

From Liminality to *Communitas*: The Collective Dimensions of Transformative Learning

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Barton Buechner¹ , John Dirkx²,
Zieva Dauber Konvissner^{3,4}, Deedee Myers⁵,
and Tzofnat Peleg-Baker⁶

Abstract

This article addresses a significant gap in the transformative learning literature as it relates to collective transformation, a transformation that is a level beyond individual transformation and is differentiated from the designed and imposed forms of social or organizational change. We consider collective transformation as an emergent and shared worldview shift that is grounded in a shared experience. The participants might not be fully aware of or even able to describe this experience until they engage with it at the interpersonal level. In prior research and practice, the five authors have independently observed and documented the phenomenon of collective transformation among members of marginalized populations who have undergone liminal experiences—forms of disequilibrium that leave individuals betwixt and between. The common thread in these experiences is the emergence of a shared feeling called *communitas*, which is a deeply felt (yet often temporary) sense of belonging and community. This study's purpose is to further explore the roles that states of

¹ Military Psychology, Adler University, Chicago, IL, USA

² Higher, Adult and Lifelong Education, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI, USA

³ Criminal Justice, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI, USA

⁴ Institute for Social Innovation, Fielding Graduate University, Santa Barbara, CA, USA

⁵ DDJ Myers LTD, Santa Barbara, CA, USA

⁶ School of Business, Rutgers University, Camden, NJ, USA

Corresponding Author:

Barton Buechner, Military Psychology, Adler University, Chicago, IL 60602, USA.

Email: bbuechner@adler.edu

liminality and *communitas* play in creating the conditions for collective transformation. We draw on several theoretical and practice-based areas of literature and on five particular types of experience. We then examine each case for shared experiences of liminality and *communitas* as well as for the underlying qualities of self-understanding, relational ability, and a collectively felt sense of new possibilities. This study also includes suggestions for the application of these concepts to other social groups and in other contexts.

Keywords

imaginal method, collective transformation, social change, posttraumatic growth, moral injury, liminality, *communitas*

Imagine the surreal experience of being suddenly and wrongfully arrested and convicted. Think of the shock, horror, and terror of the police coming to your door to question you; ripping your daughter out of your arms; and then arresting, interrogating, trying, and convicting you. Consider being innocent but being labeled a liar, a criminal, and an animal.

Next, imagine being transported in shackles to a prison that is far from your home, your family, and your work—everything that matters to you—and then being locked in a 6-by-8-foot cell. Envision spending every minute under guard, with the system controlling your every move, as you are always surrounded by the dangers of prison life—all part of a process that is designed to destroy your self-esteem and your sense of self.

Finally, imagine that after many years—or even decades—in this alien place, you are finally exonerated and abruptly released. You are provided no programs to assist in your reentry into normal life, and you are not eligible for parolee services because you are not a parolee. The system now views you as having been innocent all along—and in this way, it has erased you. Picture having to reconnect with the world—which is so different now—by reestablishing your relationships, learning new skills, and making new decisions; that is so much to adjust to—if you are even able to do so.

This nightmare experienced by wrongfully convicted and exonerated individuals can be likened to the nightmares experienced by other people who are in unplanned transitional states, including combat veterans, displaced workers, excluded students in rigid school environments and even corporate teams during a business crisis. Such groups experience the anxiety of uncertainty; they must wait without knowing where to go or how to belong because they no longer know their own purpose, worthiness, or identity.

Imaginative exercises such as the one above, which are based on real experiences that are all too common, underscore the deeply collective nature of individual traumatic experiences and how such experiences can evoke personal transformation.

However, relatively few researchers on transformative learning have considered the collective nature of these experiences. The purpose of this article is thus to argue for a more robust definition of collective transformation. In this article, we present several cases of groups whose members have experienced some form of disequilibrium or *liminality*—the experience of being detached from normal life—and then come together in an attempt to support collective change in the broader social context. Personal transformation often has a collective dimension, and this can be made more visible when people come together in temporary experiences of close community, or *communitas* (E. Turner, 2012).

Using five cases derived from the individual work of the coauthors as examples, we argue that transformative learning theory can encompass both individual and collective transformations. We then examine this phenomenon by looking closely at the experiences of liminality and *communitas* that are illustrated in each of our case examples.

Theoretical Framework

The sense of collective transformation that we utilize in this article builds on the work of scholars in the areas of transformative learning (Dirkx et al., 2006; Mezirow, 1991; Taylor & Cranton, 2012) and posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995) as well as on the research of those who have examined the nature of liminality and *communitas* in relation to transformative experiences (V. W. Turner, 1964). The proponents of these perspectives recognize the role of liminality—being “betwixt and between” (Dirkx & Dang, 2009, p. 1)—as an impetus for change. Disruptions and traumas can trigger liminal experiences, thus deeply impacting individuals’ senses of identity and purpose; individuals perceive some of these events as personal failures and others as betrayals. Such disruptions, which are termed *moral injuries* (Shay, 1995), are often accompanied by feelings of shame, guilt, or anger. Liminal experiences can, in turn, result in social distancing and difficulties with communication.

Researchers in the field of trauma studies have tended to focus on such experiences’ debilitating effects; however, there is evidence that—at least for some—the struggle with such events can result in posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995). These changes can include a greater sense of connection with others, a greater appreciation for life, and a new sense of possibilities. Although scholars of both trauma studies and conventional psychology have identified and discussed posttraumatic growth, the application of transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991) offers some additional insights—particularly in the areas of self-understanding and intersubjective capacity (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995).

Going beyond the purely descriptive level, we also consider other theoretical perspectives that address the nature and embodiment of consciousness (Rehorick & Bentz, 2008). Each of these fields plays a part in grounding this study’s

explanation of the way that lived experiences of liminality can become imbued with meaning and thus embody collective transformation.

Phenomenology, the study of consciousness, informs this study. In applying phenomenology, we begin by returning to “direct experience as a source of knowledge” and opening up realms of “the imaginative, the hidden, and the possible [with] openings and opportunities for transforming self, and others” (Rehorick & Bentz, 2008, p. 6). This phenomenological perspective fosters a deep awareness of the essence of lived experiences, and it offers analytical lenses for understanding complex states of being such as transformation, liminality, and *communitas*. Phenomenology also offers insight into the essence of things, including their true identities and the structure of their underlying forms; these concepts are crucial to transformation.

Somatics—a theory and methodology in which humans are considered an integrated system of mind, body, and spirit—also guides this study (Myers, 2015; Strozzi-Heckler, 2014; Van der Kolk, 2015). This body of science and practice has developed along with pioneering work in neuroscience and on the mind–body connection. Scholars have applied somatics to various areas of practice, including individual therapies for trauma and (as described in this article) group work as part of change management in organizational settings.

