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Zoe Rose Rudow
“War Was Either Going To Be A
Skeleton In My Closet Or I Could
Try To Make It Something Else”: An
Exploration of Moral Injury, Moral
Repair, and Veteran Anti-War
Activism

ABSTRACT

This exploratory study investigates the impact of collective anti-war organizing on veterans' experiences of moral injury. Moral injury refers to the emotional, psychological, and spiritual unrest that emerges as the result of “perpetrating, failing to prevent, [or] bearing witness to... acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations” in the context of war (Litz et al., 2009, p 695). While current literature centers treatment for moral injury through clinical interventions, this study investigates if and how anti-war activism can provide a process for moral repair. Qualitative interviews with six veteran anti-war activists reveal that many intervention steps proposed by clinical literature on moral repair occur organically through anti-war activism. Morally reparative dynamics of activism include communalization of experience and community support; giving testimony and processing one's story; agency, power and transformation of self; contextualization of violence and illuminating systems of war; and making amends, fighting for justice, and transforming society. Participants also identified elements of their activist work that were psychologically harmful. These include toxic environments and infighting; government infiltration; activist burn out; and public exposure to attack and abuse. Framing activism as a process of moral repair is not meant to exonerate veterans from responsibility for past participation in war, but rather to imagine how working

towards justice and reparations for victims of U.S. imperialism can be transformative for veterans struggling with moral injury rooted in their participation in war. This study finds that moral repair for veteran anti-war activists can be seen as a process of transforming feelings of guilt and shame into tangible action against systems of war and empire.

Key Words: moral injury, moral repair, veterans, activism, anti-war activism, PTSD, Iraq War, healing, social movements

***“WAR WAS EITHER GOING TO BE A SKELETON IN MY CLOSET OR I COULD TRY
TO MAKE IT SOMETHING ELSE”*: AN EXPLORATION OF MORAL INJURY,
MORAL REPAIR, AND VETERAN ANTI-WAR ACTIVISM**

A project based upon an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work

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Northampton, Massachusetts

2016

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This thesis is dedicated to all those working collectively to resist militarism and interrupt war.

Your work is seen, your work is just, and your work is important.



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“Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. How is this a disorder? What part of being emotionally and spiritually affected by gross violence is a disorder? How about going to war and coming home with a clear conscious disorder? I think that would be far more appropriate.”

- Matt Howard (2010), Iraq Veterans Against the War

“Moral injury is a term that loosens the noose a bit around the necks of veterans who are harangued by enormous personal guilt and distributes the responsibility for their actions (justified or not) more evenly around the chain of command, the government, and maybe even the American people.”

-Tyler Boudreau, Iraq War Veteran (2011, p. 753-754)

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

What happens to a soldier in war? How do both experiencing and enacting violence change a person? How do individuals grapple with the moral and ethical dilemmas that emerge during war? How do people who have experienced these deep ethical and moral struggles reintegrate back into their home lives after war? These questions have been explored and debated throughout history and across cultural and geographic context (Maguen & Litz, 2012). In the United States, there have been many different names for the deep and often troubling psychological impacts of war. In World War I it was called Shell Shock, and considered by many to be a result of cowardice, fear, and pre-war neurosis (Jones, 2012). In World War II, it was referred to as “combat fatigue syndrome” (Jones & Wessley, 2005). While some still dismissed combat fatigue as cowardice, it became recognized as an emotional and psychological wound that could be treated (Jones & Wessley, 2005). Soldiers returning from Vietnam with severe psychological distress were said to suffer from Post-Vietnam Syndrome. These previous wars and the experiences of returning soldiers helped shape the conceptualization of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which first emerged in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-III (DSM-

III) in 1980. Since the 1980s, PTSD has gained traction in the United States as the primary way to understand and therefore treat the psychological distress experienced by soldiers in war.

There are many who critique the diagnosis of PTSD for its limitations in both theoretical construction and approach to treatment and diagnosis (Kleinman, 1995; Maguen & Litz, 2012; Shay, 2011; Boudreau, 2012). For some, PTSD does not capture the depth and complexity of the psychological, ethical, and spiritual dilemmas of participating in war. Specifically, one criticism of the PTSD diagnosis for former combat soldiers is that it overlooks or minimizes the feelings of guilt and shame experienced by veterans, or reduces these complicated feelings to a medicalized illness or disorder (Kleinman, 1995; Maguen & Litz, 2012, Boudreau, 2012; Shay, 2011). Further, PTSD largely focuses on the impacts of life-threatening trauma and fear-based stressors rather than other warzone incidents, such as killing, perpetrating violence, or serving as an occupying force, despite the fact that these events have been tied directly to mental health problems (Currier, Holland, & Malott, 2015; Litz et al., 2009). Some critics assert that assigning a diagnosis of PTSD depoliticizes war and the systems and contexts in which war is embedded (Boudreau, 2012; Kleinman, 1995). In his critique of the diagnosis, psychiatrist and medical anthropologist Arthur Kleinman (1995) argues that understanding political violence and its impacts on individuals through the lens of PTSD creates the paradigm by which “social problems are transformed into the problems of individuals, ...collective experiences of suffering are made over into personal experiences of suffering...and social traumas are refigured, for policy and intervention programs, as psychological and medical pathologies” (p. 177).

In response to these and other critiques, a new term has emerged in mental health, spiritual, and activist communities that refers to the deep and unsettling feelings of guilt, shame,

and blame induced by war and violence: moral injury.¹ While the idea behind moral injury — that participating in violence against another people in the context of war can be personally and morally disquieting — is not new, empirical research on moral injury is (Maguen & Litz, 2012).

One broadly accepted clinical definition of moral injury is “perpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations” (Litz et al., 2009, p. 695). While this definition is dominant in mental health literature, I assert that the dimension of “learning about” morally injurious events is too broad. Specifically, it minimizes the impact of directly enacting or bearing witness to morally transgressive events and over values the impact of reading about them or being told about them secondhand. I prefer journalist Nan Levinson’s (2014) definition of moral injury: “the result of taking part in or witnessing something of consequence that you believe is wrong, something that violates your deeply held beliefs about yourself and your role in the world” (p. 212). Emerging themes of morally injurious events include acts of betrayal (by military leadership or of the larger military mission), disproportionate violence, incidents involving civilians, and within-rank violence (Maguen & Litz, 2012). While moral injury and PTSD may have overlapping symptoms such as intrusive thoughts, avoidance, and numbing, they are conceptually different (Maguen & Litz, 2012; Levinson, 2014; Guntzel, 2013). Unlike PTSD, moral injury is not intended to be a diagnosable mental disorder or diagnosis. Rather, moral injury is constructed as a dimensional concept that posits that individuals who experience moral transgressions in the context of war are impacted and haunted with dissonance and internal conflict (Maguen & Litz,

¹ In the DSM-V, which came out in 2013, a diagnostic criterion was added that addressed “persistent negative emotional states”. Listed as examples of negative emotional states are: “fear, horror, anger, guilt, or shame” (American Psychological Association, 2013). While these emotions have been added as a small part of the PTSD diagnostic criteria, they play a central role in the construction of moral injury.

2012). Manifestations of moral injury include feelings of intense guilt, shame, worthlessness, demoralization, and self-harming behaviors (Maguen & Litz, 2012). Themes in the literature on moral injury highlight feelings of guilt and shame, and their connection to self-harming, isolating, and suicidal behavior (Maguen & Litz, 2012; Kopacz, Simons & Chitaphong 2015).

People concerned with moral injury assert that current treatment methods for PTSD do not properly capture or address the psychological and ethical distress that many veterans face when returning from war (Litz et al., 2009). Furthermore, there is concern that mental health clinicians largely lack the therapeutic tools and training to adequately address veteran's deep moral anguish (Litz et al., 2009; Boudreau, 2012). As such, researchers are in the early development stages of treatments specifically aimed at what is known as moral repair (Litz et al., 2009, Brock & Lettini, 2012). While most literature on moral repair situates treatment in clinical or spiritual settings (Litz et al., 2009; Maguen & Litz, 2012; Currier, 2015; Tick, 2014), the concept of moral injury opens up the possibility for healing outside of the clinic. As Tyler Boudreau (2012), an Iraq War veteran, wrote:

What's most useful about the term "moral injury" is that it takes the problem out of the hands of the mental health profession and the military and attempts to place it where it belongs- in society, in the community, and in the family-precisely where moral questions should be posed and wrangled with. (p. 750)

Tyler Boudreau and others (Brock & Lettini, 2012) posit that the moral questions of war should be grappled with in communal spaces and through collective processes, rather than individually in therapy. This study investigates the reparative dimensions of one such form of collective process: activism. Activism can be defined as collectively and strategically, on the foundation of shared values, acting to create a more just and equitable society (Watts, Williams, & Jagers,

2003). Specifically, this thesis reflects on veterans' experiences with anti-war activism, which can be defined as collectively and strategically, on the foundation of shared values, acting against all or particular wars, towards the dismantling of militarism, and towards achieving justice for those impacted by war or militarism. *The current study explores if and how veteran participation in anti-war movements can provide avenues of healing for moral injury.* This research hypothesizes that the act of anti-war organizing and opposing the very wars in which veterans' experienced moral transgression can be morally reparative.

This study focuses on veterans who served in the military during the current era of warfare, defined as starting on September 11, 2001² to include the occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as operations under the Global War on Terror (GWOT). This research will solicit the perspectives of veterans organizing in two veteran specific anti-war collectives, Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) and Veterans for Peace, to investigate how they came to these movements and how their participation has impacted their experiences of moral injury and moral unrest. This study will look at theories behind current treatment recommendations for moral injury to see if and how they are paralleled through veterans' on the ground collective anti-war organizing. This study will explore the following questions: How do feelings of moral guilt and shame influence veterans' decisions to engage in anti-war activism? How does participation in anti-war movements change veterans' perceptions of themselves, the military, and the United States? How has activism impacted veterans' mental health and wellbeing? How do veterans engaged in anti-war activism envision a more just world?

² Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) defines membership eligibility as "anyone who has served in the military (Active Duty, National Guard, and Reservists) since September 11th, 2001" (Join Iraq Veterans Against the War). I used their inclusion designation to structure the bounds of my sample.

Because research on moral injury is at the early stages of conceptualization, formulation and study, it is a powerful moment to shape the conversation around and political implications of moral injury and moral repair. This research asserts that war is not a given, but rather the result of complex political, economic, and social forces. Investigating anti-war organizing as potential for moral repair challenges these larger forces of war, violence, and occupation while simultaneously recognizing the need for individual healing for veterans experiencing moral injury. It is my hope that this research will bridge the gap between the macro and the micro, between systems of war and perpetrators who are injured by them.

“The political and ideological import of treating combat related guilt cannot be missed here: if guilt from war is not contained by the individuals who go to war, is not characterized as extreme or mismanaged affect by treatment providers, and is not presented as something that can be corrected with the right kind of treatment, then everyone else might have to wrestle with some disturbing feelings.”

- Lisa Finlay (2015, p. 225)

“Veterans who return from a war with moral injury are both the imperialist and the vanquished. They leave behind their moral failures inscribed on the bodies, cities, and soil of the conquered, and they bring those horrors home in their souls. They also return to a nation that, thus far, has proved unwilling or unable to accept responsibility for sending them to war, preferring instead to project their own dramas upon veterans as noble heroes, traumatized victims, or baby killers who just need individual therapy. In refusing to play their part in these dramas, veterans who challenge the society to engage in a deeper moral discernment process offer ways to stop the imperialist drama and face the deeper costs of war.

- Rita Nakashima Brock and Gabriella Lettini (2012, p.108-109)

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Moral Injury and Betrayal of What’s Right

While moral injury in social work and social science literature is a relatively new phenomenon, the ideas behind moral injury - that participating in violence against another people in the context of war can be personally and morally disquieting - is not new. Dr. Jonathan Shay, with his two innovative works *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (1994) and *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming* (2002), is considered by many to be one of the pioneering thinkers and theorists behind our current conceptualization of moral injury in the United States context. In these works, Shay

outlines the theoretical underpinnings of moral injury by utilizing the experiences of soldiers³ in Homer's epics the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and comparing these with the experiences of Vietnam veterans suffering from combat injuries. In both cases, Shay outlines how events that constitute betrayal of "what's right" can lead to the shrinkage of a soldier's social and moral horizon, feelings of guilt and shame, and in some cases a "berserk" state, which refers to a frenzied state of battle (Shay, 1994).

Jonathan Shay asserts that there are three fundamental tasks that keep soldiers psychologically safe during times of mortal danger, or in other words, protect them from moral injury: "(1) positive qualities of community of the face-to-face unit that create '*cohesion*'; (2) expert, ethical, and properly supported *leadership*; and (3) prolonged, cumulative, realistic *training* for what they actually have to do and face" (Shay, 2012, p. 57 - emphasis in original). When these three conditions are met, soldiers are insulated from the distress of moral injury. According to Shay, in the absence of these conditions, soldiers are at an increased risk of experiencing some form of moral injury. Key to Shay's formulation of moral injury is the centrality of the destructive abuse of power in the military (Meagher, 2014; Shay, 2012; Shay, 2011). Shay defines moral injury as: "Betrayal of what's right, by someone who holds legitimate authority (in the military-a leader), in a high stakes situation" (Shay, 2012). This definition of moral injury centers the moral violation in the hands of the power-holders (commanders, military as a whole, the U.S government), rather than in the acts of the individual.

There has been a slight shift away from Shay's aforementioned definition among clinical researchers, with more recent investigators emphasizing the role of individual perpetration or witnessing of morally transgressive events (Litz et al., 2009), as opposed to experiencing

³ The term soldier is generally used to designate a service person in the Army, but for the purpose of this paper, the term soldier will be used to refer to any member of the US military.

betrayal by an authority figure. The clinical definition of moral injury is: “perpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs” (Litz et al., 2009, p. 700). Despite the different emphasis on the actor, these two definitions of moral injury work together and are often interrelated. Litz et al. (2009) asserts that moral injury requires,

An act of transgression that severely and abruptly contradicts an individual’s personal or shared expectation about the rules or code of conduct... [And that the transgressive event is] incongruent and discrepant with fundamental beliefs and assumptions about how the world operates or how an individual or group should be treated (p.700).

War is inherently filled with violent situations and morally opaque events. It is not uncommon for many service members to feel dissonance with their actions and their moral beliefs at some point. Transgressive events do not inherently cause moral injury, but *attributions* made about morally ambiguous events greatly impact the psychological distress that a veteran experiences. Litz et al. (2009) argue,

If the attribution about the cause of a transgression is *global* (i.e., not context dependent), *internal* (i.e., seen as a disposition or character flaw), and *stable* (i.e., enduring; the experience of being tainted), these beliefs will cause enduring moral emotions such as shame and anxiety due to uncertainty and the expectations of being judged *eventually* (p. 700- Emphasis in original).

These three attributions are key to understanding the roots of moral injury as well as the path towards moral repair.

Moral Injury and PTSD

Those generating theoretical literature on moral injury have worked to differentiate it from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Litz et al., 2009; Guntzel, J.S., 2013). Jonathan Shay challenges the conceptualization of psychological distress stemming from participation in war as a disorder and asserts that it would behoove clinicians and non-clinicians to understand this distress as an injury. He distinguishes between PTSD and moral injury by using the following analogy: a soldier is hit by shrapnel in battle, which shatters a bone, causing death. The shattering of the bone is the primary injury, which is uncomplicated. The shattered bone is not what kills him, but rather the *complications* - infection or hemorrhaging - associated with that primary injury, ultimately brings about death (Shay, 2011; Garzenel, 2013). Shay argues that the primary psychological wound of war is the “persistence into civilian life of the valid physiological, psychological, and social adaptations that promoted survival in the face of other beings trying to kill you” (Shay, 2011). These adaptations mirror the symptom criteria for PTSD: hypervigilance, avoidance, auditory or visual flashbacks, and physiological readiness towards fight or flight (American Psychological Association, 2013). Adaptations that were life-saving in the context of war become maladaptive and sometimes dangerous in civilian life. The symptoms of PTSD describe and explain the fear reactions of veterans returning from war, but PTSD does not adequately capture the depth of suffering that destroys some veterans’ lives or pushes them to suicide (Litz, et al., 2009; Shay, 2012). Moral injury, or the complication associated with the primary psychological injury that leads to psychological decomposition, does both (Garzenel, 2013; Litz, et al., 2009); Shay, 2011; Shay, 2012).

