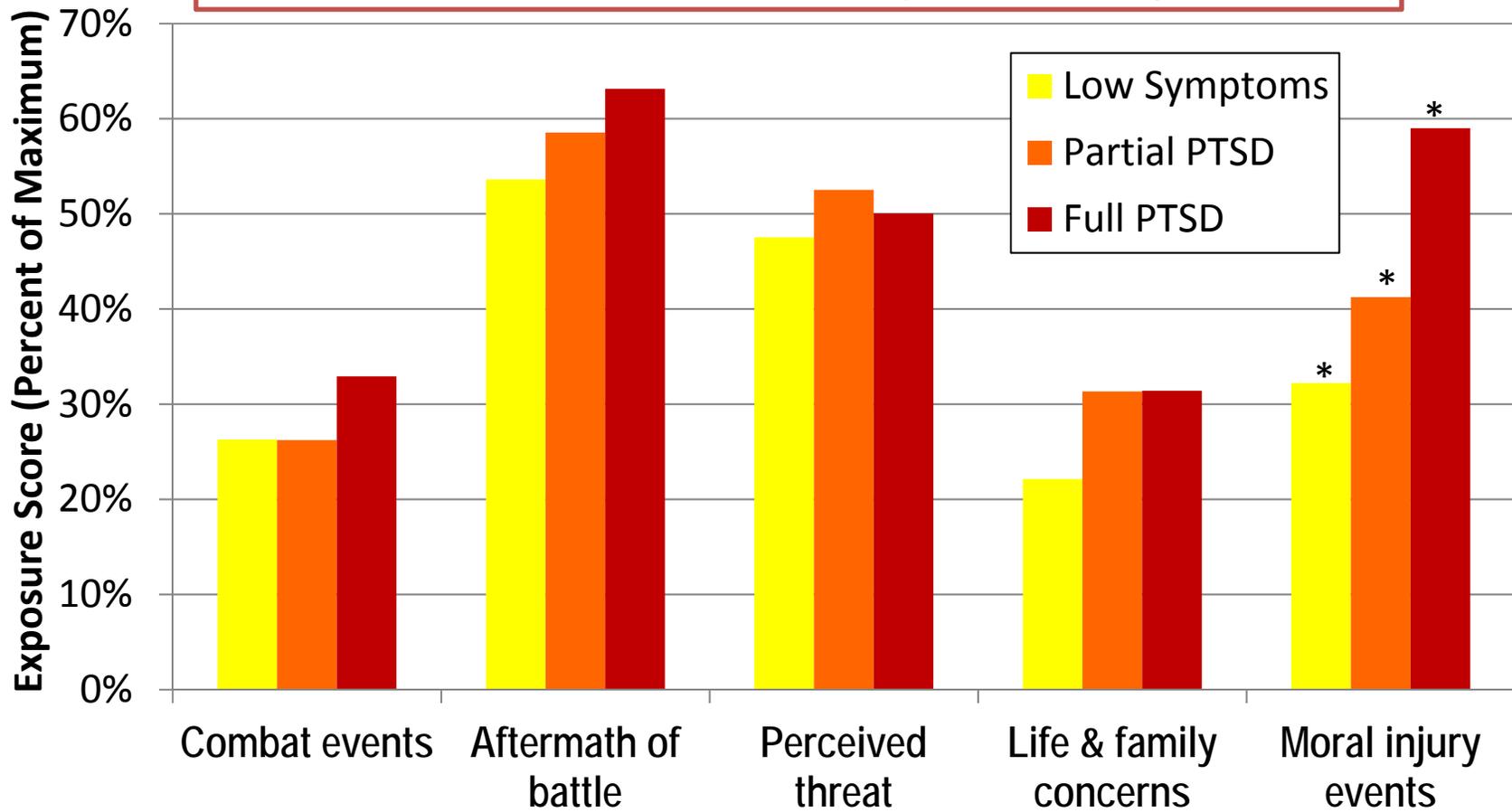
Moral Injury Events Scale (MIES)