Social systems theories are also helpful in understanding how individual experiences translate from the individual to the collective level. The coordinated management of meaning (Pearce, 2008) is a practical theory of social construction that includes heuristics for examining how meaning is made in the dynamics of communication as well as how this meaning translates into culturally embedded patterns within social worlds. These heuristics help us to understand the emergence of collective awareness, and the phenomenon of collective transformation, as distinguished from the result of a deliberate intellectual or cognitive process. Rather, a shared, collective sense becomes embodied as an outgrowth of the relational process itself, in the process of what John Shotter (2008) refers to as “joint action.” The three features of this type of “joint action” are further described as (1) not coming from intentions of particular participants but rather from the interactions among them; (2) not constrained by current reality, inviting actions by the participants who point in a particular direction; and (3) are not resident in a particular participant but rather inhabiting shared space among them (Shotter, 2008).

One way to visualize the correlations and distinctions between individual experience and collective action is through the use of a cosmopolitan communication framing (Pearce, 1989) overlaid on the All Quadrants, All Levels model of Integral theory (Matoba, 2013). This model, as represented in Figure (1) above, organizes human experience into four quadrants. The upper two quadrants (mind and brain) are the sites of individual (essential) phenomena, while the lower two (culture and system) pertain to collective (lifeworld) phenomena. Likewise, the two right quadrants are external, or physically embodied, qualities that can be measured or observed, while the two on the left are interior, or nontangible, qualities.

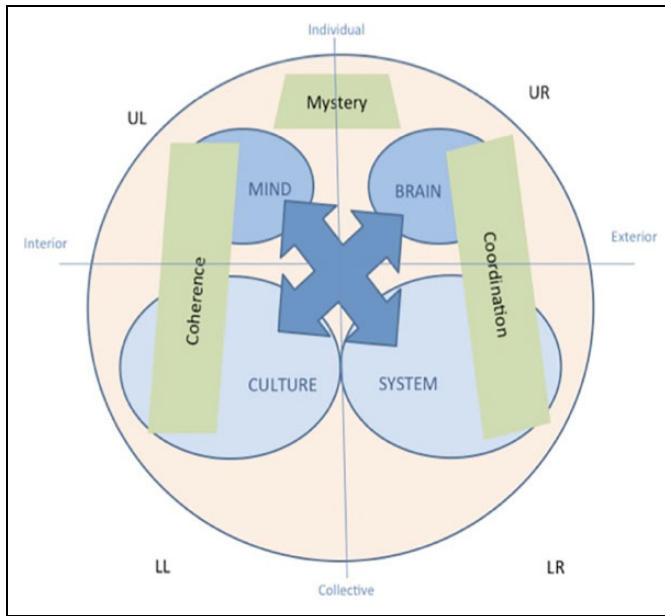


Figure 1. Cosmopolitan communication (Matoba, 2013).

For our purposes in considering the phenomenon of collective transformation, attention is focused on the lower quadrants of “shared space” or collective experience. In this shared space, culture and systems may be viewed as the context in which the shared meaning is made. Within this shared social space, individuals communicate in order to get things done (coordination) or experience a sense of “rightness” or belonging (coherence). Many of the products of these interactions are functional and intentional, but some are emergent. These are depicted here by the term “Mystery,” which is envisioned as a source of transformation or shift in individual or collective consciousness. As a practical way of using this illustration to consider relationality between individual and collective transformation, we can conceptualize personal transformation as mind–brain phenomena in the upper two quadrants and collective transformation as enlargement of culture and systems in the lower two quadrants. While the two phenomena are linked in many ways, our point here is the consideration of the ways that transformative learning theory informs the capacity for evaluating or effecting collective transformation.

Finally, in all of these cases, we focus on how shared encounters of *communitas* lead to a particular relational capacity that the anthropologist E. Turner (2012) referred to as the “immediate and genuine sense of the other” (p. 6). Individuals experience this sense of the other along with an intense (but often fleeting) quality that, despite its impermanence, has lasting significance in human cultures (V. W.

Turner, 1964). Because those who experience *communitas* are often in a liminal (or unbound) state, this experience can feature seemingly contradictory qualities such as temporary and permanent, close and distant, or essential and fleeting (Matei & Britt, 2011). E. Turner (2012) noted that this type of shared sense was “a fact of everyone’s experience yet has never been regarded as a reputable or coherent object of study by social scientists” (p. 7). Although experiences of *communitas* do not always last, their effects can be transferred to other contexts, in which those who experience such effects return to society “refreshed, renewed, reinvigorated, or even dramatically transformed” (Matei & Britt, 2011, p. 3). These experiences can also serve as catalysts within their respective social contexts. As Percival Goodman and Paul Goodman (1960) observed, very often temporary communities do not endure in themselves, but “in disintegrating, they irradiate the society with people who . . . do not forget the advantages but try to realize them in new ways” (p. 109). In this sense, individual changes due to personal reflections on liminal experiences can also apply more broadly to collective transformations as a result of subsequent experiences of *communitas*; the universality and commonality of these experiences become evident upon reflection.

Method

We developed this article after reflecting on a panel discussion that we organized and presented at the 2016 International Transformative Learning Conference (ITLC) at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington. This study is based on the stories of those who survive—and even grow as a result of—disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow, 1991), discomfiting transitions, or moral injuries (Shay, 1995). This study’s guiding premise is that such stories reveal how the dissonance of lived experiences can act as a catalyst—not only for personal growth but also for broader social change—thus helping to create more just and humane social contexts. We each brought insights from previous work that we conducted with those whose lives had been disrupted; these individuals described (in various ways) how their experiences had transformed them as well as how they had found community in the process. In developing the panel discussion, we found two intriguing areas of intersection in all of the stories: coping with liminality and finding *communitas*. Extraordinary results seemed to be occurring because of these experiences of *communitas*. We found these common attributes worthy of further exploration, so we engaged in an ongoing conversation over the subsequent 2-year period, during which we developed and tested the concepts for this article.

To illustrate the phenomenon of *communitas* and how it can contribute to both individual and social transformations, we describe five particular cases involving forms of shared liminality that occurred simultaneously with or prior to the emergence of *communitas*. These cases relate to (a) students attending dialogic school systems, (b) displaced workers being laid off after years of commitment and then being engaged in retraining programs, (c) corporate team members undergoing sustained and challenging periods of organizational change while also engaging in

somatic coaching, (d) returning combat veterans participating in holistic retreats, and (e) individuals experiencing exoneration after wrongful convictions and incarceration.

Case I: Transforming Relationships in Alternative Education

We begin this discussion with an example of how *communitas* supports relational transformations in Israeli alternative schools based on democratic and dialogic values. This case study reflects 30 years of building democratic schools, from a single school in the 1980s to 30 today. Dialogic environments have been implemented in tens of public schools and other organizations across Israel over the past 20 years. These experimental efforts illustrate a gradual shift from an individualist toward a more relational perspective.