Litz et al. (2009) looks to existing PTSD theory to ask what might explain moral injury and its symptoms. They assert, “the behavioral, cognitive, and emotional aftermath of unreconciled severe moral conflict, withdrawal, and self-condemnation closely mirrors the re-experiencing, avoidance, and emotional numbing symptoms of PTSD” (Litz et al., 2009, p. 700-701). Social-cognitive theories of PTSD hold that traumatic episodes conflict and disconfirm individuals’ existing relational schemas. As such, traumatic events challenge peoples’ fundamental assumptions about other people and the world around them. Litz et al. (2009) list three assumptions regularly confronted by those with PTSD: the belief that the world is a just place, that life has meaning, and that the person is worthy of connection with others. Similarly to fear-based events that may trigger PTSD, morally injurious events clash with internal schemas about the world. These transgressive acts challenge a person’s assumptions about the world as a just place, conceptualizations of right and wrong, and sense of self-worth. Social-cognitive theory holds that psychological distress stems from an individual’s inability to integrate these fear-based or transgressive events into their existing relational schemas (Litz et al., 2009; Jannoff- Bulman, 1985). For moral injury, like with PTSD, this inability for integration results in intrusive symptoms that include flashbacks, invasive memories, and nightmares (Litz et al., 2009). These intrusive symptoms are often accompanied with emotional distress, arousal, and attempts to avoid internal and external reminders of the morally transgressive event. Social-cognitive theory posits that this avoidance, while bringing temporary relief, ultimately sustains and deepens psychological and emotional distress, as it interferes with the individual’s ability to integrate a painful memory into existing schemas. For moral injury, this inability for integration will also manifest in “guilt, shame, and anxiety about potential dire personal consequences (e.g. ostracization)” (Litz et al., 2009, p 698).

Another theoretical approach to PTSD, the “two-factor theory” (Mowrer, 1960), can also be used to understand the avoidance symptoms associated with moral injury. This theory argues that PTSD emerges from conditioning of fear-responses stemming from a traumatic event and is maintained through avoidance behaviors (Litz et al., 2009). Strong emotional distress becomes mapped onto these fear-responses and is activated by reminders of a traumatic event. Similarly, strong emotions of shame and guilt are mapped onto cues associated with the morally injurious event; thus people experiencing moral injury will avoid cues and reminders of the transgressive events. This avoidance “thwarts corrective learning experiences (e.g., learning that the world is not always an amoral place, that the person can do good things, that others still accept them), maintaining the negative psychosocial impact of moral injury” (Litz et al., 2009, p.698). The two-factor theory of trauma falls short in explaining the lasting impact of moral injury in that it is based on conditioned fear responses in reaction to a life-endangering event. While morally injurious events may be life threatening, they are primarily associated with perpetration or betrayal of “what’s right.”

Differences Between PTSD and Moral Injury		
	PTSD	Moral Injury
Triggering Event	Actual or threatened death or serious injury	Acts that violate deeply held moral values
Individual’s role at time of event	Victim or witness	Perpetrator, victim, or witness
Predominant painful emotion	Fear, horror, helplessness	Guilt, shame, anger
Re-experiencing?	Yes	Yes
Avoidance or numbing?	Yes	Yes
Physiological arousal level?	Yes	Yes
What necessity is lost?	Safety	Trust

Table 1: Chart adapted from Jonathan Shay's (2012) *Moral Injury*. Using data from: Litz, B. T., Stein, N., Delaney, E., Lebowitz, L., Nash, W. P., Silva, C., Maguen, S. (2009). Moral injury and moral repair in war veterans: A preliminary model and intervention strategy. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 29, 695-706.

Morally Injurious Events

Those who have written on moral injury have attempted to understand which war events are most likely to lead to the development of moral injury (e.g. Litz et al., 2009; Currier et al., 2015; Shay, 1994; Drescher et al., 2011). In his book *Achillies in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (1994), Jonathan Shay set the theoretical underpinnings for understanding what events or situations lead to moral injury. Broadly, Shay categorizes morally injurious events as a betrayal of “what’s right.” Borrowing from the Greek word *themis*, Shay defines “what’s right” as encompassing “moral order, convention, normative expectations, ethics, and communally understood social values” (Shay, 1994, p. 5). In order to understand the gravity of morally injurious events for veterans and active military members, Shay highlights what is at stake at war. He writes:

Danger of death and mutilation is the pervading medium of combat. It is a viscous liquid in which everything looks strangely refracted and moves about in odd ways, a powerful corrosive that breaks down many fixed contours of perception and utterly dissolves others. Without an accurate conception of danger we cannot comprehend war and cannot properly value the moral structure of the army. We must grasp what is at stake a: lethal danger and the fear of it (Shay, 1994, p.10).

In other words, the risks are high. Morally injurious events do not occur in a vacuum, but in the context of war, where killing and violence are a part of the game. It is under this context that the betrayal of what’s right becomes moral injury.

Betrayal of what’s right can come in many forms. A team of researchers interviewed twenty-three mental health and religious professionals who work with veteran and active-duty

personnel in order to explore what war-zone events may lead to moral injury (Drescher, Foy, etc., 2011). They found that participants cited “betrayal, disproportionate violence, incidents involving civilians, and within-rank violence” as common themes of morally injurious events (Drescher et al., 2011, p. 11). Events of betrayal included leadership failures, betrayal of peers, betrayal of civilians, and failure to live up to one’s moral standards (Drescher et al., 2011, p.11). Disproportionate violence and violence towards civilians included mistreatment of “enemy” combatants, acts of revenge, destruction of civilian’s property and violence towards civilians. Drescher et al. (2011) generalized morally injurious events as “bearing witness to perceived immoral acts, failure to stop such actions, or perpetuation of immoral acts, in particular actions that are inhuman, cruel, depraved, or violent, bringing about pain, suffering, or death of others.”

Currier, Holland, Drescher, and Foy (2015) conducted psychometric evaluations with Iraq and Afghanistan veterans to assess which events constitute morally injurious experiences (MIEs). Similar to the findings of Drescher et al. (2011), participants highlighted betrayal, violence inflicted on others, death or harm to civilians, and other moral and ethical conflicts (Currier et al., 2015). Of these different types of morally injurious events, killing in war and abusive violence were found to have distinct impacts on “contributing to psychopathology among military veterans, above and beyond routinely assessed concerns in this population such as exposure to life threat traumas and other background factors” (Currier et al., 2015, p.60). The following section will explore literature on killing in war, the mechanisms used to prepare and desensitize soldiers to kill, and the psychological impact killing inflicts on soldiers who kill.

Training, Conditioning and Killing.

The psychological and emotional impact of killing in combat was first explored in depth in Lieutenant Colonel Dave Grossman’s *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill*

in War and Society (2009). In this influential work, Grossman starts with Army Brigadier General S.L.A Marshall's widely cited study of WWII ground soldiers that concluded that only 15-20% of combat infantry were willing to fire their weapons. Prior to World War II, it was assumed that one could be prompted to kill simply because a nation or general issued a call to war against a constructed enemy. Those who did not kill in war were assumed to be weak or cowardly (Grossman, 2009). Marshall's finding of the low incident of firing among combat infantry shook this assumption. Grossman's work attempts to explain why this figure was so low, and what changed. Grossman posits that humans have an innate resistance to killing that is sometimes overcome by conditioning. This conditioning, he argues, has become increasingly successful in teaching soldiers how to kill.

In WWII, only 10-15% of combat infantry fired their weapons. In Vietnam, it was close to 95% (Grossman, 2009), while in the next major U.S. combat operation, Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), this number was slightly lower than in Vietnam (Hodg, Castro, etc. 2004). What accounted for this drastic increase of use of fire? One possibility for this might be that militaries began to deconstruct the psychological safeguards that stopped soldiers from killing. According to Grossman (2009), this was done through psychological training that consists of desensitization, conditioning, and denial defense mechanisms. Desensitization in the military occurs in both formal and informal ways, including through institutionalized modern training programs implemented in boot camp or basic training. Part of the regime of desensitization includes referring to the *enemy* by racialized slurs, repeated drill chants calling for killing and violence, and the emphasis that the purpose of the military is not just to be brave or fight for your country, but ultimately to kill (Grossman, 2009). Grossman cited conditioning as the most significant piece of modern military training to reduce a person's innate resistance to killing. Conditioning

techniques to “develop a reflexive ‘quick shoot’” ability is central to the military training used in current wars, as well as during the Vietnam War era (Grossman, 2009, p. 255). Conditioning techniques include reenactments of battle scenarios, realistic targets, positive social and professional reinforcement for successfully “engaging targets,” and social or professional punishment for failing to “engage targets” with efficiency (Grossman, 2009, p. 256). Grossman (2009) writes:

Every aspect of killing on the battlefield is rehearsed, visualized, and conditioned. On special occasions even more realistic and complex targets are used... These make the training more interesting, the conditioned stimuli more realistic, and the conditioned response more assured under a variety of different circumstances (p. 256).

This desensitization and conditioning is paired with military training aimed at developing denial defense mechanisms. Grossman (2009) defines denial defense mechanism as “unconscious methods for dealing with traumatic experiences” (p. 257). Because of the conditioned rehearsal of killing, when soldiers in war do engage in killing, it becomes practice to unconsciously deny that one is killing an actual human being. The combination of these three practices – desensitization, conditioning, and the development of a denial defense mechanism – is extremely effective from the standpoint of militaries and nations engaging in war, but the psychological implications for the individuals engaged in this ready killing are deep and painful.

Maguen et al. (2010) conducted a quantitative study on the impact of direct and indirect killings on mental health symptoms of over 2,500 US soldiers returning from the war in Iraq. Using data collected as part of post-deployment screening, Maguen et al. (2010) found that around 40% of soldiers testified to killing or being responsible for killing during their deployment in Iraq. Among combat infantry soldiers, that percentage is higher, at around 48-

65% of returning soldiers reporting responsibility for the death of an “enemy combatant” and 14-28% reporting responsibility for the death of a noncombatant (Hogue, et al., 2004). Maguen et al. (2010) measured rates of PTSD, depression, substance use, hostility/anger, and relationship problems against reports of killing in combat. After controlling for exposure to combat, killing in combat was found to be a strong predictor of PTSD symptoms, substance use, anger, and relationship problems. In a later study of OIF veterans, Maguen, Luxton Skopp, Gahm, Reger, Metzler, and Marmar (2011), specifically investigated the interplay between killing in combat and suicidal ideation. They found that the association between killing in combat and the wish for self-harm was arbitrated by post-deployment PTSD and depression symptoms (Maguen et al, 2011).

In research on the interplay between killing in war and adverse psychological outcomes, Fontana, Rosenheck, and Brett (1992) investigated the different roles that veterans play in relationship to death and injury in war. These roles included being the *target* of violence, *observing* killing, being an *agent* killing or injury, or *failing* to stop at preventing death or injury. In their research with over one thousand Vietnam veterans, they found that being a target of death or injury was most uniquely associated to diagnostic symptoms of PTSD. Conversely, their research showed that failure to prevent death or injury or being a perpetrator of killing is more strongly associated with general distress and increased suicide attempts. This research suggests that killing in the context of war and being the target of killing manifest different symptoms and psychological struggles.

Just War Theory and Moral Injury

Moral philosophers, theological ethicists, and other scholars of the humanities have written about moral injury in relationship to just war theory (Meagher, 2014; Winright &

Johnston, 2015). Just war theory (*jus bellum iustum*) is rooted in early Christian theologians, namely the writings of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas (Chahill, 2015). While just war doctrine is an extensive, complex, and contested theory, it was traditionally defined as wars fought with just standards (*jus ad bellum*) and with just conduct (*jus in bello*). *Jus ad bellum* usually encompasses six criteria for defining just standards of war: just cause, legitimate authority, right intention, likelihood of success, proportionality, and last resort (Winright & Johnston, 2015). *Jus in bello* directs how war should be waged including treatment of combatants, non-combatants, and proportionality (Winright & Johnston, 2015). Just war doctrine has been used since its development to give legitimacy to state violence and “to draw a convenient, if imaginary, line between killing and murder” (Meagher, 2014, p. xix). The United States, where just war doctrine is all but universally accepted, has used it to give license to wars of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, including Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, and the operations designated as part of the Global War on Terror.

In his 2014 book *Killing from the Inside Out - Moral Injury and Just War*, Robert Meagher critiques just war theory and societies that legitimize wars with it for promoting a fallacy of moral protection and immunity for those who fight in these seemingly just wars. This misconception of moral protection stems from just war theory’s misleading promise of “war without sin, war without criminality, war without guilt or shame, war in which men would risk their lives but not their souls” (Meagher, 2014, p.129). Under the banner of just war theory, unjust wars can be legitimized as a positive good, creating a dynamic whereby service members experience painful dissonance in the space between society’s expectations of war and the realities of the violence they perpetrate. As Meagher (2014) asserts, “The truth is that just war theory has never made sense to those with blood on their hands nor to those whose blood it was”

(p. xvi). Which is to say, societal justification for war is not a protective factor against the development of moral injury. Rather, just war theory may actually give rise to it. Under the veil of just war doctrine, soldiers' actions during war are deemed just and moral and thus development of moral injury is presumed impossible. With this assumption, Meagher (2015) writes, "[soldiers] are expected to deny their own pain, ignore what war has taught them, and take up their civil status as heroes" (p. xv). It is in this disconnect, between the realities of war and the expectation of being silent heroes at home, that moral injury may fester. Further, Meagher argues that just war theory, rather than limiting the use of militarism, has become concealment for the propagation of war. And in the case of post-9/11 interventions abroad, the era of study in this paper, just war doctrine was used as a smokescreen to justify wars and operations of choice, national interest, and profit (Winright, 2015). In the cases of wars like these, that lack moral clarity, the development of moral injury may be more likely and/or more severe (Winright & Jeschke, 2015).

Moral Repair

Clinical Perspectives on Moral Repair.

Since its emergence in clinical literature in 2009, mental health professionals have attempted to develop clinical interventions to address the overwhelming guilt and shame associated with moral injury. Some clinicians and researchers, especially associated with the Department of Veterans Affairs, have tried to tweak existing clinical interventions to treat moral injury (Finlay, 2015; Litz, 2009). Most social work and psychology literature on moral repair promotes healing through modification of existing evidenced based practices (EBP) or through the development of other manualized treatments (Finlay, 2015). Some argue that existing EBPs for trauma, notably Prolonged Exposure (PE) and Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) are

sufficient for addressing moral injury as is (Smith et al, 2013). The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Health Care System considers CPT and PE the gold standards of PTSD treatment (PTSD: National Center for PTSD, 2015). As such, clinicians at the VA (which is the largest health care network in the U.S.) are trained not only how to do these treatments, but also to conceive of trauma and moral injury through these frameworks (Finlay, 2015). Critics of using existing EBPs for moral injury argue that PE is insufficient for dealing with feelings of guilt and shame, largely because it is constructed out of fear-based conceptualization of trauma (Steenkamp, Nash, Lebowitz, Litz, 2013). PE emphasizes modification of fear structures rather than addressing the moral complexity of enacting violence in war. Morally injurious events may not involve actual or perceived danger, and thus modification of fear structures may not be effective.

VA psychologist Lisa Finlay (2015) explored the challenges and dangers of approaching guilt and shame through the theories espoused by CPT and PE. Within these frameworks, guilt is portrayed as an intrapsychic pathology rather than a relational interaction. Guilt is characterized as maladaptive, rather than important and valuable. CPT and PE operate with this framework, constructing treatment interventions for guilt that are “dangerously acontextual, insensitive, and reflexive” (Finlay, 2015, p. 221). Finlay asserted that clinicians working with the theoretical frameworks underlying EBPs, specifically CPT, often assume that feelings of guilt are irrational and unreasonable and should be reframed or corrected. She argues that a cognitive behavioral reframe of guilt does not accurately address the moral and ethical questions that moral injury evokes. This is in part because current EBPs for combat trauma address guilt divorced from history, politics, and cultural frames (Finlay, 2015). Moral injury, and the treatments specifically

created in order to address it, attempt to be more rooted and grounded in these politics, history, tradition, and cultural frames.

In critique of approaching moral injury through existing trauma-focused EBPs, Brett Litz et al. (2009) suggested several theoretical assumptions about moral injury from which treatment should be developed. The first underlying assumption of moral injury presupposes that “anguish, guilt, and shame are signs of an intact conscience and self- and other-expectations about goodness, humanity, and justice” (Litz et al., 2009, p. 701). Meaning, moral injury can only occur if a veteran has an intact moral belief schema. Therefore, moral repair, personal forgiveness, and a return to an intact belief system are possible through intervention or treatment. The second theoretical assumption on moral injury is that veterans who experience moral injury are rigidly fixed in their beliefs of being unforgivable. Because of this rigidity, interventions must be “an equally intense real-time encounter with a countervailing experience” (Litz et al., 2009, p. 701). This assumption has implications for the therapist to be unconditionally supportive and sensitive in working with veterans experiencing moral injury.