Subscales: **Perpetration**, **Betrayal**

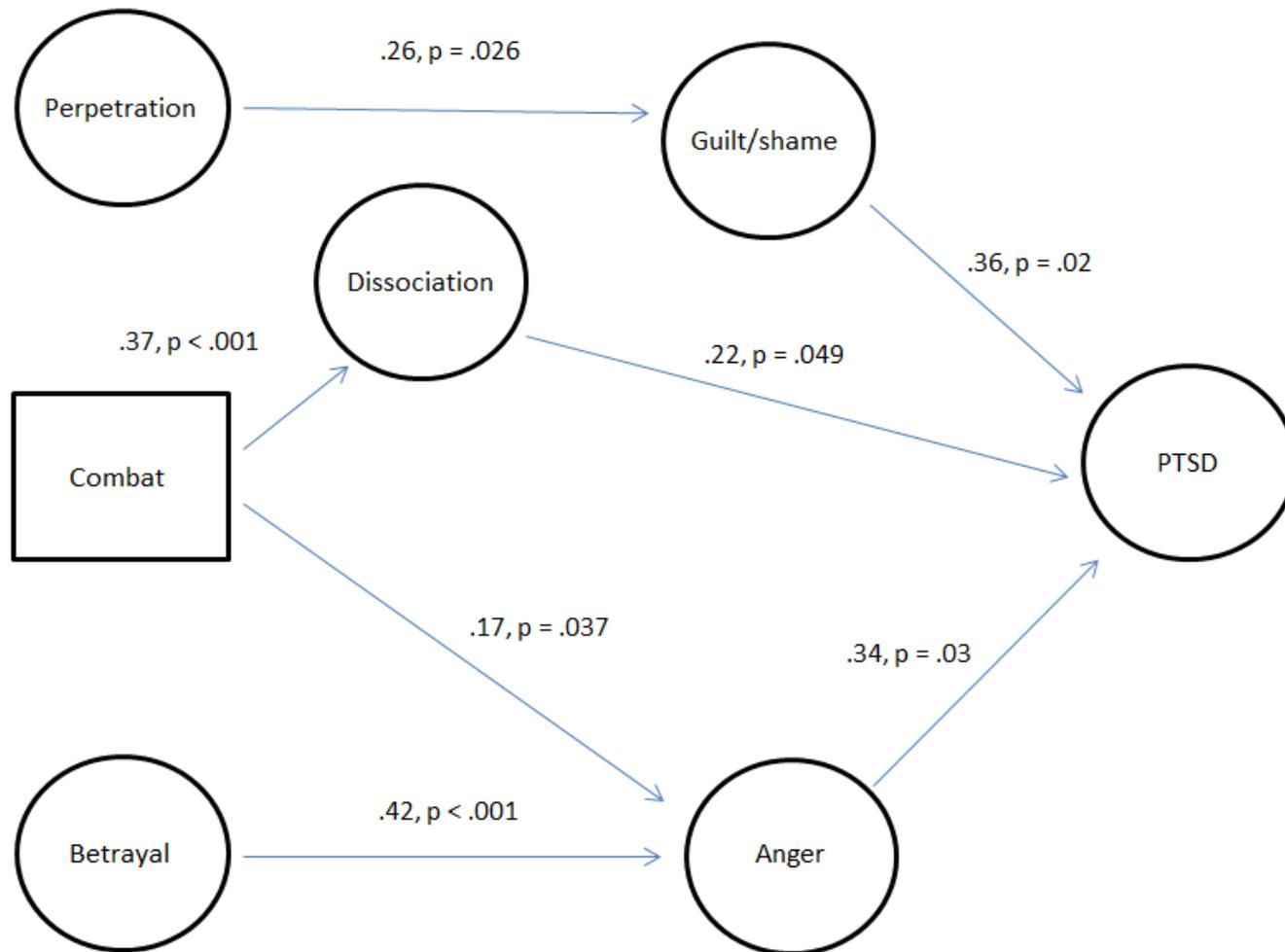
	Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I saw things that were morally wrong.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. I am troubled by having witnessed others' immoral acts.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. I acted in ways that violated my own moral code or values.	1	2	3	4	5	6
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

Moral Injury Event Exposure Best Predicted PTSD 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



Pathways to PTSD from Perpetration, Betrayal, and Combat



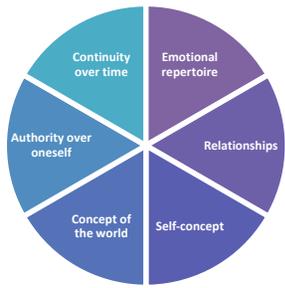
Jordan, Eisen, Bolton, Nash, & Litz, In Press

What is Damaged in Moral Injury?

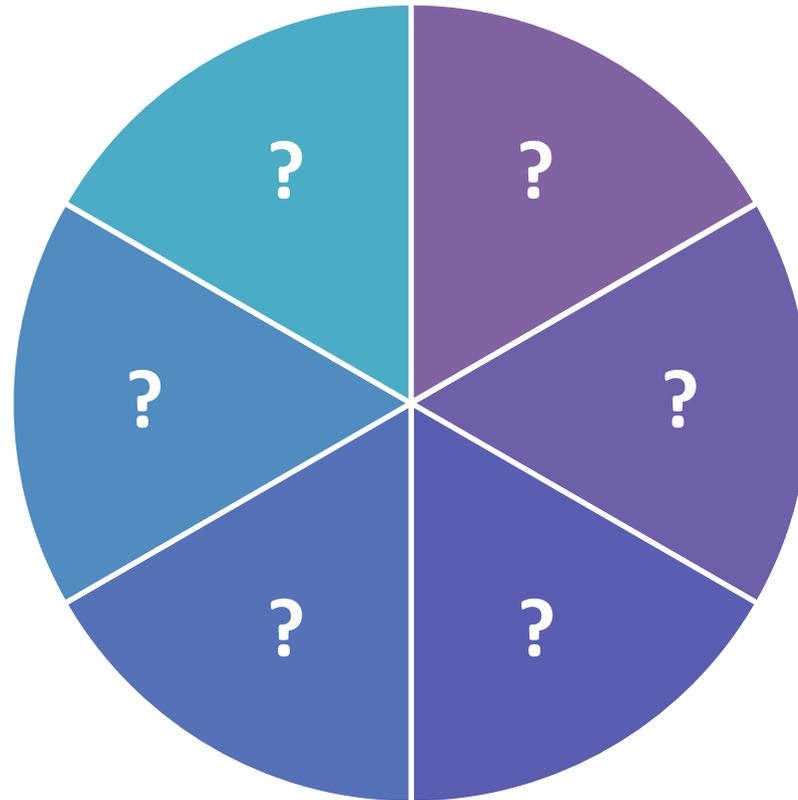
Identity. Core Self.



