

MORAL INJURY

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The views expressed in this presentation are those of the presenter and do not reflect the views of the US Department of Defense or the United States Army.



A Soldiers Eyes

**When you look into a soldier's eyes
you see the images locked deep inside
the torture and hate he has seen
the deaths of friends that have been
the hard decisions he has made
the killing blast of one grenade
the countless men he has killed
the dangerous missions he has fulfilled
the horrific gore
the madness of war
the deaths of the innocent, their piercing scream
now you too won't be able to dream
that steely eyed soldier was just a boy
until war took all his joy
so when you meet a soldier with distant eyes
think of what he has seen and why he wears that disguise**

- Kristoffer Rehder



Lone Survivor

The trailer for Peter Berg's movie gives us all a glimpse of the tension in the souls of Soldiers:

In one scene, the small Navy SEAL team assigned to kill an al-Qaeda leader is surrounding young Afghan goat-herders in the middle of the Hindu-Kush Mountains. Taylor Kitsch's character says, "The way I see it, we got two options: one, let 'em go, roll the dice. The second that they run down there, we've got 200 on our backs. Two, we terminate the compromise." Mark Wahlberg's character cuts in: ". . . Not killing kids, not feeling it. This is not a vote, we're gonna cut them loose and we're going home."



Moral Injury = Mortal Fight of the Soul

Moral injury is that serious transgression that leads to a mortal conflict of the soul when one's experience is at odds with one's core ethical or moral beliefs

Mortal because the transgression stands in opposition to the values of the soul and thus splits the self into a battle of competing parts and destroys a sense of wholeness and being. As Soldiers have often reported "my soul has fled."



The Combatants

CH Jeffrey Voyles, in his presentation on moral injury, speaks of that splitting in a number of dichotomies:

- **Professional versus personal**
- **Feminine versus masculine**
- **Warrior versus civilian**
- **Warrior versus monster**
- **Redeemable versus damned**
- **Saint versus sinner**



Moral Injury Origins

- **We value life/ natural law**
- **Training can create a response not in sync with conscience**
- **Prepared for combat, but not for dealing with spiritual shrapnel**
- **Train through repetition to overcome natural aversion to killing**
- **Civil War - 1000's loaded more than one mini ball
Vietnam -15% didn't fire weapon / today - 90% fire**



An Example

A young man who was the gunner on an Abrams tank in the Gulf War . . . He could sleep at night only if he knew the people he killed were combatants . . . He would never know, so the combat continues within him.



VUCA Environment

The Nature of Modern Combat

V = Volatility - The nature and dynamics of change, and the nature and speed of change forces and change catalysts.

U = Uncertainty - The lack of predictability, the prospects for surprise, and the sense of awareness and understanding of issues and events.

C = Complexity - The multiplex of forces, the confounding of issues and the chaos and confusion that surround an organization.

A = Ambiguity - The haziness of reality, the potential for misreads, and the mixed meanings of conditions; cause-and-effect confusion.



Dr. Ed Tick in War and the Soul tells us:

"Sitting Bull and his warriors, or other bands from innumerable traditional cultures, were never plagued with self doubt about the value of their mission, as many of our soldiers are today. In order to do battle with a whole heart, the danger and threat to one's home must be real, and the people must experience it as immediate and about to threaten their existence as a whole. They and their warriors must be in unity." (179)



That Was a Far Different World than Today

The irony is that the post modern world is less likely to give credence to the soul. The philosophy of our time is that reality is constructed without recognition of any absolute moral authority. We hold to the myth of technology - that man can be changed and programmed with the right science; and what can't be cognitively reconstructed can be medicated. It has led at least one AP reporter* to ask the question, “has the military failed by focusing on PTSD and neglecting moral injury?”

*** http://vitals.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/02/22/17056891-veterans-suffer-moral-injury-from-warfare?lite**



From the Leaders in the Field

Dr. Johnathan Shay first coined the term “moral injury” and characterized it as the “undoing of the soul.”

Dr. Tick writes, "We do not help survivors rebuild dignity and rediscover inner peace. Certainly, in contrast to traditional cultures, our modern processes do not include sacred and communal dimensions of healing. Also, the recovery of each individual is no longer a priority to the larger social system because the system functions even with the loss of significant numbers of its adult population. Nor do we reserve special roles for our returnees; we want them to function the same as they did before. We do not recognize that they have been through a profound death-rebirth process and are significantly and permanently transformed." (104)



The Realities of Being a Soldier

You are trained to overcome the natural resistance to killing. That is a core value and part of your morality.

We have learned from past wars that Soldiers are naturally reluctant to kill. We are now much better at teaching Soldiers to overcome that reluctance. (In Civil War, WWII and Korea many did not fire, changed training methods and now above 90 %). (Grossman – On Killing)

If you are an American Soldier in today's Army, you have been trained to close in on and destroy the enemy. One of our commanding generals has a fondness for saying: "We don't want a fair fight." And we don't. If we are to engage and kill the enemy we want it to be with "shock and awe."