Litz et al. (2009) assert a third theoretical assumption that there are two routes to moral repair: (1) by emotional and psychological processing of a morally transgressive memory and the meanings associated with it, and (2) exposure to a corrective life experience. The first route is best achieved, the authors argue, through a type of exposure therapy, during which veterans can examine and challenge negative beliefs and expectations associated with their morally transgressive experiences. The second route requires veterans to be exposed to restorative acts, good deeds, and loving relationships that challenge the “tainted” view of themselves and the world.

The fourth assumption advanced by Litz et al. is that moral repair is a long and complicated process. They argue that people have few built-in opportunities and mechanism to heal from moral injury: “it is difficult to correct a core belief about a personal defect or a destructive interpersonal or societal response, especially when these contingencies lead to a pervasive withdrawal from others” (p. 702). Therefore, moral repair takes time.

From these four theoretical assumptions, Litz et al. (2009) proposed an eight-step intervention plan for moral repair. These steps are: (1) connection, (2) preparation and education, (3) modified exposure to component, (4) examination and integration, (5) dialogue with a benevolent moral authority, (6) reparation and forgiveness, (7) fostering reconnection, and (8) planning for the long haul. While these eight steps are constructed for a clinical intervention, I argue that many of these steps, or a modification of this process, can emerge organically through engaging in collective anti-war organizing. Below is a detailed outline of Litz et. al. (2009)’s proposed clinical intervention plan:

The first and most primary step is developing a strong therapeutic relationship based on acceptance. The roots of moral injury are shrouded in shame and guilt; in order for the veteran to disclose their experiences of war, it is imperative that they feel safe and connected to their clinician. For moral repair to occur, clinicians need to practice holding space, both for the potentially horrendous violence that a veteran has enacted or witnessed, and for a deep understanding and compassion for the individual. The second theoretical step includes preparation and education about moral injury and the process of therapy. Third, Litz et al. call for modified exposure of memories associated with morally injurious events. Like other exposure-based therapies, this calls for detailed and present tense retelling of an index morally transgressive event. The authors posit, “the goal of the exposure is to foster sustained

engagement in the raw aspects of the experience and its aftermath” (Litz et al., 2009, p.703). They contend that this emotional reliving is a crucial pre-condition to moral repair in that it allows veterans to revisit their memories and reconsider harmful beliefs associated with the morally injurious events.

For the process of examination and integration, Litz et al. (2009) suggest that therapists prompt veterans to examine their beliefs about the cause and context of the morally injurious event and explore themes around globality/specificity, stability/instability, internality/externality (p.703). In this examination, therapists should encourage veterans to synthesize past actions in new ways that take into account context, power, the reality of violence in the world, all while adapting to new understandings of morality, good, and bad. Litz et al. (2009) stress that neither veteran nor therapist “need to accept the [morally injurious] act to accept the imperfect self that committed the act” (p. 703). The process of examination and integration should give the veteran a sense of agency while also placing that agency within the context of war and larger systems of which they are a part.

The fifth intervention step of moral repair involves metaphorically calling into the therapeutic room a person of moral authority to listen to and counsel the veteran about their morally transgressive experiences. Litz et al. suggest a form of empty-chair dialogue, where the veteran is guided through an imaginary conversation with a person with whom they have a close, loving, and respectful relationship. In this conversation, the veteran is encouraged to disclose what they did or saw, their understandings of the events and themselves, and what they think should happen to them as a result of their actions (or inactions). After these components are shared, the therapist asks the veteran to verbalize what the moral authority figure would say and how they would give council to the veteran.

The sixth step of moral repair is aimed as reparation and forgiveness. Litz et al. (2009) suggest that the therapist support the veteran in developing a concrete and realistic behavioral plan to complete “good deeds.” While this step is called reparation, Litz et al. do not suggest relating these “good deeds” back to the individual, community, or country upon which the morally transgressive was committed. Instead they focus on *making amends*, in an effort to “draw the line between the past and present and in some ways change one’s approach to how he or she behaves and acts so that one moves towards the positive, towards better living” (p.704). They argue that making amends or engaging in service based tasks will allow the veteran to reconnect with their moral values and reimagine what justice and goodness can look like.

Litz et al. (2009) advance that sustainable moral repair also takes place through healing, positive, and supportive relationships and community outside of therapy. While therapy is vital for uncovering and processing painful experiences, true moral repair comes through community support, connection, and integration. Litz et al. warn that questions around disclosure of acts of perpetration to friends, families, and partners may be difficult to navigate and negotiate.

And the final proposed intervention step of therapeutic moral repair is preparing for the long haul. This entails reviewing progress of therapy, celebrating therapeutic breakthroughs, acknowledging the complexities of war and violence, and recognizing that repair is a process and not an end-goal.

Based in part on the above theoretical assumptions and proposed treatment plan, two manualized clinical interventions have been developed in order to address the painful feelings of moral injury. One of the first clinical interventions developed specifically to address moral injury stemming from killing in combat is called Impact of Killing in War (IOK). It was designed as an add-on to existing trauma-focused treatments for PTSD, such as Cognitive Processing Therapy

(CPT) or Prolonged Exposure Therapy (PE). This six to eight session module relies largely on the cognitive-behavioral theoretical steps outlined by Litz et al.'s *Moral Injury and Moral Repair in War Veterans: A Preliminary Model and Intervention Strategy* (2009). Steps of IOK include: (1) education about the interplay between the context of war and the psychosocial and moral dimensions that may cause dissonance and moral injury, (2) identifying meanings and thoughts about killing in war, (3) self-forgiveness, and (4) making amends. (Maguen & Litz, 2015).

Another treatment for moral injury that has gained traction in clinical environments is called Adaptive Disclosure (AD). AD is a manualized treatment developed for treatment of moral injury, traumatic loss, and life-threat trauma, specifically for active-duty service members (Gray et al., 2012). AD is a hybrid of exposure therapy that includes imaginal retelling of a seminal event and cognitive based strategies (Grey et al., 2012). Like IOK, Adaptive Disclosure relies heavily on the theoretical steps posed by Brett Litz et al. (2009). AD consists of six to eight 90-minute weekly sessions. The bulk of sessions consist of imaginal exposure exercises, similar to PE. For people with moral injury, AD calls for experiential breakouts in which participants are asked to engage in imaginal conversations with a person they consider to be a benevolent moral authority (Grey et al., 2012). While similar to CPT and PE, Adaptive Disclosure recognizes that moral guilt and shame are not necessarily cognitive falsehoods or distorted beliefs. Rather, in the case of morally injurious combat events, “there are judgments and beliefs about transgressions that may be quite appropriate and accurate and yet excruciating” (Grey et al., 2012, p. 410). With this recognition, AD does not explicitly attempt to ameliorate shame and guilt, but rather attempts to promote new learning about the context and role of perpetration and ultimately move from self-blame to compassion and forgiveness (Grey et al.,

2012; Steenkamp, et al., 2013). In an early empirical study of the efficacy of AD, Grey et al. found that among 44 active duty marines, this treatment was found to promote reductions in PTSD and depression symptoms and increases in posttraumatic growth.

Critiques of Clinical Approaches to Moral Injury.

Despite the promising results outlined above, there are growing and important critiques of these two treatment modalities as well as the theoretical framework for clinical moral repair as found in clinical, social work, and psychological literature (Finlay, 2015; Winright & Johnston, 2015; Brock & Lettini, 2012; Kinghorn, 2012; Verkamp, 1993). Many critique the clinical interventions as proposed by Brett Litz et al. (2009) and others, as being too rooted in the medical model. Tobias Winright and E. Ann Jeschke (2015), theologian ethicists writing about the interplay between moral injury and just war doctrine, assert, “therapeutic approaches to moral injury, which tend to be reductionist, overly cognitive, and mechanical, fail to address adequately the whole person who has experienced moral injury” (p. 175). Dr. Warren Kinghorn (2012), a psychiatrist who works on integrating religious communities and practices with modern health care, writes in his critique of manualized treatments for moral injury, “the medical model, once invoked, inducts post-combat suffering into the means-end logic of technical rationality” (p.65). The problem with this technical rationality as found in treatments like AD and IOK, he argues, is that it creates neat and measurable scales and standards that may miss the nuanced, messy, and complex reality of veterans and their experiences of moral injury.

Other critics of clinical moral repair posit that individual therapy depoliticizes guilt and disconnects participation of war from the actual systems, consequences, and victims of war (Finlay, 2015; Brock & Lettini, 2012). VA psychologist Lisa Finlay (2015) questions not only the ability of manualized treatments to address guilt but also asks what it means to “repair”

someone's guilt of killing. Finlay asserts that IOK and AD are meant to ease the psychological strain of participating in violent systems of war and occupation, specifically the psychological weight of killing another human. In treating moral injury through manualized treatments, repair of guilt and shame is divorced from the actual 'other' that has been mistreated, harmed, or killed (Finlay, 2015). Finlay contends, "In this context, the therapy room in which a patient mentions guilt is a relational vacuum, where the therapist's role is to help the patient change his or her perspective or experience of self" (Finlay, 2015). In the setting of war perpetration, the act of transgression has a relational other – the people, communities, and countries targeted by the U.S. military. Morally injurious events, like killing, desecrating human remains, interrogation and torture, occupation, or the socialized dehumanization of "the enemy" have real violent impacts for people in Iraq, Afghanistan and other countries targeted by the Global War on Terror (Finlay, 2015).

Reverends Rita Nakashima Brock and Gabriella Lettini, in their book *Soul Repair: Recovering from Moral Injury After War* (2012), highlight the importance of radical and reparative approaches to moral repair that transforms guilt into *genuine* and *actual* accountability and amends for participation in unjust wars. In critique of calls for veterans to atone for their feelings of guilt by going to religious services, writing notes, or donating their time to "good" projects⁴ they assert, "this strategy may alleviate guilt, but it is an imperialist atonement that costs the former imperialists very little...[With this strategy] the imperialist economic world order remains intact" (p. 106). In other words, individual alleviation of guilt does nothing to interrupt and upend the very imperial projects that continue to propagate war and state violence abroad. Processes of moral repair, they argue, must be rooted in accountability of actions during

⁴ This type of strategy is advanced both as a component of Adaptive Disclosure and by some spiritually based approaches to moral repair (Litz, Lebowitz, Gray, & Nash, 2016; Tick, 2011)

war and towards the end of challenging the political and economic systems of war. But they are quick to highlight that this process should not fall solely on the shoulders of veterans, but with collective accountability for society's part in sending them to war. To truly account for the moral questions of war and to build towards collective moral repair, Brock and Lettini ask us to understand moral injury as "part of a larger social consequence of war and, therefore, not simply a private problem that can be solved by therapy" (p.112). This form of moral repair calls for an engagement with veterans, families, communities, and societies about the moral costs of funding and carrying out unjust wars of politics and profits. The above critiques of clinical moral repair share the understanding that morally injurious events have real impact on the people that the United States has invaded and occupied and that guilt should be held collectively. Moral repair, in this framework, should interrupt forces of violence. These ideas undergird my investigation of the morally reparative processes of collective anti-war activism.

Emotions, Activism, and Social Movements

Activist Orientation, Identity and Relationship to Social Movements.

As already defined, activism is the process of collectively and strategically, on the foundation of shared values, acting to create a more just and equitable society (Watts, Williams, & Jagers, 2003). Activism is a collective process that opposes societal power structures and systems with the aim of upending and reimagining the interactions between institutional systems and individual (Svirsky, 2010). This research proposes that engagement in the collective processes opposing the structures and systems of war can be an avenue of moral repair for veterans struggling with feelings of guilt and shame about their participation in war. The following section will review literature on social movements and the relationship between emotions and activism.

Political psychologists Corning and Myers (2002) define activist orientation as an “individual’s developed, relatively stable, yet changeable orientation to engage in various collective, social-political, problem-solving behaviors spanning a range from low-risk, passive, and institutionalized acts to high-risk, active, and unconventional behaviors” (p.704). This definition encompasses the broad spectrum of activities associated with activism that have been offered by social theorists. Activist organizing can look as conventional as participating and working on influencing electoral politics, to more overt and high-risk forms of action, including protests, civil disobedience, property destruction. Literature on social movements asserts that an individual’s tendency to participate in organizing and activism reflects ongoing, stable, yet malleable alignment with political involvement and action (Corning & Myers, 2002; McAdams, 1989). These tendencies towards political involvement and action are developed through early socialization processes and, once established, often endure over time (Corning & Myers, 2002).

Sustained activism over time is predicated on the connection and strength of interpersonal and organizational ties with other activist and larger social movements (Corning and Myers, 2002; Klandermans and Oegema, 1987; Morris, 1984). Interpersonal and organizational ties “encourage and support the sometimes difficult decision to engage in costly or risky behavior” (Corning, Myers, 2002, p. 705). Lisa Leitz (2014) writes, “In order to get sustained involvement from their members, social movement organizations must... develop a sense of belonging, community, or we-ness among participant, or what social movement scholars call *collective identity*” (p. 21). This collective identity, which can be defined as an individual’s connection to a larger community or institution, is constructed by participation in social movements (Polletta and Jasper, 2001; Leitz, 2014). Sociologist William Gamson (1991) asserts that collective activist identity has three interconnected layers: organizational, movement, and solidarity. Of these three

layers, identification with a movement or an organization is the primary factor for the development of activist behaviors because political “movements provide a context that politicizes” an identification with a disadvantaged or solidarity identity (Leitz, 2014, p. 22).

For veteran anti-war organizers, their collective activist identities are uniquely shaped by what Lisa Leitz (2014) calls their insider-outsider status. By this she means that veterans have intimate knowledge and experience of war, patriotism, and the military system, yet are set apart from normative military communities because of their anti-war beliefs and organizing inclinations. Similarly, while anti-war veterans operate within larger peace movements, their military histories and relationship with military institutions set them apart. Lisa Leitz (2014) writes of this insider-outsider status: “activists built a positive identity that combined these two distinct aspects of themselves through collective action. Their collective identity was built on a shared definition of the Iraq War as a problem for the military, and they demonstrated how military experiences required antiwar activism” (p.22-23). Lisa Leitz (2014) highlights how this particular insider-outsider status is strategically employed to influence external political audiences. Deploying this identity as a political tactic undermines claims of pro-war critics that the anti-war movement is unpatriotic or supporting troops is synonymous with supporting wars and occupations (Leitz, 2014). Additionally, this insider-outsider identity is deployed to exert authority and present as expert on the military and war as to build trust among the greater public and influence public opinion on the war. Utilizing these identities allows veterans to connect with and influence bystanders in both emotional and cognitive ways (Leitz, 2014). As such, this insider-outsider identity is both personal and political.

Emotions in Social Movements.

Sociologists and behavioral theorists have written on the interplay between emotions, rationality, and political action. Sociologists Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper (2006), in an article outlining the changing theories of emotions and social movements, situate the roots of social movement theory in crowd dynamics. Crowd dynamics understands rationality and emotions as being in conflict with one another. As such, early literature on social movements asserted “institutions were calmly reasonable, and crowds were emotional and irrational (Goodwin & Jasper, 2006, p. 612). This pathologized view of emotions as counter to rationality fell to the wayside in social movement theory during the growing social and civil rights movements in the 1960s. What emerged in its place was structural understanding of social movements that effectively ignored the power and importance of emotion in collective organizing. Social movement theory explored *how* collectives were able to mobilize individuals around deep seeded grievances but could not explain, “why frustration only sometimes led to collective action” (Goodwin and Jasper, 2006, p. 615). Social movement theory in the 1960s and 1970s was narrowly focused on the rationality of movements, depicting activists as calculating, rational, and unemotional actors. Problematizing this analysis of social movements, Goodwin, Jasper, & Polletta (2000) write, “by defining rationality in contrast to – and as incompatible with – emotionality, resource mobilization and political process theorists missed powerful springs of collective action” (p.71-72).

In the 1980s, social movement theories began to acknowledge organizing collectives as “efforts to transform dominant cultural codes and identities rather than as bids for political or economic power” (Goodwin and Jasper, 2006, p.616). During this time, theorist William Gamson (1992) posited “injustice frames” that depend on “the righteous anger that puts fire in

the belly and iron in the soul (p. 32)” drive social protests and collective organizing. Gamson and his fellow researchers conducted experiments in which people were exposed to transgressions by authority figures. They found that “hostility to authority preceded the development of an injustice frame” which is a central motivation in engaging in social movements (Goodwin, Jasper, & Polletta, 2000, p.73).

