Overview

- Review of the scientific literature and military context to better understand battlefield ethics

- Presentation divided into three sections:
  - Section 1 - Automatic processing
  - Section 2 - Moral disengagement
  - Section 3 - Moral worldviews

- Discuss key take-away messages
SECTION I: AUTOMATIC PROCESSING
Why could soldiers act unethically?

- Many of the highly publicized cases of military personnel acting unethically occurred when soldiers felt angry and/or frustrated.
  - Canadian soldiers tortured & killed Shidane Arone while serving in Somalia
  - US soldiers at Abu Ghraib were influenced by anger
  - UK soldiers in Iraq tortured and killed hotel receptionist Baha Mousa
  - US soldiers in Haditha killed non-combatants

- Emotions, such as anger and frustration, are processed automatically rather than deliberately and rationally (Kahneman, 2003).
Dual-Process model of ethical decision making

**Automatic Processing (aka the intuitive system)**
- Fast and effortless
- Autonomous system that does not require controlled attention
- Often below the level of awareness

**Deliberative Processing (aka the reasoning system)**
- Generally slow and effortful
- Linked to a central working memory resource (controlled attention)
- Involves awareness
Stress and automatic processing

- Under conditions of extreme stress (e.g., a soldier in combat), the ability to engage in rational thinking that involves controlled attention is severely limited.

- Extreme stress impairs working-memory and perception.

- Although stress impairs deliberative thinking, extreme stress does not appear to influence automatically processed information (Chajut & Algom, 2003).
Take-away message

- In stressful conditions and when emotions are strongly experienced, automatic processing is the dominant approach; deliberative thinking is severely impaired.
- Train as you intend to fight, in which ethics training is conducted in a manner similar to other types of operational training.
  - Realistic training scenarios that incorporate an element of stress
  - Over-learning
- Self-control training may help soldiers when faced with a provocation.
- Understanding how to influence ethical behaviour is important.
  - Cannot assume that training aimed at influencing attitudes will translate into behaviour.
SECTION II: MORAL DISENGAGEMENT
Moral disengagement

- According to Albert Bandura, people internalize societal moral standards.
- When people act in accordance with these standards, they feel good.
- When they do not, they feel badly, which then leads to self-condemnation.
- Moral standards need to be activated.
- People engage in selective activation.
- Numerous psychological processes are used to deactivate the self-sanctions.
- Moral disengagement refers to the psychological processes people use when they engage in unethical behaviour.
Examples of moral disengagement in military context

Displacement of responsibility = holding others accountable for one’s actions

In My Lai, Vietnam, American soldiers killed non-combatants, including women and children. When Lieutenant Calley was tried for the acts that took place that day, he said:

*I felt then and I still do that I acted as I was directed and I carried out the orders that I was given, and I do not feel wrong in doing so, sir.* (Daniel, 1972-1973, p. 478).
Diffusion of responsibility = people feel less personally responsible for a harmful action when that action is carried out by a group

Examples of diffusion of responsibility by soldiers at Abu Ghraib:

Everybody knew. Everybody that was inside of that prison, that stayed there, lived there, worked there, they had the pictures.  

(Private First Class England)

What sucks is that almost the entire company has seen the pictures and have done nothing.  

(Specialist Harmer)
Take-Away Message

More research is needed to understand how moral disengagement could occur in a military context. Ways to address this research gap could include:

1. Identifying justifications soldiers use when they consider acting unethically
2. Challenging soldiers’ justifications with counter arguments
3. Determining which counter arguments are most effective at thwarting unethical behaviour
SECTION III: MORAL WORLDVIEWS
Understanding moral worldviews


- He describes several moral foundations, including:
  - **Harm** – Is anybody getting hurt?
  - **Fairness** – Is it fair?
  - **Loyalty** – Am I defending my in-group? Am I a traitor?
  - **Hierarchy** – Is authority being respected?
In-group loyalty and hierarchy

- Most people have moral worldviews that incorporate harm and fairness concerns.

- Some people, especially non-westerns, consider loyalty to one’s in-group and obedience to authority as part of their moral worldview.

- Winslow (2004) asserts that misplaced loyalties among soldiers contributed to unethical behaviour in Somalia, in which Canadian Airborne Regiment soldiers placed loyalty to their Regiment above their loyalty to the organization.
More research is needed to determine how to best communicate ethics related training in a way that appeals to people with different moral worldviews.

The more messages “fit” with military personnel’s views, the more effective messages will be.

For military personnel who include in-group loyalty into their moral worldview, messages that support in-group loyalty will be more persuasive than messages that are inconsistent with their moral beliefs.

If messages conveyed during ethics training are framed in a way that foster protecting the unit from harm, soldiers who incorporate in-group loyalty into their moral worldview may be more motivated to take action when confronted with a unit member who is engaging in unethical behaviour.
Summary of Key Take-Away Messages

1) Extreme stress impairs rational thinking but not automatic processes. Ethics training that does not rely solely on deliberate, rational thinking for those employed in combat zones could be considered.

2) More research is needed to identify ways military personnel may engage in moral disengagement. Then develop ethics training strategies that challenges potential rationalizations and justifications that can lead to unethical behaviour.

3) More research is needed to determine how to best communicate messages related to ethics to military personnel with multiple moral views.
The way forward

- Research finding pertaining to battlefield ethics is informing the next ethical decision making model.
  - Automatic ethical decision making will be incorporated into the revised ethical decision making model used by DEP

- Presently pilot testing a new loyalty measure that was developed in collaboration with Dr. Jeffrey Spence at the University of Guelph.

- More research is needed to develop and support even stronger evidence based ethics training programs.
Contact Information

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