

Moral Injury:

A Wound to the Soul

Tina Thompson, LMSW
Breanna Gillis, BSW

Michigan State University
School of Social Work

Combat Veterans
Certificate



"Moral injury is a wound to the SOUL.

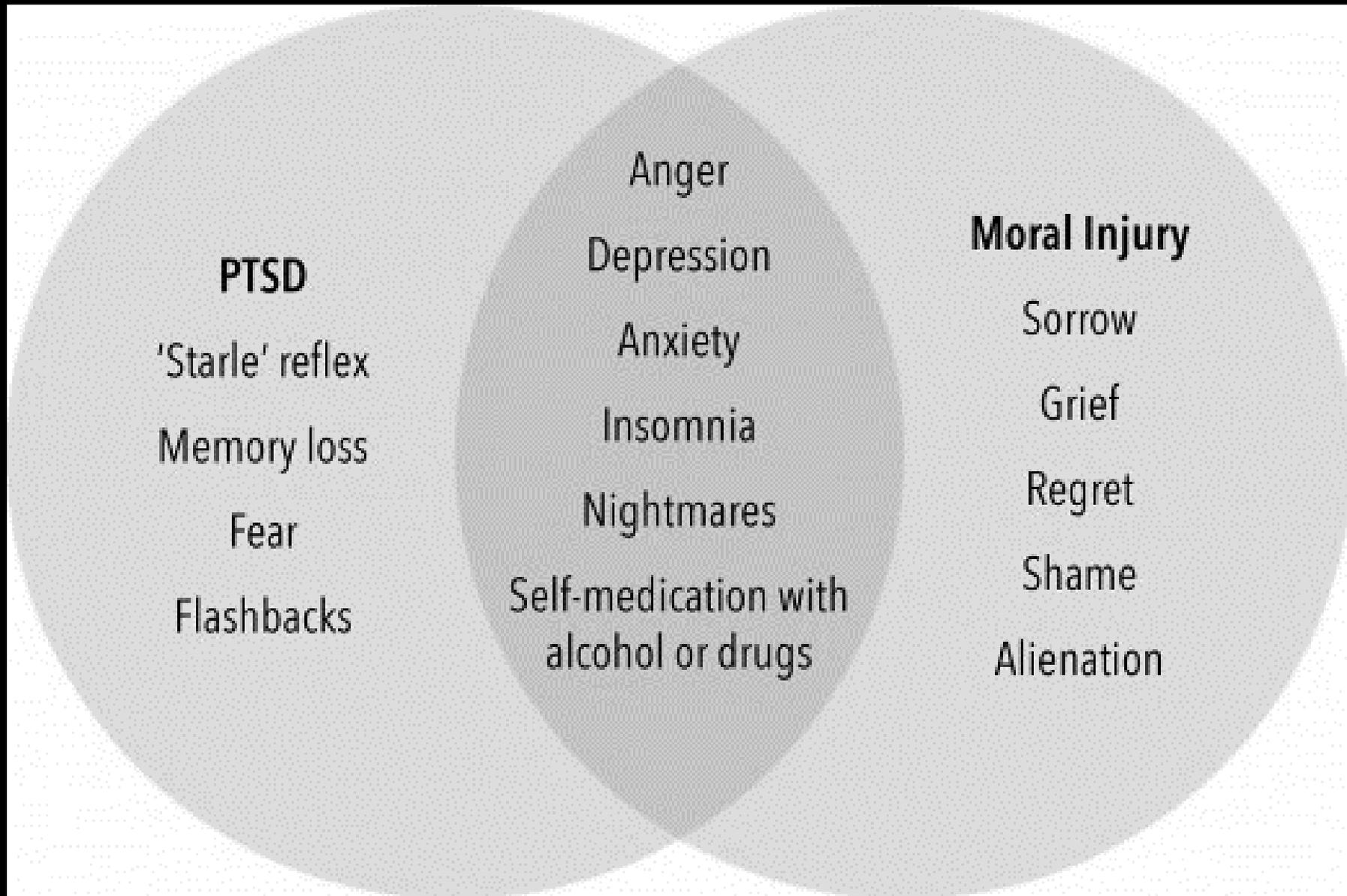
It happens when you participate in or witness things that transgress your deepest beliefs about right and wrong...

that manifests as grief, sorrow, shame, guilt...

it shows up as negative thoughts, self-hatred, hatred of others, feelings of regret, obsessive behaviors, destructive tendencies, suicidal ideation, and all-consuming isolation."

