Moral Personality of Brave and Caring Exemplars

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Two contrasting types of moral exemplars were examined so as to identify personality variables associated with moral action. The sample comprised 50 Canadian awardees for either exceptional bravery or caring, as well as 50 comparison participants. Participants responded to a set of personality questionnaires and a life-review interview. Personality variables were found to substantially augment moral cognition in the prediction of exemplary action. In support of the notion that there is a personological core to the moral domain, it was found that moral exemplars were distinguished from the comparison groups by themes embodied in their life narratives. Specifically, moral exemplars had stronger motivational themes of both agency and communion, were more likely to construe critical life events redemptively, more frequently identified helpers in early life, and reported more secure attachments. Furthermore, the personality of caring exemplars was more nurturant, generative, and optimistic than that of brave exemplars; these somewhat divergent personality profiles imply multiple ideals of moral maturity.

Keywords: moral personality, judgment–action, exemplarity, bravery, care

A major challenge facing the field of moral psychology is to mount a credible explanation of exemplary moral action. Present explanations of moral functioning have emerged in the wake of The Enlightenment, a movement that promulgated the notion that rationality forms the core of moral functioning and that regarded personological factors (“the passions”) as subverting biases to be somehow surmounted (Kant, 1785/1964). As a consequence, contemporary moral psychology seems conceptually askew—rich in its understandings of moral cognition but impoverished regarding other aspects of moral functioning, notably the moral personality. We contend that the field must move beyond single-variable theories and encompass more of the breadth and complexity of the domain in order to provide a comprehensive and coherent account of moral functioning. One way to accomplish this goal is to accord greater conceptual and empirical attention to moral personality and to the intrapsychic aspects of morality that have long been eschewed (Blasi, 2004; Campbell & Christopher, 1996; Hardy & Carlo, 2005; Walker & Hennig, 1997).

One source of disillusionment with the construct of moral cognition, long advanced as the primary index of moral functioning (Kohlberg, 1984), is the accumulating evidence of its generally weak relation to moral action, typically explaining only about 10% of the variability (Blasi, 1980; Walker, 2004). This tenuous relationship has become known as the “judgment–action gap” (Straughan, 1986). The core premise of the present research is that moral judgment is inadequate in accounting for moral action and that personality variables may go a considerable way toward bridging that gap. In other words, it is hypothesized that personality is not irrelevant, nor is it merely collinear with moral judgment in predicting action, but rather that it accounts for a unique and substantial portion of the explanatory equation. Presuming some indication of the relevance of personality in general to moral action, the primary purpose of the present study was to explore the personality functioning of two groups of moral exemplars, using the template of well-validated models and measures of personality, in order to identify the personality variables most closely associated with moral action. To eventually understand the functional relationship between personality and moral action, it is essential to first establish what aspects of personality are morally relevant.

Within psychology, there have been two recent lines of research relevant to this enterprise of identifying aspects of the moral personality: One has examined folk conceptions of moral functioning; the other has examined the personality characteristics of moral exemplars. The study of folk conceptions aims to identify the personality traits that people believe to characterize moral functioning and, as such, taps their implicit personality theory regarding morality. Such studies (e.g., Lapsley & Lasky, 2001; Walker & Hennig, 2004; Walker & Pitts, 1998) have been helpful in suggesting alternate conceptions of moral maturity and in iden-
tifying aspects of morality that are salient in everyday understandings but inadequately represented in dominant models of moral psychology. However, this empirical approach is constrained in that it simply assesses people’s conceptions and does not examine actual psychological functioning. Do real moral paragons evidence the range of moral virtues that are extant in people’s conceptions? Philosophers (Flanagan, 1991; Johnson, 1996) have likewise come to the realization that ethical frameworks, which define moral ideals and prescribe action, must take account of the operative psychological processes in moral functioning. So the study of the exemplary moral personality has considerable relevance. If the lives of moral exemplars are studied holistically, then the complexity of their personality and their balancing of various virtues will be more readily apparent. It is to that line of research that we now turn.

