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Abstract

This paper presents the quantitative portion of a mixed methods study of moral injury among professionals in K-12 public education. Using a cross-sectional correlational survey design, 218 licensed K-12 professionals from 68 schools in one urban school district in the Midwest completed an on-line survey that included measures of moral injury and emotional and behavioral correlates. The K-12 professionals exhibited levels of moral injury similar to those experienced by military veterans. Correlational analyses found that experiences of moral injury were associated with feelings of guilt, troubled conscience, burnout, and the intention to leave one's job. Linear regression analyses demonstrated that professionals working in high-poverty, racially segregated schools were significantly more likely to endorse experiences of moral injury. These findings reinforce the significance of the intersectionality of race and class in reproducing oppressive and immoral educational practices and outcomes. A deeper understanding of and greater attention to potential sources of moral injury is critical in order to foster a more just and ethical education system.

Key words: Moral injury, moral challenges in K-12 education, survey research, burnout

Originally coined by mental health professionals working with American military veterans (Litz et al., 2009; Shay, 1994; 2014), moral injury refers to the lasting emotional, psychological, and existential harm that occurs when an individual "perpetrates, fails to prevent, bears witness to, or learns about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations" (Litz et al., 2009, p. 700). Moral injury occurs when an individual experiences deeply troubling cognitive dissonance between their internal moral code and the actions that he or she engaged in or witnessed (Litz et al., 2009). Symptoms of moral injury include guilt, shame, anxiety, depression, and anger (Dombo, Gray, & Early, 2013; Jinkerson, 2016; Litz et al., 2009) and can lead to a loss of trust in oneself or others, existential dread, and deep demoralization (Jinkerson, 2016). These symptoms can be long-lasting, do not resolve easily on their own, and are often resistant to typical psychological treatments for trauma (Litz et al., 2009). The damage to one's internal moral schema or moral belief system is a particularly significant outcome of moral injury that can lead to irreparable change in an individual's self-identity (Dombo et al., 2013). Moral injury causes a "disruption in an individual's confidence and expectations about one's own or others' motivation or capacity to behave in a just and ethical manner" (Drescher, et al., 2011, p. 9), and a "breakdown in global meaning" (Currier, Holland, Rojas-Flores, Herrera, & Foy, 2015a, p. 26).

The majority of research on moral injury has occurred within the military (Haight, Sugrue, Calhoun, & Black, 2016) but a handful of scholars have begun to explore its applicability among populations in other morally high-stakes contexts, such as refugees (Nickerson et al., 2015), teachers in violent areas of El Salvador (Currier et al., 2015a), women with substance abuse histories (Hartman, 2015), women who are homeless (Otte, 2015), and parents and professionals involved in the Child Protection System (Haight, Sugrue, Calhoun, &

Black, 2017a; Haight, Sugrue, & Calhoun, 2017). Keefe-Perry (2016) and Levinson (2015) have proposed the relevance of moral injury to the American public education context, due to the morally-complex and high-stakes natures of the settings in which educators work and the ethically-challenging actions they are often required to take. Specifically, Levinson (2015) argues that educators are frequently faced with situations in which they "have the obligation to enact justice, but . . . have to take action under conditions in which no just action is possible" (p. 206). This inability to act justly is a type of moral transgression, which results in moral injury (Levinson, 2015; Litz et al., 2009). Keefe-Perry (2016) hypothesizes that moral injury may be widespread among public school teachers in the U.S. In the age of high-stakes testing, widening racial and economic achievement gaps, and zero-tolerance discipline policies, teachers are faced with "a daily struggle between a desire to feel like you are part of a system that produces good in the world and piercing evidence to the contrary" (Keefe-Perry, 2016, p. 7).

The purpose of this study was to explore the extent of and factors associated with moral injury among professionals in K-12 education. "Professionals in K-12 education" refers to all professionally licensed non-administrative staff who have direct contact with students, including teachers, school social workers, school psychologists, school counselors, speech pathologists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, and school nurses. In addition to psychological distress, moral injury may result in decreased compassion (Haight, Sugrue, Calhoun, & Black, 2017b; Keefe-Perry, 2016), normalizing of problematic behavior and unethical decisions (Dudzinski, 2016; Webster & Bayliss, 2000), burnout (Currier et al., 2015a) and eventual exit from the profession (Keefe-Perry, 2016; Levinson, 2015). More importantly, the presence of moral injury among educators signals that aspects of the education system are unjust and immoral. Moral injury is not an individual psychological issue, but rather

a social problem, reflecting a betrayal of society's morals and values (Boudreau, 2011; Levinson, 2015). If educators experience moral injury due to their moral transgressions, we as a society share in their culpability by creating situations in which those transgressions occur (Levinson, 2015). Thus, if we believe in the need for a just and moral education system, we have a responsibility to identify and understand potential sources of moral injury in order to enact the systemic changes needed to prevent them.