In writing about the interplay between constructions of morality and collective organizing, Goodwin and Jasper (2006) assert, “Shame and guilt perhaps begin to get at these moral emotions better than sociological theories of justice do” (p. 629). Meaning, it may be an individual’s shame rather than an abstract understanding of justice that leads people to social movements. And social movements are arenas where people may transform these feelings of anger, guilt, and shame (Lietz, 2014). Writing of veteran peace activists, Sociologist Lisa Lietz (2014) writes:

Participation in activism can...transform the emotions experienced by activists. In the course of working with others and locating the source of their troubles outside themselves, activists move from feeling shame, fear, and guilt about their situation to anger at the other people or the structures that caused their pain. Veterans... who oppose the Iraq War often experience guilt and internalized anger over their participation in war...The construction of a movement... identity alters activists’ emotions so that they express group provide, love for and protectiveness of fellow activists, and anger directed at structures and authorities. Activism can transform *emotions of powerlessness* into *emotions of resistance* (p. 26).

It is from this understanding – that activism can impact not only systems and societies, but the emotional experiences of the activists themselves – that I position this research. Focusing

specifically on emotions associated with moral injury, this work looks to investigate the transformative nature of anti-war organizing for those veterans impacted by war and militarism.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

This study relies on qualitative semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions. Qualitative research methods attempt to understand individuals, communities, and social phenomenon in the full and rich context of their environment. Carol A.B. Warren (2002) frames qualitative interviewing as a mechanism aimed as “understand[ing] the meaning of respondents’ experiences and life worlds” (p. 83). In order to make claims about the transformational and reparative characteristics of anti-war organizing, I looked for participants to interpret and reflect on their nuanced and varied lived experiences of activism. This qualitative exploratory approach offers a rich and complex analysis of a particular population and their experiences, with hopes that it will serve as a jumping off point for further research and exploration.

Sample and Recruitment

The Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee approved this study (Appendix A and Appendix B). After approval, I recruited participants using convenience and snowball sampling methods. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling method that allowed me to recruit participants who were easy to reach. I first contacted and recruited individuals from my personal and professional networks that I knew fit the inclusion criteria for my study. Snowball sampling, another non-probability method, asks

participants to recommend other people who fit the inclusion criteria (Rubin & Babbie, 2010). From these acquaintances, I asked them to forward my recruitment flyer (Appendix C) and email to people they thought would be interested in participating. In addition to referrals sought through personal acquaintances, I posted recruitment flyers at local coffee shops and businesses throughout the Seattle area. My recruitment flyer was also disseminated over social media sites, including the Facebook page for Iraq Veterans Against the War.

Inclusion criteria for participation in this study were the following: 1) veterans who served in the military on or after September 11, 2001 and 2) participation in any collective anti-war organizing with either Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) or Veterans for Peace (VFP).

Recruitment for my study proved to be difficult ($N = 6$). I attribute this difficulty to a number of factors. First, veteran anti-war activists are a small subsection of US veterans, who already constitute a relatively small percentage of the population. Second, a number of activists that I reached out to reported that veteran anti-war activists are often approached with requests for participation in research. As such, it is possible that many are tired of telling their story for the purpose of research. However, the small number of participants does not detract from the richness of their stories and the depth of findings in the current study.

Ethics and Safeguards

Interviews were conducted over Skype or in-person. All interviews were audio recorded with prior consent of the participant. Audio files and subsequent transcripts of interviews were saved using pseudonyms and all names and identifying information have been changed or altered to protect the identity of subjects. The list of participants' names and affiliated pseudonyms and the consent forms were maintained in a locked file during the thesis process, to be maintained for three subsequent years in accordance with federal regulations. Audio recordings, transcribed

interviews, and other thesis documents are also password protected for the next three years. After this time period, all documents and recordings will be destroyed.

At the start of each interview, I outlined the purpose of the project and the agenda for the interview. Participants were reminded of their option to abstain from answering any questions and their right to withdraw at anytime during the interview. The consent form (Appendix D) outlined participant's rights, the purpose and design of the study, and the foreseeable risks and benefits of the study. Each participant was asked if they had any concerns or clarifying questions before the interview began.

There was no financial compensation given for participating in this study. Participants were informed that their stories could contribute critiques of U.S. militarism and war and to new conceptions of therapeutic healing that are informed by political action. Further, their testimonies could contribute to research that helps to expand moral repair to outside of the clinic and into important political and system challenging settings.

Interviewees were informed of potential risks involved in participation. Interviews had the potential to bring up hard, uncomfortable, or distressing feelings. At the beginning of each interview, participants were reminded they could take a break, decline to answer any question, or end the interview early should their discomfort become too great. Further, each participant was given a resources list of free or low-cost clinicians, veteran support groups, acupuncturists, the national veteran crisis line, and legal supports in their area should need additional support after the interview (See Appendix E for a sample resource sheet).

Data Collection

Data was obtained through semi-structured interviews that investigated the relationship between a veteran's experiences of moral injury, their shifting political consciousness, and their

mobilization into anti-war collectives. Interviews ranged from 30 to 90 minutes. Participants were interviewed with open-ended questions to gain a comprehensive and nuanced picture of a veteran's military experience, feelings of moral injury, their changing political perception and belonging in social movements against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. This research was guided by grounded theory, meaning that interview questions changed slightly to reflect information and nuances emerging from earlier interviews. These slight changes did not constitute different treatments or groups, but rather reflect the exploratory nature of my study. Further, the semi-structured nature of my interviews allowed for some deviation as participants share their varied and different experiences (See Appendix F for interview guide.) Narrative data was transcribed and coded while identifiable information was disguised to ensure confidentiality.

Data Analysis

After I transcribed recorded interviews, I analyzed the data by pulling out themes as they emerged from the data. These themes reflected observed similarities and differences in response. Themes were recorded on an excel spreadsheet in order to visualize connections between the narrative data and the research questions

"We were living in one of Saddam's bombed out palaces, and I was out on this deck one night looking at the stars. And it was really clear and I just started crying, like uncontrollably. All this darkness, all this regret, just welled up out of me."

-Eric, Army National Guard, IVAW Organizer

"I realized that my past participation in war was either going to be a skeleton in my closet or I could try to make it something else. [That's why I] really started doing activism."

-Matt, Marine Corps, Reparations for Iraq Activist

CHAPTER IV

Findings

The purpose of this research study was to explore the therapeutic impact of anti-war organizing on veteran's experiences of moral injury related to their military service. This chapter outlines the findings of this exploratory, qualitative study based on six interviews with 9/11 era veterans who participated in collective anti-war organizing with either Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) or Vets for Peace (VFP). Demographic information was collected from each participant addressing their age, race, gender identity and details of their military service. Open-ended interview questions explored veterans' backgrounds before joining the military, their experiences during in the military, their involvements in anti-war organizing, their relationships to the anti-war movement, and the therapeutic impact of activism on their experiences of moral injury. A number of themes emerged about the ways that anti-war activism can impact a veteran's experience of moral injury. I've organized these themes into two categories: morally reparative dynamics of activism and harmful dynamics of activism. These two categories will be investigated in depth below. This study also produced other important and critical questions

about the ethics of centering veteran healing in political resistance that will be examined and discussed in the following chapter.

Demographic Information

Six anti-war activist veterans were interviewed for this study. All participants identified as men. Five of the six participants identified as White, while one veteran identified as Black. Participants ranged in age from 26–37. Four participants lived in the Northeast, while one lived in the San Francisco Bay Area and one lived in the Pacific Northwest.

Military branch, deployment experience, and military job varied. One participant was enlisted in the Marine Corps. Three participants enlisted in the Army National Guard. Two participants served in both the Army and the Army National Guard. Of the six participants, two were infantrymen, one was a truck driver, one was a medic, one was an emergency management journeyman and taught chemical weapons survival, and one was a counter intelligence agent who specialized in human interrogation. Four participants were deployed to Iraq: one operating primarily in Baghdad, one from Kuwait to Baghdad, one near Mosul in northern Iraq, and the other in Fallujah, a city in the Al Anbar province west of Baghdad. Two participants were not deployed overseas. Two participants are AWOL from the military, while the other four participants have been discharged. Dates in the military spanned from 1997-2013.

All six participants have been involved in some capacity with either IVAW or VFP. One participant is an active organizer with VFP, two have served as national organizers with IVAW, one participant is active in online organizing and training with IVAW, one is involved primarily with reparations activism with Iraq and doesn't identify with IVAW or VFP, while one participant has organized with IVAW regionally in the Pacific Northwest. All participants have been involved in anti-war organizing through multiple avenues including but not limited to

protests, reparations projects, art and documentary activism, giving public testimony, online organizing, and movement building.

Morally Reparative Dynamics of Activism

This section explores the therapeutic dynamics of anti-war organizing and activism. A number of key subthemes emerged that revealed the multi-dimensional and nuanced mechanisms by which activism can be morally reparative for some. These five subthemes are:

communalization of experience and community support; giving testimony and processing one's story; agency, power and transformation of self; contextualization of violence and illuminating systems of war; and making amends, fighting for justice, and transforming society.

Communalization of Experience and Community Support.

One of the primary morally reparative components of collective anti-war organizing cited by participants is the community that emerges from activism. Most participants cited immense feelings of isolation upon returning from Iraq and/ or leaving the military. Adam⁵, who was deployed to Iraq in the early years of the war, described coming home and going to his college's football game,

I remember watching the marching band and thinking, why are they still marching, don't they know that there's a war going on? Like, what the fuck? And they are playing the same song. How has none of this changed? And realizing that I had changed. But at first, it's a shock to see everything the same. I had a lot of anxiety and guilt and anger. I was so isolated.

For Adam, isolation was compounded with feelings of guilt and anger. Adam felt changed by this military experience and his participation in the war, and came home to a seemingly unaware

⁵ All names and identifying information has been changed to preserve confidentiality.

and unchanged world. Adam's isolation was grounded not only in going to war, but guilt about what he participated in. Tom, who served as a counter intelligence agent in Iraq, echoed this sentiment:

Coming back was a really hard transition. When you get on a plane from Iraq, it's almost like you are entering another world. There are different rules, different laws. We used to joke that when we came back stateside we were "coming back to the world." Going to war, being there, and seeing and participating in all this crazy shit and then coming back and going to like the mall. And nothing has changed and the world is just going on normally. Without anyone even caring about what was going on in Iraq. About what we did.

For most interviewees, learning about veteran activists was the first time they realized there were other people who had similar experiences of the military and like critiques and questions of militarism and U.S. imperialism. Imperialism refers to the spread of U.S. economic and cultural power abroad, which in this case, is carried out through military interventions and the process of nation-building. Eric, who was deployed to Baghdad as part of the Army National Guard and is currently an organizer with IVAW described the first time he saw veteran anti-war activists:

I found a flyer for a march on DC in 2007.... We rolled up on the national mall and there's like 250,000 people there and they've got this huge stage set up in front of Capitol Hill, like Congress is our backdrop. And they have speaker after speaker after speaker of well-known people. And then like this group of rag-tag, fucked-up looking veterans get up there. They have on their DCU⁶ jackets and their Oakley sunglasses...I heard a lot of them speak but the one I really remember was Garrett Reppenhagen who is a really well

⁶ DCUs stand for Desert Camouflage Uniform, used by the US military from the 1990s and phased out of use by 2011.

known member of ours. He was our first active duty member of IVAW, ever. And I remember him speaking and thinking wow, you know this guy is saying the same things that I've been saying. You know, we all thought we were going over there to do some good, and that's not what we ended up doing. We now feel that it's our duty to come back here and tell people about it. So, I was really floored, I was like wow...It was really helpful to know that I wasn't the only one, because I definitely felt alone.

Eric highlighted the amazement he felt in discovering that there were others who had similar critiques of the war and responsibility for participation in it. The act of hearing from other activists interrupted his isolation. Adam, who was exposed to IVAW at that same 2007 protest confirmed Eric's excitement and disbelief of discovering others with a common account of participation in military and similar criticisms of U.S. actions in Iraq,

I was feeling so isolated and then in January 2007 when I went to this protest, and I met 22 other Iraq veterans who were also against the war. I was like, holy shit, there are other veterans who are cool and smart and this guy is getting a doctorate and they're all super fucking smart and thoughtful. And my experience in the military was opposite. You're taught not to think. And here is this group of veterans who are thinking and they are thinking critically about their own experiences and they are trying to share it. And for me that was so healing to have a common ground to build from.

Like Eric, Adam had felt isolated and alone in his role in and critiques of the war in Iraq. Emerging from the military, where he wasn't encouraged to think critically Adam found solace in other like-minded veterans who were examining and reevaluating their roles in war. Their common experience was the basis for his healing relationships. The notion of the activist community as healing was echoed by the majority of participants.

John, who trained soldiers in chemical weapons survival for the Army National Guard, highlighted the importance of organizing with other veterans. John describes his experiences of being an organizer for IVAW,

It's important for me to find a community that understood the perspective that I was coming from in having learned my anti-war perspective through the experience for preparing for war. And by joining in community with other veterans, it gave me the opportunity to both simultaneously work on undoing what I contributed to and honoring a part of myself that still felt good, that still felt important to me. [That being] the accomplishments that I made in getting through the trainings and having been wounded and still mustering through to achieve the rank that I did. Winning the awards that I did. They are all very personally important to me. But I needed a balance. And IVAW offered that balance to me.

John highlighted the importance of finding an activist community in which he could bring his whole self, the part that was critical of the war and the part that was still proud of his accomplishments and identity as a soldier. This insider/outsider position- of being an insider to the military but an outsider because of his political beliefs- was validated by engagement with other veteran anti-war activists. Further, his statement highlights the unique perspective of veterans in the peace movement of coming to hold anti-war beliefs because of past training, socialization, and participation in militarized institutions. While all participants addressed the importance of building large anti-war coalitions and relationships with civilian peace activists, all but one highlighted the unique importance of organizing with veteran-specific anti-war organizations and movements.

Chris, who went AWOL from the Army National Guard, framed the community he was a part of in Veterans for Peace as the antithesis to trauma and violence of war,

These connections and this community is inherently countering violence... Here are these veterans who have this unique voice who are saying, we know what violence is like, we know what war is like, ask us, we'll tell you. We were there. And we know that this is not the course that humanity should be going in. Even more than a moral or ethical calling, it's just cool to just hang out with some like-minded people.

This sentiment, that building relationships with other anti-war activists is inherently counter to the violence that they participated in and produced in the military was reiterated by Adam,

Organizing is ultimately about relationships and relationships are about creating common meaning and common bonds. And that is healing. Like meaning is literally the absence of trauma. Trauma is the absence of meaning. It's an experience devoid of meaning. And so creating those bonds, creating those relationships is healing... I think all of those things: organizing, stories, language, connection, counter violence and counter dehumanization.

For veterans who are processing their role in violent systems, who are isolating because the guilt and shame they have felt because of their participation in war, the act of forming bonds with others is fundamentally reparative. John spoke directly about the ways that shame of his participation in the military led to his isolation, and the ways that having an activist community was the inverse of that shame and isolation. He reported, "If shame is the feeling of being excluded or feeling like you should be excluded from a community, then here is a community that it accepting because they've all experienced the same thing. That is healing."

Adam was quick to highlight the importance of trust in developing relationships with other activists. Comparing it with the role trust plays in therapy ("As a therapist, you can't help a

client if they don't trust you. You know, trust building has to be the first thing that happens"), he described: "[developing trust] is true in an activist community too. You can't tell a story or share a moment without that trust. And I think at times that trust has come very quickly in IVAW. [Trust] solidified and bonds have been made that are everlasting." The communalization of veteran's experience is predicated on trust for their fellow activists and larger movement. Both Adam and Eric described how their involvements in war and their feelings of guilt made it difficult to trust others. The process of building relationships with other activists took time and work. But once made, those bonds were seen as fundamental to their healing. What happens when trust is broken will be explored later on in this findings section.

Eric highlighted the ways that the IVAW community and organizing with fellow anti-war activists led to a sense of shared responsibility for the actions and injustices he had committed in Iraq. Instead of holding that responsibility alone, organizing communalized this burden. Citing research about the ways that indigenous societies helped warriors process war and integrate them back into society, he stated,

There was always a step where warriors kind of isolated by themselves, and processed for themselves. And then there was a part where they would tell stories in a community, and the communities would actually listen to the warriors. They shared the responsibility for what the warriors had done. And then they would integrate warriors back into society, and we don't have anything like that anymore in this country. When you get out, we can't even transport your military records to the VA, let alone reintegrate you in any healthy way where you don't feel alienated from society. Like when you get out of the army, they give you a class on how to write a resume and they sign you up on monster.com, and that's basically it. And other than that, they try to keep you in the military. I think that's

something that IVAW has been experimenting with without being fully cognizant that we're doing it. We're trying to have this community come hell or high water because we know that community is important to healing and that if we're alone, and we're isolated. I always isolate. Trauma makes you want to disconnect from things, and if you don't have community it makes it really easy to disconnect.... I think that my work with IVAW and all the other things that have come from that, have given me some sense of hope.