The number of studies of the psychological functioning of moral exemplars is limited. Of these studies, psychobiographies and qualitative case studies seem to be the norm; illustrative examples include the analysis of Gandhi’s life (Erikson, 1969) and the studies of philanthropists (Monroe, 2002), rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe (Oliner & Oliner, 1988), hospice volunteers (Oliner, 2003), and heroes who risked their lives to save others (Oliner, 2003).

One of the more influential studies of moral exemplarity—and one that prefigures the present research—is Colby and Damon’s (1992) qualitative analysis of a small sample of social activists. These exemplars were identified by a panel of ethical experts who formulated several criteria for moral excellence. Despite the striking individuality of these exemplars, Colby and Damon inferred four major developmental processes underlying the acquisition and maintenance of moral goals and action. These processes included (a) a continuing capacity for change; (b) certainty about moral values and principles, which was balanced by open-mindedness and truth seeking; (c) positivity, humility, love, and an underlying faith; and (d) an identity that fused the personal and moral aspects of their lives and that focused on integrity. Although these case studies yield some heuristic insights, the lack of a comparison group and of objective and systematic methodology leaves numerous questions unanswered.

A more systematic study of moral exemplarity by Midlarksy, Jones, and Corley (2005) compared a sample of Holocaust rescuers with comparison groups of bystanders and prewar immigrants. These older adults were administered several self-report measures of personality (almost a half century after World War II). Rescuers were distinguishable from the other groups on the basis of several personality variables, being particularly characterized by evidence of altruistic motivation (internalized altruistic values, a sense of social responsibility, and empathic concern). However, some caution regarding the interpretation of these findings is suggested given that, although members of the comparison groups were originally residents of the same geographical areas in Europe as were the rescuers, they were not matched on any other demographic variables.

There is also some relevant research with adolescent and young adult moral exemplars to note. Hart and Fegley (1995) and Reimer and Wade-Stein (2004) focused primarily on the self-concepts and self-understanding of adolescents who displayed exceptional levels of altruism. Matsuba and Walker (2004, 2005) comprehensively assessed the personality of young adults who showed remarkable commitment to social service organizations. These studies yielded a number of findings that provide the foundation for a more complete understanding of the moral personality. All, however, focused on the adolescent and early adulthood part of the life span (in which aspects of the moral personality are only beginning to emerge and become consolidated), and all focused on a single type of moral exemplarity (caring volunteers).

The Present Study

The present research extends these findings by drawing a large sample of participants from across the adult life span, by comparing two dissimilar types of moral exemplarity (brave vs. caring), by recruiting closely matched comparison groups, and by using a broadband assessment of personality functioning. The comparison of different types of moral exemplars is intended to challenge the notion of a singular model of moral excellence, such as Kohlberg’s (1984) notion of principled moral judgment. Moral philosophers have similarly posited that “ethical goodness is realized in a multiplicity of ways” (Flanagan, 1991, p. 332) and that there may be “irreducibly different types of moral excellence” (Blum, 1988, p. 201). These different visions of moral exemplarity—brave and caring—are well represented in philosophical thought (W. I. Miller, 2000; Noddings, 1984). Lapsley and Narvaez (2006) have further argued that the notion of moral exemplarity need not imply uniform excellence across the full range of virtues and that fostering excellence in one area might come at some cost in another.

The implication of such arguments, for present purposes, is that a comparison of differing types of moral exemplarity can reveal both what is common to their personality functioning (and thus indicative of the psychological core of morality) and what is unique (which would be suggestive of different ideals of moral excellence). Our main hypotheses are (a) that the personalities of exemplars in general will differ manifestly from those of ordinary individuals and (b) that brave and caring exemplars will also be distinguished from each other, albeit in more moderate ways. These, then, form our primary research questions: Is there a foundational core to the moral domain? Are there different personality profiles of moral exemplarity?

The identification of actual moral exemplars faces two primary challenges. First, whereas theories of moral ideals can be constructed “cleanly” in the abstract, persons cannot; in reality, no one is an unblemished paragon of morality. Second, the identification of moral exemplars is controversial due to differing opinions regarding what it means to be moral. One person’s saint is often another’s scoundrel. Witness the divergent evaluations of iconic exemplars such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Mother Teresa, and Oskar Schindler.