Facets of Identity



What are the Effects of Moral Injury on Identity?



What are the facets of Moral Injury?

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)*

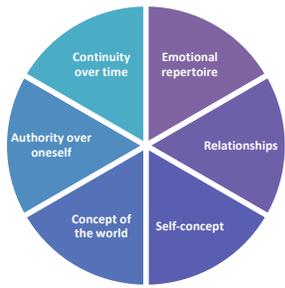
— **Genesis 4:13-14 (NSV)**

Miasma: Greek Root of Moral Injury

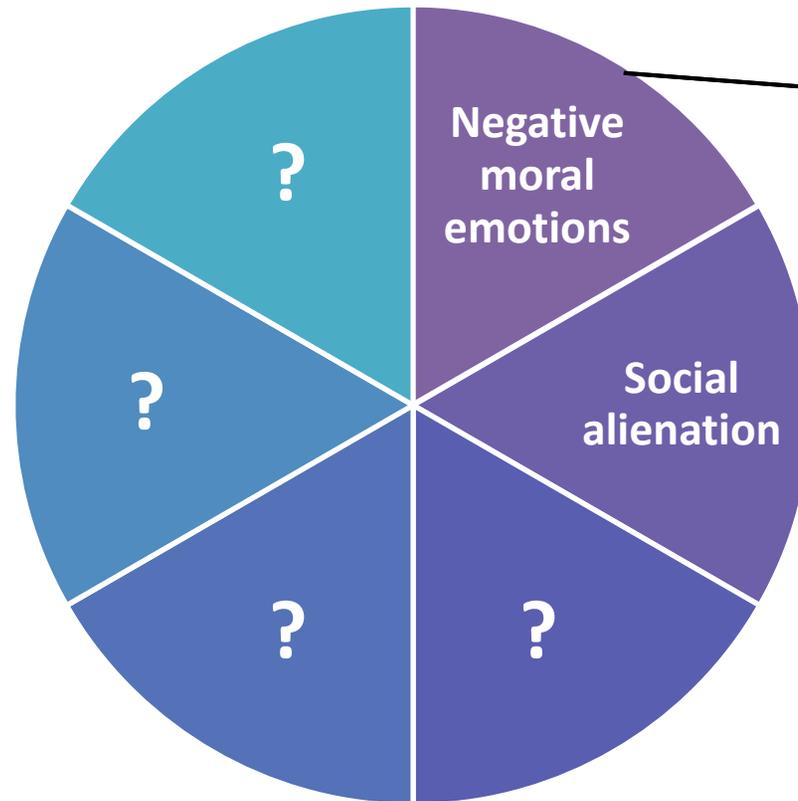
Miasma: Ancient Greek concept of moral defilement or pollution, often resulting from unjust killing

*“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)