Our Lethality Equals an Enormous Cost to Body, Mind and Soul

The story of Brandon Bryant, a man who joined the military on a whim. He eventually ended up as a sensor operator (co-pilot) for drones. His job at Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico was to sit in front of 14 computer monitors and fly a predator drone in Afghanistan 6,250 miles away. One day, upon receiving the order to fire, he pushed a button that launched a Hellfire missile into a mud hut that had been lased. At the launch it took sixteen seconds to put steel on target. Three seconds from impact, a child walked around the corner of the hut. There was a flash and then the realization, "Did we just kill a kid?" After that he began to shut down. He got moody. He had trouble sleeping. One day he collapsed at work spitting up blood. He was diagnosed with PTSD. But there was something there beyond the physical and mental symptoms. Suffering from a moral injury, he decided to quit after walking into work one day and saying to his coworkers: "Hey, what motherfucker is going to die today?" (Spiegel Online)



You Don't Even Have To Be There

Bill Nash, a VA leader in the field of moral injury, defined it this way in a recent Time magazine article: "Moral injury is stress resulting from perpetrating, or merely witnessing, acts - or failures to act - that transgress deeply held, communally shared moral beliefs and expectations."

<http://nation.time.com/2013/04/17/moral-injury-a-profound-sense-of-alienation-and-bject-shame/>

You Don't Have To Be The One Pulling The Trigger

- **Bitter Vietnam era chaplain - one thing you will learn “He who lives by the sword dies by the sword.”**
- **Retiring General Officer who asks the question, “Can God forgive me?”**
- **Many senior officers carry around cards on every Soldier they have lost.**
- **Chaplain who, because of his friendship, caused an interpreter to be gutted and hung.**
- **A gifted sniper who can't sleep or eat. He is haunted by the deaths that are being caused because he is not there to kill.**
- **Soldier stood by as friend put a bullet in badly injured child.**
- **Alvin York (the most decorated American Soldier in WWI) plagued by questions over what he had done.**



I Did Right, But I Did Wrong

Even when killing is justified, Soldiers can still feel guilt and experience moral injury.

"In *The Naked and the Dead*, Norman Mailer described the discomfort of Catholic Soldiers during WWII who were afraid they might die in battle before they could make confession and be purged of the killings they had done." (Tick 141)



13th Annual Force Protection Conference: Dr. William Nash's Moral Injury Scenarios

As you are greeted by a village elder outside his home, machine gun fire erupts from a second floor window, killing one of your marines and injuring another. As you hit the deck, the elder pleads with you, "Don't shoot! Don't shoot! My family is in there!"

A Marine handler of bomb-sniffing dogs is asked to train other Marines in your squad in his special skill set. One of his first pupils, while handling a dog on his own, fails to spot an IED that kills his best friend in the squad.

Your squad is approached at a checkpoint by an Afghan woman holding a young boy with a badly infected leg wound. The boy is dying. Your request for a CASEVAC is denied. You must send the woman and her son away to seek care at a local Afghan hospital.



The Pastoral Perspective

Kent Drescher who has an M.Div and a Ph.D. in psychology from Fuller and has worked at the VA in Palo Alto has been an advocate for the validity of moral injury as distinct from PTSD. Part of the reason for this is that PTSD does not "sufficiently capture moral injury, or the shame, guilt, and self-handicapping behaviors that often accompany moral injury." (PTSD Qtr Research Vol 23:1, 2012)

Drescher's Insights on Moral Injury

- **Contributing events:** Betrayals by leaders, trusted peers or oneself; Disproportionate violence or revenge; Harming civilians or civilian property
- **Signs and symptoms:** Misconduct, violence, and other disciplinary problems; Social alienation, alienation from self; Loss of faith, loss of meaning
- **Intervention approaches:** Diverse psychological, social and spiritual recommendations

(Taken from the 13th Annual Force Protection Conference:
<http://www.slideshare.net/marina761/2010-force-health-protection-conference-deployment-healthcare>)



Moral Injury and Theology

- **Did I do the right thing? It's not about ROE, it's a matter of the heart.**
- **Can God forgive me?**
- **Oh, sir, you're talking about guilt. You mean they have given it a name?**
- **Professed vs. real theology (TBI)**



PTSD Vs. Moral Injury

Though there may be some overlap in symptoms, moral injuries aren't what most people think of as PTSD. The nightmares and flashbacks of terrifying, life-threatening combat events.

A moral injury tortures the conscience. Symptoms include deep shame, guilt and rage. It's not a medical problem, and it's unclear how to treat it. "The concept ... is more an existentialist one," says retired Col. Elspeth Ritchie, former psychiatry consultant to the Army Surgeon General.

(http://vitals.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/02/22/17056891-veterans-suffer-moral-injury-from-warfare?lite)



PTSD – Criteria DSM-V

- 1. Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violence**
- 2. Intrusion symptoms**
- 3. Avoidance of stimuli**
- 4. Negative alterations in cognitions and mood associated with the event (moral injury?)**
- 5. Marked alterations in arousal and reactivity**
- 6. Duration is more than one month**
- 7. Disturbance in social, occupational or other areas**
- 8. Not related to effects of substance or another medical condition**



Moral Injury Criteria Categories Illustrated in “Fury”

Idealization vs. reality

“Ideals are peaceful; war is violent.”