The first challenge presents an unavoidable problem for the psychological study of moral exemplars. Other methods that do not rely on grouping individuals by some status of moral action are needed to complement the exemplar approach. The second challenge has been addressed by taking different approaches to the identification of moral exemplars, for example, the nominations of experts (Colby & Damon, 1992) versus the nominations of laypeople (Matsuba & Walker, 2004). In the present study, exemplars were nominated by members of the general community, vetted by an independent advisory committee, and eventually recognized by
a national award. Such awardees, of course, may differ in some respects from other highly moral people whose actions are, for some reason, somewhat less visible to others.

In the present study, we attempted to provide a comprehensive examination of the personality functioning of moral exemplars by using multiple measures and a broadband assessment. Numerous approaches to personality assessment are extant, but McAdams’ (1995b; McAdams & Pals, 2006) typology provides a particularly useful template. He proposed that personality can be described on three broad levels, each having its own obvious strengths and weaknesses but together yielding a comprehensive profile. The first level is that of dispositional traits—broad, decontextualized, stable, and implicitly comparative dimensions. The second level is that of characteristic adaptations—motivational, developmental, and strategic aspects of personality, as evidenced in particular temporal, situational, and role contexts. The third level is that of integrative life narratives—the psychosocial construction of a personal identity and a framework for deriving unity, purpose, and meaning in life.

The measures used in this study reflect all three levels of personality description and were chosen in an attempt to extend the findings of previous research. In terms of dispositional traits, Walker and Pitts (1998) found that naturalistic conceptions of moral exemplarity were organized primarily along a self–other dimension, which references notions of agency and communion. This suggests the particular relevance of the circumplex model of personality (Wiggins, 1995), which taps the dimensions of dominance and nurturance. Walker and Hennig (2004) found that conceptions of brave exemplarity emphasized the dominance dimension, whereas conceptions of caring exemplarity emphasized the nurturance dimension. Indeed, Matsuba and Walker (2004) found, in assessing personality trait self-attributions, that caring exemplars scored higher on agreeableness (i.e., nurturance) than a matched comparison group of young adults. Given that high levels of both dominance and nurturance have been identified as adaptive (Wiggins, 1995), it is hypothesized that exemplars will score higher than comparison participants on both dimensions and that, furthermore, caring exemplars will be particularly nurturant, and brave exemplars will tend toward dominance.

At the midlevel of personality description dealing with characteristic adaptations, the goal motivational aspects of personality are especially relevant. Emmons’ (1999) construct and measure of personal strivings allow the thematic coding of a range of motivational themes of agency and communion. The notion that moral desires (in contrast to moral commitments, which provide a framework for one’s identity and for deriving meaning in life. Dismayed by challenges associated with the essentialist, traitlike self, some researchers (e.g., Hermans, 1996) have suggested that the self, in its entirety, is located in life narrative. The exclusivity of such claims aside, there is growing agreement that narrative is a crucial component of selfhood and identity. Several aspects of personality can be tapped through an analysis of the features of individuals’ life stories. McAdams, Hoffman, Mansfield, and Day (1996) found that the fundamental motivational themes of agency and communion were evident in life stories and were meaningfully associated with other assessments of personality. McAdams (1993) argued that both themes are important in generative action, which suggests that both may be evident in moral exemplarity. Matsuba and Walker’s (2005) evidence in that regard is mixed: Their caring exemplars were more agentic than the comparison group, but these researchers found no differences in communion themes. Our prediction here is that brave and caring exemplars will have strong themes of both agency and communion—given that both types are motivated to help others and that doing so often requires considerable effort—but that the caring exemplars, in particular, will evidence enhanced communal themes given their continuing commitment to service.

Another aspect of functioning that can be examined at this level of personality description is the affective tone that pervades individuals’ life stories. There is accumulating evidence that dispositional optimism is generally indicative of adaptive coping and better adjustment (McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001; Peterson, 2000). Both Colby and Damon’s (1992) and Oliner (2003) noted that many of their moral exemplars displayed hopefulfulness and positivity, but systematic research (Matsuba & Walker, 2005; McAdams et al., 1997) has failed to provide supportive evidence, pointing to the importance of including comparison groups. Nevertheless, it is predicted here that the life stories of caring exemplars, given their pattern of sustained moral commitment, will be characteristically optimistic.