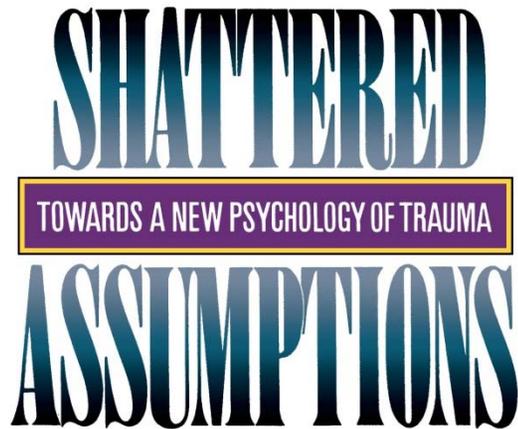
Facets of Moral Injury



- Shame
- Guilt
- Anger
- Contempt
- Loss of honor
- Loss of joy

- Loss of trust
- Severed ties
- Disconnection
- Contamination
- Unforgivability

Janoff-Bulman: Shattered Assumptions

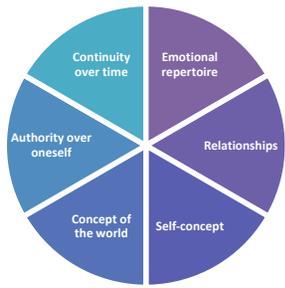


Ronnie Janoff-Bulman

Three Necessary Assumptions

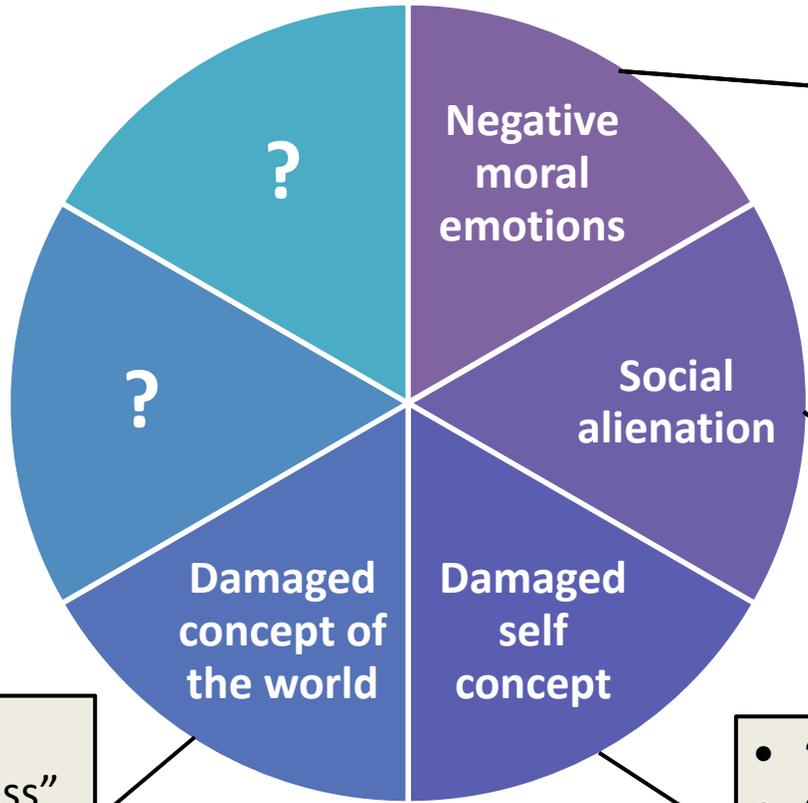
- The self is worthy
- The world is benevolent
- The world is meaningful

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



Facets of Moral Injury

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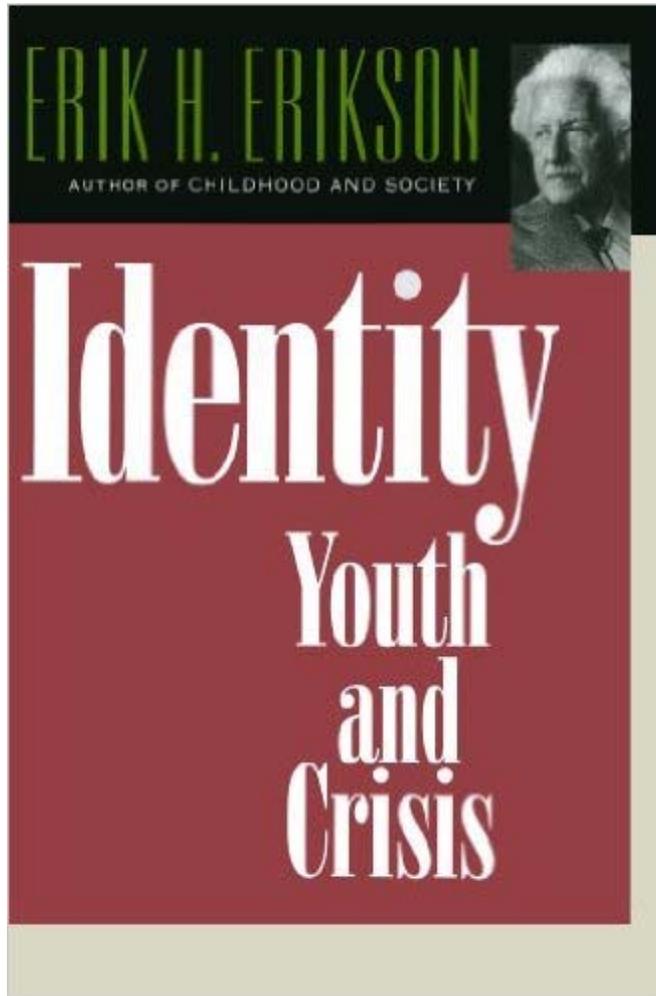


- Loss of trust
- Severed ties
- Disconnection
- Contamination
- Unforgivability

- “There is no God”
- “There is no goodness”
- “Life has no meaning”
- “Life has no purpose”

- “I am not good”
- “I can’t be trusted”
- “I am a failure”
- “I am hopeless”

Erik Erikson: “Identity Crisis”



