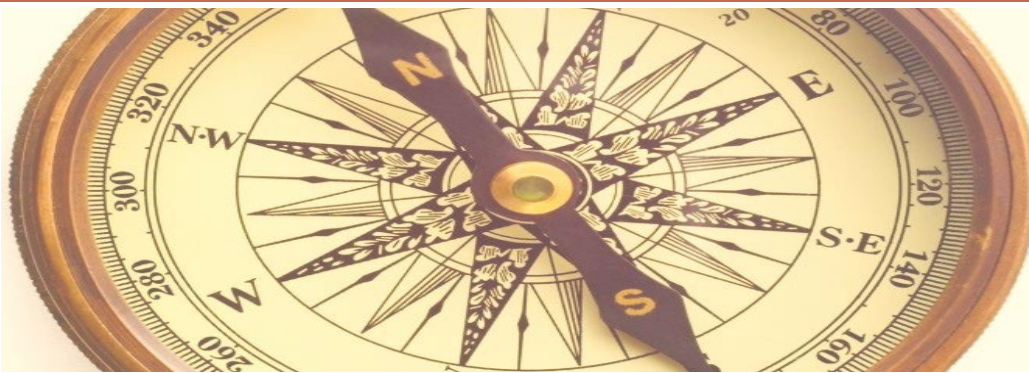


MORAL INJURY

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 2



UPDATE FROM THE CHAIRS

Dear SIG Members,

Seasons Greetings! We hope this final issue of the newsletter for the year finds you and your families safe and well. 2020 has certainly been a year of great upheaval and challenge, requiring us all to adjust in ways we never imagined. The winter season and new year offer opportunities for reflection with a promise of beginnings. This year, we met virtually and continued our discussion on the ubiquity of moral injury across disciplines, issues of operationalization and assessment, and ways to facilitate SIG collaborations. We communicated with the scientific program committee and have several actionable steps to hopefully increase the number of

moral injury related presentations accepted to the next annual meeting. We spotlighted training sites, international members, and various SIG members' original works. While none of us can predict what 2021 will bring, we look forward to continuing to build and strengthen this community.

In the spirit of new beginnings, Dr. Wyatt Evans, our founding chair, will be transitioning out of his role. We are delighted to be welcoming a new co-chair, Dr. Bart Buechner, as well as two new student co-chairs, Amanda Gentz and Jason Cruze. We are thrilled to have such passionate new leadership on board, and excited by the diverse lenses they will bring to the SIG. In this

issue, you'll find each new chair spotlighted. We are pleased to share that you'll also find an update on the development of the Moral Injury Outcome Scale in this issue. The Trainee Section also includes a list of programs where there are opportunities for moral injury training. Finally, check out the Research Highlights for a sampling of articles on moral injury published since our last newsletter.

From Wyatt:

I want to personally thank each of you for your presence, curiosity, and contributions – to this SIG and to the burgeoning field of moral injury. When I began preparing the application to establish the SIG in 2017, I had only recently begun studying moral injury and moral healing. I

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UPDATE FROM THE CHAIRS (CONT.)

knew then that the research and discourse were increasing. I had no idea, though, how much the field would develop over the following three years, how impactful and meaningful the unfolding work would be, or how diverse and vibrant this community of scholars, creators, and healers would become. I am grateful to ISTSS for allowing us to establish this professional home; to Sheila, Amanda, and many others for helping to build this group; and to everyone who has supported its development and contributions thus far! I know the SIG will continue to grow and support the field under Amanda's and Bart's leadership. I look forward to continuing to communicate and collaborate with this talented and compassionate group!

Wyatt & Amanda
Moral Injury SIG Chairs

*When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.*

A Poem by Wendell Berry

MISSION

The Moral Injury Special Interest Group (SIG) aims to bring together clinicians and researchers from across healing disciplines and related fields including philosophy and ethics, military culture and history, and religious/spiritual studies in order to provide a professional home for moral injury discourse and development. In gathering ISTSS members from across these disciplines and the world, this SIG will facilitate a rich scientific conversation and will advance the state of the science in conceptualization, assessment, and intervention for moral injury. Though the concept of moral injury has recently regained a great deal of popular interest, the field is in its infancy. At present, essential conceptual distinctions need refinement and the potential paths to moral healing require paving. Addressing these areas will be the primary objectives of the Moral Injury SIG, and will be approached in the following ways:

