Moral Injury in the Aftermath of Afghanistan

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Moral Injury

- *Morally Injurious Events*: Perpetrating, failing to prevent, or witnessing actions (or inactions) that violate deeply held moral values (Drescher et al., 2011; Farnsworth et al., 2017; Litz et al., 2009; Shay, 2014)

- *Moral Pain*: Dysphoric moral emotions and cognitions (Farnsworth et al., 2017)
    - Guilt, shame, contempt, disgust, anger
    - Condemnation, judgment, denunciation, disapproval, blame

- *Moral Injury*: Biopsychosocial-spiritual suffering stemming from costly attempts to avoid or control moral pain (Farnsworth et al., 2017).
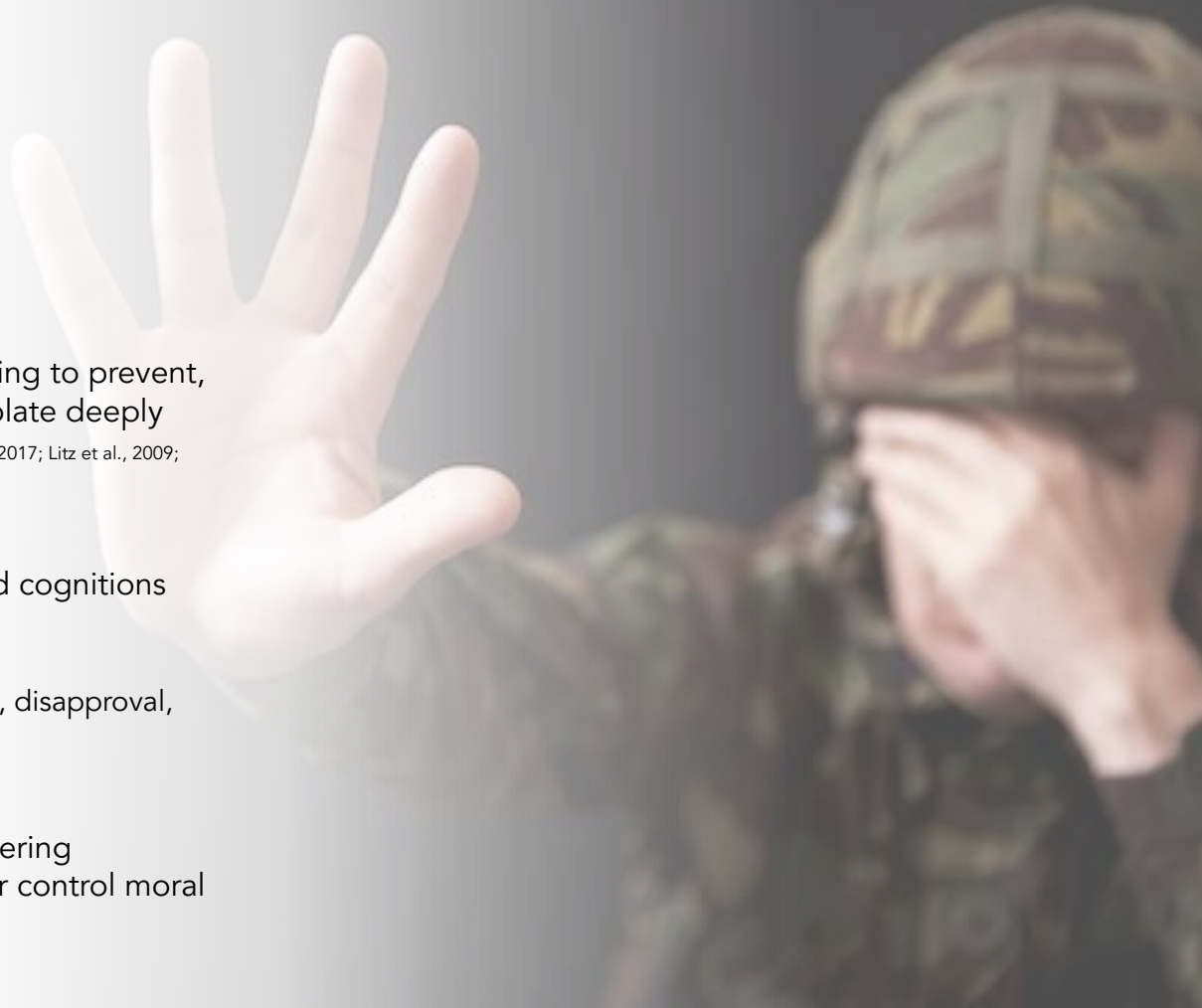
"Moral injury is a harrowing experience of failing to transition, readjust, and reintegrate in which one's needs—to share stories, to sort through dissonances, to confess and lament, to practice rituals of grief, reconciliation, and renewal, and to learn new ways of thinking, feeling, working, and loving within the contexts presented by one's life—are not adequately met by one's social-relational worlds…"