Background

Morals

The terms *morals* and *ethics* are often used interchangeably, colloquially and in philosophical literature, to refer to systems of values and beliefs about right and wrong (Crisp, 1998; Sheraton, 2012). Within philosophy, morality tends to be discussed in two broad senses: descriptively, when referring to "codes of conduct put forward by a society or a group (such as a religion), or accepted by an individual for her own behavior" (Gert & Gert, 2016, no page), and normatively, when discussing "a code of conduct that, given specified conditions, would be put forward by all rational persons" (Gert & Gert, 2016, no page). Thus, moral beliefs are, at one level, absolute, and at another, socially and contextually determined, (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002).

Morality in the Context of Education

Discussions of morals and morality have been traditionally absent from modern American teacher preparation programs, perhaps due to concerns about their affiliation with religious or spiritual beliefs (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002; Hansen, 2001). Yet, over the past few decades, scholars have written on the inherent moral dimensions of teaching and education (e.g. Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002; Campbell, 2008; Clark, 1990; Goodlad, 1990; Hansen, 2001;

Huebner, 1996; Pring, 2001). The idea of teaching as a moral endeavor is ancient, dating back to the writings of Plato, Confucius, Aristotle, and the Buddha (Hansen, 2001). All teaching involves relationships and interactions between two or more individuals and all human relationships are moral in nature (Buzelli & Johnston, 2002). As articulated by Fenstermacher (1990), "what makes teaching a moral endeavor is that it is, quite centrally, human action undertaken in regard to other human beings. Thus, matters of what is fair, right, just, and virtuous are always present" (p. 133).

Elements that are central to the education context, such as evaluation, assessment, and the physical control of student bodies in school, are laden with moral meaning and can be sources of difficult moral dilemmas for educators (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002). The ubiquity of moral dilemmas in education requires that educators be attentive to the moral nature of their work in order to identify just and meaningful solutions (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002). Buzzelli & Johnston (2002) refer to this awareness of the moral significance of one's work as 'moral sensibility' and stress the importance of educators cultivating this awareness in order to lead to moral action. Levinson (2015) argues that moral sensibility will not lead to just and appropriate solutions to educational dilemmas because the nature of the political, economic, and social constraints that shape (and are shaped by) the U.S. education system places educators in situations in which they are obligated to enact moral justice but in which no just action is possible. Despite their obligations, their awareness, and in many cases their best intentions, educators continue to perpetrate moral wrongs, resulting in moral injury (Levinson, 2015).

Beyond the moral components of specific actions and practices, public education is a morally complex system because it is charged with transferring society's values, beliefs, and expectations to the future citizenry (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002; Hansen, 2001; Goodlad, 1990;

Pring, 2012). Widespread moral transgressions can lead not only to moral harm for educators (Santoro, 2011; Levinson, 2015) but also for students who must attempt to cope with and successfully navigate an immoral system (Sabic-El-Rayess, 2014). One way that both educators and students cope with an immoral education context is by accepting and normalizing the immorality (Sabic-El-Rayess, 2014; Levinson, 2015). Thus moral transgressions may lead not only to distress or injury to individuals in the public education system, but to an overall moral weakening of a core democratic institution (Sabic-El-Rayess, 2014).

Working Conceptual Model of Moral Injury

As moral injury is a relatively recent topic of empirical research, conceptual models are continuing to be developed and refined. The most commonly cited moral injury conceptual framework is Litz and colleagues' (2009) *working conceptual model of moral injury.* According to this model, when an individual perpetrates or witnesses an action that violates deeply held values and moral expectations, cognitive dissonance results due to the discrepancy between the individual's moral beliefs and the event. Individuals will attempt to resolve this cognitive dissonance, and when doing so, those prone to moral injury will make cognitive attributions that are "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)" (Litz et al., 2009, p. 700). These beliefs will lead to feelings of guilt, anxiety, and shame, which will then result in withdrawal behaviors, which prevent corrective and reparative experiences with peers and the community that might allow for self-forgiveness for the individual (Litz et al., 2009). As time passes, the resulting isolation leads to a growing belief that not just the act is unforgivable, but that the individual is unforgiveable. This self-condemnation leads to the individual engaging in avoidance and/or

numbing strategies or self-harming behavior and feelings of demoralization, all of which feed
back into the stable, global, and internal attributions (Litz et al., 2009).