The arguments regarding the adaptive nature of dispositional optimism suggest that individuals’ construal of transformative life events may also be a telling aspect of personality functioning. McAdams (2006) contends that it is not the recounted events...
themselves that are primary in assessing personality, but how they are construed (as redemption or contamination sequences) and what meaning is derived from them. The extant evidence is mixed: McAdams et al. (1997, 2001) found that generative adults had more redemption and fewer contamination episodes than the comparison group, but Matsuba and Walker (2005) found that their caring exemplars had fewer episodes of both contamination and redemption than the comparison group. These mixed findings aside, we contend that the ability or conscious choice to construe some benefit out of adversity is an adaptive form of functioning (McAdams, 2006) that may also sustain moral action; hence, our prediction for the present study is that both brave and caring exemplars will evidence predominantly redemptive construals of critical personal experiences.

The final aspect of personality functioning that was assessed in the present study focuses on a cluster of four themes relating to early advantage. McAdams (2006; McAdams et al., 1997) holds that several early life experiences are formative in what he labels a “commitment story”—a life narrative in which one recalls, from the past, a highly positive childhood and in which one constructs, for the present and future, a personal ideology revolving around prosocial commitments and goals. The early life experiences include (a) a sense of having been advantaged in some fashion, (b) sensitization to the needs of others, (c) the presence of “helpers” who scaffold development (and the relative absence of “enemies”), and (d) secure attachments in various relationships. McAdams et al. (1997) found that generative adults recalled a stronger sense of family benefit than the comparison group as well as greater exposure to the needs of others and fewer enemies; however, no differences were found in terms of the presence of helpers or security of attachments. Matsuba and Walker (2005) reported congruent findings regarding awareness of the needs of others and the presence of fewer enemies, but no differences in terms of helpers. Our predictions here are that both types of moral exemplars will construct this cluster of early advantage themes as formative in their personality but that caring exemplars in particular will show early awareness of the needs of others.

In summary, the objectives of this research were threefold: (a) to determine whether personality variables substantially augment moral cognition in bridging the judgment-action gap, (b) to delineate the personality variables that distinguish moral exemplars from comparison participants and thus are suggestive of the foundational core of moral functioning, and (c) to contrast the personality profiles of brave and caring exemplars as a means of challenging the notion of a unitary model of moral maturity and instead pointing to multiple types.

Method

Participants

Exemplar groups. Participants who are identified here as moral exemplars were recipients of a national award given by the Governor General of Canada, the de facto head of state. Our focus was on two contrasting types of moral exemplars: brave and caring. The brave exemplars were recipients of the Medal of Bravery, a civilian award that recognizes individuals who have risked their lives to save others and who have persisted in their rescue attempt despite considerable danger. The caring exemplars were recipients of the Caring Canadian Award, a parallel award in the Canadian honors system that recognizes volunteers who have shown extraordinary and long-term commitment in providing care to individuals or groups, or who have supported community service or humanitarian causes.1

The pool of awardees from which the present sample was drawn was honored between May 2000 and August 2001. Of this pool of 267 award recipients, the number potentially available for research participation was initially reduced to 101 because of (a) posthumous awards (N = 27); (b) joint awards (N = 27), in which case only one of the recipients, randomly chosen, was considered; (c) awards to children or adolescents (N = 11); (d) awards to noncivilians (N = 5); (e) awards to individuals from remote regions of the country such as the northern territories (N = 31); and (f) the inability to obtain valid mailing addresses (N = 65). The remaining 101 awardees were contacted successively until the intended number of participants for each type of award was recruited (it was unnecessary to contact 38 awardees). In the initial contact letter, prospective participants were informed that the research project was studying positive human characteristics such as altruism, courage, hope, and personal control, that they were of interest because of their award, and that a $50 honorarium would be paid on completion of all parts of the project. Of the 63 people contacted, 46 were recruited who subsequently completed all measures, 1 completed only some measures (and thus was dropped from the sample), 1 did not speak English, 5 could not participate due to illness, 2 had scheduling problems, and 8 were unwilling. In order to accommodate the researcher’s cross-country travel schedule to interview participants, an additional 4 awardees who were recognized later (in 2002) were recruited to yield a total sample of 50 exemplar participants. Participants were drawn from all 10 Canadian provinces. The time interval between the award ceremony for these exemplars and our initial recruitment contact averaged 11.4 months (SD = 5.7).