Rev. Zachary Moon, PhD

An Analog: Combat-related Posttraumatic Stress

| PTSD	Contextual Adaption
• B: Intrusive Thoughts/Emotions • C: Avoidance • D: Negative Thoughts/Mood • E: Hyperarousal/Reactivity	• Contingency planning • Reactivity to recognized cues • Suppression of burdensome or impairing emotions/thoughts • Restricted trust/bonding • Narrow focus, interests, affect • Vigilance • Guardedness • Reactivity • Aggression

An Analog: Combat-related Posttraumatic Stress

PTSD	Contextual Adaption
• Intrusive Thoughts/Emotions	• Contingency planning
• Avoidance	• Reactivity to recognized cues
• Negative Thoughts/Mood	• Suppression of burdensome or impairing emotions/thoughts
• Hyperarousal/Reactivity	• Restricted trust/bonding
	• Narrow focus, interests, affect
	• Vigilance
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Mapping Moral Injury
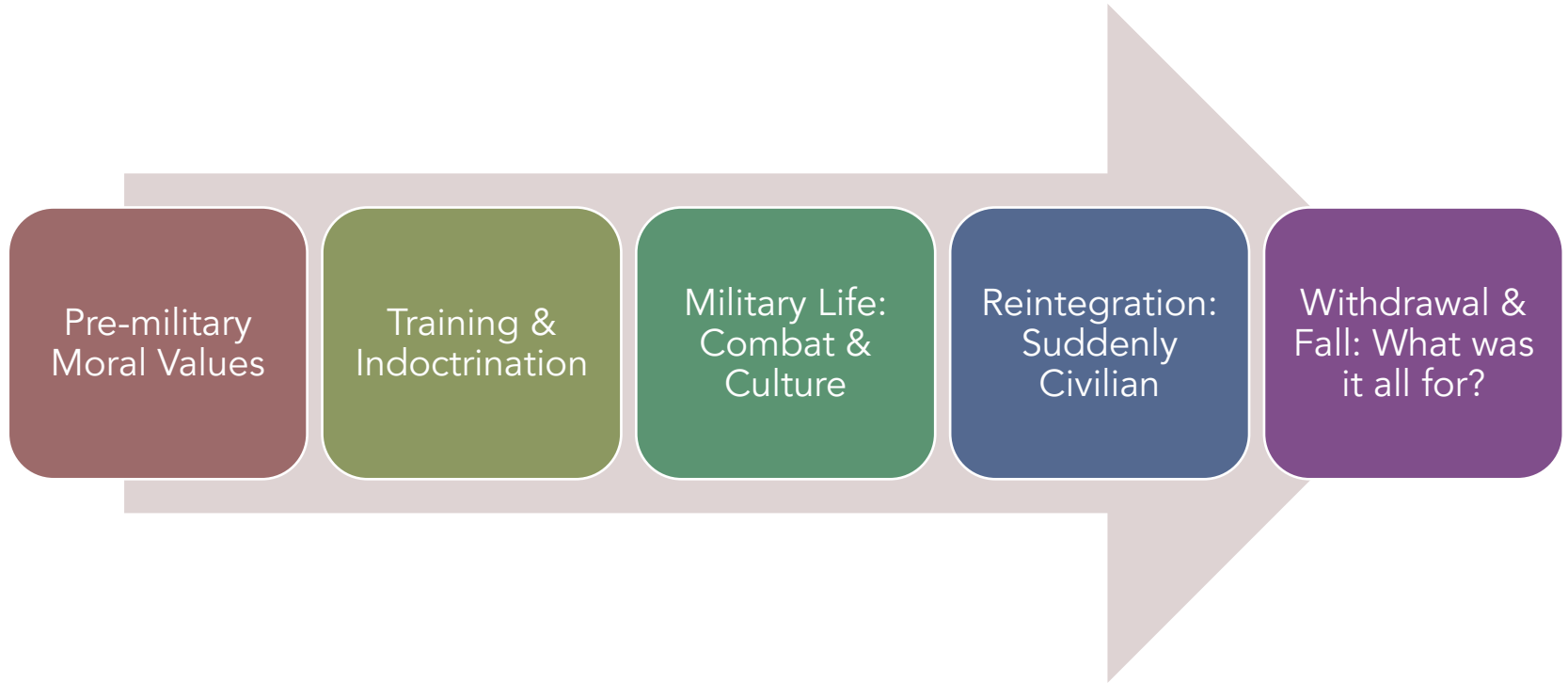
Aftermath of Afghanistan