The Current Study

This study was guided by a simplified version of Litz and colleagues' (2009) working
conceptual model of moral injury, with less attention paid to the complex cognitive processes
involved in moral injury and more focus on the ecological contextual factors that might
contribute to educators' experiences of moral injury. It is hypothesized that individual
characteristics of K-12-education professionals and characteristics of the schools in which they
work contribute to the likelihood of an individual professional experiencing moral injury.
Additionally, consistent with previous research on moral injury, it is expected that education
professionals' experiences of moral injury will be characterized by certain emotional, social, and
behavioral responses, such as guilt, burnout, and a desire to leave one's profession.
The research questions for this study are:

1) To what extent do K-12 professionals in an urban public school district experience moral
   injury in their workplace?
2) What individual or school-level characteristics are associated with the experience of
   moral injury among these professionals?
3) What emotional, social, and behavioral symptoms are associated with experiences of
   moral injury among these professionals?

Methods

Data Source and Sample

Data for this study were taken from a larger study which featured an explanatory
sequential mixed methods design (Creswell, 2014). The quantitative portion of the study

employed a cross-sectional, correlational survey design. Data were collected via a web-based survey that was developed using Qualtrics (Qualtrics, 2017). Approval for the study was received from the University of Minnesota's Institutional Review Board, under exempt status.

A link to the survey was sent via email to all licensed non-administrative K-12 education professionals in one urban public school district in the Midwest ($n = 3,169$). This district was chosen because its size and diversity, both in terms of types of schools (elementary, secondary, alternative), size of schools (ranging from 200 to 2000 students), and in the racial and economic make-up of the schools (some schools that are predominantly White and affluent, some that are predominantly students of color and low-income, some with varying levels of integration in terms of race and class). The email distribution list of all licensed non-administrative K-12 professionals was created from information provided by the school district's staff directory, which was available on the district website. The survey remained open for six weeks and weekly reminders were sent via email. At the end of the survey, participants had the option of entering their name for inclusion in a drawing for one of two $50 gift cards. During the data collection period, 553 participants initiated responses. Upon review, 318 respondents were eliminated from the sample due to substantial missing data. Seventeen respondents provided complete data but failed to sign the consent form and could not be included in the study. The final sample consisted of 218 respondents who resemble the population of professionals in the district on several demographic characteristics (see Table 1).

Measures

Moral injury. Moral injury, the dependent variable in this study, was measured using a modified version of the 9-item Moral Injury Events Scale (MIES; Nash et al., 2013). The MIES has a three-factor solution—Transgressions-other, Transgressions-self, and Betrayal—with

strong internal consistency estimates for each factor, α = .79, α = .94-.96, and α = .83-.89, respectively (Bryan et al., 2016). Items include "I saw things that were morally wrong," and "I am troubled by having acted in ways that violated my own morals or values" and responses are assessed using a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 6 = "strongly agree." Although there is no clinical cut-off score on the MIES that designates what score denotes "moral injury," in their study of parents involved in the child protection system, Haight et al. (2017a) determined that participants with a mean score lower than 3 exhibited "no reported moral injury" (p. 480). A score of "3" denotes a response of "slightly disagree," to statements regarding having experienced morally problematic events and being troubled by those events.

The MIES was designed for use with a military population (Nash et al., 2013; Bryan et al., 2016) and two modifications were made for use in the current study. First, participants were prompted to reflect on events that have occurred in the context of their work in their current school, rather than in the military. Second, the three items that make up the Betrayal factor were altered to reflect the difference between a military setting and a school setting. Instead of asking about betrayal by "leaders," "fellow service members," and "others outside the U.S. military" (Nash et al., 2013), education professionals were asked if they felt betrayed by "administrators in my school and district," "colleagues," and "education leaders and policy makers on the state and/or federal level." In this study, the modified MIES demonstrated strong internal consistency on all three factors: Transgressions-Other (α = .91), Transgressions-Self (α = .91), and Betrayal (α = .80).