- Advocate for rigorous clinical and scholarly work that attends to cultural and contextual factors in this field
- Disseminate high quality scholarship in the moral injury field to ISTSS members and to the broader international community
- Support collaborative exploration of moral injury between members of the SIG, facilitating submission of proposals on moral injury and related topics to ISTSS Annual Meetings and other appropriate venues and nurturing research on moral injury and healing
- Establish and maintain an active SIG listserv to facilitate direct and wide-spread sharing of new and upcoming literature, training, etc. of interest to SIG membership

AN UPDATE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MORAL INJURY OUTCOME SCALE (MIOS)

MACKENZIE H. CUMMINGS, RUTH CHARTOFF, JACQUELINE E. BRAUGHTON, & BRETT T. LITZ

We appreciate the opportunity to provide the ISTSS Moral Injury Special Interest Group with an update on our Moral Injury Outcome Scale (MIOS). The effort to develop the MIOS is a three-phased process, and as we prepare to close out Phase II, we are happy to share progress on where the scale currently stands on behalf of the MIOS Consortium.

The Moral Injury Outcome Scale (MIOS) Consortium

Developed in 2016, the MIOS Consortium is a collaborative group of international clinical scientists and direct-care clinicians who research and treat military service members and Veterans across various nations, including the United States (US), United Kingdom (UK), Canada, Israel, and Australia. We are pleased to introduce four new members to the Consortium:

Fardous Hosseiny and Patrick Smith of the Canadian Centre of Excellence on PTSD, and Yossi Levi-Belz and Gadi Zerach of the Lior Tsfaty Center for Suicide and Mental Pain Studies in Israel.

Our collective aim is to create a highly content-valid and psychometrically sound measure of moral injury as a multidimensional outcome associated with exposure to potentially morally injurious experiences (PMIEs). For details, see Yeterian et al. (2019). Since this publication, we have made great strides in the creation of this international scale and are pleased to report the following updates:

Phase 1: Content Generation and Initial Creation of the MIOS

Yeterian et al. (2019) outlined initial qualitative findings

collected from semi-structured interviews ($N=26$) at the Veterans Affairs (VA) Boston, Fargo VA, and the Operational Stress Injury (OSI) Clinic in Ontario with clinical staff and clergypersons who work with active-duty service members and Veterans. These findings served as a subset of the overall effort to collect qualitative data via interviews ($N=100$) with active-duty service members, Veterans, chaplains, and clinicians from the US (Texas A&M University, Fort Hood), the UK, Canada (Ottawa), and Australia.

Using a grounded theory framework, the US VA Boston research team identified salient and overarching themes of impact from exposure to morally injurious experiences found within the narratives of Veterans, service members and care providers. These broad themes aided in the creation of a

preliminary description of the moral injury syndrome (i.e., the psychological, spiritual, interpersonal, physical, and existential impacts of morally injurious experiences) and provided the basis of an initial framework from which all consortium sites would use to code their site-specific data. We met regularly via conference calls to identify gaps and inconsistencies, and further refine the codebook.

Our findings illuminated six domains of impact, each with their own sub-components:

1. Alterations in self-perceptions (e.g., disruptions in global ideas about personal identity, loss of trust in self as a moral agent)
2. Alterations in moral thinking (e.g., judgmental thoughts and appraisals of others, hyper-focus about the morality of one's own behavior)
3. Social impacts (e.g., aggressive behavior toward others, expecting rejection or judgment)
4. Self-harming and self-sabotaging behaviors (e.g., engaging in risky behaviors, disengaging from enjoyable activities)

5. Emotional aftermath (e.g., shame, guilt)
6. Beliefs about life meaning and purpose (e.g., loss of religious or spiritual beliefs or practices, loss of belief in the purpose or meaning of life)

The consortium created an initial MIOS measurement model using qualitative data-driven domains of impact, theory, and consensus expert judgment. Our next step was to generate items for a preliminary MIOS. All sites individually created example items for each domain's subcomponent. VA Boston team culled items together and edited for clarity and redundancy, which resulted in a set of nearly 300 items. Then, each site-specific team used their

experience treating and/or researching moral injury to review and rate each item as either a "Core" or "Not Core" dimension to the concept of moral injury. In total, 50 items were retained. Next, the VA Boston team created a card sort task using Qualtrics, an online survey platform, to examine how people without prior moral injury knowledge would sort these items via the six domains denoted in the model. We used results to clarify domain definitions, cut out items that did not readily fit under a single domain, and conduct a second card sort for further refinement. The final item list resulted in 34 items.

