

# The Social Deconstruction of Moral Injury in Combat Veterans: Homecoming and Healing through Cosmopolitan Communication

*Presented During:* The Presence of Our Practice: Applications of Communication Theory Outside of Academia

**Sponsor: Applied Communication Division**

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As the current generation of combat veterans returns home and begins to tell their stories, we are beginning to see a signature characteristic of many of the participants as manifestations of "moral injury," or the impact of difficult decisions and situations in service. From both phenomenological and somatic standpoints, moral injury is experienced in a different way that posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and therefore should be managed and treated differently. For many returning soldiers, being formally diagnosed with PTSD is perceived as a sign of weakness, and also subjects them to clinical treatment for a mental illness. Both of these are stigmatizing, particularly to the warrior mentality, which focuses on strength and service to others. This paper and presentation address the dynamics of Cosmopolitan Communication as a method of understanding the nature of moral injury, and a way of assisting returning veterans to make an intercultural transition from a combat environment where one set of moral standards and logics apply, and the very different social worlds of campus, community, and workplace.

This examination will be framed in the theory of cosmopolitan communication as outlined by W. Barnett Pearce (1989). Outcomes include the experience of increased levels of mutual understanding and appreciation (coherence) across cultural divides. Discussion will center around the integrative and healing effects at the individual, subcultural, and global levels.

## **Author**

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