

## Background/Problem

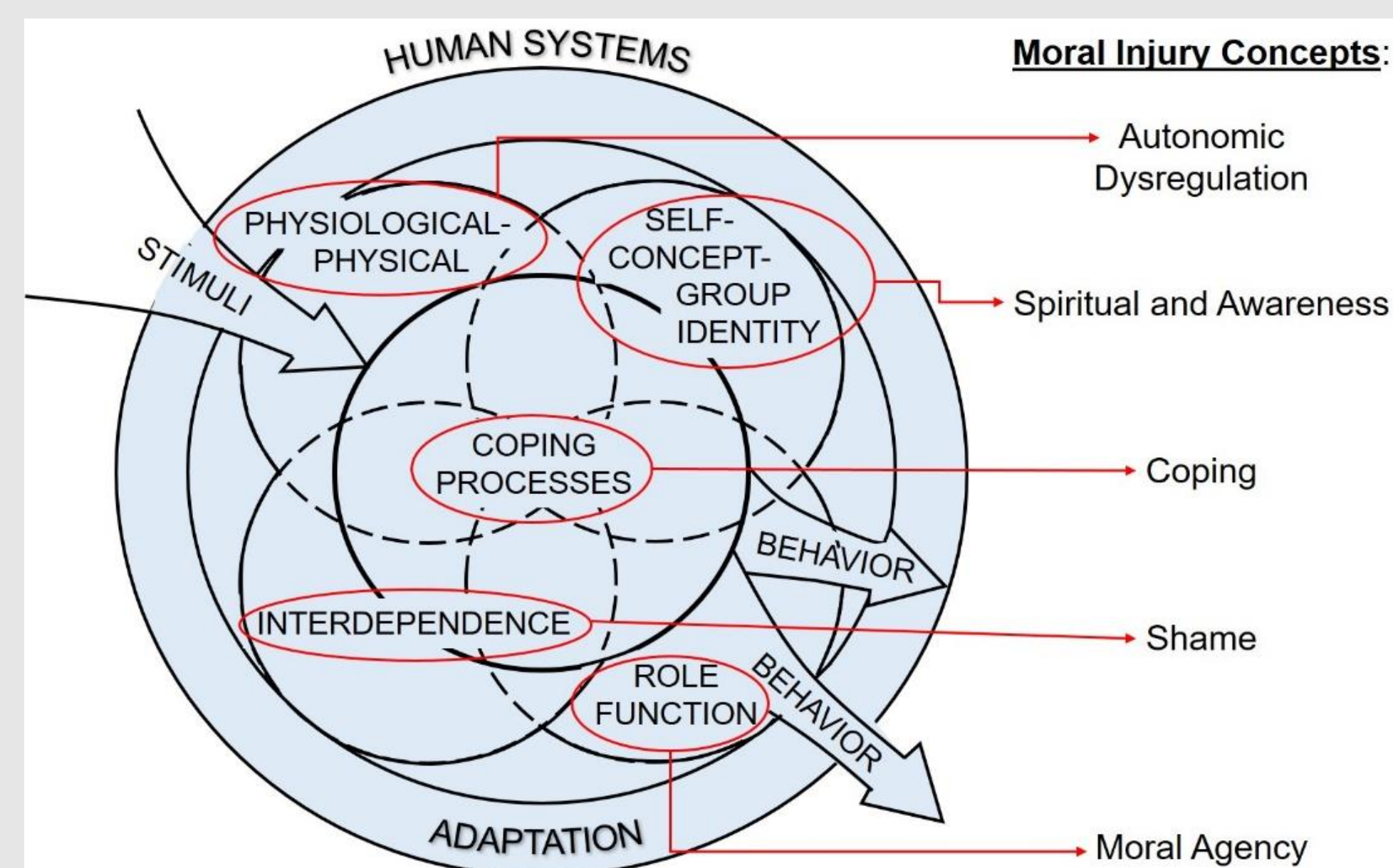
### More veterans die by suicide, than fall to the enemy

- Moral Injury (MI) is the damage done to one's conscience or moral compass when the person perpetrates, witnesses, or fails to prevent acts that transgress one's own moral beliefs, values, or ethical code of conduct (Litz et al., 2009)
- 22 veterans commit suicide each day
- Across all ages veteran suicide is 1.5 times higher than non-veterans
- Between 2005 and 2016, suicide rate for veterans rose a staggering 80%
- Validation of the concept of MI in veteran healthcare may lead to enhanced understanding, improved screening, and treatment for those affected