Individual and school-level characteristics. Participants were asked to report several socio-demographic characteristics. Gender was assessed with four options (male, female, transgender, and "I do not identify with a gender") and respondents provided their age in number

of years. Respondents identified their race and ethnicity by selecting all that applied from the

following options: White, African American, Latino/a, Native American, and Asian. A

multiracial group was created to reflect respondents who selected more than one option. For

analytic purposes, race was recoded from a six-category variable to a binary variable (white /

non-white). Respondents also provided information on their role in the school (e.g. teacher,

school social worker, psychologist), the number of years they had worked in education, the

approximate number of students in their school, and their school level (e.g. K-5, K-8, K-12, 6-8,

9-12). Role in school was recoded into two dummy variables to denote: 1) all special education

teachers, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, and English

Language Learner teachers (versus all other roles) and 2) mental health professionals, such as

school social workers, school psychologists, school counselors, and school nurses (versus all

other roles). School type was recoded into a binary variable, with all schools containing any

grades between K- 5 being coded as "elementary," and all schools without any students in grades

K-5 being coded as "non-elementary." Finally, respondents also selected the name of their

school from a drop-down menu. Using the name of the school, the percentage of students of

color and the percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch in each school was gathered

from the State Department of Education's online data center.

      Guilt. Guilt was measured via the Trauma-Related Guilt Inventory (TRGI; Kubany et al.,

1996). The TRGI is a 32-item scale that assesses six guilt-related factors: global guilt, distress,

guilt cognition, hindsight-bias/responsibility, wrongdoing, and lack of justification. Participants

responded to statements such as "What I did was inconsistent with my beliefs," and "I

experience intense guilt that relates to what happened," using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging

from 0 = "Not at all true," to 4 = "Extremely true." The TRGI has demonstrated good internal

reliability estimates across the six factors (α = .67 - .91) and strong test-retest reliability (rs = 0.75-0.86) (Kubany et al., 1996). Participants respond to the items while thinking about a specific event, allowing the measure of guilt to be directly related to the specific morally injurious events reported on in the MIES. The survey instructions asked participants to recall the event or events they were thinking about as they completed the MIES, to choose the most troublesome or distressing event, and to consider this event while completing the TRGI. Internal reliability estimates across the six factors in the TRGI in this study were strong (α = .74 - .91).

Stress of conscience. The Stress of Conscience Questionnaire (SCQ; Glasberg et al., 2006) is a 9-item scale developed to assess "troubled conscience" and its accompanying stress among practicing nurses. Glasberg and colleagues (2006) define "troubled conscience" as the "the discrepancy between our individual conscience (personal core values) and external restrictions (e.g. society's or the profession's values)" (p. 635) and "stress of conscience" as "the stress generated by a troubled conscience" (p. 635). This description of "stress of conscience" appears consistent with aspects of moral injury; and, the "discrepancy" associated with stress of conscience is reminiscent of the "cognitive dissonance" that leads to moral injury (Litz et al., 2009).

Each SCQ item contains an A and a B question. The A question asks about the frequency of exposure to the stressful event and the B question asks about the amount of distress or troubled conscience the event generated. For example, the A question, "How often do you lack the time to provide the instruction and/or support that a student needs?" is responded to using a 6-point Likert scale, with 0 being "Never," and 5 being "Every day." Then the B question asks "Does this give you a troubled conscience?" and the participant responds on a 6-point Likert scale, where 0 = "no, not at all," and 5 = "yes, very much." The SCQ has been found to contain

two factors, Internal Demands and External Demands/Restrictions, with good reliability coefficients (α = .74 and .78, respectively; Glasberg et al., 2006), but also comes close to meeting the criteria for unidimensionality, with an internal consistency estimate of .83 for all items, indicating a total "stress of conscience" score (Glasberg et al., 2006). In the current study, the word "patient" was replaced with "student," and "provide care" was replaced with "provide instruction and/or support." Cronbach's alphas for the full scale score (α = .84), the Internal Demands factor (α = .71), and the External Demands factor (α = .78) were nearly identical to those found in Glasberg et al. (2006).

Burnout. The Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI; **Kristensen, Borritz, Villadsen, & Christensen, 2005**) is a 3-scale inventory that measures personal burnout, work-related burnout, and client-related burnout among human service sector workers. Participants are asked to report how often they feel tired, how often their work frustrates them and whether they find it hard to work with students. Responses are measured on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = "Never/almost never or to a very low degree," and 5 = "Always or to a very high degree." The CBI has demonstrated initial evidence of reliability (α = .85–.87.) and has been argued by its authors to be a more valid measure of burnout than the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI; Maslach et al., 1996; 1997) (Kristensen et al., 2005). In this study, "clients" in the "client-related burnout" scale of the CBI was changed to "students" to be consistent with the education context. Internal reliability estimates (α = .78 - .91) were strong and consistent with those found by Kristensen and colleagues (2005).