Some example items include:

Domain	Subcomponent	Example Item
Social impacts	Expecting rejection or judgment	I feel rejected by people.
Alterations in self-perception	Loss of trust in self as a moral agent	I do not trust myself to be good.
Alterations in moral thinking	Judgmental thoughts and appraisals of others	People need to be held accountable.
Emotional aftermath	Guilt	I feel guilty about what happened.
Beliefs about life meaning and purpose	Expressions of reduced confidence in the value of morality and whether people can be good	I have lost faith in humanity.

After review, we included further questions regarding patient demographics (gender, age range, race/ethnicity), specification about the morally injurious event (self, other, or betrayal), and DSM-5 PTSD symptom screening. These additions finalized the first iteration of the MIOS.

Current Status: Phase II Scale Refinement and Reliability Testing

Phase II consists of each consortium site administering this initial scale to Veterans and service members to examine reliability and item fit using exploratory factor analyses. The VA Boston staff administered the initial version of the MIOS to Veterans across the US via Qualtrics. Participants were recruited through official VA social media, online Veteran forums, local and student Veteran Centers, and Veteran organization listservs. Over 300 US Veterans completed the initial MIOS online ($N=363$). Other consortium sites, including the UK, Canada, Australia, and

Israel, likewise administered the initial MIOS to service members and/or Veterans in their respective countries, and the cumulative number of participants thus far is currently well over 1000 and counting.

The next step in this phase of scale development entails examining the MIOS's internal consistency and item fit. We will be conducting an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to explore the factor structure and to aid in item trimming. We will then conduct a multi-group confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using data from participating countries to confirm the invariance of the factor structure.

The Next Steps: Phase III Construct Validity and PMIEs Epidemiological Examinations

As we reach the end of Phase II, we also begin to look toward the third, final phase in the development of the MIOS. In Phase III, we will conduct large-scale construct validation of the scale, chiefly convergent and

discriminant validity, to ensure the scale is measuring the moral injury construct. This third phase will also involve epidemiological examinations of the scope of PMIEs and magnitude of moral injury in various active-duty military personnel and Veteran populations. More specifically, we will evaluate the prevalence and correlates of moral injury outcomes across populations and in diverse data collection contexts. Once a final list of construct validity measures is chosen by consortium members, we will administer these measures and the finalized version of the MIOS established in Phase II to large groups of service members and Veterans internationally.

As the COVID-19 pandemic proliferates across the globe, frontline workers are confronted with novel and distressing demands in the workplace. Now, more than ever, the concept of moral injury is crucial to providing support to those facing the aftermath of moral transgressions. We hope that the

finalized MIOS will be an invaluable tool across all populations to help quantify the impact of experiencing a morally injurious event and guide future treatment decisions.

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ARTICLE SUBMISSION

We invite SIG members to submit relevant articles of no more than 1,500 words. Submissions may be data-driven, descriptive, theoretical, clinically oriented, etc. provided that they are relevant to the field of moral injury. Consistent with our mission to bring together clinicians and researchers from across healing disciplines and related fields, we hope to consider a range of submissions.

Articles should be no more than 2000 words (including references, tables, and figures). At least one SIG member should be an author on all submissions, though non-members may contribute in any role. As always, collaborations among members are highly encouraged. Submissions should be addressed to the SIG Chairs:

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International Society
for Traumatic Stress Studies

Information About The 37th Annual ISTSS
Meeting Coming Soon

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

2021-2023 CHAIR: BARTON BUECHNER, PHD



Dr. Barton Buechner is a founding faculty member in the MA in Psychology with emphasis in Military Psychology (MAMP) program at Adler University. He earned his doctorate from Fielding Graduate University's school of Human and Organizational Development in 2014. Buechner is also a 1978 graduate of the US Naval Academy, and earned a Masters in Organization Development and Assessment degree from Case Western Reserve University in 1993. He served in the US Navy for 30 years in a mix of active duty and reserve capacities, retiring at the rank of Captain in 2008.