Organizing with IVAW has become a way to share responsibility for actions he took in war. Eric recognizes these processes of integrating warriors back into society as happening organically through the work and community of anti-war movement building. Again, he highlights the ways that building of community is the antithesis to isolation. That communalization of experience helped him develop a sense of hope.

In addition to the sense of shared responsibility and the cultivation of support and hope, Eric also discussed the concrete ways that the activist communities provided him support during moments of crisis. After giving public testimony about his experiences in Iraq, Eric became suicidal and checked himself into the inpatient unit at the VA. He recounted,

[When I was on the inpatient suicide unit], IVAW and the extended community of VVAW⁷ and VFP was there for me, when nobody else was....it was VFP members and IVAW members who were checking on me and calling me. [This one VFP member] and his wife visited me every day to check on me. This other guy, [who was part of the 1971 Winter Soldier⁸] and a VVAW member, called me. We had met at Winter Soldier, and really connected a lot. He was one of two people who called me while I was on the ward.

⁷ Vietnam Veterans Against the War

⁸ Vietnam Veterans Against the War originally put on the Winter Soldier Investigation in 1971 to give testimony to war crimes and atrocities committed by the US military. IVAW organized a

The IVAW, VFP, and VVAW community provided the tangible support and connection that Eric needed to survive while on the inpatient unit. This concrete level of support cannot be understated in importance. Respondents confirmed the tangible network of support that activist spaces have created.

Community support and communalization of experience was cited as a primary way that collective anti-war organizing with other veterans was experienced as therapeutic and morally reparative. The realization that other veterans had similar feelings of guilt and similar critiques of US actions abroad led to a breakdown of isolation and aloneness felt by participants. Meeting and organizing with fellow veteran anti-war activists provided processes whereby individuals' burdens of responsibility were communalized and shared with others. Participants have reported that veteran anti-war organizing spaces create a situation in which individuals see themselves, their military experiences, and their political selves in others. Trust, and the building of trust, emerged as an important theme among respondents as central to both organizing and healing. Collective anti-war organizing also provides a tangible network of support (in the form of in person visits, calls, and meetings) for members in crisis. The above testimonials show the diverse and varying ways that the veteran anti-war movement provides community and support and the importance of these communities in the process of healing.

Giving Testimony and Processing One's Story.

Another element of healing cited by most respondents was the act of processing one's past through participation in collective anti-war work. Participants discussed how their identities as veterans and histories of participation in war were often central to their movement work. As such, participants reported often telling their stories and processing their past as part of their

Winter Soldier event in 2008, in which veterans, journalists, and Iraqi civilians gave testimony of their experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan.

activism. While there were mixed critiques as to the political implications of centering one's past and one's story in activism (this tension will be explored later in the discussion section), all participants agreed that their identities as a veterans in anti-war movements surfaced through their work. This section will look at the process of telling one's story and processing one's past as an aspect of moral repair and healing for veteran activists.

All participants discussed how it took them a long time to join anti-war collectives. For many, it took years to turn towards activism. Most participants understood their initial hesitation to jump into activism as a combination of an unawareness of activist movements and a resistance to face their participation in war. They highlighted an initial desire to avoid, forget, and leave behind their memories of the military. Tom, a regional organizer with IVAW who helped found a G.I. Resistance coffee shop⁹, examined this resistance to revisiting one's past,

I know that a lot of vets who, even if they're anti-war, don't want to revisit [the war.]. A lot of soldiers understand that the war is fucked up and wrong. I know a lot of soldiers feel guilty about their role in it. Probably, I'd say, more than not. But do all these soldiers join anti-war movements? No, it's a really small group. Well we live in this society that kind of worships soldiers and worships militarism. You know people always pat you on the back saying, thank you for fighting for our freedom. And it can be really hard to go back and say, "no, it's not like that, don't thank me. What I did wasn't good." And if you're a person who's lost a lot of people in the war, it can be really hard to get up and say my friends died for no reason. That's a tough pill to swallow. It's easier to just shut up and forget.

⁹ During the Vietnam War, anti-war veterans and their supporters opened up coffee houses outside of military bases to "serve as havens for dissenting soldiers" (Morris, 2006). Inspired by this movement, some Iraq and Afghanistan veterans opened G.I. resistance coffee shops in this era of combat.

Tom highlighted the common reaction to resist and avoid approaching one's role in war and the complicated and difficult emotions associated with it. He touched on the role of society in maintaining an environment that superficially engages with the realities of war and the experiences of those most directly impacted by it. Tom emphasized how the high stakes of war, of life and death, and the guilt of surviving make speaking out against war and processing one's responsibility even more painful and difficult. But despite the pain and discomfort of facing one's responsibility for participation in war, Tom discussed the restorative dimension of sharing and processing his involvement in the military,

But I think mentally, it's actually really good to come to terms with the war and what you did there. I know so many people who've done anti-war work who've said it's been really good for their mental health. They could finally be honest and open with themselves about what they were involved in. Because trying to avoid what you did, you know, just lying to yourself over and over can cause so much mental stress and is not good for you in general...I've found that talking about my experiences of war has been really important. [Through IVAW] I've talked about it a ton and there are all these youtube videos of me talking about my experiences in Iraq. But even though it's been healing and important, it's not something I'm like stoked on, you know. It's not pleasant to revisit those experiences, but I think it's necessary.

Tom referenced the mental strain and pain of avoiding coming to terms with one's actions in war. Through giving activist testimony about his role as an interrogator in Iraq, he found healing and repair. While the act of telling his story and publically asserting his responsibility for violence in Iraq was painful, he gained moral repair through this process.

Eric also shared initial resistance to process his experiences in Iraq and mechanisms that he used to avoid acknowledging and thinking about them. Prompted by IVAW and other anti-war activists, Eric began giving testimony about his actions and involvement in Baghdad. Eric disclosed that these initial testimonies were difficult to give, and caused him severe pain and anguish. He described his thoughts around giving public testimony and acknowledgement of his actions,

At first I didn't want to go that deep into my experiences. I wasn't comfortable with dealing with that stuff. And that's why I was drinking myself to death. Just trying to not think about that stuff. [That was] the strategy I used to deal with my pain... my strategy was to forget about it, or hope that my memories would go away. That they wouldn't be there and I wouldn't have to deal with them anymore.

Eric disclosed that while he initially used drinking and avoiding his memories to cope with his trauma and moral injury he eventually,

...realized [that it was] not actually a good strategy at all. It's not like I can cut these memories out of my brain. They are there for life. And some things hurt, some memories are just painful. But I'm trying to remain present, to remain more mindful. Being an activist, I've had to tell my story, to process it.

Eric attested to how the processing and claiming his story through activism, along with trauma focused therapies, has helped him to better integrate his memories and past experiences. This act of integration contributed to a sense of acceptance for his military involvement.

Eric shared how he's seen anti-war organizing become a ritual for processing, accepting, and making meaning of the traumas and guilt of war,

I have a friend in Austin Texas that just joined Veterans for Peace, he's combat wounded in Iraq, he was part of the initial invasion in Iraq and now he's completely turned around. He's a religious person. He's totally into non-violence and peace. And he looks at VFP as a way to continue to do work, it becomes a ritual, it's almost like a practice that you do every day to deal with the trauma to deal with the wounds. And I can see this in the way he engages with the work, and how political active he's become. And it really helps him process and face the things he's been a part of.

Chris's friend has approached anti-war organizing as a type of ritual for processing and transforming his guilt and wounds of war. Adam disclosed a similar process of using activism to tell his story and create meaning out of his traumatic and violent participation in the military through different forms of anti-war activism. In addition to organizing with IVAW, Adam used art and art activism to both process his participation in war and critique US imperialism.

And I was able to be one of the original core organizers behind Winter Soldier... I saw that as a creative process. You know, as telling a story...And really these stories are about creating meaning. About creating meaning out of our world and experiences that don't always have meaning. The world is filled with a lot of trauma and it's filled with a lot of, I don't know what the best term is, but I guess chaos and destruction. And to me, organizing was a way to collectively tell a story and my artwork was my way of individually telling my story.

Adam's activism, both individually and collectively has been a way to share his story and create meaning from the trauma and violence of war.

The above passages show how the act and practice of anti-war organizing activism, whether creating art or giving public testimony of participation in war, can create a ritual by

which veterans can construct meaning out of their military experiences. This public act of meaning making is a mechanism of emotionally processing and integrating painful memories, morally transgressive events, and distressing affect associated with participation in war.

Agency, Power, and Transformation of Self.

Another theme of moral repair articulated by participants was the experience of gaining power and agency through activism. This process of empowerment ushered in a process of self-transformation. Most participants articulated having feelings of guilt, shame, and anger about their participation in the military and a sense of hopelessness about challenging the enormity of the systems of militarism and nationalism that propel war. Their anti-war movement work became an avenue by which participants remade themselves into agents of change. In the act of trying to change society, they themselves became transformed.

Matt, who deployed to Iraq as part of the Marine Corps and was active in reparations work towards Iraq described how activism became away to transform his guilt about participation in war into something just. Anti-war organizing became the way he enacted his agency. Matt, who has hesitancy to and critiques of understanding political action as a healing action, disclosed,

Sometimes you have to wonder if your intentions are as genuine as you think they are.

At the end of the day, maybe you aren't doing this for others, but just so you can look at yourself in the mirror. Because I did have to go through this whole process of making myself into a different person, because I saw myself very negatively. I saw myself as the occupier, as the imperial soldier. Or, you know, the guy that wasn't smart enough to not participate in this war. So, from start to present day, [activism] was about trying to help

the people I hurt, but it was also about me trying to be a different person. I can't separate that.

Action towards "trying to help the people [he] hurt" became a parallel process of self-transformation away from being an occupier and toward an activist against United States imperialism and towards justice in Iraq. The process of activism enabled a sort of healing by which Matt could understand himself as more than just a soldier of violence.

John articulated undergoing a similar process of empowerment by which he was able to transform the guilt of his participation in war into action towards justice,

Activism has enabled me to feel like I'm able to do something about my feelings of guilt and shame. Like I'm able to take an action that may never directly atone for my participation but that I can feel a sense of power again, and a feeling of healthy power, some sense of capability. Whereas the military took that away and very much intended to diminish that sense of myself.

Tom also expressed how anti-war activism contributes to a feeling of empowerment and agency for veterans struggling with understanding and making sense of their role in war,

I think soldiers returning home from war can feel really victimized, whether they are mentally or physically injured. People can often feel really disempowered. And anti-war activism is the exact opposite from that. It can be really empowering and give you back a sense of agency that you can be missing. And that's what anti-organizing has been for me.

It's been a really important thing for me coming back.

Participation in anti-war organizing has the power to transform veterans from victims into agents of transformation and change.

Chris characterized anti-war activism as a process of empowerment and of finding purpose out of the violence of war. He asserts that this transformation towards peace and justice is a duty for veterans trained and socialized in violence,

The military trains you for war, trains you for violence, for oppression, trains you for trauma, for tragedy. It was how we chose to live our lives, or were forced into living our lives because of economic hardship. And I think a primary duty for people who were trained for war, when you return is to learn how to contribute to peace. Once you serve the military, once you serve the nation, once you serve the empire, you should come back and serve the people, serve your community, and serve the cause of peace... That's really important thing. And we don't have... process for a soldiers coming back from Iraq, Afghanistan... to find a way to reintegrate back into culture. Because you are so full of violence, and trauma, and guilt and tragedy. [This work] gives me a sense of purpose.

Participants in this study have shared the ways that anti-war activism provided a process by which they were able to transform their feelings of guilt and shame into agency and action towards resistance. This empowerment was articulated as counter to the socialization of violence and oppression learned in the military.

Contextualization of Violence and Illuminating Systems of War.

When asked about their pathways to IVAW or VFP, most participants conveyed a similar process of learning about systems of violence and the contextualizing the current era of war in a longer history of US militarism as catalysts towards activism. As Tom articulated, "I first looked at [Iraq] as kind of like a fluke. Like maybe this was just a bad war, but the more I learned about the history of U.S. imperialism, I realized that these *flukes* are way more commonplace. This was just another chapter of U.S. imperialism." Learning about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and

the Global War on Terror as manifestations of larger systems of war, violence, and power continued through participant's involvement in the anti-war movement. In action and rhetoric, the anti-war movement aims to challenge systems and profiteers of U.S. imperialism and war rather than the foot soldiers that enact this violence on the ground. Contextualizing the war in which veterans participated and continuing to illuminate and challenge the systems of violence responsible for war is a process of moral repair. Part of moral injury is an attribution of violence committed in war as "global (i.e. not context dependent) and internal (i.e., seen as a disposition or character flaw)" (Litz et al., 2009, p.700). Therefore the process of contextualizing their participation in war while challenging those very systems is morally reparative. This contextualization broadens the burden of responsibility and guilt. Chris began to realize how the military socializes soldiers into committing violence,

Training is so very clearly geared towards making the soldier ok with participation in violence and making them feel justified and morally righteous in their cause of war. Really valorizing this hero complex in service members. And there are so many ways this happens from how they show us how to shoot the weapons to how to move and shoot, to what the targets look like, to how we refer to the enemy. It's this amazing thing. As an activist now who is trying to do anti-violence work, trying to do peace work, just that language and this sort of ground level manifestation of militarism so much informs what I do and what I fight against.

Chris was able to illuminate the mechanisms of militarism and the socialization that enables soldiers to enact violence. As an organizer with VFP, his activism is targeted at the militarized language people use to excuse violence.

Adam articulated how learning of systems of war and oppression, while healing, can be difficult to accept,

Healing is difficult and growing is difficult and painful. And learning about how much we are intertwined with this epic form of repression. Like we are the spears that have helped oppress and repress people at certain moments in history...I think that history will look back and question what we did. And communities that are speaking out and resisting are really important to uplifting and highlighting that there is this veteran community that doesn't agree with these policies. And that these policies are hypocritical to the core beliefs about our society and of ourselves. Hypothetical to democracy, to freedom, to liberty. When these contradictions arise, we have to address them.

John communicated how large systems of war devalue the lives and wellbeing of the individual soldiers who carry out the policies of occupation and conquest,

[Through anti-war organizing] I've learned that to truly take care of veterans is to stop war in the first place. Because the operations of war are not interested in the common soldier and it wouldn't be feasible if the common soldier was more taken care of. The process of military operations, conquest, conquering, and occupation makes risk/benefit calculations of the lives and the health and wellbeing of people, particularly in lower ranking, which are more injury or conflict prone positions, This is certainly inextricably linked to demands from higher political powers.

John has come to understand that veteran healing that does not challenge the systems of war is merely a Band-Aid solution. Through his organizing, he is able to resist and interrupt these systems.

Adam shared his frustrations with the ways that the diagnosis of PTSD perpetuates the individualizing of war. He argued that the overemphasis in society of PTSD as a way to conceptualize the distress of soldiers sent to war shields the larger systems truly responsible for continued occupation and violence,

PTSD is individualized. That diagnosis has individualized these issues [of war and violence]. So I become the one that has PTSD. I'm the one that has to carry this burden. And I'm the one that's fucked up. And that's not true. Our society is not rational right now. It is rationalizing wars that are not rational. Like we're hurting and occupying people. That's not rational....We individualize these issue on people through mental health at times. And through this term PTSD. And I'm interested in flipping it on its head. That's what organizing does. It points out that this whole society is irrational, not my personal experience...It's important that PTSD is recognized as a real issue. But it's also problematic that we are parading people around, individualizing it. And then they have to deal with it alone and by themselves. So why not blow your fucking brain out i.e. the mass suicide epidemic in the veteran community. We have to illuminate that this isn't the work of individuals, but of systems. We do this work through our activism.

Adam asserted that our current mental health system perpetuates the dynamic by which veterans or soldiers hold the burden of the war as individuals. He connects this act of individualizing the violence of war with the suicide epidemic among veterans in the U.S.. He asserts that that process of uncovering the political and economic systems behind war will help mend those veterans most burdened with carrying weight of the war alone.

Similarly, Eric attests to the burden of carrying the responsibility of war as an individual. After giving public testimony about his experiences in Iraq for one of the first times, Eric

became suicidal and checked himself into the inpatient unit at the VA. Eric described what happened when a fellow veteran anti-war organizer visited him on the unit,

I told him that I was wanting to hurt myself, wanting to die. And he was like, ‘Eric, if you kill yourself, these motherfuckers win. That’s what they want. They don’t want you to live a great life. They don’t want you to fight against them, they don’t want you here.’ And that was an important thing for me to hear at the time, because whatever it was, it provided me with some motivation to continue on. Like it's convenient for those war systems if you carry the burden and guilt individually. And that was like the beginning of my experience in the anti-war movement.