Intention to leave. The Intention to Leave Scale (ILS; Rosin & Korabik, 1991) contains four items used to measure an individual's intentions to leave their current job: (1) At this time in your career, would you want to quit this job if it were possible?, (2) Are you actually planning to

leave your job within the next six months?, (3) Are you actively searching for another job right now?, and (4) Please indicate whether you have ever had thoughts of leaving your job. Items 1 and 2 were rated as 0 = no, 1 = not sure, and 2 = yes. Item 3 was rated as no = 0 and yes = 1. For item 4, participants responded with 1 = I never have had such thoughts, 2 = I occasionally have such thoughts, or 3 = I frequently have such thoughts. Although the intention to leave one's job is not the same as actual job turnover, researchers have found that measures of the intention to leave a job are the strongest predictor of an actual decision to leave (Rosin & Korabik, 1991). Internal reliability of the ILS in this study (α = .81) was high and nearly identical to the α = .82 found by Rosin & Korabik (1991).

Data Analysis

Univariate analyses (means and standard deviations) were used to answer the first research question to determine the extent that educators experience moral injury in their workplace. Multiple linear regression analyses were conducted in order to best understand the potentially complex and combined impact of individual and school-level factors on professionals' reported experiences of moral injury. The data included 218 individual professionals from 68 schools, suggesting clustered data and thus the possibility of a multi-level model being most appropriate for the analyses. The largest cluster included 13 professionals from 1 school and the smallest included only 1 participant in a school. Nineteen of the schools in the data set (28%) contained only one participant. Interclass correlations (ICCs) were calculated for each of the three MIES factors (transgressions-other, transgressions-self, and betrayal) which serve as the dependent variables. All three ICCs were non-trivial ($\approx$ .10): ICC (Transgressions-Other) = 0.199, ICC (Transgressions-Self) = 0.097, ICC (Betrayal) = 0.106. Both multi-level and single-level models for the three dependent variables (Transgress-other,

Transgress-self, and Betrayal) were run and compared. In the resulting equations, the estimated coefficients were nearly identical between the multi-level model and the single-level regression for all three outcome variables, varying at most by one hundredth of a point. Additionally, in the multi-level models, the variance attributed to the intercept (i.e. the clustering effect) was small and not statistically significant. Thus, the impact of school-level clusters was not relevant to the accuracy of the estimated coefficients in the regression models and based on the **principle** that, when possible, a simpler model is preferable to a more complex model, a single-level model was chosen for all analyses. However, multicollinearity was detected between several variables - the percentage of students of color and the percentage of students on free or reduced lunch; age of the teacher and number of years in education; and the number of students in the school and the school level. As such, the percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch, the age of the teacher, and the number of students in the school were removed from the models. All other regression assumptions (e.g., linearity, homoscedasticity, and normality of distribution) were met.

Correlational analyses were used to answer the third research question, regarding the emotional and behavioral factors associated with moral injury. Because the MIES and the scales measuring the emotional and behavioral factors (TRGI, SCQ, CBI, and ILS) were ordinal scales and two of the TRGI subscales demonstrated an elevated level of skewness (see Table 7), Spearman's Rho correlations were used. All analyses were performed using SSPS version 24 software (IBM Corp., 2016).

<div align="center">Results</div>

Extent of Moral Injury Among K-12 Professionals

Mean scores for each of the three MIES factors (see Table 2) were as follows: 4.4 (SD = 1.5) for Transgressions-Other, 2.9 (SD = 1.5) for Transgressions-Self, and 3.8 (SD = 1.5) for Betrayal. Although no clinical cut-off score exists for the MIES, "3" reflects that the participant "slightly disagrees" with a statement referencing a morally injurious experience. Thus, scores above 3 suggest endorsement of morally injurious experiences. 80.2% of participants (n = 175) scored above a 3 on the Transgressions-Other factor, 45.4% (n = 98) scored above a 3 on Transgressions-Self, and 68.4% (n = 148) scored above a 3 on the Betrayal factor, denoting agreement with statements regarding experiencing and being troubled by morally problematic events. Scores on the Transgressions-Other factor skewed slightly high, with 52.7% (n = 115) of participants scoring a 5 or higher (out of a 6-point scale), suggesting moderate to strong agreement with exposure to others' morally troubling actions.

Individual and School-Level Characteristics Associated with Moral Injury

Tables 3, 4, and 5 present the single-level regression models for each of the MIES factor scores (Transgressions-Other, Transgressions-Self, & Betrayal). The first model includes only individual-level variables, including the professional's gender (male or female), race (white or non-white), the number of years the professional had worked in education, and whether or not the professional's role fell into the mental health category (i.e. psychologist, social worker, counselor, or nurse). Multicollinearity was detected between the mental health and special education variables, thus the special education variable was removed from the model. The second model includes the individual-level variables from Model 1 and two school-level variables, the type of school (elementary or non-elementary) and the percentage of students of color in the school. The third model includes only the variables from Model 2 that demonstrated statistical significance ($p < .05$).