We offer this case first to frame what may be possible as a systemic approach to personal and collective transformation. These inclusive schools report much less violence than conventional schools, which is achieved by applying systemic, participative practices as holders of differences and conflicts. In the case of dialogic schools, reflective work on the link between self and other is added.

Although some traditional schools are meant to renew and improve, most remain conservative, hierarchical, and authoritarian—just as they were at the beginning of the 20th century. Indeed, most of these traditional schools' worldviews, structures, and curricula have not changed much despite the drastic social, political, cultural, and technological revolutions that have taken place over the past century.

In the rigid traditional school environment, some students feel excluded, particularly those who struggle to adjust to the system. Students who have been diagnosed with disciplinary, behavioral, personal, learning, or social difficulties often experience an acute sense of alienation and can suffer devastating psychological and social distress. Although conventional schools often label these students as problematic, democratic, and dialogic, schools typically welcome them. Founded upon human rights and the values of respect and equality, these schools apply a democratic system where all stakeholders—including students, staff members, and parents—participate in daily decisions. This humane and inclusive context produces a deep sense of belonging and solidarity among all stakeholders and sustains students' intellectual curiosity. This approach thus creates new possibilities for the students to engage in personal and collective transformations.

These schools do not just teach the theory of a democratic society; they also practice it daily. The underlying assumption is that students who experience democratic values and respectful relationships will enact these values and relationships as adults. In addition to having all stakeholders participate in decision-making, a mentor is assigned to each student. With the mentor's support, students have the autonomy to choose what to learn and how to utilize their time.

Akin to democratic states, these schools operate within three branches: legislative, judicial, and executive. Any stakeholder, regardless of age or position, can

initiate a topic for discussion in the parliament, address conflict in a school's conflict resolution or appeals committee, discuss current affairs in morning gatherings, learn collaboratively, or implement decisions within a school's routine and ad hoc committees. Because these environments strengthen a sense of collective being, stakeholders continuously undergo a transformative journey on both personal and collective levels. The combination of *action*—participative practices with *insight*—consciousness raising efforts of self-other relationship benefits stakeholders not only with addressing immediate problems but also helps sustain long-term transformations. Stakeholders regularly explore and clarify relational concepts, dignity, respect, equality, and otherness by using various conceptual models that were developed for this purpose.

For example, the model of respect, based on Schlanger's (2000) three-dimensional model of respect, is being used to examine current versus desired relationships at school—among teachers, between teachers and principals, and between teachers and students. This reflective work involves examining intermissions, students' evaluations, and communicating with parents. The respect framework is one example of many which helps stakeholders to improve their relationships, learn to position the other as equal in their interactions, and identify organizational aspects that require modification.

The insight work complements action that involves creating organizational practices and structures such as parliaments, committees, and conflict resolution systems that serve as social holders—organizational spaces wherein stakeholders practice their new relational insights.

The incorporation of insight and action is critical for the creation of a lasting transformation. The reflective work around the link between the self and other in dialogic environments takes us a step forward toward a relational understanding.

It has been essential for creating a deeper sense of *communitas*, which can be a challenge within the individualist, monologic context we inhabit. This individualist ethos wherein the self is at the forefront often leads us to seek explanations regarding the human experience within the individual mind rather than in the relationships between individuals. With the self at the center, the other becomes peripheral and exists mostly to serve the self (Sampson, 2008).

The individualist perspective is well established in the theories and practices of conflict resolution as in other social sciences. The autonomy of conflicting parties, their strategic choices, self-determination, and self-interest are central. The focus on the individual as the driving force of conflict and the expectation of a neutral intervener fail to capture invisible elements of conflict, including its fluidity, relational ambiguity, and complexity (Bush & Folger, 2005; Putnam, 1994).

The independent, idealized, and prioritized person within the individualist culture finds themselves in a perpetual state of alert to defend self-boundaries and create coherent, desirable senses of self (Sampson, 2008). This existential condition deepens division and alienation, resulting in defensive reactions clouded by intense negative emotions. When the self takes priority, neither the other nor its relationship

with the self has intrinsic value (Sampson, 2008); both become insignificant, and the other is often excluded and denied a voice.

With the understanding of separated, bounded selves, conflict has received a negative reputation in Western culture. It is often associated with disturbances, interruptions, and violence. However, these characteristics depict only a condition of destructive conflict, not conflict generally. Conflicts can have substantial personal and social importance, can stimulate learning (Steele, 1988), and can spur new ways of thinking and acting (Coser, 1956; Deutsch, 1973; Lederach, 2003). It can also prevent stagnation, stimulate interest and curiosity, initiate discussions, and lead to creative problem-solving (Deutsch, 2003). In short, differences and conflicts are essential sources of learning and drivers of both personal and social change.

As Lederach (2003) suggests, conflict is normal within a relationship where it arises and evolves; therefore, we may consider focusing on the relationship rather than the individual if we hope to learn and transform conflict. Conflict transformation refers here to the shift from adversarial interactions to dialogic relationships. The latter stands in stark contrast to the adversarial mode and signifies a genuine encounter between the self and the other in which both actively and equally cocreate reality and relate to one another in their own terms (Peleg-Baker, 2019, 2020). Within such relationships, conflict can become a source of learning.

Alternative schools are inspiring, but an individualist premise still guides them. The dialogic experience does take us a step forward to a more relational understanding. However, its focus is still on the subjects and less on the space between them. This emphasis is problematic, considering communal and dialogic aspirations. The question of whether these incredible efforts take us far enough to fully embrace our relational account remains open.

If we are to reduce division and create inclusive *communitas* with a true sense of belonging, we may consider moving toward the relational unit. For decades, we have focused on the intrinsic nature of the self. Instead of searching for explanations about the human experience *within* the individual, we may want to understand the co-constitution of the space between us better to embrace the other as an equal cocreator of reality.

Such deliberate attention to the relationship spawns a new understanding of conflict—not as an isolated event but as a beneficial experience for our growth and well-being. Relational lenses, such as social construction, can expand our understanding of sustainable, collective transformation. “If human connection can become as real to us as the traditional sense of individual separation, so do we enrich our potentials for living” (Gergen, 2009, p. xvi).

Case 2: Solidarity in the Face of Dissonance: The Stories of Displaced Workers

The second case offers an illustration of a disorienting dilemma on a collective scale. This case involves displaced workers who commit their lives to a particular industry

or business that then collapses. Dirkx (2012) and Dirkx and Dang (2009) employed Jungian and post-Jungian psychology to examine efforts to retrain displaced workers, including the powerful, transformative dynamics that are evoked in such experiences.

According to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, downsizing in the U.S. manufacturing industry in the late 20th and early 21st century resulted in the displacement of substantial numbers of men and women from well-paying jobs, some of which they had held for many years (Dirkx & Dang, 2009, p. 107). Many of these people began to work in their factories right after—or even before—their high school graduation. In the wake of their downsizing, they have found themselves without a way to support themselves or their families. In their efforts to retool themselves, they have faced daunting and often traumatic transitions. To a dislocated worker, this transition is a crisis. When such workers attend retraining classes, their traumas and worries are clearly evident in their bodies, their language, and their tone of voice. They feel desperate and alone because they are grieving the loss of both their way of life and their sense of self. This leaves many of them feeling empty, emotionally spent, and bereft. During retraining, these workers are ready to bolt at the first hint of employment because they crave security, familiarity, and certainty (Dirkx & Dang, 2009).