This VVAW activist challenged Eric to see his pain, distress, and guilt in the context of the larger systems of war. The suicide of veterans who shoulder the guilt and responsibility of war alone functions to keep the larger political and economic forces of war unchallenged and unchanged. This simple statement, by illuminating systems of war, shifted something for Eric and reoriented his relationship to the Iraq war and his responsibility in it. Recognizing the larger forces behind war gave context to his role and actions in Iraq. That recognition also provided a target for activism and an external object to challenge and change.

Making Amends, Fighting for Justice, and Transforming Society.

The fifth theme that emerged in this study was the morally reparative impact of being involved in changing society, combating systems of violence, and promoting justice and reparations for Iraq, Afghanistan, and others in the Middle East. The desire to challenge forces of war was a primary reason participants turned towards activism. Matt articulated,

I got convinced that the problem with these wars wasn’t going to go away. The same cycle of wars kept on happening. I realized that my past participation in war was either

going to be a skeleton in my closet or I could try to make it something else. And for those reasons I really started doing activism.

The process of activism became the mechanism by which Matt could transform his guilt into actions to challenge cycles of war. It became a process of making amends towards those he has hurt. The collective anti-war movement provides the apparatus through which the interruption of militarism takes place. Interviewees disclosed many ways they contributed to fighting for justice and interrupting war: money raised for children in Iraq suffering from medical issues due to the United States' use of depleted uranium and other chemicals in war, public protests calling for the end to the U.S. military presence in Iraq, Afghanistan, Guantanamo, and other countries around the world, emotionally and legally supporting military resisters, and using art and media to center the voices of victims of U.S. militarism. Many participants identified the act of challenging systems of violence, of transforming society, and of promoting justice for victims of U.S. imperialism as a critical process of healing and repair.

Chris described his work with Veterans for Peace, [VFP] provides a structure, a framework. It provides organizational resources to contribute to the cause of peace in a direct way. And of course there are things to do in our individual lives, but we can't just focus on the individual. We have to start acting as a collective, as an organization, as a people.... [Organizing with VFP] you're active, you feel like you've done something and you've contributed. And it's this amazing feeling. Chris' collective action towards peace evokes positive and constructive feelings. Activism can be seen as a ritual for making amends through collective action for justice. John explained how activism gave him the framework for making reparations for his participation in the military,

[Organizing with IVAW has been] important because I've been able to gain a sense of repairing from the damage of the military experience by feeling like I'm giving back after what I had participated in taking away... I feel like I've been able to undo some of the sweat and time and energy I contributed to the occupation.

John's testimony highlights the importance of restitution in the process of moral repair. Action towards undoing past wrongs is a central component of this restorative healing.

Eric reflected on the energy and commitment that it took for him and other veterans struggling with moral injury and trauma to create cultural shifts. He proposed that veterans in the anti-war movement take the time and space to acknowledge their dedication to and accomplishments toward interrupting war and creating cultural changes despite the enormity of their wounds and pains,

So here you are, you're a person who's dealing with their own mental shit...I mean we are soldiers who've experienced some of the worst of what the military has to offer. So a lot of us come to this work with baggage. And somehow we're expected to come up with an organizational mission and a strategy that is moving us to this future world that's better. Everyone is dealing with their own wounds...It makes you want to separate; it makes you have a negative outlook at the world and see only problems. And it feels overwhelming, and it makes you feel angry, it makes you nervous, and you're afraid...And you put people with all those issues together to organize, and it's bound to fail. And it's a testament to a stick-to-it-ness that we're still here as an organization. That we're financially stable, that we have a strategy that is like really well done. The fact that we accomplished all that, that we put on Winter Soldier...[We've] changed the culture... I just try to get people to pat themselves on the back as much as I can, because we've achieved

a lot. I mean we have literally saved people's lives. There are service members and veterans who are alive because they found IVAW, and they wouldn't be if they had not. And they will tell you that. And I'm one of them, and there are a lot of other people that would tell you that story. We changed a culture in our generation.

Eric commented on the interplay between personal support and societal transformation. Despite the individual struggles of each activist, as a collective they created profound changes and accomplished great things. His work with IVAW, including the logistical work of putting together an organizational strategy and running a national activist network, has succeeded in slowly yet profoundly challenging systems of war and societal relationships to violence and militarism. And through this anti-war movement work, individual lives, including his own, have been supported in healing and repair.

Harmful Aspects of Activism

In addition to the morally reparative elements of anti-war activism explored in the previous section, participants also described dynamics of the anti-war movement that felt harmful, distressing, and wounding. These nuanced dynamics will be outlined in this section. Subthemes of the harmful dimensions of anti-war work are: *toxic environments and infighting*; *government infiltration*; *activist burn out*; and *public exposure to attack and abuse*.

Toxic Environments, Infighting, and Problems with Trust.

In reflecting on their experiences in the anti-war movement, a number of participants referenced the cyclical and up-and-down nature of activist communities and spaces. There was wide recognition that movement work isn't stagnant. Shifts over time, in response to different external political moments, and changes in activist population and participation mean that anti-war activist spaces oscillate. Part of this natural ebb and flow has led to moments of infighting

and toxic environments that participants cited as damaging force. Adam commented on this dynamic,

I think that IVAW has oscillated between [perpetuating trauma and being a therapeutic space]. It can be an extremely healing space. It has also been, at times, a space where people don't trust each other. A place where people don't think it's an honest space. And it can go back and fourth. And I think that's just one of the growing pains of an organization or a movement.

Eric, too, observed how movement infighting could be harmful and destructive,

In my early years of IVAW, I remember all these meetings that would devolve into these terrible arguments. They were not therapeutic environments, they were not helping us process our trauma in healthy ways, they were exacerbating it sometimes. They could be triggering and we could be our worst selves.

Toxic organizing spaces have the capacity to aggravate activist's feelings of isolation, blame, anger and guilt. In moments of infighting, participants agreed their activism could be a burden and inflict psychological harm on individuals. Toxic infighting was emphasized as the most damaging element of movement work.

Tom highlighted how infighting and the call-out culture he associates with left-wing organizing is antithesis to the environment of solidarity and unity fostered in the military,

[The toxic environments is] the thing that I would say is the worst about organizing. It's also tough to be in activist spaces as a veteran sometime. In the military, even if you are against the war or questioning the missions, you are tight with your unit. You have your brothers' backs. Even when you don't even fucking like them, they are your brothers.

And activist spaces can sometimes be these weird places where people will throw each other under the bus. Coming from that [military] environment, it can feel different. ...People will fucking race to throw [people] under the bus. And it can suck. And I've been that person that throws people under the bus. Unfortunately it can get to be a toxic environment. It's a very left-wing movement thing... Basically, there is no room for mistakes. They get thrown under the bus and people don't help them grow. It can become a really bad environment. Especially for veterans, who are used to having each other's back no matter what. I mean there should be accountability for people, but it can be hard to be in spaces that are so quick to shut people down... It can sometimes feel like love the movement hate the scene...It goes in cycles though. When I first got involved, there was a lot of room for growth and it was super inclusive and supportive, but that quickly changed.

Tom's testimony touches on the tension between holding activists accountable to anti-oppressive language and actions while allowing space for growth, learning, and transformation. Particularly toxic and severe call-out cultures that can arise in left wing organizing can erode trust among activists and the movement's capacity for community support. This erosion can perpetuate isolation for activists and has the potential to inflict psychological and emotional harm.

Government Infiltration.

In addition to toxic infighting that can plague activist movements, half of the participants highlighted the presence of government and FBI infiltration into anti-war movements as a force that can be particularly damaging and destructive. Eric described this phenomenon as adding additional tension and discord to an already fragile movement,

So you mix [the infighting], with the mental struggles, with infiltration from government agencies, which we know for a fact has happened. We haven't filed FOIA requests about it or anything but we know that we have been infiltrated by police agents. It's an awful combination.

Tom cited government infiltration in national IVAW during the time of the Winter Soldier, There was this issue of people who would join IVAW to give testimony who were completely making shit up. Like they wouldn't have even been deployed to Iraq. Like they were trying to discredit IVAW. We had issues with infiltrators [in our local anti-war movement] too. It makes people not trust other people.

Government infiltration and suspicion about undercover activists erodes movement's trust and unity. Adam referenced a history of government infiltration into anti-war movements and the harmful impact it has on anti-war spaces and activists,

There is a historical precedence of corrosive interventions into these activist communities. And we have documented cases in IVAW of people being informants. So I'm not being a conspiracy theorist, like this happens. Examples of people not being who they said they were. And to me, that is a really unfortunate thing. Because for me, [organizing] has been extremely healing...[But] all of this healing is dependent on trust. And I think that government institutions know that movements are dependent on trust and I think it's really easy to incite mistrust, especially in traumatized communities. And that can perpetuate trauma and pain within a community, instead of it being a healing space.

Government and FBI infiltration into anti-war movements poses a particular concern as it relates to the reparative dimensions of organizing. Government intervention is meant to disrupt the power of anti-war movements and sow discord between activists. This leads to the corrosion of

social trust, support, and solidarity at the expense of the mental health of organizers and the potency and strength of the movement.

Activist Burn Out.

Another taxing component of anti-war organizing is activist burn out. The majority of participants made some reference to the ways that movement work can lead to psychological or emotional fatigue. This exhaustion can be due to organizational infighting, erosion of trust, or the strain of resisting large and powerful political and economic systems of war. The perpetual reminder of one's past experiences in the military, the constant engagement with systems of violence, and the pressures of day-to-day life can become overwhelming. Tom described his experience of activist burn out,

Sometimes organizing can be psychologically traumatizing. You spend all your time talking about how shitty things are for soldiers. About how fucked up this war is and the occupations. And it can be hard to continually process that.

The consistent reminders of war and the pressure to continually process one's past experience can lead to a potential reopening of psychological pain and distress. Reflecting on his experiences in the anti-war movement, Eric described a tendency to forgo self-care and healing in his dedication to political work,

[In IVAW] we've always focused on cultural transformation and less on personal transformation. It's really hard to get a holistic view [of integrating veteran health and political resistance] plugged into the anti-war movement. Because you're so focused on where you're at and where you want to go, and how you're gonna get there. So you have all these intense meetings where you're all focused on strategy and all this other stuff, and often this healing work can be left behind.

Anti-war organizations' commitment to political resistance, to organizational structure, and to movement building can sometimes lead to activist burn out. Burn out manifests as emotional, spiritual, and psychological exhaustion that can exacerbate activists' symptoms of moral injury and trauma.

Public Exposure to Attack and Abuse.

The final subtheme that emerged about the harmful dimensions of anti-war organizing on the mental health of veteran activists is the risks associated with public exposure. Part of political strategy of anti-war movements is to utilize veterans' identities *as* veterans to critique and challenge the military and US foreign policy. This strategy then requires veteran activists and their stories to be public and broadcasted. Publicized testimonies of participation in war and other acts of resistance open up veteran activists to public exposure. In this spotlight, activists can be the target of attack and ridicule that can be damaging and traumatic. Tom spoke about the attacks he's experienced as an activist,

As an anti-war vet, you're put in this limelight. You have all this critique open to you and that's hard. There are all these articles on the Internet about me, like trashing me and trying to tear apart my story. And it's fucking hard. You know, I've gotten death threats mailed to me. And that sucks. It's pretty fucking terrible.

While all attacks against someone's character or life can be scary and psychologically harmful, Eric described a uniquely painful experience of being harassed by members of his military unit,

When I testified in Winter Solder, our testimonies went on YouTube. And there was all this international press around us... We were the number one news story in the entire world for that weekend. Democracy Now spent the whole next week highlighting our testimonies, so people in my unit saw my testimony. And [they] thought I was accusing

them of war crimes and saying that they were bad people. And that bothered me. I felt very alone at that time. Because that's not what I was trying to do. I was trying to say that we were trained to use certain tactics, and we were doing exactly what we were trained to do. And it was not good. It was not just. I'm not saying that we were doing anything we weren't supposed to do. We were told to do all this stuff. And it was still very wrong. But I wasn't trying to accuse any of them, but they thought that. So I was feeling really alone at that time. When your own unit is like calling you a Benedict Arnold¹⁰, you feel like your whole world is over. You know, these were the people who you've spent the most significant part of your life with. You just went through it with those guys. You've been calling them brothers forever, and now they all of a sudden hate you.

Eric disclosed that this harassment from his former unit led to a deterioration of his mental state to the extent that he became suicidal and checked himself into the VA hospital. Veteran activists run this unique risk of becoming ostracized from and harassed by the units they served with in the military. This particular form of attack and ostracization can be especially distressing, painful, and harming.

Summary

Findings from this study suggest that anti-war organizing can be a vehicle for moral repair among veterans who are dealing with feelings of moral injury. Morally reparative dynamics of activism include *communalization of experience and community support; giving testimony and processing one's story; agency, power and transformation of self; contextualization of violence and illuminating systems of war; and making amends, fighting for justice, and transforming society*. Activist testimonies cited above demonstrate these complex

¹⁰ Benedict Arnold was a general for the American Continental Army who defected to the British Army during the Revolutionary War. His name has become synonymous with being a traitor.

processes as they have reflected on their experiences in the anti-war movement. While there are many therapeutic components of anti-war organizing, there are also elements of activist work that can be psychologically damaging and harmful. These include *toxic environments and infighting; government infiltration; activist burn out; and public exposure to attack and abuse*. The implications of these findings and further analysis will be discussed in the following chapter.

"I'm still wrestling with this tension between not wanting political action to be a healing process, but at the same time, acknowledging that it's pretty impossible that it wouldn't be."

-Matt, Marine Corps, Reparations for Iraq Activist

"It's important to remember that we're not the primary victims of this war."

-Adam, Army National Guard, IVAW Organizer

"Speaking about moral injury places morality, justice, and human dignity at the center of public attention and exposes a collective amnesia about war, its victims, and its aftermath. To listen to the witnesses of veterans who struggles with moral injury shifts conversation from the individual issues of some soldiers after war to larger questions about war...The veterans who speak about their moral injury and the cost of the latest wars on U.S. soldiers do so with a deep concern for the people they fought against. They are not asking for public interest in U.S. veterans that would disregard the realities and the humanity of Iraqi and Afghani people."

-Rita Nakashima Brock and Gabriella Lettini
(2012, p. 112-113)

CHAPTER V

Discussion

In this study, I explored the impact of collective anti-war activism on veterans' experiences of moral injury. Qualitative interviews with six post-9/11 era veterans involved in the anti-war movement unearthed processes of moral repair as they occur organically through collective activism. This study was rooted in critiques of clinical approaches to moral repair that are disconnected from the political, social, and economic forces that drive war and are detached from reparations and justice for the victims of the United States' wars and operations abroad.

In this chapter, I emphasize the major findings, discuss the political implications and possibilities of understanding veteran healing within anti-war organizing frames, address strengths and limitations of this study, and make recommendations for future research.

Key Findings and Relationship to Existing Literature

Findings from this study suggest that anti-war organizing can be a process of moral repair for veterans who are dealing with feelings of moral injury. Morally reparative dynamics of activism include *communalization of experience and community support; giving testimony and processing one's story; agency, power and transformation of self; contextualization of violence and illuminating systems of war; and making amends, fighting for justice, and transforming society*. While participants identified therapeutic components of anti-war organizing, they also cited elements of their activist work that were psychologically damaging and harmful. These include *toxic environments and infighting; government infiltration; activist burn out; and public exposure to attack and abuse*. The following sections will explore the relationship of these findings with existing literature.

Morally Reparative Aspects of Anti-War Activism.

As outlined in the literature review, Brett Litz and colleagues (2009) proposed eight intervention steps towards moral repair for veterans dealing with moral injury. This intervention plan includes the following components: (1) strong, trusting, and caring relationships; (2) education about moral injury; (3) emotional-processing of events and experiences surrounding moral injury; (4) a way to understand context and implications of morally injurious experience; (5) an (imaginable) dialogue with a moral authority; (6) a process to foster reparation and self-forgiveness; (7) reconnection with community; and (8) planning for the future (Litz et al., 2009). Many of these steps occurred organically in participants' experiences of anti-war activism. Below, I will explore ways in which my findings are similar to clinical literature on moral repair as well as points of difference. Additionally, many critiques of clinical approaches to moral repair (for its roots in the medical model, for its disconnect from systems of war, for

individualizing guilt and responsibility, and for promoting reparations as detached from the true victims of the United State's interventions abroad) are acknowledged in my findings. I will also touch on how my findings interact with literature about social movements and activism.