~ Tom Voss, *Almost Sunrise* and *Where War Ends*





JAMA, February 2020

(Steenkamp, Litz, & Marmar)

- Reviewed effectiveness of CPT and PE with service members/veterans
- Most CPT and PE studies based on civilians and sexual assault
 - <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/apps/decisionaid/compare.aspx>
(click on "Is it effective?" then "Show me the studies")
- Findings: "Manualized short-term monotherapies widely disseminated across the VA and DoD, particularly PE and CPT, are **not effective** for between **one-half and two-thirds** of patients.." (p. E2)
- Conclusion: Military-related PTS(D) is usually more complex than civilian PTS(D), often including "**morally** compromising experiences and traumatic losses."

“The current evidence-based treatments have been developed to address the symptoms associated with PTSD, but they fall short when addressing the core issues of moral injury including unresolved loss, guilt and shame. Moral injury often co-occurs with PTS, but one condition may exist without the other... For us to assist those with moral injury to heal, we must know what we are treating and use the appropriate interventions or we risk making moral injury worse.”

Dr. Mindy Keenan, Founder of the Center for Post Traumatic Growth

<https://centerptg.org/>

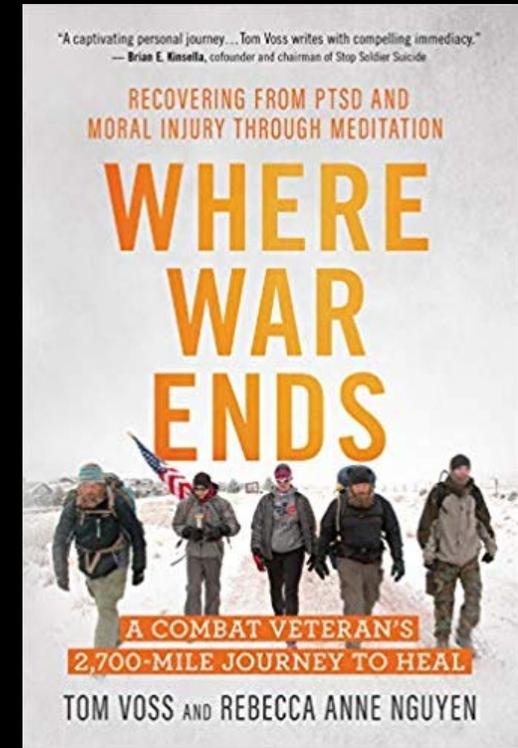
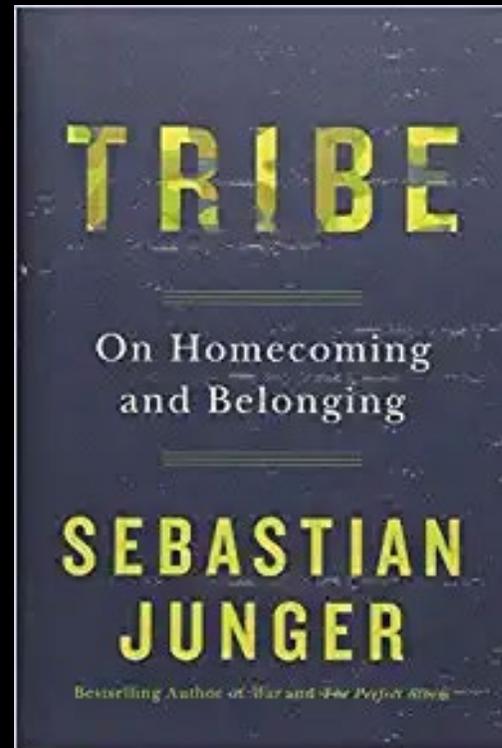
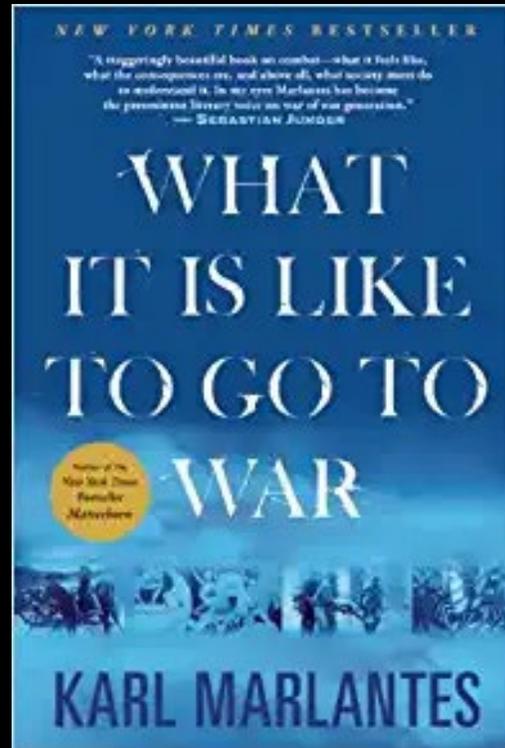
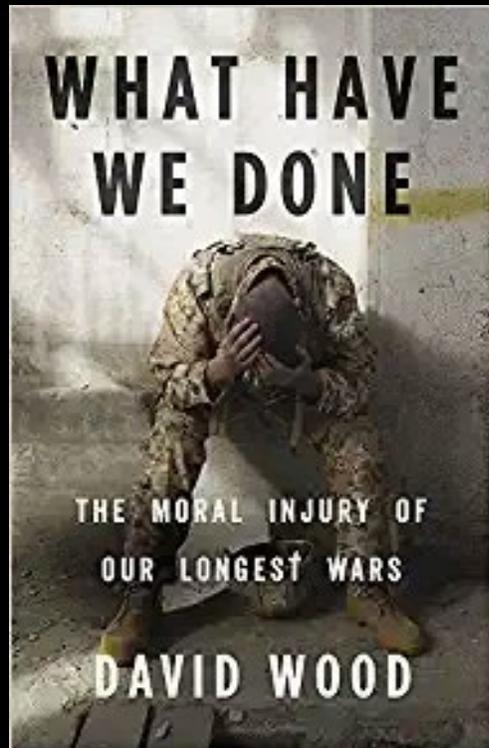
“We must start treating moral injury if the suicides are to stop.”