Adulthood can be characterized as a series of relatively stable states, punctuated by varying levels of discomfiting but predictable transitions. However, both voluntary and involuntary transitions are increasingly characteristic of individual and collective lives; these transitions cause varying degrees of conflict and trauma that manifest at the psychological, moral, spiritual, and physical levels—contributing to what Vaill (1996) referred to as “permanent white water” (p. 1). In these difficult periods, many people succumb to their traumas in various ways, but others are able to grow through these experiences—or are even transformed as a result.

Daloz (1986) used Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy* to illustrate the transformational journey of adult learning. The story begins when a middle-aged Dante is “lost in a dark wood, terrified and fleeing in desperation from wild animals” (Daloz, 1986, p. 28). When Dante has lost all hope, Virgil appears and “leads the pilgrim through Hell on the paradoxical journey downward to the light” (Daloz, 1986, p. 28). They encounter those who have been condemned, but Virgil continues to guide and instruct Dante. At one point, Virgil gathers Dante into his arms and plunges further downward, past some evil spirits; he then tells Dante to look directly at the “Emperor of the Woeful Kingdom” (i.e., Satan):

My master . . . took himself from before me and made me stop, saying: “[this is] the place where thou must arm thyself with fortitude.” How chilled and faint I turned then. . . . I did not die, and I did not remain alive; think now for thyself, if thou has any wit: What I became denied both death and life. (Daloz, 1986, p. 43)

In this excerpt, Daloz (1986) portrayed a central, powerful characteristic of the transformative journey: the liminal space. The encounter with the Emperor of the Woeful Kingdom is a metaphorical expression of the liminality that characterizes transformations. In contrast to the relatively stable, recurring states that seem to depict normal life, the experience of liminality feels like being pulled toward each of two powerful poles: one that seeks unity or fusion and another that struggles for separation or differentiation. People are frightened by the prospects of disintegration and separation as well as by the stark challenges that come with the struggle for wholeness.

When opposites pull at individuals' being, those people find comfort by moving toward one end or the other; however, this comfort also creates a sense of incompleteness, leaving them betwixt and between (V. W. Turner, 1964). These transitional spaces reflect rites of passage that, according to V. W. Turner (1964), are associated with a change from one state to another, a feeling of being neither here nor there, a sense of marginality (of not belonging to any group), and a deep and painful loss of identity. Dante captured the psychological and spiritual dimensions of transitions in powerfully imagistic and poetic language.

When framed through the lenses of Dante's experience and post-Jungian psychology, certain aspects of the displaced workers' transitional experiences are important. Crucially, the workers are challenged to reimagine their senses of self. After having spent 20–30 years as factory workers, they now need to reimagine themselves and rewrite their stories. Perhaps their greatest challenge is the emotional struggle of letting go of who they once were and reimagining themselves as students rather than factory workers (Dirkx & Dang, 2009).

The dislocated workers use the vocational retraining programs as a context for reworking their senses of self. This process, as Dante so clearly saw, evokes individuals' inner demons. However, this darkness should not be underestimated; rather, it must be gazed upon, and a relationship must be established with the feelings that arise as a result: despair, grief, doubt, hope, and longing (Dirkx, 2012). The texts, teachers, and fellow worker–students all provide the contexts for this process, including the emotion-laden images associated with it.

Individuals in this transition need to learn how to be open to these emotion-laden images—and to the other experiences associated with this transition—and they need to be willing to engage with the process through images, symbols, rituals, fantasies, and imagination (Dirkx, 2012). In addition, this process needs to occur within a particular context. Learning to live with and work through the sense of liminality that comes with these powerful transitions also requires the presence of *communitas* (V. W. Turner, 1964). This liminal experience creates a shared sense of marginality, which results in intense solidarity and togetherness among the worker–students. The social status within the group is also leveled, thus providing the members with the opportunity to explore new, more egalitarian social roles and identities. When the members act as a cohort, the group itself provides a kind of container or holding

environment (Winnicott, 1960), thus enhancing the students' ability to engage with their identities as learners.

As this example demonstrates, in an intentional organizational intervention, the act of working through transitional trauma is mediated through the resulting liminal experiences and reshaped by the emergence of *communitas* within the group. This group provides a safe space in which the members can, through imaginative engagement, reconstruct their identities and try out selves that involve being different kinds of workers.

Case 3: Somatic Coaching of a Corporate Team Undergoing Organizational Change

For the next topic, we consider how a group that was in the midst of a profound organizational change created a feeling of *communitas* by means of shared somatic practices and somatic coaching.

In recent years, many organizations' practices have become more complex and even unpredictable, with constant stress and volatility arising from both internal and external sources. The ability of the traditional cognitive processing and critical reflection models to help people thrive in these environments is now in serious question (Mosak & Maniaci, 1999). The long-established requirements for organizational leadership success—cognition, intelligence, and domain expertise—may no longer be sufficient. In such an increasingly unsettled (i.e., liminal) environmental and organizational context, individuals who seek to successfully navigate the multitude of complex conversations, decisions, and actions also require heightened self-awareness regarding their identity, purpose, and emotions. Leaders in such organizations now must be present, open, and connected in a multitude of contextual frameworks, not just with the self but also with the other (Brendel & Bennett, 2016; Strozzi-Heckler, 2007, 2014). Organizations with holistic leadership development programs that deal with such complexity have a greater ability to tap into their employees' potential by ensuring that they are engaged and committed; this process is embodied in teams.

In this case, the author was directly engaged as a somatic coach to assist a community credit union in adopting a somatically based leadership program for 50 of its executives and middle managers; this act occurred during a time of high organizational stress due to changes in the industry. First, the managers learned mindfulness-enhancing centering practices through two modalities: individually (in one-on-one coaching sessions) and collectively (with the entire team). The organization selected practices that enhanced the managers' capacity for centering due to these practices' ability to increase workers' capacity to be present for others and in the environment; these practices included commitments to listening, collaboration, and "courageous action" (Strozzi-Heckler, 2014, p. 84). According to Strozzi-Heckler, "courageous actions" include both verbal and physical acts that entail letting go of safe and familiar structures and acting into new and as yet uncertain

ones. By increasing their capacity for making such commitments, the participants learned to remain open to new possibilities, to stay connected to the most important matters, and to better manage their moods in difficult situations; ultimately, they began to take effective and skillful actions. Centering practices support these capacities by generating greater “breadth and depth [of paying] attention” and by providing more choices “of what [to] pay attention to” (Strozzi-Heckler, 2014, p. 160). To help participants develop the capacity for centering, trained somatic coaches guided them in mindfulness practices that involved standing, sitting, and moving while reflecting as well as engaging in courageous conversations with partners.