Dr. Buechner has served from 2018-2020 as the Co-Chair of the Military Special Interest Group of the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS), and also serves on the Boards of Directors of YourNexStage (transition support for women veterans); the National Veterans Foundation (NVF); and the Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) Institute for Personal and Social Evolution. He is the co-editor of a 2016 monograph publication of veteran-related scholarship from Fielding

Graduate University titled "*Veteran and family reintegration: Identity, healing and reconciliation* (2016), and is co-editor of an upcoming special edition of the *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship* (JCES) featuring research by military-connected graduate students (Expected to publish March 2021).

1. What inspired your work on the topic of moral injury and what led you to serve those suffering after morally injurious experiences?

My Father and Grandfather were both wartime Army veterans (World War II and World War I, respectively). Growing up, I heard things in their stories that suggested that there were things they could not talk about, but that affected them deeply - changing the way they saw the world. I could also see in my Father a quiet but deep sense of moral integrity, and a corresponding sensitivity to actions or statements of those in authority which showed a lack of this quality. Later on, when I took a staff position at a veterans' care facility, I had the opportunity to listen to stories of other veterans of World War I and World War II, Korea and Vietnam. I heard similar patterns in their stories, and this set me on an inquiry to find out more about what was behind it. This later turned into a doctoral dissertation, focused on the experiences of returning veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan. The bottom line of this was that I did not want to see us continue to make the same mistakes we had made with earlier generations of veterans, in terms of post-service transition and mental health support.

2. What were some of the most informative learning experiences that impacted your career path?

I have always been fortunate to be surrounded by colleagues who were driven by imagination and principle, as well as a good sense of humor. A highlight was meeting Dr. Barnett Pearce at Fielding Graduate University, when I was beginning my dissertation studies. Although not a veteran himself, he was keenly interested in the experiences of veterans and the moral and ethical dilemmas of combat. His seminal work on communication and moral conflict has deeply informed my thinking about the social construction of moral and ethical codes, and the challenges of repairing meaning structures when they are challenged by life events. Similarly, I also had some inspiring, enlightening and often amusing conversations with Jonathan Shay about his insights into moral injury right around this time. Effective storytelling is an important part of revealing conflicts and imagining new possibilities.

3. What do you find most challenging about this work at this time? What do you find most rewarding?

The challenges I see for the engagement with moral injury is to shift attention from the individual to the collective impact. If we don't recognize the broader forces and patterns that cause moral structures to become damaged or come into conflict, then we will have a difficult time addressing them in a positive and potentially transformative way. This applies to many other groups who have somehow become marginalized by society, and not just military veterans. The most hopeful and wonderful experiences I have had in recent years are with my students at Adler University. Like Fielding, Adler is a school that seeks to foster leaders of positive social engagement and change. Both schools attract students who are committed to principle, and willing to take on complex issues in unconventional ways. Discussing concepts like moral injury and social construction with such people unleashes a great deal of energy, and I believe, also expands the moral imagination, creating new possibilities and sometimes also bridging areas of difference.

4. Describe your goals for you career and your work in the field of moral injury going forward.

I think we are not "discovering" moral injury for the first time, but rather coming back to it at a time in which we are blessed to have an expanded capacity to understand it and engage it productively. Moral conflict has long been addressed in literature and the arts, as well as philosophy and theology, but we now have scientific evidence in fields such as neuroscience, communication, cybernetics and sociology that can help us to better account for, anticipate, and navigate complexity. I see a time when we may be able to move from a narrow, linear, and internalized view of mental health towards a more holistic and multi-dimensional understanding. In this sense, the social-systems approach to psychology pioneered many years ago by Alfred Adler and Rudolf Dreikurs may have increased relevance, and may play a role in thinking about how to come to grips with moral injury in creative and constructive ways.

NOMINATIONS FOR THE SPOTLIGHT

The Moral Injury SIG welcomes nominations for students, researchers, and clinicians, and anyone advancing the moral injury field to be “spotlighted” in an upcoming newsletter.

Nominations should include a brief nominating statement and the CV of the nominee. Self-nominations are encouraged. Nomination materials should be addressed to the SIG Chairs:

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STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

2021 CO-CHAIR: AMANDA GENTZ



Amanda Gentz is currently a second year PhD student at the University of Tulsa. She received her undergraduate degree from the University of California, Santa Barbara, and worked in community research and evaluation for several years. With her current research through the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, her goal is to expand the concept of moral injury outside of military populations with respect to journalists. She hopes to contribute to understanding the various stressors that may result in moral injury and how they affect different populations. Further, she is working on operationalizing moral injury in ways that distinguish it from grief, moral outrage, and other related constructs. She is currently running several studies that are looking at how various stressor may result in moral injury amongst medical professionals, science writers, and environmental journalists; as well as potential protective factors to buffer these effects.

