**Moral Injury**

Moral injury is the damage done to one’s conscience or moral compass when that person perpetrates, witnesses, or fails to prevent acts that transgress their own moral and ethical values or codes of conduct. Imagine if, in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Atticus had stepped aside and let the lynch mob take Tom Robinson out of the jail and kill him. Imagine if he had deliberately done a poor job defending Tom in court, as almost everyone in the town wanted.As Atticus pointed out to his children, he wouldn’t have been able to live with himself.

**In the context of war,** moral injuries may stem from direct participation in acts of combat, such as killing or harming others, or indirect acts, such as witnessing death or dying, failing to prevent immoral acts of others, or giving or receiving orders that are perceived as gross moral violations. The act may have been carried out by an individual or a group, through a decision made individually or as a response to orders given by leaders.

**Examples:**

* Unintentional errors: Military personnel are well trained in the rules of engagement and do a remarkable job making life or death decisions in war; however, sometimes unintentional error leads to the loss of life of non-combatants, setting the stage for moral injury.
* Transgressive acts of others: Service members can be morally injured by the transgression of peers and leaders who betray expectations in egregious ways.

**What is the aftermath of moral injury?**

In terms of the aftermath of moral injuries, transgressive acts may result in highly aversive and haunting states of inner conflict and turmoil. Emotional responses may include:

* Shame, which stems from global self-attributions (for example “I am an evil terrible person; I am unforgivable”)
* Guilt
* Anxiety about possible consequences
* Anger about betrayal-based moral injuries

Behavioral manifestations of moral injury may include:

* Anomie (for example alienation, purposelessness, and/or social instability caused by a breakdown in standards and values)
* Withdrawal and self-condemnation
* Self-harming (for example suicidal ideation or attempts)
* Self-handicapping behaviors (for example alcohol or drug use, self-sabotaging relationships, etc.)

(https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/co-occurring/moral\_injury\_at\_war.asp)