In the individual coaching sessions, the coaches encouraged the participants to notice when they were off-center in a relationship or action so that they could then return to center with greater awareness of their intentions. The intention of these sessions was to help participants increase their embodied awareness of the self in varying contexts including moods, sensations, and emotions. From this state of heightened awareness, the coaches helped the participants feel comfortable in a state of liminality in which they did not feel compelled to act in accordance with previous habitual patterns of behavior, thereby creating a *somatic opening* that enabled new ways of seeing and being. The ability to remain centered in liminal space helped the participants to build capacity for paying attention to embodied sensations, which indicate what is meaningful. The increased capacity to attend to the self from within a state of embodied awareness ultimately minimized the degree to which the participants automatically returned to old habits (e.g., trying to fix problems) and repeated ineffective actions. Following these coaching sessions, the participants reported a newfound sense of letting go, an enhanced feeling of balance in their bodies, an ability to think more clearly and with greater access to their emotions, and an increased sense of self-accountability.

Next, at the team level, the managers participated in coordinated group centering practices to cocreate a shared space of being. Building on the enhanced level of self-awareness that they had achieved through the individual centering practices, the participants performed shared somatic activities at the group level, which helped them to tune into others’ cognitive, emotional, and sensational concerns. This shared somatic practice made the participants feel more aligned with—and more a part of—their team by giving them an enhanced authentic capacity and desire to understand the other (Sampson, 2008). Collectively, the participants reported greater reflective awareness of their leadership efficacy and a greater sense of shared responsibility with regard to fulfilling their commitments. They reported that the centering practice was effective at building trust, managing conflict within the group, and increasing the members’ ability to listen to diverse perspectives without countering.

Only after this awareness and sense of connectedness had emerged did the group finally engage in a discussion of practical issues and feelings at the organizational level. In this state of attunement, a mutually felt sense of the organization’s vision, mission, and strategies emerged.

At the end of the somatic coaching experience, the group members felt that they had progressed further, and experienced fewer interpersonal strains and obstacles, than they had when using more traditional meetings. Accordingly, they realized that they had created a space for deciding on strategic objectives and agreeing on goals that span multiple functional departments—topics that otherwise can generate defensive feelings.

A team can be envisioned as a collective product of the embodied qualities, or *somas* (Strozzi-Heckler, 2014), that each member brings to the whole. These qualities include both sensory and cognitive dimensions of awareness and being, which have dynamic relationship to environment. Each individual brings not only distinct experiences and emotions but also a dynamic capacity to feel and make sense of the body in relation to the self and the other within the organization's social context (Myers, 2015). Each team has a soma and certain ways of self-organizing, engaging in deliberate dialogue, coordinating, collaborating, communicating, committing, and taking action. The team members' collective somatic experiences create a container for the team's soma. By extension, engaging the team members' emotions can create somatic openings for advanced learning (e.g., understanding their resistance) and for developing a sense of purpose through generative dialogue and action. This can include reflections on how the team members have historically coordinated and mobilized.

A somatic opening is liminal in the sense that the team members generate new possibilities by lowering their defense mechanisms (or *somatic armor*) through the processes of awareness, deconstruction, and learning of new practices (Haines, 1999). This type of intentional somatic development makes major organizational transformations possible because it requires disengagement from the organization's historical self, thus creating an opening through which the leaders can construct a new organizational shape. The organization can then embody new practices that will sustain, and possibly advance, the organization. In other words, collective transformation begins with an awareness of what the organization already embodies, continues with the use of imagination to envision the future, and concludes with a commitment to using intentional practices to strategically create a life-giving and sustainable organizational shape.

As illustrated in this example story, organizations that commit to working through liminal qualities can use mindfulness practices such as centering to instill in their members a higher tolerance for ambiguity through greater control over the embodied programmed responses to perceived threats. This move away from a reactive state of being results in a somatic opening with many liminal qualities but with few or no barriers to new experience. A high-quality somatic opening broadens the participants' perspectives, thus allowing them to connect in more authentic and less programmed ways. Deliberately cultivating such an opening helps the members to create a state of being that embodies the qualities of *communitas*, with a group focus on moving toward shared connections and commonalities. This is a temporary state of being, and it is outside of the group's normal way of operating; that is, why it has the capacity for liberating the group from its embodied routines and responses. In such a state, which is liminal yet grounded in the group members' connections to

each other, shared concepts can emerge, including an organizational vision, a common sense of purpose, and a strategic framework for purposeful action. An area for further contemplation might be the degree to which these impressions are consciously arrived at or bear up under critical analysis. However, after doing this work in numerous corporate settings, we have found that, when concepts are formed around deeply felt connections and shared experiences, they are more likely to remain viable across changing internal and external environments.

Case 4: Holistic Retreats for Returning Combat Veterans

The next example relates to a series of retreats for combat veterans; these retreats took place at a holistic retreat center in a serene natural environment that was specifically meant to serve as a space for contemplative reflection (Bentz & Giorgino, 2016). We replicated this retreat's methodology 4 times (each year from 2016 through 2019). Some veterans participated in more than one retreat, but at least 70% of the group was new each year. The retreats included instruction and guidance in such practices as yoga, tai chi, and mindfulness meditation, but participation in any practice was not required. Activities also included facilitated group dialogue, a type of phenomenologically informed reflective journaling known as *jnana yoga*¹ (Rehorick & Bentz, 2008), and various forms of artistic expression (e.g., painting, music, and poetry). In addition to the veterans, several other groups were present at the retreat center during this time; the groups shared a common dining room and other facilities. During each of the retreats, the participants were invited to control the group's processes, to collaboratively make decisions, and to jointly construct rules and norms for the group. At each retreat, the veterans met initially as a larger community and then split up into smaller groups to conduct more in-depth discussions. These meetings were largely free-form, but one rule was strictly enforced: Neither facilitators nor participants were allowed to give advice or offer a diagnosis during group sessions. This practice had the effect of shifting the conversational dynamics from problem-solving to shared meaning-making within the context of the group's sharing of stories and their current experience with each other in community.

Although the retreat was initially meant only for combat veterans, during the 2017 retreat, the group, spontaneously and by consensus, decided to open an event to outsiders. As the 2017 retreat had unfolded, stories of encounters between the veterans and other groups on campus had filtered back into the sessions. The veterans characterized these interactions as embodying mutual respect, compassion, and insight. At the retreat's midpoint, one of the veterans suggested (in a full-group meeting) inviting not just members of other groups but also the retreat center's staff members to an "open-mic night" (a type of talent show) that would take place near the end of the week. This was a significant departure from the first year when the open-mic event served as an outlet for venting, deep personal sharing of often difficult and previously untold stories, and some irreverent levity. This occasionally

included disturbing imagery and language, which many of the retreat participants considered cathartic.