1. What inspired your work on the topic of moral injury and what led you to serve those suffering after morally injurious experiences?

The widespread applicability paired with the lack of understanding of moral injury inspired my research in this topic area. One of my first projects in graduate school offered me the opportunity to collaborate with environmental journalists. The way they described moral injury and its negative outcomes, while never even hearing the term, inspired me to gain a deeper understanding of this topic. Putting words to what they were experiencing when they did not have any is what led me to serve those suffering morally injurious experiences.

2. What were some of the most informative learning experiences that impacted your career path?

My most informative learning experiences were around being able to collaborate with these journalists who were actually experiencing these events. I really learned the importance of understanding moral injury, because I wanted to give them a voice. They did not know how to describe the type of difficulties that they were experiencing.

3. What do you find most challenging about this work at this time? What do you find most rewarding?

What I find most challenging at this time is the lack of widespread knowledge regarding moral injury. The further the field of moral injury develops the more we are realizing the widespread impact it has. However, there are many people in clinical psychology and the public who do not know what moral injury is, and this limits people's access to evidence-based treatments.

4. Describe your goals for your career and your work in the field of moral injury going forward.

My goal for my work in this field is to really expand our understanding of who moral injury may affect. I want to understand the different events that may contribute to moral injury, and how they may be affecting non-military populations. Further, I would like to contribute to the understanding of various protective factors that may impact these groups.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

2021 CO-CHAIR: JASON CRUZE



I am currently a first-year doctoral student in the Clinical Psychology program and Health Psychology emphasis track at Alliant International University, Los Angeles. My research interests include PTSD, moral injury both on the battlefield and beyond it, interventions to increase posttraumatic growth, prevention of sexual and domestic violence, the intersection between moral injury, epistemology and social psychology, and bioethics. Currently, my clinical interests are focused on reconstructing moral relations after wrongdoing, the biopsychosocial model of mental health, perpetrator trauma, and spiritually integrated treatments for veterans exposed to trauma. I'm also passionate about and have spent the last five years working with youths in foster care and justice-involved adolescents and adults.

1. What inspired your work on the topic of moral injury and what led you to serve those suffering after morally injurious experiences?

I have a background in philosophy, which provided me with robust exposure to concepts such as free will and moral responsibility studies, ethics, and especially contemplative spiritual traditions. I discovered the construct of moral injury through my readings, which felt like a natural inclusive landscape with the promise of new interdisciplinary insights that could be leveraged for more holistic clinical interpretation. For me, the construct really came to life in the testimonies of trauma I witnessed while working as an educator and court advocate for justice-involved adolescents and adults, and youth in foster care. My applied interest in moral injury peaked at the intersection of health and justice, since many of my client's family members were veterans and also involved in the criminal justice system. Although my research and clinical interests are wide-ranging, working with moral injury is at the core of my goals in becoming a clinical psychologist.

2. What were some of the most informative learning experiences that impacted your career path?

What stands out the most is my personal experience of cultivating the practice of self-compassion. Specifically, doing my own personal work in therapy for several years; learning the practice of acceptance of previously unacceptable parts of myself as central to healing and recovery. Healing, I believe, is about taking the time to notice and integrate what gets in the way of feeling connected to one's life, community, and the felt internal sense of what is possible. The distinction between self-kindness and self-judgment, common humanity and alienation, mindfulness and over-identification: these continue to be important lessons in my own growth as a budding clinician. The development of self-compassion, as a research interest and clinical interest, is central to what has impacted me in my career path. My path has been greatly shaped and encouraged through guidance and care from professors over my years of education at Alliant, in collaborations, and through my work with foster and justice-involved youths.

3. What do you find most challenging about this work at this time? What do you find most rewarding?

I'm especially excited about the proliferation of moral injury research including the expansion of using neuroimaging to examine differences between PTSD and moral injury and the application of moral injury to understanding pandemic-related morally challenging contexts. Moral injury is not bound by a specific field and I am excited by the interdisciplinary landscape available. On the other hand, there are still many challenges ahead. I'm interested in new research being done that works towards bringing more consensus regarding whether the PTSD diagnostic framework should be revised to render distress symptoms associated with a possible moral injury. I'm also wondering about the ways in which moral injury gets conceptualized as both a traumatic theme of PTSD and as an allied notion to PTSD, yet separate.