Communalization of Experience and Community Support. Most participants articulated experiencing extreme and painful isolation upon returning from war or leaving the military. Feelings of isolation from others and disconnection from society at large has been well documented in literature about soldiers returning from war and in literature about moral injury (Sherman, 2015; Tick, 2014; Brock & Lettini, 2012; Shay, 1994). Jonathan Shay (1994) articulated this isolation as a byproduct of the breakdown of social trust which soldiers experience after morally injurious experiences in war and in the military system. For participants in this study, feelings of isolation were compounded with critiques of U.S. militarism and interventions abroad. This contributed to many of them feeling doubly isolated and removed from potential communities of support.

For many participants, finding other anti-war veteran activists was one of the first times they met others veterans who held their critiques of militarism and imperialism. Hearing others with similar stories of the military, similar feelings of guilt and anger, and similar critiques of systems of war was tremendously important for many participants. Fellow members of the anti-war movement provided a communalization of experience for participants. This finding is reflected in Lisa Leitz's (2014) work on veteran and military families in the anti-Iraq war movement. Leitz highlights the insider/outsider status of veteran anti-war activists where activists share "a consciousness, or a world view, and identity that separate[s] them from both people in the military and the wider peace movement (p.77). The community of veteran activists

gave participants a home for this insider/outsider identity — a community where many participations realized, in the words of Eric, “I wasn’t the only one.”

Participants overwhelmingly cited community support, building trust with others, and developing relationships with veterans who had similar experiences and critiques of war as primary morally reparative components of anti-war activism. Brock and Lettini (2012) write in *Soul Repair*, about the healing power of friendship and community. They articulate, “moral identities can be found again through friendships. Friends probe and question and challenge each other to make each other more complete” (p. 91). Participants echoed this sentiment – the bonds they formed with other activists gave them grounding to start to heal. Jonathan Shay (1994) emphasizes that it is in peer community, not in clinics, that veterans experience real repair.

Brett Litz and colleagues (2009) underline the importance of developing strong relationships as part of moral repair, but they propose that this relationship be with a clinical provider. While the object of relationship is different, participants identified the same qualities Litz et al. suggests of patient/therapist relationships – trusting, genuine, and caring – as essential to their relationships with other activists and to their healing. Litz and associates (2009) do highlight the necessity of community integration and community support to moral repair, but frame it as a step after therapy rather than as a first step towards healing. My findings seem to suggest differently. For many participants, it was building relationships that became in and of itself as a step towards countering the violence of their military service rather than a step only possible after moral repair.

Giving Testimony and Processing One’s Story. Another element of moral repair cited by participants was the power of giving testimony to their experiences in the military and processing their past. The act of telling one’s story through the forum of anti-war activism

mirrors the third and fourth steps of emotional processing and integration found in Litz et al.'s (2009) intervention plan for moral injury. Built off of Edna Foa's (2006) theory of emotional processing and exposure therapy, Litz et al. (2009) suggests veterans go through modified exposure, operationalized as "real-time sustained consideration of particularly upsetting deployment experiences that will unearth or reveal harmful and unforgiving beliefs so that they can be processed (reconsidered and changed)" (p. 703). They frame the emotional reliving of painful memories as a pre-condition for change and growth. While activists do not sit in a room across from a clinician with "eyes shut so they can be less constrained by the relational aspect of sharing" (Litz et al., 2009, p. 703), participants attested to the healing experience of emotionally reliving experiences of war through the act of giving public testimony in activist forums. While painful, this process provided ways to accept and integrate their past experiences into their current worlds. But rather than change "maladaptive interpretations" (Litz et al., 2009, p. 703) about actions in the war, participants framed this processing as a way to, in their words, "make meaning...out of chaos and destruction," to "face things [they've] been a part of" and to "be honest and open ... about what they were involved in."

Participants' reflections on the act of giving testimony did not suggest that they understood their feelings of guilt or anger as cognitive maladaptation or stuck points, as literature on cognitive approaches to moral injury suggest (Finlay, 2015). Participants did not approach telling their story as a way to reframe or reassess their guilt of participation in war, but rather a way to turn toward, integrate, and grapple with it in context of political action against militarism. This reflects Finlay's (2015) recommendations of understanding war-related guilt "as an important, adaptive, relational emotion that can lead to valuable commitments and/or

reparations” and as rooted in “particular political, philosophical, and moral frameworks that are relevant for the [veteran]” (p. 226).

Agency, Power, and Transformation of Self. I could not find reference to building agency and power in clinical literature about moral repair. Instead, literature on clinical approaches to moral repair are concerned with symptom reduction and integration back into community. While clinicians may be interested in supporting their clients’ ability to build power and agency, it is not explicitly named in the literature. This absence is important to highlight. Most participants in this study articulated activism as a process of empowerment contrasted to hopelessness and despair they felt leaving the military. Participants described how anti-war movement work helped them to transform their feelings of guilt into action, their feelings of inability into power. This empowerment was transformative for participants. Discussion of these processes of empowerment is consistent with literature on activists and social movements (Leitz, 2014; Gould, 2009; Britt & Heise, 2000; Gamson, 1991) as well as literature on liberation psychology (Afuape, 2011; Watkins & Shulman, 2008).

A number of participants articulated that their activism gave them a means to transform themselves from agents of violence into agents of justice, or as Matt described, as a way to be able to “look [himself] in the mirror” again. This articulation reflects theories rooted in liberation psychology, Mary Watkins and Helene Shulman (2008), in their book, *Toward Psychologies of Liberation*, explore the path that perpetrators of atrocities take to understand and make sense of the violence they committed. They write, “to confront one’s participation in atrocities, one must... begin to evolve an alternative survival mission, in the hopes of restoring personal meaning and connection. Sometimes this can lead to despair... unless a new life orientation can be developed” (p.98). Anti-war activism can be understood as part of a development of a new

life orientation. Participants, through their dedication to anti-war activism and working toward reparations for victims of U.S. imperialism, were able to orient themselves towards a new and meaningful way of moving in the world. Lisa Leitz (2014) suggests that for veterans struggling with their actions in the military, activism provides a vehicle to “transform emotions of powerlessness into emotions of resistance” (p.26). Findings in this study echo this assertion of transformation. This transformation of feelings of guilt and shame into feelings of resistance may contribute to a new way of understanding moral repair for clinicians and others working with veterans. What if moral repair was not intended to reduce feelings of guilt but rather to transform and channel feelings of guilt into emotions of righteous anger and resistance directed towards systems of violence rather than directed inward?

Contextualization of Violence and Illuminating Systems of War. Literature on moral injury posits that *attributions* about morally transgressive events have great impact about how an individual makes sense of their experiences in war (Litz et al, 2009). Litz and colleagues highlight, “if the attribution about the cause of a transgression is *global* (i.e. not context dependent), *internal* (i.e. seen as a disposition or character flaw), and *stable* (i.e. enduring, the experience of being tainted)” it can lead to the deep and painful emotions associated with moral injury (p.700). Moral repair therefore targets these attributions. Findings of this study confirmed that contextualization of one’s actions in war was experienced as healing for many activists. By identifying the forces behind U.S. imperialism, activists were able to understand their own participation in war as part of this larger system, not of their sole responsibility.

Breaking from clinical approaches to repair, however, participants articulated that contextualization of war and externalizing responsibility for occupation was not an end goal, but rather a jumping off point. Activists viewed it as their responsibility to not only know and

understand war systems, but to challenge them. In clinical intervention models for moral repair, veterans are prompted to contextualize their experiences of war through examination and integration (step 4) and through imaginal dialogue (step 5) where veterans are guided through an imaginal conversation where they ask a chosen moral authority to arbitrate guilt and responsibility (Litz et al., 2009; Finlay, 2015). In this clinical model, veterans' participation in war is contextualized but the systems remain intact. As Lisa Finlay (2015), critiques,

It is worth noting that [Adaptive Disclosure] encourages the patient to dialogue in imagination with a moral authority figure to move past shame and guilt. In what context other than a secular, individualistic, atraditional society would a person choose his or her own moral authority, and dialogue with that authority figure only imaginally? (p. 226)

This is the key difference between the findings of this thesis and literature on clinical moral repair: activism brings these processes of moral repair outside of the imaginal and into society. The therapeutic act of illuminating the history of U.S. imperialism and directing guilt towards action against systems of violence is reflected in Leitz's (2014) ethnographic work with veteran activists. She articulated, "The movement directed their anger away from themselves and those around them by shaping it into righteous anger aimed at the architects of the Iraq War" (p. 150). Participants understood the therapeutic benefits of contextualizing their participation in war *because* it provided them a path towards action and resistance.

Making Amends, Fighting for Justice, and Transforming Society. This thesis found that for veteran activists, combating systems of violence and working toward justice and reparations for the victims of U.S. wars was a process of moral repair. While intervention models for perpetration-based moral injury make reference to reparation, it is conceived of differently than participants in this study expressed (Litz et al., 2009). In clinical intervention models, reparation

is framed as “good deeds as a vehicle to self-forgiveness” (Litz, et al. 2009, p. 704). Therapists are instructed to support veterans in developing “doable behavioral tasks” (Litz et al., 2009, p. 704). Examples of these behavioral tasks include, “symbolically (through an unsent letter or role play) explain to either the victim or his or her family the limits of one’s culpability,”; “symbolically ‘repay the debt’ by giving something of value to or an organizational or other social group that can serve as a proxy for the person wronged”; “seek out positive restorative experiences or opportunities to make amends... (e.g, registering to become an organ donor; giving blood)” (Litz, Lebowitz, Gray, & Nash, 2016, p. 136). These acts of reparation are starkly different than the acts of reparation and making amends that participants highlighted.

Participants disclosed raising money to fund surgeries for Iraqi children suffering from medical issues due to the United States’ use of depleted uranium, organizing and participating in public protest calling for end to U.S. military presence in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Guantanamo, providing legal and emotional support for military resisters, and using media and art to call attention to U.S. occupation and give voice to victims of U.S. militarism. These acts are directly tied to taking responsibility for past participation in violence and making amends by supporting those harmed by U.S. action abroad and/or interrupting U.S. militarism. Conversely, reparation acts in clinical moral repair are symbolic and dangerously disconnected from the actual victims of U.S. interventions abroad. Findings of this study reflect Lisa Finlay’s (2015) critique of cognitive approaches to guilt, where clinicians construct forgiveness as if there “is no actual ‘other’ that has been neglected or harmed” (p. 222). In the case of perpetration-based moral injury, there are others who have been harmed, killed, and occupied. This study found that only acts of reparation directly connected to interrupting war systems were felt as morally healing by participants.

Findings of this study supported Brock and Lettini's (2012) critique of some approaches to moral repair as relieving the guilt of the individual without interrupting the "imperialist economic world" (p. 106). In the current study, new ways of imagining moral repair that simultaneously work to interrupt the imperialist economic world and the forces of war and violence have been identified.

Harmful Dimensions of Anti-War Activism.

In this section, I explore the relationship between existing literature and findings about the harmful dimensions of anti-war activism. To refresh, the elements of activist work that participants articulated as psychologically damaging and harmful were: *activist burn out*; *toxic environments and infighting*; *government infiltration*; and *public exposure to attack and abuse*. Because these dimensions are directly tied to activist work, it is not surprising that discussion of these events were missing from clinical literature on moral repair and moral injury. These findings were largely confirmed by literature about social movements.

Activist Burn Out. This study found that veteran activists may sacrifice their own personal needs in order to support the aims of the movement. This dynamic can lead to activist burn out where veterans' psychological pains of moral injury become retriggered. Lisa Leitz's (2014) comprehensive ethnographic work on veterans and military families in the peace movement confirms the psychological risks of activist burn out as identified by veterans in this study. Leitz (2014) emphasizes that veteran anti-war activists are exposed to different and often more risks than civilians engaged in the same work. Sustained involvement in activism may reopen psychological war wounds. This assertion was endorsed by a number of participants who acknowledged the mental strain of having to constantly relive their military experiences publically in order to transform public opinion of war.

The particular social location of veterans and their first-hand knowledge of the brutalities of war may lead to more chronic and severe activist burnout. Chen and Gorski (2015) assert that “activism related to social justice and human rights concerns requires activists to develop a deep understanding of social conditions related to suffering and oppression...[and] this burden... increases their level of stress and self-inflicted pressure, elevating the threat of activist burnout” (p. 3). Findings of this study suggest that because veteran activists come to their work as a means to make reparations for their participation in war, they may feel a particularly heavy burden to sacrifice their own wellbeing for the goals of the movement. This could elevate their risk of experiencing the harsh impacts of activist burn out. This risk, in turn, can have adverse impacts on the strength of the movement.

Infighting/Toxic Environments. While I chose to analyze activist infighting and the development of toxic organizing environments as separate to activist burn out, Chen and Gorski (2015), in their work on activist burnout in social justice and human rights organizations, classify infighting as a primary factor in the development of activist burnout. In this study, the most commonly cited harmful dimension of anti-war work was movement infighting and the development of toxic environments. Participants disclosed that in moments of infighting, activist groups could become vicious and venomous and individuals were quick to be “thrown under the bus” for misspeaking or making mistakes. Participants acknowledged that this toxic environment had the potential to trigger activists’ traumatic feelings and psychological distress. Chen and Gorski (2015) found similar results through their work: that that a culture of bullying, attack, and undermining can be psychologically detrimental and damaging to activists.

Government Infiltration. Half of the participants in this study identified government infiltration and the distrust it sows among participants as a notable source of distress that they

experienced while in the anti-war movement. While the history and political impact of U.S. government infiltration into activist groups is well documented (Greenwald, 2014; Blackstock, 1988), I could not find literature exploring the internal and psychological distress it inflicts on the activists themselves. Veterans in this study articulated the specific ways that this provocation triggered many of their tendencies to isolate and detach from the activist community. The particular impacts of government infiltration and surveillance on veterans struggling with moral injury may be an important thing to explore in future research on veterans in anti-war movements.

Public Exposure to Attack and Abuse. Participants also named the psychological distress that accompanies public exposure to criticism and attack for their anti-war views. Participants identified specific life-threats made against them and disclosed the pain and distress this caused. Most salient was the pain caused by character attacks made by former unit members. Leitz (2014) addresses the psychological risk of estrangement from family, friends, and military community that accompanies many veterans' decisions to join anti-war movement. She does not, however, dedicate space in her book to the particular psychological pain that veteran activists may face from direct attack and abuse from people in their unit. In this study, participants articulated this attack as specifically sharp, painful, and triggering of traumatic memories and symptoms.

Summary.

This study contributes to new conceptualizations of moral repair for veterans struggling with perpetration related moral injury tied to participation in the military. This study locates moral repair through the act of collective anti-war activism. While mirroring many of the clinical processes of moral repair outlined by Brett Litz and colleagues (2009), anti-war activism as

moral repair is grounded in critiques of clinical approaches to moral injury. This study reflects literature about both the risks and power of social movement work, and applies this literature to better understand the nuanced and multi-layer processes that impact veteran anti-war organizing and activism centered moral repair.

Critiques and Implications

The purpose of this study was to investigate the morally reparative dimensions of anti-war activism for veterans struggling with difficult emotions and feelings related to moral injury. In my interviews with veteran anti-war activists, an important critique of this study question emerged. I want to give space to these questions and critiques in order to discuss the political implications and possibilities of centering veteran healing within the framework of anti-war activism. One participant, Matt, articulated discomfort with framing activism as a process of moral repair. He explained,

I think that often [activism] is framed as a way to exonerate yourself from collective guilt, which is to a certain extent problematic. So I don't know, I struggle with [this question], because I don't know how to reconcile the fact that at the end of the day this process has been extremely healing for me. But on some rational, non-emotional level, I do believe very deeply that you should just leave your identity at the door when you're doing this type of work. And just think collectively what is best for justice... I'm still wrestling with this tension between not wanting political action to be a healing process, but at the same time, acknowledging that it's pretty impossible that it wouldn't be.

Matt highlights a very important tension that is inherent to the framing of this study. What does it mean to promote veteran healing in activist work that is aimed at bringing justice to those harmed by the military? Is activism just a mechanism to “exonerate [oneself] from collective

guilt”? Is justice work for victims of U.S. imperialism dichotomous to veteran healing? Does centering veteran healing in anti-war activism cheapen the act and impact of this work?

Often justice work is framed as intrinsically disconnected from the healing and wellbeing of those involved in perpetration of violence. And there are important political reasons for this disconnect. There is an asymmetry of power in war and it’s essential to distinguish between the suffering of the perpetrator and the suffering of the victim. As Adam stressed in his interview, “It’s important to remember that [veterans] not the primary victims of this war.” Therefore activism work targeting systems of war and working towards justice and reparations must remain centered on the needs and leadership of those targeted by U.S. imperialism.