After some discussion, all of the veterans agreed to open up the event to outsiders. When the time of the show arrived, despite some initial nervousness, the atmosphere was warm and palpably authentic. Both veterans and guests openly shared stories of loss and healing. One veteran called this experience a “trauma group on steroids,” and another said that he felt he had made more progress in this one night than he had in years of traditional therapy.

After the 2017 retreat, a key question was whether this spontaneous process of opening up an event to outsiders was replicable. During the 2018 and 2019 retreats, we tested the concept by again putting the decision to the group. In each of those years, the group again agreed by consensus to include others. The outcomes were similar to those from 2017: warm encounters and sharing between the veterans and the other participants. This contravenes conventional wisdom, by which veterans’ programs and therapeutic services are kept separate from those for other communities and mainstream social settings. In clinically controlled settings, in particular, disclosure is limited, and protections of privacy have high priority. Such practices, although well intended, likely result in barriers to transformative experiences such as those we observed.

Although many returning combat veterans have had profoundly life-changing experiences during their service, they often seem to have trouble finding appropriate social space outside of the military and veterans community for expressing or processing these stories after returning to civilian life. Furthermore, labeling these veterans with a psychological pathology, such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), serves to create additional barriers due to the stigma of mental illness and the perception that this pathology prevents them from effectively relating to others (Buechner & Jinkerson, 2016). Drawing upon the literature on liminal experience, we propose a potentially more productive conceptual model: *moral conflict*, which refers to a disruption of the moral code that a group uses to ground itself in reality (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997). More serious than moral conflict is moral injury, which includes perceived personal failures and betrayals by others (Shay, 1995). Both moral conflict and moral injury are often accompanied by feelings of shame, guilt, or anger, which can then result in social distancing and difficulties with communication. Recognizing and normalizing these feelings can help to create social space where constructive meaning can be made of such experiences. Reconceptualizing the effects of these liminal experiences of moral injury away from psychological pathology—perhaps seeing them instead as *disorienting dilemmas* or *transformations of perspective* (Mezirow, 1991)—could lead to new ways of restructuring or even enlarging the capacity of people’s social worlds. In this area, further application of transformative learning theory concepts could likely make much-needed contributions to reimagining the transition process by which veterans return to civilian life. This has both individual and collective implications.

To provide a benchmark for the impact that the open-group event had on the veterans, after each of the retreats, the participants completed a questionnaire on life-changing events which was based on the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995). Their scores revealed several profound shifts, particularly in the area of *relating to others*. The participants' responses indicated that their levels of connection—both among their own group and with others at the retreat center—reached new highs. It was not feasible for us to evaluate each of these variables individually, but we consider it likely that contextual factors (e.g., group somatic activity, creative expression, the holding of contemplative space, and self-reflection on common elements of lived experience) can work in combination to create the observed phenomenon. Using this framing, Mezirow's concept of transformative learning may be more helpful than conventional approaches to postservice transition and mental health in terms of addressing combat veterans' moral injuries (Kent & Buechner, 2019). This approach shifts the focus away from individual mental illness and toward the disorienting effects that result from the moral and ethical dilemmas inherent in liminal war experiences.

One way to view this collective transformative potential of working with the liminal experience of combat veterans that bridges the disciplines of education and psychology is through the lens of Adlerian social systems psychology (Mosak & Maniaci, 1999). This way of thinking shifts the focus of attention of mental health from internalized cognitive processes to developmental effects at the community level, with emphasis on the system-level interactions that create problematic "contradictions, conflicts, and paradoxes" in the first place (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997, p. 136). This level of engagement requires deep and purposeful listening to the experiences of the people who exist at the intersections of social worlds, including the ways in which their stories are unique, yet relatable to the group's common experience. It also requires a capacity for openness, trust, and respect that resembles the "beloved community" envisioned by Rev. Martin Luther King (Bobrow, 2015) or the "community feeling" described by Alfred Adler (Mosak & Maniaci, 1999).

Although these qualities are elusive, the replication of the phenomenon described in the case of the veterans' retreat suggests that the conditions for this phenomenon can be created by reducing or removing typical cultural and institutional constraints—thus allowing *communitas* to spontaneously emerge. These cultural and institutional constraints might include the widely held assumptions that combat experiences are universally pathologizing, that health and mental health institutions serving veterans and service members must be separated or insulated from the mainstream, and that postservice education of transitioning service members should be primarily vocationally (as opposed to developmentally) focused. Further, there are likely untapped potential benefits to mainstream society by reducing the constraints to hearing what veterans have to tell us, unleashing potentially transformative forces through the process of hearing, reflecting, and making meaning of the existential and often liminal experiences which many veterans have undergone.

Case 5: Exonerated Women in the Innocence Movement

The final example of *communitas* is drawn from research on female casualties of the criminal justice system as evocatively described in the Introduction. The trauma of a wrongful arrest and the subsequent conviction and incarceration, before an eventual exoneration, is comparable to the traumas of torture survivors, concentration camp survivors, refugees, and asylum seekers, many of whom similarly have been arrested, wrongfully incarcerated, and released back into society (Konvisser, 2015). These experiences can also be likened to the moral injuries that returning veterans experience, including traumas to their spirit, values, and deeply held beliefs and expectations (Buechner & Jinkerson, 2016). These groups are all survivors of sustained catastrophes that extend over long periods and that can forever change not only their own lives but also and the lives of their loved ones.

The traumas and dissonance that exonerees experience when they reenter society compel some of them to seek out opportunities for further understanding and overcoming those experiences. All exonerees have been raised to believe in the safety of the world and the justness of society, but after the justice system violates them, they all understand its flaws; some also take action to remediate the injustices they have suffered and to find personal meaning in their experiences (Konvisser, 2012). Some exonerees are able to make sense of what happened to them and to cope with the resulting dissonance by working on their own restitution, by helping other prisoners or former prisoners (both the rightfully and wrongfully convicted), or by reaching out to those who are experiencing the wrongful conviction process. Others speak publicly about their cases to educate the public and raise awareness about the plight of the wrongly convicted (Konvisser, 2015).

The so-called innocence movement (The Innocence Network, n.d.; Innocence Project, n.d.) has done more than just help exonerate many wrongfully convicted individuals. It has also provided collective avenues through which exonerees can channel their energies toward correcting injustices in the system through organized activism. In addition, it has created safe spaces that allow for personal growth through temporary experiences of *communitas*.

About 10% of the over 2,300 exonerations in the United States since 1989 have involved women (National Registry of Exonerations, n.d.) and 40% of these women's sentences were for child abuse, endangerment, neglect, or murder (including for shaken babies and for arson). Often, the evidence in such cases involved mass hysteria or junk science; in some cases, there may not have been a crime at all, and in many cases, the women have had to deal with not just their criminal charges but also their deep personal senses of loss following the tragic deaths of their loved ones (Center on Wrongful Convictions, n.d.).