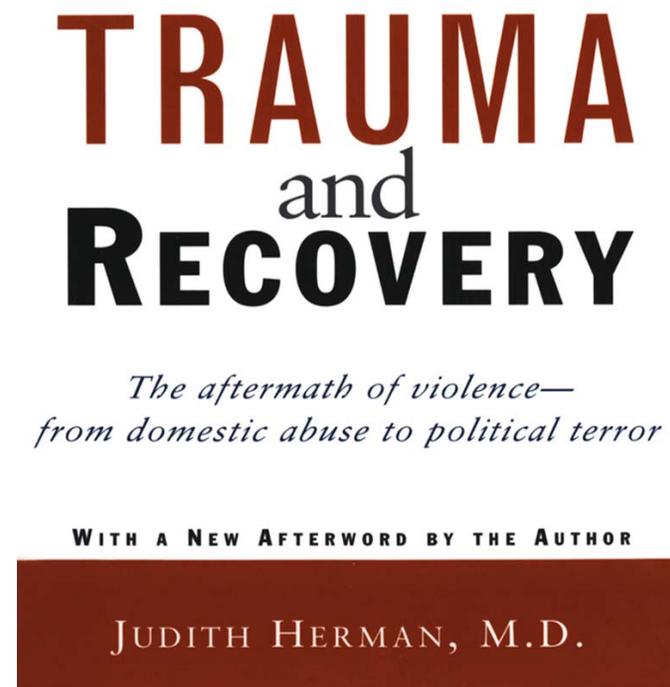
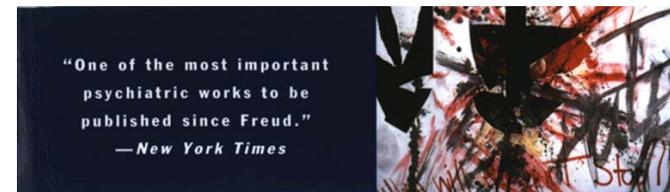
‘The term “**identity crisis**” was first used, if I remember correctly, for a specific clinical purpose in the Mt. Zion Veterans’ Rehabilitation Clinic during the Second World War... Most of our patients, so we concluded at that time, had neither been “shellshocked” nor become malingerers, but had through 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.

Herman: “Complex PTSD”

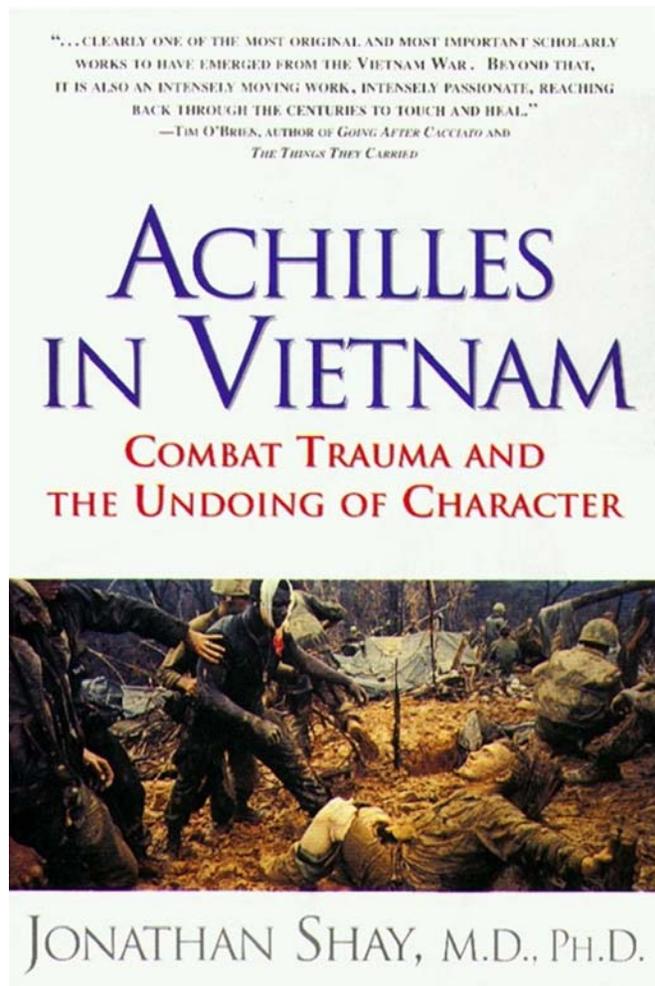
Complex PTSD: Herman’s Criteria

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



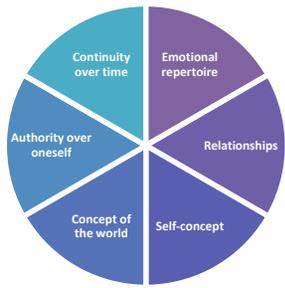
Herman (1992). New York: Basic Books.