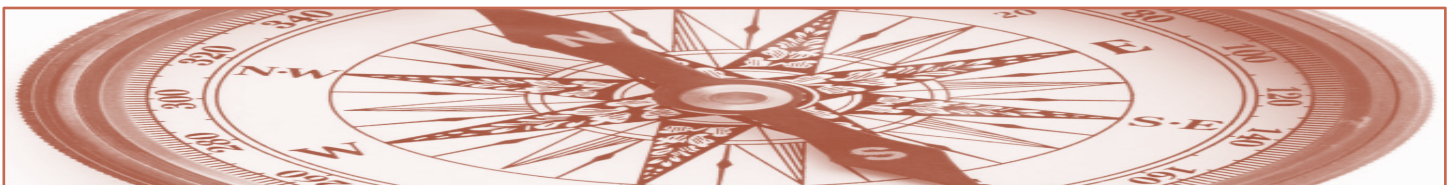
4. Describe your goals for you career and your work in the field of moral injury going forward.

I look forward to getting to apply my understanding of moral injury in my upcoming practicum clinical training. Specifically, I hope to build a comprehensive model for moral injury that may guide clinical practice and research in the long-term, incorporating my knowledge of moral injury with evidence-based approaches, gestalt work, and compassion-focused strategies. I'm especially interested in examining the role of self-compassion as a moderator in moral injury related processes. I had the fortunate opportunity to present a poster at the APA Military Psychology Summit on the role of self-compassion in helping combat veterans recover from moral injury. My sense is that this is a rich area of research that is still underexplored in addressing moral injury.

I also aim to conduct research that broadens the focus of moral injury to applying a biopsychosocial model of health that addresses trauma exposure and moral injury symptoms that are associated with violence among inner city victims and perpetrators, and the potential function moral injury has to strengthen a trauma-focused spiritually integrated intervention that addresses religious distress and existential anxiety experienced by those exposed to trauma. I'm excited about the new possibilities of raising awareness and collaboration with others in the field to help bring the construct of moral injury into the mainstream mental health arena.

JOINING THE SIG

- 1. Log in to the ISTSS website as a member**
- 2. Click "Edit Your Profile" on the right side of the page**
- 3. Click the "SIG Choices" tab**
- 4. Check "44 - Moral Injury"**
- 5. Click "Save" – You're a member!**



TRAINEE SECTION

Welcome to the trainee section! This corner covers various topics that arise as a trainee working with moral injury across disciplines. Every newsletter includes a spotlight and a list of training opportunities. If you'd like to nominate a trainee or spotlight your training site or if there's anything else you'd like to see covered here, please email Amanda.Khan@ucsf.edu

TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

The following is an up-to-date list of sites that offer opportunities in moral injury (clinical, research, or otherwise) within the U.S. for trainees.

If you would like your site listed here, please email Amanda.Khan@ucsf.edu

Site	Location	Training Level Offered
Boston VA Health Care System	Boston, MA	Psychology Postdoctoral Fellow <i>*More opportunities available working in Dr. Brett Litz's laboratory</i>
Road Home Program: Center for Veterans and Their Families (Rush University Medical Center)	Chicago, IL	Psychology Postdoctoral Fellow <i>*Email Dr. Brian Klassen for information about clinical & research opportunities (brian_klassen@rush.edu)</i>
Rocky Mountain Regional VA Medical Center	Denver, CO	Psychology Intern & Postdoctoral Fellow <i>*Email Dr. Jacob Farnsworth for more information (jacob.farnsworth@va.gov)</i>
Loma Linda VA Medical Center	Loma Linda, CA	Psychology Postdoctoral Fellows via Holistic Mental Health focus area
San Francisco VA Health Care System	San Francisco, CA	Psychology Intern & Postdoctoral Fellow
VISN 17 Center of Excellence for Research on Returning War Veterans	Waco, TX	Psychology Postdoctoral Fellow
VA North Texas Health Care System	Dallas-Fort Worth, TX	Psychology Externs, Interns, and Postdoctoral Fellows <i>*Email Dr. Wyatt Evans for more information (wyatt.evans@va.gov)</i>

MORAL INJURY RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

Note: This is not an exhaustive list of articles relevant to the field of moral injury. Listed articles were compiled from a standard database search of keywords. All articles yielded by this search were included.

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