There were 25 brave exemplars (7 women and 18 men) and 25 caring exemplars (12 women and 13 men). Although it may not be surprising that there are more men than women among the recipients of the award for bravery (given that men are more likely to be involved in rescues entailing physical prowess; Becker & Eagly, 2004), the gender distribution across the two groups is not significant, χ²(1, N = 50) = 1.36, p = .24, Φ = .16. In any case, the relatively small numbers of men and women in each group constrain our ability to explore the relationship between gender and moral exemplarity. The ethnic composition of both groups was primarily Euro-Canadian: 96% of the brave exemplars and 88% of the caring exemplars; again, this is a pattern that is not significant according to Fisher’s test (p = .61, Φ = .07). Educational attainment between the two groups was also comparable: 13.8 total years of education for the brave exemplars and 14.2 years for the caring exemplars, F(1, 46) = 0.76, p = .39, η² = .02. However, one demographic variable, age, did distinguish the two groups: The brave exemplars averaged 40.7 years of age (SD = 8.5, range = 23–58), whereas the caring exemplars were substantially older, averaging 70.1 years (SD = 13.1, range = 43–91), F(1, 46) = 82.04, p < .001, η² = .64. This age disparity would be

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1 Citations for award recipients are accessible on the Governor General’s Web site at http://www.gg.ca
expected given that brave exemplars are being recognized for a heroic rescue in often dangerous contexts in which younger people are more typically engaged, whereas the caring exemplars are being recognized for long-term volunteer service and, for this reason, tend to be older. Nevertheless, this age confound between the two exemplar groups potentially complicates the interpretation of any personality differences that might be revealed between them, a point to which we shall return in the Results section.

Comparison groups. Participants in the comparison groups were individuals drawn from the general community. They resided in four Canadian provinces, although the majority (72%) were from the Vancouver area. Aside from not having received a national award for bravery or caring, there were no other exclusion criteria (and no data were obtained regarding any possible honors or awards they might have received). They were ostensibly recruited for a research project that was studying positive human characteristics such as altruism, courage, hope, and personal control (the same description as was provided to the exemplar groups, except no mention was made here of national awards), and they were similarly offered a $50 honorarium. They were recruited primarily at community centers, seniors centers, clubs, and continuing education classes for adults; a small number was recruited by a snowballing technique. Prospective participants initially provided contact and demographic information. This recruitment procedure yielded a database of several hundred potential participants from which 50 were drawn who closely matched the exemplars, on a case-by-case basis, in terms of four demographic variables: gender, ethnicity, education, and age. The matching of exemplar to comparison participants was conducted because of the possible association between these demographic characteristics and personality variables. Interpretive pitfalls of the matched-group design could arise if the association between these demographic characteristics and personality variables is stronger than the association between the exemplars and their matched comparison group of 25, and 25 caring exemplars and their matched comparison group of 25.

Procedure

The procedure for the exemplar and comparison groups was identical. Participants who agreed to be involved were first mailed a package of personality questionnaires to complete. In addition to providing demographic information, they responded to Wiggins’ (1995) Revised Interpersonal Adjective Scales (IASR) and to Emmons’ (1999) Personal Strivings List (PSL). These questionnaires typically required 45–60 min to complete.

Subsequently, an individual audiorecorded interview was conducted, typically in each participant’s home, and took approximately 2 hr. The interview was later transcribed for coding (transcripts averaged about 14,000 words in length). This semistructured interview was adapted from a life-review protocol developed by McAdams (1995a) and, in essence, asks participants to construct the story of their life. The interview was organized into three major sections: First, participants were prompted to describe in some detail the main chapters of their life story. This part of the interview was rather open-ended and thus has considerable projective potential. (For coding purposes, these life chapters were later regrouped into childhood, adolescent, and adulthood sections.) Second, they were then asked to focus, in turn, on several specific life events that were critical in their life story and to share the concrete details of the event but, more importantly, to also convey the event’s impact and what it says about who they are as persons. In particular, they were prompted to discuss a high-point event, a low-point event, a turning-point event, their earliest memory, an important childhood memory, an important adolescent memory, and an important adult memory. Third, participants were asked to recall a difficult moral conflict from their personal experience; several probing questions served to elicit their reasoning regarding this conflict. Note that exemplars were not explicitly prompted to discuss the actions that garnered them an award.