Gender, being a mental health professional, and the percentage of students of color in a school were all positive predictors of Transgressions-Other (see Table 3). For Transgressions-Self (see Table 4), only the percentage of students of color in the school was a positive predictor. For Betrayal (see Table 5), women were more likely to score higher and scores increased as the percentage of students of color in the school increased. The adjusted *r*-squared values for each MIES factor were quite small, ranging from .045 to .153, suggesting that the variables examined do not explain large amounts of the variance in MIES scores.

Emotional, Social, and Behavioral Symptoms Associated with Moral Injury

Means and standard deviations for scores on the TRGI, SCQ, CBI and ILS are presented in Table 6. Mean scores on the TRGI were relatively low, ranging from .81 (SD = .84) to 1.9 (SD = 1.1), out of a possible range of 0 to 4. Mean scores on the SCQ Internal, External, and Total mean scores were 46.6 (SD = 26.8, range = 0 – 150), 57.3 (SD = 29.8, range = 0-150), and 88.7 (SD = 47.5, range = 0-225), respectively. On the CBI, participants scored highest on the Personal Burnout factor (M = 60.0, SD = 20.7), followed by the Work-Related Burnout factor (M = 58.1, SD = 18.0) and then the Client-Related Burnout factor (M = 38.7, SD = 22.5). The mean score on the ILS (M = 3.4, SD = 2.1) was near the mid-point of the scale (range = 1-8). In response to the first question on the ILS, "At this time in your career, would you want to quit this job if it were possible?" 25.75% of participants (n = 56) responded "Yes." 14.2% of participants (n = 31) said they were planning to leave their job within the next six months and 16.1% (n = 35) stated that they were actively searching for a job at this moment. 30.7% of participants (n = 67) said they frequently have thoughts of leaving their job.

Spearman's Rho correlational analyses were used to examine the relationship between each of the MIES factors (Transgressions-Other, Transgressions-Self, and Betrayal) and the

TGRI, SCQ, CBI, and ILS, (see Table 7). The data show moderate to large correlations between the Transgressions-Self factor on the MIES and all subscales on the TRGI, aside from Lack of Justification (r_s =.541, .415, .560, .433, .624). In addition, all three MIES factors were moderately to largely correlated with the TRGI subscales of Global Guilt ($r_s = .413, .541, \& .427$) and Distress ($r_s = .489, .415, \& .589$). The data show moderate correlations ranging from .328 to .494 across all three SCQ scores and all three MIES factors. Among the MIES factors, Transgressions-Other and Betrayal were most highly correlated with the CBI factors, particularly CBI Personal ($r_s = .293 \& .413$) and CBI Work ($r_s = .329 \& .459$). The ILS scale was moderately correlated with the Betrayal factor ($r_s = .369$) and slightly but significantly correlated with the Transgressions-Other factor ($r_s = .214$).

Discussion

The results of this study provide empirical support for Levinson (2015) and Keefe-Perry's (2016) arguments that moral injury is a relevant concept for K-12 professionals. The mean scores on the MIES suggest that professionals have witnessed or participated in situations in the context of their work in public education that violate their moral beliefs. The mean scores for professionals in K-12 education follow a similar pattern to those in the two other published studies that have used the MIES with Airforce and Army National Guard members (Bryan et al., 2016) and child protection professionals (Haight et al., 2017), in which higher scores were found for the Transgression-Other factor, followed by Betrayal, and then the lowest scores for Transgression-Self. Although these samples represent different populations and no direct comparisons can be made, it is still valuable to consider the MIES scores from this study's sample in the context of what has been reported in this small but growing literature.

Interestingly, most of the individual-level variables that were examined, such as the race of the professional or their years of teaching experience, were not significantly predictive of MIES scores in any of the regression models. Gender was significant or approached significance for Transgressions-Other ($p =.091$) and Betrayal ($p = .04$) scores, with women scoring higher than men. Additionally, women made up over 75% of the sample and these results must be considered in light of the smaller number of men in the sample, although these proportions accurately reflect the gender proportions of the workforce (see Table 1). Mental health professionals demonstrated significantly higher scores on the Transgressions-Other factor (B = 1.001, $p = .002$), meaning they were more likely to endorse having witnessed others in their school engage in morally-troubling actions. One reason for this finding could be that mental health professionals have more exposure to the actions of other professionals than classroom teachers. Classroom teachers spend most of their day alone in their classrooms with students. In contrast, psychologists, social workers, counselors, and nurses are often in the halls, in and out of different classrooms, interacting with a wide variety of staff and students, and thus they may be more likely to witness others' morally troubling actions. In addition, these professionals frequently work with students who are struggling academically, emotionally, or behaviorally in the school environment. It may be that close interactions with students whose needs are not being met by the school is inherently morally troubling.