In early 2010, five female exonerees found themselves in a sea of male exonerees at the annual conference of The Innocence Network (n.d.). As the women discussed

their experiences, they were struck both by the common elements of their cases and by the stark differences between their wrongful convictions and those of their male counterparts; in particular, they shared a need to build relationships, to speak out, and to have women who have had similar experiences hear and validate their feelings (Center on Wrongful Convictions, n.d.). Such discussions led to a vision for the first Women and Innocence Conference, which was held in November 2010. This was followed in 2014 by the Center on Wrongful Convictions' Women's Project Conference. At this conference, a panel titled "Exonerated Women Speak Out—Hear Our Voices" created a space in which women exonerees could be heard and could share the physical, emotional, social, and material challenges that they face after exoneration; the creative and resourceful strategies that help them cope with both the reality of life after exoneration and the consequences of wrongful conviction; and the help that they still need to rebuild their shattered lives and to productively reengage with life.

For these women, the subsequent annual Innocence Network conferences have enabled them to engage with and work through their unique issues in an environment of *communitas* that includes other exonerated women. Events such as a Women's Welcome Gathering and a Women's Panel provide spaces for the attendees to give voice to their emotion-laden experiences; to build shared bonds with other women (whom they often call *sisters* or *new family*); and to find comfort, safety, and healing in a community of supportive others who understand their pain, shame, and guilt—all without "having to explain where you've been or what you have been through," as expressed by many of the women.

The attendees agreed that their biggest need "is more time with each other." Nevertheless, they also recognized a need for broader public awareness of their unique qualities, issues, and challenges: As one of the women stated, "we need to change the public perception of us. We don't really have a face yet. It's the innocence conferences that allow us to do this."

Although speaking and advocating are difficult—and sometimes even retraumatizing—these acts can also be transformative and healing. These women who have survived wrongful convictions have learned to live alongside their feelings of grief, pain, and helplessness, thus overcoming suffering, growing, and moving forward to hope and healing (Konvisser, 2015).

Not all exonerees are able to participate in such conferences or to advocate for the rectification of the injustices that they and others have suffered, but some of those who have done so have organically grown into effective leaders and advocates for criminal justice reform (Konvisser, 2012; Weigand, 2008). In the process, these women have demonstrated the power to "irradiate society" (Bentz & Giorgino, 2016, p. 114) by transforming not only themselves but also the innocence movement and possibly even the criminal justice system; the results thus reveal potential methods for building a more inclusive society—a goal that lies at the heart of U.S. constitutional values (Konvisser & Werry, 2017).

Conclusion: Liminality, *Communitas*, and Transformative Learning

Now that we have presented and considered some examples of the phenomenon we have identified as collective transformation, we conclude with a few thoughts about implications for the engagement of transformative learning theory and practice in further study of collective transformation and some ideas for the evolution or expansion of the theory itself.

Rather than suggesting a radical departure from what we already know about transformative learning theory, we hope that this way of looking at transformation from the level of social systems might serve as an integrative turn. We envision that this might stimulate some further interdisciplinary conversations with other communities of scholarship and practice.

Specifically, transformative learning has for some time contributed significantly to the understanding by educators about the development of human potential for greater intersubjective capacity. What we now suggest is a shift of attention from these individual qualities to the dimension of social space or a “container” in which interpersonal relations take place and the roles which shared experiences of liminality and *communitas* might play in creating conditions for transformation at the level of social and personal meaning systems. Adding insights and illustrative models from the literature of relational approaches and social construction, somatics, and mindfulness may help us to further understand the dynamics of transformative processes. To help further illustrate how these connections might be made, we conclude by foregrounding and linking several of the central ideas from the examples shared earlier in this article.

Our first case of democratic and dialogic schools shows the significance of developing capacity for co-creation among all stakeholders—staff, students, and parents for realizing sustainable *communitas* by combining both reflective efforts on the link between self and other and participative practices. In such systems, learning becomes vital and dynamic, and differences are a source of growth. These environments are more likely to deeply impart a shared sense of the “way we are together” in *communitas*, as a form of shared, higher level purpose. In such systems, learning seems to be vital and dynamic, and differences become a source of growth. Relational lenses, such as social construction, expands our understanding of the applications of transformational learning theory to the collective level.

While these schools are incredibly inspirational, individualist values still guide them. If we are to co-construct a reality of participation and a true sense of belonging, we may want to reconsider the meaning of the self and the positioning of the other in the interaction and what conditions promote or hinder collaboration and a sense of belonging and community. Our example points at the importance of shifting our focus more toward the relational unit for realizing a vision of a genuine relational transformation and collaborative communities.

Our second case example challenges many fundamental assumptions about “job retraining” of adults and opens the door to consider broader implications of social identity to the process of career transition. The use of traditional methods of pedagogy in the task of teaching displaced workers’ new job skills is a one-dimensional approach that also carries with it the risk of making the workers feel like they are being returned to juvenile status. Application of transformative learning methods in working with such individuals can go further harnessing the liminal experience of displacement as a catalyst for introspection, self-reflection, and personal growth and as a way of constructing a new identity for oneself.

To someone undergoing such a transition, which often happens abruptly, this entire experience can feel very much like trauma, defined as an existential threat or a form of betrayal, and this can be taken very personally. By redirecting attention to the collective level, and incorporating metaphors from the humanities and Jungian analysis into the process, a group can come to find solidarity within themes and patterns common to the broader human experience. As further expressed by Dante’s poetic evocation, such a group can also discover together that their collective strength, and the pathway to growth, lies in moving *in the direction of* the shared trauma, not *away* from it. Recognizing and cultivating the ability of such a group to find *communitas* with each other, and expand their collective horizons together through encounters with philosophy and literature, may offer further potential in transforming the perspective of job displacement from a life-ending personal tragedy to a turning point filled with new possibilities. The arts, literature, and other “humanities” offer powerful metaphors and means of creative and imaginative expression that has long been associated with a liberal arts education, but this is not often considered as part of the more practically focused process of adult transition linked to more concrete and measurable socioeconomic outcomes. Taking a transformational learning perspective at these turning points, informed by the humanities, may help turn the shattered identities and personal dilemmas of displaced workers into new shared visions of growth and social change.

If the situation of displaced workers described above is evocative of a shipwreck, in our third case example, we can extend that metaphor further as we find members of a corporate team still on board, with all hands on deck, trying to weather the storm by charting a new course. While they are being buffeted by the winds of change, they are not yet in the water nor quite yet ready to head for the lifeboats. While their practical problem is a bit different, the liminal qualities of the situation are just as present as are the collective implications. The immediate consideration, since the danger is still present, is to tamp down individual preservation instincts, allowing for space to collectively envision a new way of collective being in order to survive the storm and continue the voyage.