Shay: Moral Injury & Undoing of Character

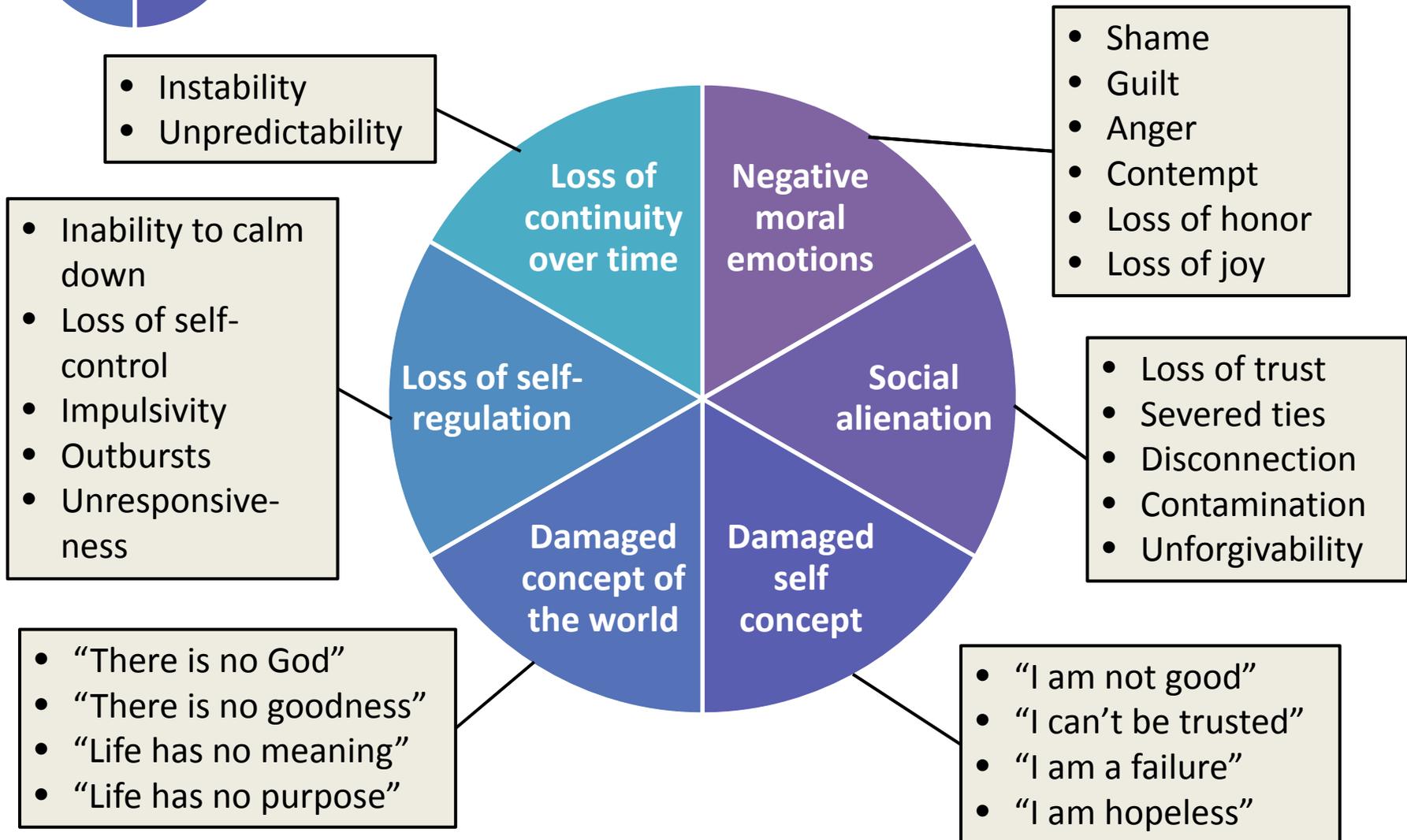


“However, I shall argue what I’ve come to strongly believe through my work with Vietnam veterans: that **moral injury is an essential part of any combat trauma that leads to lifelong psychological injury.** Veterans can usually recover from horror, fear, and grief once they return to civilian life, so 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.