RECOVERY & HEALING

(NAKASHIMA-BROCK, 2020)

- Treatment is NOT the same as HEALING
- Individual Strategies: memory processing (writing/drawing/enacting trauma narrative); holistic health practices (meditation, yoga, sleep hygiene, labyrinth walking); restoration of empathy (rehumanize the enemy, compassion for self); acceptance (forgiveness, compassion for others)
- Collective/Community Rituals/Support: ceremony/cleansing (restore meaning and support from community); use of arts (music, dance, theater, writing groups); grief processing (letter writing/burning); spiritual practices; peer support models; service to others; sharing personal stories; public recognition
- Deep Listening: listening with our hearts; listening to listen, not listening to solve/fix; listening from a place of empathy and compassion; allowing veteran to unburden their pain and moral anguish

Recommended Reading



Additional Resources

- MSU School of Social Work, Combat Veteran Certificate (non-credit option):
<https://socialwork.msu.edu/Programs/MSW/Certificates/Combat-Veterans>
- Center for Post Traumatic Growth:
<https://centerptg.org/>
- Shay Moral Injury Center: <https://www.voa.org/moral-injury-war-inside>

Available Services

- Rosie Bickert: LMSW, ACSW, DeWitt:
<http://www.gentlehoofbeats.com/>; 517-490-7712; Warrior Weekends and individual counseling
- Derrick Guty: MA, LPC, USMC OIF, East Lansing:
<https://www.sempergumby.org/>; 517-775-3871
- Vet Centers in Michigan:
<https://www.va.gov/directory/guide/state.asp?dnum=ALL&STATE=MI&v=1>

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Tina Thompson, LMSW
blaschke@msu.edu

Breanna Gillis, BSW
gillisb1@msu.edu