With this important distinction between perpetrator and victim in mind, this study pushes us to reimagine the possibility of bringing justice work together with veteran healing. As revealed through the testimonies of those interviewed in this study, taking accountability for perpetration of violence and taking action to interrupt systems of war can be a tremendously restorative and healing process. Situating moral repair outside of the clinical space and in political action can lead to a more restorative and liberatory understanding of moral injury and the potential for veteran healing. This study does not mean to negate or belittle the importance of therapy for veterans struggling with experiences of moral injury, but rather to push literature about and approaches to moral injury and moral repair to be more accountable to interrupting the very systems of violence that bring about moral injury. This study’s findings suggest that moral repair for veteran anti-war activists can be seen as a process of transforming feelings of guilt and shame into tangible action against the systems of war and empire. The importance and significance of transforming guilt into accountability and action cannot be overlooked. Participants in this study articulated that it was through action, through protest, through

interruption of business as usual, that they were able to make meaning of their feelings of guilt and shame. I hope that this study will contribute to a reimagining of moral repair that simultaneously works towards healing and towards justice.

Study Limitations and Strengths

This study was limited by sample bias, stemming from a small sample size (N=6), resulting in a lack of sample diversity with regard to racial identity, gender identity, and education level. While attempts were made to broaden the sample size, recruitment for this study proved difficult. As discussed in the methodology section, there may be a number of reasons for this small sample size. First, only a small percentage of the population of the United States serves in the military (one half of one percent of the total population), and of those, a relatively small percentage engages in the anti-war movement (Pew Research Center, 2011). Additionally, as someone who has never served in the military and therefore not active in veteran anti-war movements, I was an outsider recruiting from a close-knit community. Further, a number of activists to whom I reached out reported that veteran anti-war activists are often approached with requests for participation in research. As such, it is possible that many are weary of telling their story for the purpose of research.

Another limitation of this study comes from the nature of my non-probability sampling methods. Participants in this study were largely recruited by snowball sampling. As such, participants are connected through one or two people, and thus represent a particular subsection of eligible participants, thereby limiting the ability to generalize to other veteran anti-war activists' experiences.

Despite these limitations, the research questions and study design succeeded in collecting important narratives and stories of veteran anti-war activists. The findings, therefore, reflect the

diverse lived experiences of veterans who have engaged in anti-war movement work to interrupt forces of U.S. militarism. The open-ended interview guide allowed participants flexibility to explore and share about nuanced, varied moments in their life that they found important and noteworthy. This produced deep and rich data from which I was able to draw out important and subtle trends, themes, and findings. Qualitative research allowed me to bring participants' voices into the study, and together we were able to co-construct meaning from both their lived experiences and theoretical processes of moral repair.

Recommendations for Future Research

As indicated above, the sample bias in this study created problems with the generalizability. Further research on this subject should elicit perspectives from a more diverse sample population, especially taking into account experiences of veterans of color, veterans who did not attend college or university, as well as women, trans, and gender non-conforming veterans.

This study defines activism broadly and does not distinguish between different types of activism in terms of investigating impact. I recommend future research into the varied impacts of different forms of activism. For example, is there a differential experience for veteran activists doing direct reparations work with Iraqis versus participating in an anti-war march? While many veterans participate in multiple types of activism, research that looks explicitly at different forms and goals of activism may unearth further nuances about processes of moral repair.

Future research about the impact of anti-war organizing on veterans' experiences of moral injury would also benefit from investigation into different generations of veteran activists. Many participants in this study shared that they were influenced and guided by the fierce and brave work of Vietnam era veterans who organized against war. Vietnam veteran activists built

strong collectives and played a major role in pressuring the United States to end its campaign in Vietnam. It would be illuminating to understand the similarities and differences between activists of today and activists against the Vietnam War. Additionally, research with Vietnam veterans could reveal the long-term impacts of anti-war organizing on experiences of moral injury.

Another possible interesting area of research could look into the reparative dimensions of activism in general, rather than anti-war specific activism, for veterans dealing with moral injury. For example, does participation in environmental activism mirror the same processes of moral repair that a veteran experiences in the anti-war movement? A study of this nature could indicate if these processes of moral repair are unique to anti-war work or if these are processes found in all types of social movements.

Conclusion

This study provides important insight into the impact that collective anti-war activism has on veterans' experiences of moral injury. Qualitative interviews with veteran activists revealed that many intervention steps proposed by clinical literature on moral repair occur organically through anti-war activism. Morally reparative dynamics of activism include communalization of experience and community support; giving testimony and processing one's story; agency, power and transformation of self; contextualization of violence and illuminating systems of war; and making amends, fighting for justice, and transforming society. Participants also identified elements of their activist work that were psychologically damaging and harmful. These included toxic environments and infighting; government infiltration; activist burn out; and public exposure to attack and abuse.

This study also grappled with critiques of centering veteran healing within movements geared towards ending war and brings justice to victims of U.S. policies abroad. Framing activism as a process of moral repair is not meant to exonerate veterans from responsibility for past participation in war, but rather to imagine how working towards justice and reparations for victims of U.S. imperialism can be transformative for veterans struggling with moral injury rooted in their participation in war. This study finds that moral repair for veteran anti-war activists can be seen as a process of transforming feelings of guilt and shame into tangible action against systems of war and empire.

Indeed, this study suggests an important difference between clinical approaches to moral repair and moral repair rooted in activism. In clinical approaches to moral repair, therapists used imaginal exercises and symbolic reparations to help veterans release guilt and shame, while through activism, veterans participate in collective activities aimed at interrupting systems of violence and making tangible reparations towards those harmed. This important distinction highlights the gap between current clinical approaches and this study's findings, which argue that veterans experience healing not through releasing feelings of guilt and shame but through transforming and channeling them into action aimed at interrupting the structures of authority that are responsible for the violence of war.

But it is important that this work of interrupting war and opposing empire does not rest alone on the shoulders of veterans. I push all citizens of empire to take collective responsibility for the immense violence and pain that war inflicts, not only on its victims, but also on the moral consciences of those who carry it out. As Rita Nakashima Brock and Gabriella Lettini (2012) eloquently wrote,

To engage veteran's moral struggles without recognizing our societies responsibilities for war is disingenuous, self-serving, and ultimately futile... The fact that many veterans live in anguish because of moral injury while most citizens still sleep comfortably at night is not evidence of a collective clean conscience. It is evidence of a lack of awareness and accountability. We cannot uphold our moral integrity by pleading an ignorance of fact, by claiming a war is legal, or by distancing ourselves from the leaders who declare a war. To treat veterans with respect means to examine our collective relationship to war with the same standards of courage and integrity veterans themselves have modeled (p. 10).

The veterans who volunteered so graciously for this study have examined, with the utmost courage and integrity, their role in war and their responsibility to oppose it. So let us follow their lead, and support the courageous activists, from Iraq to Afghanistan to the United States, who are working, despite tremendous risk, for justice.

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Appendix A- HSR Approval Letter



School for Social Work
Smith College
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063
T (413) 585-7950 F (413) 585-7994

January 18, 2016

Zoe Rudow

Dear Zoe,

You did a very nice job on your revisions. Your project is now approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Congratulations and our best wishes on your interesting study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elaine Kersten'.

Elaine Kersten, Ed.D.

Co-Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Adam Brown, Research Advisor

Appendix B: HSR Amendment Approval Letter



School for Social Work
Smith College
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063
T (413) 585-7950 F (413) 585-7994

February 8, 2016

Zoe Rudow

Dear Zoe:

I have reviewed your amendment and it looks fine. The amendment to your study is therefore approved. We send our compliments, as your flyer is excellent. It is very nicely done. Thank you and best of luck with your project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elaine Kersten'.

Elaine Kersten, Ed.D.
Co-Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Adam Brown, Research Advisor

Appendix C- Recruitment Flyer

Volunteers needed to bring voices and experience to research!



ARE YOU?

- A veteran who served in the military on or after 9/11?
- Someone who has participated in any collective anti-war organizing or activism with either Iraq Veterans Against the War or Veterans for Peace?

WOULD YOU LIKE TO SHARE?

- About your experiences in the anti-war movement?
- The impact that anti-war activism has had on your mental health and healing?
- What anti-war organizing means for you?

This study aims to explore the reparative dimensions of activism and organizing as they relate to veterans' experiences of war. This research asserts that war is not a given, but rather the result of complex political, economic, and social forces. Investigating anti-war organizing as potential for moral repair challenges these larger forces of war, violence, and militarism while simultaneously centering the need for veteran healing. It is my hope that this research will bridge the gap between the macro and the micro, between systems of war and the individuals and communities who are injured by them.

Participation includes one 30 to 60 minute interview with a student researcher from Smith College for Social Work.

Contact Zoe Rudow
Smith College MSW Candidate 2016
(XXX) XXX-XXX
XXXXXX

Thank you!

This study protocol has been reviewed and approved by the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee (HSRC).

Appendix D- Informed Consent Form



SMITH COLLEGE

2015-2016

**Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Smith College School for Social Work ☐ Northampton, MA**

.....
**Title of Study: Addressing Moral Injury: An Exploration of Collective Anti-War Organizing
and Moral Repair Among Iraq and Afghanistan Era Veterans**

Investigator: Zoe Rudow, Smith College School For Social Work

.....

Introduction

- You are being asked to be in a research study of the impact of collective anti-war organizing on feelings and experiences of moral injury.
- You were selected as a possible participant because you are a veteran who served in the military on or after 9/11, have experienced feelings of guilt and shame associated with your military service, and have organized with either Iraq Veterans Against the War or Vets for Peace.
- We ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Purpose of Study

- The purpose of the study is to understand if and how participation in collective anti-war organizing impacts Veterans' feelings of moral injury related to their role in the military. This study aims to center moral repair outside of the clinical setting and in the community.
- This study is being conducted as a research requirement for my master's in social work degree.
- Ultimately, this research may be published or presented at professional conferences.

Description of the Study Procedures

- If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following things: engage in a one-on-one semi-structured interview that should last for one to one and a half hours. With your permission, I will audio-record and take notes during the interview. The purpose of the audio-recording is to accurately record the information you provide, and will be used for transcriptions purposes. If you choose not to be recorded, I can take notes instead. Even if you agree to being recorded, at any time you feel uncomfortable, I can turn off the recorder at your request. You also have to power to stop the interview at anytime.
- I expect to only conduct one interview, however follow-up interviews or questions may be needed for clarification. If I have clarification questions, I will contact you by email or by phone to request to schedule a follow up in a time/place of your choosing. During a follow-up

interview I will ask for clarifications on answers you gave during our previous interview.

Risks/Discomforts of Being in this Study

- The study has little foreseeable risk but I will be asking you to discuss events associated with feelings of guilt and shame and experiences from your military service that may bring up painful and difficult memories and emotions. If at any point during the interview, you have the power to take a break, decline to answer any question, or end the interview early should your discomfort become too great. I will provide you a list of follow-up supports in the area.

Benefits of Being in the Study

- The benefit of participation in this study is the ability to articulate and give voice to your experiences with anti-war organizing and moral injury. Your story can provide important critique of forms of US militarism and war while widening the conception of moral repair and healing through political action.
- The benefits to social work/society are: to provide information that helps to expand moral repair to outside of the clinic. To provide information that bridges anti-oppression and anti-war work and therapeutic work.

Confidentiality

- Your participation will be kept confidential. The researcher will be the only person who will know about your participation. The interview will take place either on the phone, skype, or in quiet coffee shop or other public place of your choice. Additionally, the recordings, transcriptions, and records from this study will be kept confidential. I will be the only one with access to the audio recording, with the exception of a potential transcriber, who will sign a confidentiality agreement. Recordings of your interview will be destroyed after three years and will not be kept on the recording device.
- All research materials including recordings, transcriptions, analyses and consent/assent documents will be stored in a secure location for three years according to federal regulations. In the event that materials are needed beyond this period, they will be kept secured until no longer needed, and then destroyed. All electronically stored data will be password protected during the storage period. We will not include any information in any report we may publish that would make it possible to identify you.

Payments/gift

- You will not receive any financial payment for your participation.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

- The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study *at any time* up to April 7, 2016 without affecting your relationship with the researchers of this study or Smith College. Your decision to refuse will not result in any loss of benefits (including access to services) to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely up to the point noted below. If you choose to withdraw, I will not use any of your information collected for this study. You must notify me of your decision to withdraw by email or phone by April 7, 2016. After that date, your information will be part of the thesis and final report.

Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns

- You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the

study, at any time feel free to contact me, Zoe Rudow at XXX or by telephone at XXX. If you would like a summary of the study results, one will be sent to you once the study is completed. If you have any other concerns about your rights as a research participant, or if you have any problems as a result of your participation, you may contact the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Committee at (413) 585-7974.

Consent

- Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep. *You will also be given a list of referrals and access information if you experience emotional issues related to your participation in this study.*

.....

Name of Participant (print): _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher(s): _____ Date: _____

.....

[if using audio or video recording, use next section for signatures:]

1. I agree to be audio taped for this interview:

Name of Participant (print): _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher(s): _____ Date: _____

2. I agree to be interviewed, but I do not want the interview to be taped:

Name of Participant (print): _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher(s): _____ Date: _____

Appendix E- Sample Resource List

Free or Cheap Legal and Mental Health Resources

Berkeley Free Clinic- Free Peer Counseling

Phone: (510) 548-2570

Web Site: <http://www.berkeleyfreeclinic.org/peer-counseling/>

The Berkeley Free Clinic provides free, confidential peer counseling for individuals. The clinic provides both drop-in and regular sessions depending on time availability and preference.

Berkeley Community Acupuncture

Phone: (510) 704 0593

Website: <http://www.bcaclinic.com/>

Berkeley community Acupuncture offers low cost acupuncture in a community setting that is aimed at providing healing and restore balance. Acupuncture can help with stress, anxiety, and other mental and physical health needs.

The Veterans Crisis Line

Phone: 1- 800- 273-8255 and Press 1

Website: <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net>

The Veterans Crisis line is a free, confidential, 24/7 support line for Veterans in crisis and their friends and family. The Veterans Crisis line is staffed by trained Department of Veterans Affairs responders.

The Coming Home Project

Phone: (415) 353- 5363

Website: <http://www.cominghomeproject.net>

The Coming Home Project provides care, education, and support to Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, active duty service members, their families, and their care providers. They work through multidisciplinary teams of psychotherapists, veterans, family members, and interfaith leaders to address the psychological, emotional, spiritual, and relationship health.

Soldier's Heart

Phone: (518) 274-0501

Website: <http://www.soldiersheart.net>

Soldier's Hearts is a healing project specifically tailored to the emotional, spiritual, and psychological needs of Veteran and their friends and families. Soldier's heart offers retreats, clinical support, workshops, and veteran-to-veteran mentoring.

The Military Law Task Force of the National Lawyers Guild

Phone: (619) 463-2369

Website: <http://nlgmltf.org/about/>

The Military Law Task Force is a project of the National Lawyers guild and is made of attorneys, law students, paralegals, and draft and military counselors whose work involves military law and policy. The MLTF assists those with military related legal issues and sponsors legal and educational work on military dissent, the rights of service members, and challenges to oppressive military policies.

GI Rights Hotline

Phone: (877) 447-4487

Website: <http://girightshotline.org>

The GI Rights hotline provides free and confidential military counseling and information on military charges, AWOL and UA, and GI rights.

Appendix F- Interview Guide

Demographic/ Military Information:

Location: _____

Age: _____

Gender Identity: _____

Racial Identity: _____

What branch of the military did you serve in?

Dates of military service?

What was your role in the military?

Where did you serve?

Before the Military:

1. Can you tell me a little bit about the reasons you chose to enter the military?
2. How would you describe yourself politically before you joined?
3. What were your perceptions of the wars (or if before the invasions, of US foreign policy) before you joined?

Military Experiences:

1. Can you recall particular events during your military service that challenged your understanding of the war/occupation? Of understanding of your role in the war/occupation? Of your perception of the military?
2. How did you process these events?

After the Military/ Activism:

1. Can you tell me a little about what returning from Iraq was like?
2. When did you first hear about IVAW and/or Vets for Peace?
3. What prompted you to join?
4. Can you tell me about what your organizing/ activism has looked like with IVAW?
5. Why do you choose to organize in a veteran specific anti-war collective as opposed to a civilian centered anti-war collective, such as ANSWER or Code Pink?

6. How you found community in organizing?
7. Why do you organize?
8. Have there been any particular organizing moments that stand out to you? Any campaigns that you feel are particularly meaningful?
9. What has been the most meaningful thing that has come from your activism/ organizing?