Meaning Made…Unmade

- Shattered stories of the value, righteousness, and (moral) success of the war

- Confirmation/ exacerbation of beliefs about wrongness, inconsequentiality, etc.

Novel Moral Pain

- Contempt replaces content (or even pride)

- Shame arises from the ashes of a "failed" war

Coping Skills Insufficient & Inflexible

- Intra-personal cognitive, emotional, behavioral strategies breakdown

- Narrow understanding of essential processes (i.e., forgiveness)

Social Support Shortfall

- Disconnection from military community

- Civilians "don't get it" or "don't care"

- No space to grieve or lament

Personal, Professional, & Systemic Outcomes

Depression

Anxiety

PTSD

Alcohol/Drug Abuse

Suicide

Relationship Issues

Parenting Issues

Religious/Spiritual Struggles

Burnout*

Compassion fatigue

Disengagement

Poor performance

Disinclination toward promotion

(to leadership)

Recruitment & Retention

Morale

Cohesion

Productivity

Absenteeism

Increased spending

Moral Healing

Professional Care

Prolonged Exposure (Evans et al., 2021; Held et al., 2017; Rauch et al., 2020, Smith et al., 2013)

Cognitive Processing Therapy (Held et al., 2017, Koenig et al., 2017; Wachen et al., 2020)

Adaptive Disclosure (Gray et al., 2012; Litz et al., 2016; Litz et al., 2021)

Impact of Killing (Burkman et al., 2021; Maguen et al., 2017)

Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (Borges, 2020; Evans et al., 2020; Farnsworth et al., 2017)

Trauma Informed Guilt Reduction (Capone et al., 2020)

Spiritual & Pastoral Care (Harris et al., 2011; Kopacz et al., 2017)

Integrated Care (Antal et al., 2019, Cenkner et al., 2020; Smigelsky et al., 2020)

Family & Friends

- Awareness
- Knowledge
- Skills
- Compassion
- Forgiveness
- Psychological, social, and spiritual support