“We saw it, but we couldn’t understand it.”

Violated core values and morals

(juxtaposition of Bible quotes, talk of salvation, killing and war crimes)

Perceived failure

(Wardaddy’s loss of a team member)

Performed duty – produced tragic results

(carried out mission and the sorrow/guilt of not keeping every one alive)



Adaptive Disclosure Therapy

Psychologist Brett Litz and his team have addressed “these morally injurious experiences . . . associated with shame and guilt and feeling that you're not entitled to get better and have a good life . . . by creating Adaptive Disclosure Therapy, or ADT. It is relatively short . . . six weeks. Soldiers close their eyes and imagine they are speaking to an unconditionally loving and non-judging person.”

(<http://www.pri.org/stories/2013-12-27/military-going-beyond-ptsd-help-soldiers-who-have-suffered-moral-injury>)



Adaptive Disclosure

In a further adaption:

"The treatment, Adaptive Disclosure, consists of eight 90-minute sessions, each of which includes imaginal exposure to a core haunting combat experience and uncovering beliefs and meanings in this emotionally evocative context. In cases where traumatic loss or moral injury are present, patients also engage in experiential exercises that entail either a charged imaginal conversation with the deceased or a compassionate and forgiving moral authority in the context of moral injury. In an open trial, Adaptive Disclosure resulted in reductions in PTSD symptoms, depression symptoms, and negative post-traumatic appraisals, and increased post-traumatic growth."

(PTSD Qtr Research Vol 23:1, 2012)



Dr. Nash's Thoughts of the Role of Community

- **Moral Repair requires reconstruction of damaged moral covenants and trust; making amends; asking and accepting forgiveness**
- **Community leaders (in family, church, military organizations, nation) are responsible for social justice as an adjunct to moral repair**
- **Moral authorities may have unique abilities to forgive or encourage forgiveness**
- **(<http://www.slideshare.net/marina761/2010-force-health-protection-conference-deployment-healthcare>)**



Importance of Theological Integration

- **Gary Asklog JPC 2001**
- **58% Religion very important, 26% psychologist**
- **90% belief in personal God, 24% psychologist**
- **“They don’t leave their spirituality in the waiting room.” (Pargament, 2007)**



Guidelines for Pastoral Intervention

- **Providence**
- **Faith**
- **Grace or gratefulness**
- **Repentance**
- **Communion**
- **The sense of vocation**
- **Awareness of the holy**

(Pruyser)



What We Bring As Pastoral Counselors

- **Theology**
- **Experience**
- **Models**
- **Person of the pastor**
 - ▢ **Practice faith**
 - ▢ **Supervision**
 - ▢ **Therapy**
 - ▢ **Pastor/spiritual director**
- **Worship**
- **Bible**
- **Community of faith**
- **Prayer**
- **Practices of the faith**
- **Sacraments**



Proven Approaches to Trauma Counseling

- **CBT**
- **Prolonged Exposure**
- **Cognitive Processing Therapy**
- **EMDR**
- **Group**



Common Factors in Psychotherapy

Factor	Percentage of Influence
Client & Extra-Therapeutic Factors	40%
Therapeutic Relationship	30%
Expectancy	15%
Techniques	15%

(Hubble, Duncan, Miller)



Approaches to Pastoral Counseling

- **What matters most is WHO we are as people of God.**
- **“The prayers and supportive love of a simple Christian may be far more healing for a hurting soul than the counsel of a professionally trained pastor empty of divine presence.” (Chirban, 1996)**
- **Are you willing to bear the pain of another?**

Approaches to Pastoral Counseling



Approaches to Pastoral Counseling

- **Winnicott – When there is anxiety in the room there is no room for the other.**
- **Bion – Unless there are two equally scared people, therapist and client, therapy is not being conducted**
- **Friedman - The technical superiority of therapist is not required, but rather his or her actual self.**
- **Chirban – “As Christians, we are here to insist on the vital need for unmediated personal encounter: not machine to machine, but face to face, person to person, *prosopon* to *prosopon*, according to the model of God the Trinity.”**



Approaches to Pastoral Counseling

- **Listen deeply**
- **Encounter the other in dialogue**
- **Be changed by the encounter**
- **Journey toward healing by God**



Listening

“Christians, especially ministers, so often think they must always contribute something when they are in the company of others, that this is the one service they have to render. They forget that listening can be a greater service than speaking.”

- Bonhoeffer



Final Reflections

“What can I do? Where can I hide from all this and not be found? What wings would take me high enough? How deep a hole would I have to dig? My shame for the evil I have done consumes me . . . I am soaked in blood-guilt, polluted, contagious . . . I am a pollutant, an offense to gods above.”

- Herakles in Euripedes' Herakles (424 BCE)

"Cain said to the Lord, “My punishment is greater than I can bear! Today you have driven me away from the soil, and I shall be hidden from your face; I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and anyone who meets me may kill me.””

- Genesis 4:13-14