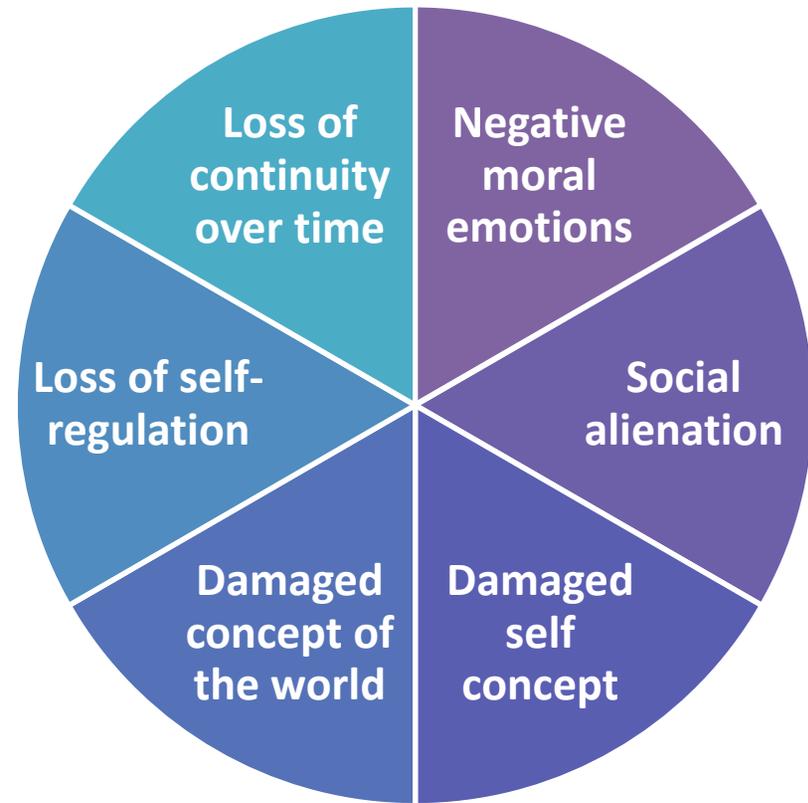
Facets of Moral Injury



Moral Injury Affects All Facets of Identity

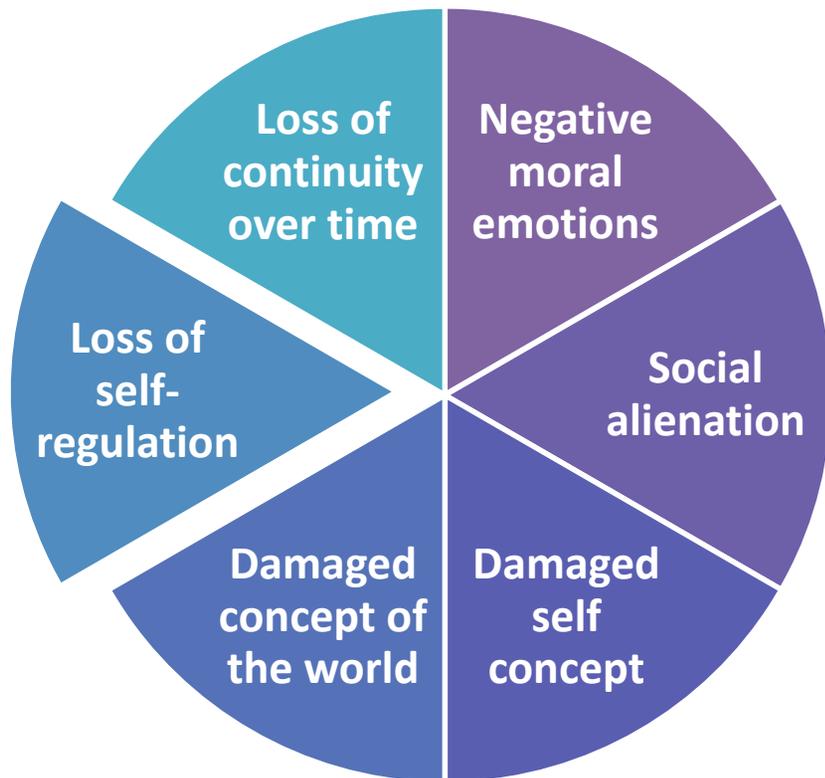


Identity



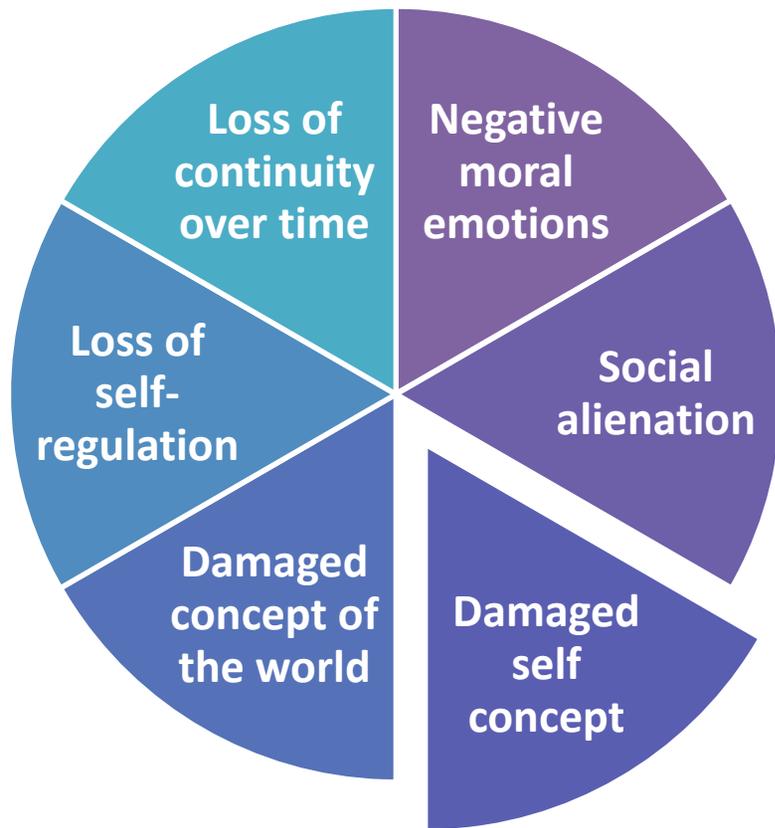
Moral Injury

Targeting Self-Regulation: Restore Health to Brain and Body



- First, put out the fire!
- Sleep!
- Reduce stress load
- Stop panic attacks or rage outbursts
- Sleep, exercise, diet
- Prayer, meditation, yoga
- Self-calming
- Psychopharmacology