Community Connection & Care

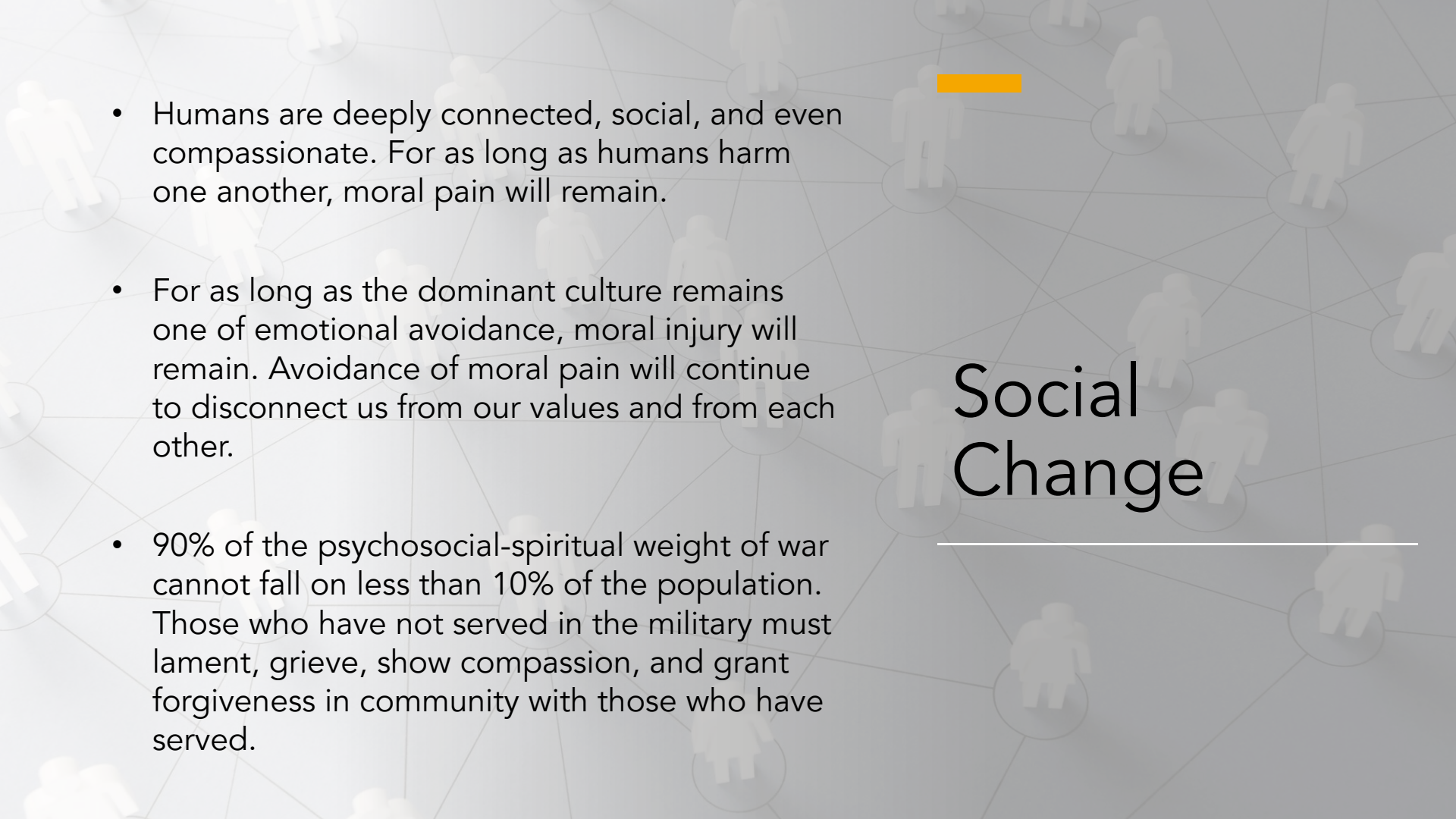- Faith communities
- Veteran support groups
- Social events
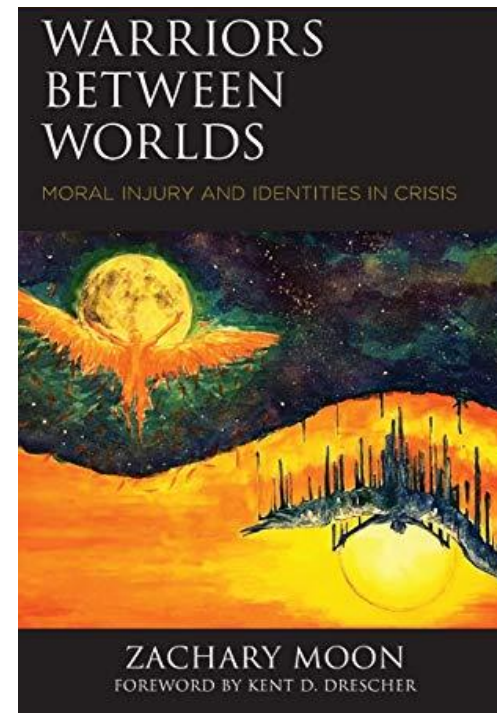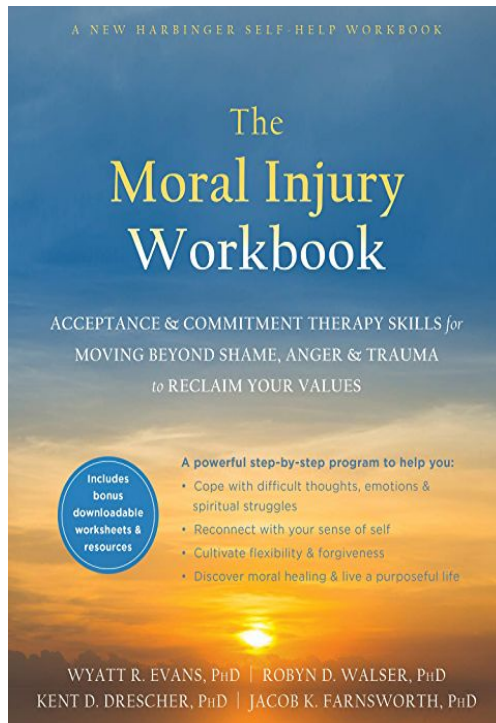- Volunteering