Our case study illustrates the use of mindfulness practices and somatic coaching to create a new path forward that starts individually and moves to collective space. The initial competencies and qualities required are increased bodily awareness and capacity for self-regulation. These are gradually increased to expand the capacity to

first tolerate liminality and later to embrace liminality as a way of being. This can be alternatively described as a process of acquiring the learned ability to attend, objectify, and ultimately extinguish feelings and behaviors that are counterproductive to collective survival. Like members of a seasoned sailing team, the group learns to disregard fear and self-preservation instincts and instead focus on what needs to be done to read the winds and current and navigate emerging obstacles. The team's emerging somatic awareness helps to create an "opening" in which new ideas can emerge, unfettered and unconstrained by instinctive reactions that were previously (and erroneously) associated with self-preservation and safety. This is a form of *communitas* that has long ensured human survival and thriving.

We recommend further study of the integration of these somatic concepts and mindfulness practices with transformative learning theory as a way to help expand horizons and enable the collective imagination to emerge. Many of our current social divisions and conflicts could likewise benefit from an enhanced realization that we are all in the same boat in this storm and the enhanced capacity to envision ways to create more inclusive social space. As illustrated in our case example, this might include the cultivation of abilities for deep listening and bearing witness, while suppressing the enactment of learned defensive routines that too often preclude the envisioning of new possibilities when we are presented with challenges to our belief systems.

The dilemma of reintegration of combat veterans described in the fourth case example brings up the possible use of transformative learning theory as an alternative to the transition model that is commonly used and also as a complementary form of postservice mental health support outside of clinical structures. The latter is a particularly urgent matter due to two unfortunate social phenomena that have evolved since the Vietnam Era: (1) the (largely inaccurate) labeling of nearly all veterans with the stigma of mental illness through a PTSD diagnosis and (2) the social isolation of veterans which has resulted from the lack of a holistic and community-based transition strategy. Given our tendency to rely on specialized institutions to deal with social problems, we currently lack a coherent support network for transitioning veterans which is fully integrated at the community level. As is well established in the literature, and reinforced by the case study presented here, there has been a persistent military–civilian divide in the United States, and as a result, many veterans often do not feel understood by their fellow citizens. This is an issue that is related to the phenomena of diversity and inclusion; yet, this is not fully represented within the literature on those topics as currently studied and practiced in the fields of higher education and social science research.

Additionally, many veterans are troubled by the stereotyping that has taken place due to the application of "medical model" practices to mental health support services, requiring a formal diagnosis before any support is offered. We are coming to understand "moral injury" as an alternative to combat trauma as a way of understanding the troubling experiences that veterans sometimes have in transition. As opposed to an individual form of mental illness as delineated by the PTSD diagnosis, moral injury is better understood as a collective phenomenon. As such, it encompasses the entire

society and our relationship with the imagery and metaphors of warfare, the well-documented difficulty veterans have with homecoming, and the individual moral and ethical decisions and trade-offs that take place amidst the liminality of combat.

As in the previous case examples of liminal experiences, the addressing and healing of moral injury depend upon the ability to face it and move in the direction that this inquiry takes us, not in suppressing or curing it. With proper support and direction, that direction may be upward, as encompassed by the literature of post-traumatic growth. This represents a highly relevant and compatible, yet largely unexplored, territory for the transformative learning community around an issue that is vitally important, both to veterans and to society as a whole. Imagine the impact on our social fabric if we are able to learn and grow from what the current generation of men and women who have served on the front lines have to tell us about the ground truth of conflicts they have witnessed, and the power of *communitas* they have felt through living in the company of comrades who would willingly sacrifice their own lives for each other, for no reason other than love.

After considering the collective transformation examples of the other marginalized populations, the wrongfully convicted and later exonerated women presented in our final case example shows how a shared traumatic and liminal experience, followed by a shared sense of transformed perspective, can be harnessed as a force for broader social change beyond their group. Through the innocence movement, exonerates can not only experience *communitas* with each other through small group discussions within organized conferences but also, by sharing their stories and their resolve, work towards mending the broken places in our justice system that created the conditions for their unjust treatment. This social change initiative is not the result of an intellectual or cognitive process but rather becomes embodied as an outgrowth of the relational process itself. Through the use of a little imagination, we can see the transformative potential of the *communitas*-based approach exemplified by this group as an impactful and positive approach to social change and social justice as well as to individual growth. A further examination of the potential for the application of transformative learning theory to practices of social justice and social change advocacy would appear to be warranted.

We have endeavored to show by the examples presented in this article that collective transformation is a possible outgrowth of a shared liminal experience among a group that later finds *communitas* with each other. We have also made some suggestions on possible further exploration of the phenomenon of collective transformation, combining insights from transformative learning theory with others from trauma studies, somatics and mindfulness practice, interpersonal conflict transformation, the humanities, and social construction and communication. We acknowledge that this is just a modest beginning, and we look forward to hearing from others in the field with regard to related research, observation, and theory building.


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ORCID iD

Barton Buechner  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3758-4356>

Note

1. The term *jnana yoga* means “the yoga of knowledge”; it refers to the process of discriminating the real from the unreal through a self-reflective writing process that is informed by scholarship (Valerie Bentz, personal communication, May 29, 2019).

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Author Biographies

Barton Buechner, PhD, is senior adjunct in the MA in Military Psychology program, Adler University, and Adjunct in the Creative Leadership for Innovation and Change PhD program, University of the Virgin Islands. His research interest is the phenomenon of moral injury among transitioning members of the military. He is a Board member of the National Veterans Foundation and the Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) Institute for Personal and Social Evolution.

John Dirks, PhD, is professor and Mildred B Erickson Distinguished Chair (emeritus) of Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education at Michigan State University. His research focuses on Jungian and post-Jungian perspectives on transformative learning in higher and adult education.

Zieva Dauber Konvisser, PhD, is an adjunct assistant professor of criminal justice at Wayne State University and a Fellow of the Institute for Social Innovation at Fielding Graduate University. Her research focuses on the human impact of traumatic events, such as terrorism, genocide, combat, and wrongful conviction. She serves on the boards of METIV: The Israel Psychotrauma Center, Strength to Strength, and Proving Innocence and is the Oral Historian at the Holocaust Memorial Center Zekelman Family Campus.

Deedee Myers, PhD, MSc, is the chief executive officer of DDJ Myers, Ltd, founded in 1989. Her focus of study and work is embodied leadership and pragmatic action in executives, teams, and boards of directors. Myers also researches the role of somatic practices in amputees restoring dignity in their bodies post-amputation.

Tzofnat Peleg-Baker, PhD, is an adjunct professor of conflict and negotiation in the professional MBA program, the school of Business at Rutgers University-Camden. Tzofnat is a social psychologist and a conflict resolution scholar-practitioner. Her focus of research and practice is on conflict as an opportunity for learning, transforming adversarial interactions into dialogic relationships, overcoming implicit social-psychological barriers to constructive relations, the role of leadership in constructing dialogic realities, and the inclusion of diversity.