## Methodology

- The project utilized focus groups
- Selection Process: stakeholders who worked with veterans and snowball sampling
- Dual-moderator focus group sessions
- Two 60-minute focus group sessions were conducted, one to identify characteristics of MI and the other to refine the concepts and generate approaches to promote adaptation
- 14 pre-determined questions developed by project team to generate discussion
- Recognizing that veteran self-harm is an intense topic; therefore if a focus groups participant decided to leave they were advised to use a "thumbs up" or "thumbs down" to indicate a need for assistance
- Thematic analysis of verbatim transcript; themes checked by second analyst
- The project was approved by IRBs of both Samford University and Grayson College
- Themes were separated into the Roy Adaptation Model (RAM) utilizing the four adaptive modes: physiological, self-concept, interdependence, and role function

## Theoretical Framework



## Purpose



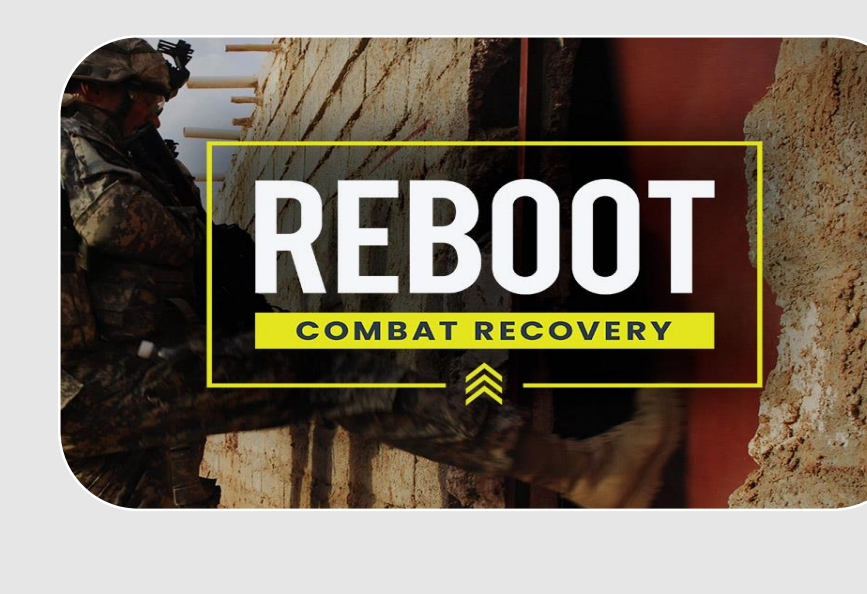
Create Provider and Veteran Awareness



Diminish Shame



Decrease Barriers to Treatment



Prompt Creation of Improved Therapies

### Objectives:

- 1) Provide stakeholder validation and application of the concept of MI
- 2) Build provider and veteran awareness surrounding the concept of MI to reduce self-harm
- 3) Create strategies to diminish shame
- 4) Use focus group insight to prompt the creation of new therapies

## Results

### Physiological:

- Sympathetic and Parasympathetic Systems
- Internal vs. External Triggers
- Anxiety and Depression

"PTSD you have physical triggers like a smell or a noise or something else."

"You can't control the physiological pain, but you can control your actions. In the military we don't always have the ability to control our actions."

"MI is more of a thought reflective process than high sensitivity trigger like a car backfiring triggers a physiological response to the peripheral nervous system."

### Self-Concept: Group Identity

- Group Identity
- Sense of Purpose
- Reflection

"People no longer self-reflect, they reflect what everyone else thinks about them. That is why you only see positive stuff on Facebook."

"Society is not taught self-reflection."

### Interdependence

- Relationships, Relational Integrity
- Thought Process
- Stigma

"Their view of normal has changed."

"I don't deserve this., but I did this, I don't deserve help, and I am ashamed."

"You have adjusted yourself to behave because of your combat environment, which is no longer acceptable in your current environment."

### Role Function

- Role in Society
- Group Identity
- Boundaries
- Mistrust, Betrayal, & Guilt

"He looks the same, why doesn't he act the same?"

"They have an internal indicator of right and wrong. The switch is in the wrong direction."

"He sees himself reflected as a monster, and asks, How did I become this monster?"

"The veteran believes himself to be irredeemable."

"MI changes the thought process and therefore their fundamental identity."

## Discussion

- The RAM provides perspective for developing screening criteria, which identifies maladaptive coping strategies that address the focal, contextual, and residual stimuli that affect the human systems
- Associating these elements within the RAM components of physiological, self-concept, interdependence, and role-function, the project team identified themes and created an awareness campaign targeting veterans, families, and community veteran liaisons
- The awareness campaign centers on utilizing the "Battle Buddies for Life" slogan. The slogan signifies that no veteran is alone in their struggles

## Acknowledgements

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