DoD Policy, Procedures, & Practices

- The military invests a great deal of money, personnel, and time into training recruits but only provides a fraction of such resources to reentry and reintegration (Moon, 2019).

- Revise resilience training programs that foster context sensitivity, values awareness, and flexibility in action (Evans et al., under review).

- Accelerate the culture change around behavioral health, psychological suffering, and help seeking.

- Prioritize social connection, support networking, and community during the separation phase.

- Humans are deeply connected, social, and even compassionate. For as long as humans harm one another, moral pain will remain.

- For as long as the dominant culture remains one of emotional avoidance, moral injury will remain. Avoidance of moral pain will continue to disconnect us from our values and from each other.

- 90% of the psychosocial-spiritual weight of war cannot fall on less than 10% of the population. Those who have not served in the military must lament, grieve, show compassion, and grant forgiveness in community with those who have served.

Social Change

Resources

ADDRESSING MORAL INJURY in CLINICAL PRACTICE

Edited by
JOSEPH CURRIER
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A NEW HARBINGER SELF-HELP WORKBOOK

The Moral Injury Workbook

ACCEPTANCE & COMMITMENT THERAPY SKILLS for MOVING BEYOND SHAME, ANGER & TRAUMA to RECLAIM YOUR VALUES

Includes bonus downloadable worksheets & resources

A powerful step-by-step program to help you:
• Cope with difficult thoughts, emotions & spiritual struggles
• Reconnect with your sense of self
• Cultivate flexibility & forgiveness
• Discover moral healing & live a purposeful life

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KENT D. DRESCHER, PhD | JACOB K. FARNSWORTH, PhD

WARRIORS BETWEEN WORLDS

MORAL INJURY AND IDENTITIES IN CRISIS

ZACHARY MOON
FOREWORD BY KENT D. DRESCHER

Questions!
Answers?

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