The most significant predictor of MIES scores, across all three factors, was the percent of students of color in the school. As the percent of students of color in the school was highly correlated with the percent of students receiving free or reduced lunch, these results can be interpreted as reflecting a similar positive relationship between the percentage of students in poverty in a school and a professional's endorsement of experiences of moral injury. Levinson

(2015) asserts that educators experience moral injury when they are required to act justly "in situations where no just action is open to them" (p. 211). One major constraint on educators' ability to act justly is "the impact of *contextual injustices*" (Levinson, 2015, p. 211; italics original), including poverty, trauma, and racial and economic segregation. Levinson's argument is supported by the data in this study—the more economically and racially segregated the school, the more likely a professional was to endorse moral injury. Professionals in these schools may experience moral injury as they come into close contact with the impact of racism and income inequality, two inherently immoral social forces, on the daily lives of their students.

Levinson (2015) also cites "*school-based injustices*" (p. 211, italics original), such as discriminatory school policies and insufficient funding, as potential sources of moral injury for educators. One example of a school-based injustice is the racial disproportionality in suspension rates. In 2014, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights released data demonstrating that African American students have a suspension rate that is three times that of White students. A 2017 study by the Brown Center on Education Policy at the Brookings Institute found that African American students had higher rates of suspension in higher poverty schools than low poverty schools and higher rates of suspension in schools with more African American students (Loveless, 2017). The exact nature of moral injury was not assessed in the survey. The professionals in current study sample who scored highest on the MIES (e.g. those who worked in schools with a higher percentage of students of color and students on free/reduced lunch) may experience more exposure to school-based injustices such as high suspension rates for African American students, leading to increased moral injury.

This study adds important information to the understanding of the emotional and behavioral symptoms associated with exposure to morally injurious events outside of the military

context. Previous researchers have found guilt to be associated with moral injury (e.g. Currier et al., 2015a; Drescher et al., 2011; Jinkerson, 2016; Litz et al., 2009). Most of the mean scores on the TRGI subscales were moderately to strongly correlated with mean MIES scores, lending support to the relationship between guilt and moral injury among K-12 professionals. However, overall the TRGI mean scores were relatively low, suggesting that K-12 professionals did not experience a great deal of guilt related to their experiences of moral injury. McDonald (2017) has argued that moral injury is less about guilt and shame related to what an individual has done or failed to do in "singular events" (p. 5) and more about the feelings of loss and hopelessness due to experiences that shatter one's sense of a moral world. Similarly, in her work on teacher demoralization, a concept closely related to moral injury, Santoro (2011) describes teachers as experiencing demoralization not due to singular acts, but because of a general sense that they are unable to do what is right in their work. In this study, K-12 professionals who scored high on moral injury may have still experienced relatively low levels of guilt because their moral injury was due less to individual actions and more due to a general sense that the education system has become morally untenable.

The moderate correlations between all three SCQ scales and all three MIES factors lend support to the hypothesis that moral injury and stress of conscience are related concepts. This finding suggests that as the conceptualization of moral injury continues to be shaped and refined, researchers should look to work being done on stress of conscience (e.g. Glasberg, Eriksson, & Norberg, 2007; Glasberg, Eriksson, & Norberg, 2008; Juthberg, Eriksson, Norberg, & Sundin, 2010; Ahlin, Ericson-Lidman, Eriksson, Norberg, & Strandberg, 2013). Not only could the stress of conscience literature aid in conceptual development of moral injury, but the Stress of Conscience Questionnaire appears to have significant strengths over the MIES and other current

quantitative measures for moral injury, such as the Moral Injury Questionnaire (MIQ) (Currier, Holland, Drescher, & Foy, 2015b). The SCQ allows for both the measurement of the exposure to the troubling event and of the individual's moral appraisal of that event. In contrast, the MIES and the MIQ are limited in that they conflate exposure to specific events with appraisal of these events.