Targeting Self-Concept: Competence and Self-Confidence



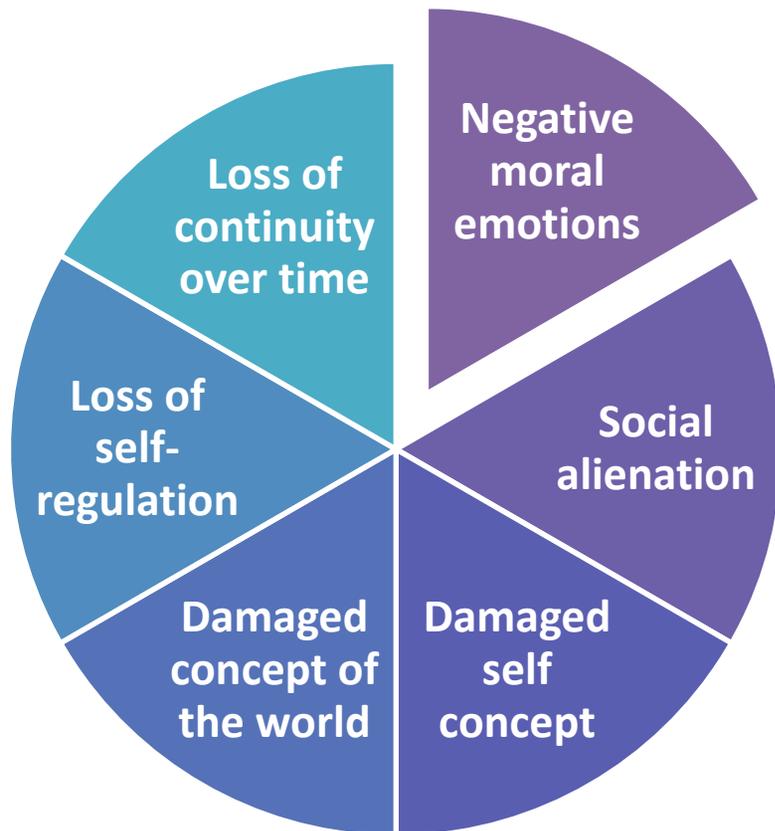
- **Competence before confidence**
- Do, create, atone, become
- Identify and correct cognitive distortions
 - Over-generalizations
 - Black-and-white thinking
- Align with a benevolent moral authority

Targeting Concept of the World: Social Justice, Spirituality



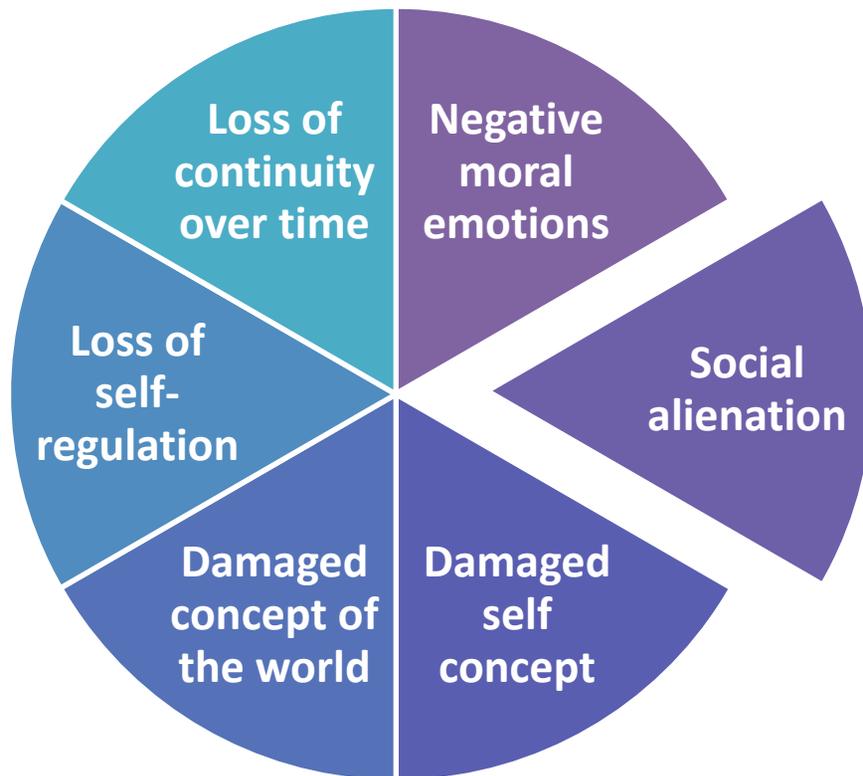
- Return to the world
- Give or seek amends
- Seek organizations or entities that still deserve respect and idealization
- Make the world a better place
- Religious practice
- Art, journaling

Targeting Moral Emotions: Mindfulness, Exposure Therapy



- Learn to tolerate intense negative moral emotions
- Mindfulness meditation
- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)
- Practice positive moral emotions
 - Joy
 - Awe

Targeting Social Alienation: Peers, Family, Community



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



Thank you