INTRODUCTION

UNTOLD STORIES, HIDDEN WOUNDS—WAR TRAUMA AND ITS TREATMENT:
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We had several goals when inviting speakers of various disciplines to share their perspectives on war trauma and its treatments: To find a way into the experiences of today’s soldiers and veterans; to reclaim our relationships to these men and women; and to reconsider what they might need of us as clinicians, researchers, policymakers, and citizens.

Through this learning, we hoped to confront the dissociation and disconnection between those attending a conference in a small town in Massachusetts and the soldiers and veterans acting on our behalfs thousands of miles away. This was the frame for the 2012 Fall Conference of the Erikson Institute at the Austen Riggs Center, entitled “Untold Stories, Hidden Wounds: War Trauma and Its Treatment.” Here, in an invited collection of papers, we bring you the voices of those who presented at the conference.

Among the presenters, there was variety, not only by discipline but also in voice and in medium used to present. Here, we represent these in varying formats and tones—some more academic, others less formal. Commentary is woven into more traditional papers, and there are two interviews. All are inspired by the authors’ time spent talking with soldiers, veterans, and survivors of torture. As Jonathan Shay, MD, PhD (Shay, 2014, pp. 182–191), a psychiatrist retired from a career in the Department of Veterans’ Affairs Outpatient Clinic in Boston, Massachusetts, and author of the acclaimed Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character (Shay, 1994), suggests, it is imperative to consider one’s voice when writing about and speaking with veterans who have had their trust in authority shattered; you will find the straight talk he champions in several of the pieces.

You will also find interviews of two of the presenters who showed videos at the conference—one a feature film and one a training video. Filmmaker and Professor of Art at Williams College, Liza Johnson showed and, via Skype, discussed her evocative and award-winning film, Return (Harlan, Howe, & Johnson, 2011), which focuses on the experience of a woman in the National Guard as she returns from deployment to a war
zone. Here, in a discussion with me (Biedermann, 2014, pp. 245–254), Ms. Johnson introduces us to her process as a filmmaker and to the genre of coming-home films. In the training video “Psychotherapy for Chronic PTSD: A Vietnam Vet’s Journey,” (available at www.giftfromwithin.org), Frank Ochberg, MD, a pioneer in the study of psychological trauma and former member of the committee that defined posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), demonstrated several techniques he has used when working with veterans of the Vietnam War. In collaboration with M. Gerard Fromm, PhD (2014, pp. 206–216), Conference Director, and Evelyn Stefansson Nef, past Director of the Erikson Institute at the Austen Riggs Center, Dr. Fromm reflects on his personal connections to his work and reconsiders the therapeutic action of his interventions through a psychoanalytic, primarily Winnicottian, lens.

Several other authors challenge the conceptual model underlying the diagnosis of PTSD, asking us to reconsider the unique impact of what Dr. Jonathan Shay (Shay, 2014, pp. 182–191) has described as “moral injury,” the psychological and social aftermath following the “betrayal of what is right by someone who holds legitimate authority in a high stakes situation” (p. 182). Whereas Dr. Shay (2014) outlines the literary and historical roots of moral injury in Greek narrative, Brett Litz, PhD (2014, pp. 192–205), a researcher, clinical psychologist, and professor in the Departments of Psychiatry and Psychology at Boston University as well as Director of the Mental Health Core of the Massachusetts Veterans Epidemiological Research and Information Center at the Veterans’ Affairs Boston Health Care System, refashions the definition and offers a cognitive behavioral perspective regarding its treatment. He reviews relevant literature before thoughtfully critiquing it and making practical suggestions for clinicians. Steven Xenakis, MD (2014, pp. 236–244), Retired U.S. Army Brigadier General, former advisor to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and founder of the Center for Translational Medicine, details the lived realities of soldiers today, notes the failure of the systems designed to treat them (including neglect of the impact of traumatic brain injury and other comorbid medical conditions), and proposes a more integrative, holistic, systems-based model of care.

Nancy Sherman, PhD (2014, pp. 217–245), a Professor at Georgetown University, Faculty Affiliate at Georgetown’s Kennedy Institute, Instructor at the Georgetown University Law Center, and 2013 Guggenheim Fellow, brings a philosopher’s perspective. Based on her experiences as Distinguished Chair in Ethics at the United States Naval Academy and her research for Untold War: Inside the Hearts, Minds, and Souls of our Soldiers (Sherman, 2011), she presents the concept of self-empathy, a stance she suggests is necessary to confront the recalcitrant shame plaguing the moral consciences of our soldiers. Bearing witness to one’s self might, in Dr. Sherman’s estimation, promote a fairer self-assessment of culpability and agency.

Finally, from her professional perspective as an expert on terrorism and personal perspective as a survivor of rape as discussed in her memoir, Denial: A Memoir of Terror (Stern, 2010), Jessica Stern, PhD, lecturer and Academic Director of the Program on Terrorism and the Law at Harvard Law School, member of President Clinton’s National Security Council, and 2009 Guggenheim Fellow, offers a startling review of the emotional and fiscal costs of the war on terrorism and the ways in which contemporary warfare may increase the risk of developing PTSD (Stern, 2014, pp. 255–261).

Across these perspectives, you will hear calls for clinical and social responsiveness to what is neglected in current diagnostic and treatment models, particularly moral injury and shame. As the conference closed, there was a plenary discussion in which participants reflected on the need for more opportunities to restore the link between civilians and the
soldiers and veterans serving on their behalf, and to address their experience communally. My hope is that this collection of pieces will inspire the same.

Since the conference, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are winding down, and we, as a country, are engaged in, or considering entering into, new conflicts. As clinicians, researchers, and citizens, we have the opportunity to respond to and learn from returning soldiers’ and veterans’ needs. It is with deep gratitude to Elliot Jurist, PhD, PhD, the Editor of *Psychoanalytic Psychology* who conceived of this collection, that I introduce you to these clinicians, researchers, and scholars.

References