Burnout scores on the CBI among the study sample were notably larger than scores in previous studies of healthcare providers (Kristensen et al., 2005) and secondary teachers in New Zealand (Milfont, Denny, Ameratunga, Robinson, and Merry, 2008). One possible reason for burnout scores being so high among this sample could be due to the time period when data were collected. Participants completed the survey between mid-May and of the end of June, a period that straddles the last weeks of school in this district. General levels of exhaustion related to work are likely to be at their highest near the end of a long school year and this may have inflated the professionals' scores. It is notable, however, that the Client-Related mean score (M = 38.7) was relatively smaller than those on the Personal- (M= 58.1) and Work-Related (M = 60.0) subscales. This suggests that the K-12 professionals found aspects of their work to be a source of exhaustion, but not their direct work with students themselves. The small to moderate correlations between the MIES scores and CBI subscales suggest that a relationship exists between burnout and moral injury. This finding lends some support to Gabel's (2012) assertion that the similar construct of demoralization may be a precursor to burnout, though the cross-sectional nature of the data does not allow for any conclusions regarding temporal order of the phenomena.

Levinson (2015) posits that one response educators may have to moral injury is to leave the profession. Santoro & Morehouse (2011) call educators "principled leaders" and

"conscientious objectors" when they leave the field because they cannot stand being complicit any more with wide-spread oppression and injustice. The results from this study demonstrated a small but significant positive relationship between moral injury due to others' transgressions and the intention to leave one's job and a moderate, significant positive relationship between betrayal and intention to leave one's job. No relationship was found between moral injury related to one's own actions and scores on the ILS.

The findings of this study must be considered within the context of several limitations. The response rate for the on-line survey was quite low ($< 7\%$). One reason for the low response rate may have been that the time of year, mid-May to mid-June, in which the survey was made available, coincided with the end of the school year. That time of year is typically very busy for K-12 professionals, with end-of-the-year assessments, grading, special events, and graduations, making it less likely that professionals would have the time and energy to devote to a survey. Although the demographics of the sample closely mirrored those of the larger district population of licensed non-administrative professionals, attempts to generalize these findings to the entire district population must be done with caution because there might be differences between survey responders, survey completers, and those who did not initiate the survey. Additionally, the MIES has limitations as a standardized tool to measure moral injury. First, the MIES does not allow for identification of the specific events that participants perceived to be morally injurious. Thus, conclusions regarding the specific sources of moral injury among K-12 professionals can only be hypothesized based on this data. Secondly, the MIES conflates exposure to and the appraisal of morally injurious events. For example, the Transgressions-Other factor contains two items, "I saw things that were morally wrong," and "I am troubled by having witnessed others' immoral acts." A K-12 professional could potentially give a high rating (e.g. 6, strongly agree)

to having witnessed acts that were morally wrong while also giving a low rating (e.g. 1, strongly disagree) to the statement regarding being troubled by having witnessed these actions. When these scores are averaged, per the scoring instructions, the result is a Transgressions-Other score of 3.5. The meaning of this score is difficult to interpret because it is equally influenced by both one's exposure to and appraisal of an event effectively washing out meaningful information in the data and compromising the scale's overall validity. However, the high correlations between the MIES and the SCQ, a scale that does not confound the exposure to the immoral event with the emotional appraisal of the event, suggests that despite the design flaws, moral injury can be validly measured by the MIES.

The most significant finding from this study was the relationship between the racial or economic make-up of a school's student-body and a professional's experience of moral injury. However, because of the high correlation between percent of students of color and the percent of students on free/reduced lunch in this dataset, it was impossible to untangle the impact of the student body's racial make-up from the impact of the student body's socio-economic make-up on the likelihood of and intensity of moral injury among the K-12 professionals. Intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989) posits that race and class are interwoven identities and cannot and should not be untangled when understanding the experiences of individuals (powell, 2007). powell (2007) argues that "race and class are distinct and at the same time mutually constitutive, recursive processes in the United States that render race and class radically incoherent without understanding their interactive nature" (p. 358). Viewed through intersectionality theory, the limitation in this study is not the high correlation between the racial and economic make-up of the schools in the dataset, but rather the limits of traditional regression analyses in trying to

understand the how the racialized and classed elements of the educational context may relate to K-12 professionals' experiences of moral injury.

Although moral injury is most frequently associated with the combat experiences of military veterans, this study provides empirical evidence of the relevance of moral injury to professionals in the U.S. K-12 education system, particularly for those working in segregated schools with high percentages of students of color and students living in poverty. Examining moral injury within the K-12 education context allows for discussions of problems in the education system to move beyond policy and pedagogy to encompass considerations of the morality (and immorality) inherent in the racialized and classed structure and practices of American public education. To mitigate moral injury in education, future research will need to further explore these contextual sources of moral injury in order to identify and implement systemic changes to increase educational and social justice.

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