Coding of the interview and of responses to the PSL was conducted blindly by undergraduate and graduate students in psychology who had been extensively trained on the respective coding systems. Different coders were used for different sets of variables: personal strivings, themes of agency and communion, affective tone, redemption and contamination sequences, early life advantage, and moral reasoning. For each of these measures, interrater reliability was determined by the independent coding of the data of a randomly selected subsample of 25 participants. The data of the primary coder were used in analyses.

Measures and Coding

The IASR. Reflecting the first level of McAdams’ (1995b) typology of personality description, the IASR (Wiggins, 1995) taps the circumplex dimensions of dominance and nurturance (or, in the terminology of the five-factor model, Extraversion and Agreeableness) as well as the other three dimensions of the five-factor model (Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience). These three other dimensions (which are not situated on the circumplex) were not considered as being particularly relevant to moral exemplarity and so were not included in the present analyses. Participants were asked to rate, on an 8-point Likert scale, the accuracy of 124 trait terms in describing themselves.

In the interpersonal circumplex, interpersonal variables (and hence the trait terms on the IASR) form a continuous circular ordering around the two basic dimensions of dominance and nurturance, representing blends of these primary axes. Individuals’ circumplex profiles are reduced to two dimensional scores (dominance and nurturance) for analysis (Wiggins, 1995). Cronbach’s alphas for the octants that comprise the circumplex profile ranged between .75 and .89, consistent with the psychometric properties of the IASR reported by Wiggins (1995).

The PSL. The PSL (Emmons, 1999) assesses personality at the second level of McAdams’ (1995b) typology by tapping characteristic adaptations, which are more contextualized and more explicitly motivational than the trait terms of the IASR. Participants were asked to reflect on and then to write down a list of their personal strivings, that is, the things they are “typically or characteristically trying to do.” They were asked to provide at least 10 strivings, and the page provided space for 15. It is held that such recurrent personal strivings are ideographic instantiations of the major nomothetic motivational categories (Emmons, 1999; Little, 1989).
Thematic coding of the strivings was conducted for seven categories of motivation that were held to be most relevant to moral action. Participants’ handwritten lists were transcribed so that the entire corpus of strivings could be randomized for blind coding and so that each category could be coded independently. For each category, each striving was classified for the presence/absence of the relevant motivational theme, using the definitional criteria provided by Emmons (1999; Sheldon & Kasser, 2001). Note that the categories are not mutually exclusive: A striving may overlap more than one category or may not be codeable at all.

The seven categories of goal motivation are (a) power—concern with influencing others, seeking fame or attention, providing help when none is requested; (b) affiliation—concern with maintaining relationships, social acceptance, being with others; (c) intimacy—concern for close and communicative interactions, and commitment to another; (d) generativity—concern for providing for the next generation, giving of oneself for others, having an enduring influence; (e) spiritual self-transcendence—commitment to concerns that transcend the self (e.g., a divine awareness, universal equality, oneness/unity); (f) identity—concern with resolving role confusion, seeking greater self-understanding, greater freedom with respect to others; and (g) personal growth—concern for personal well-being and for improving aspects of the self.3

For these seven categories, interrater reliabilities were substantial, with exact agreement averaging 93% (range = 91%–95%) and with Cohen’s $\kappa$ averaging .77 (range = .70–.88).

**Agency and communion.** The third level in McAdams’ (1995b) typology of personality assessment focuses on integrative narratives of the self. McAdams (1993) argues that agency and communion are two superordinate motivational themes in individuals’ life stories. He recommended that these themes be coded in the sections of the life story where they tend to be most salient, so we coded in the three life chapters (childhood, adolescence, and adulthood) from the first part of the interview and three critical life events (high point, low point, and turning point) from the second part. Following McAdams’ (2001) manual, each of these six sections was coded for the presence/absence of eight different themes, four reflecting agency (self-mastery, status/victory, achievement/responsibility, and empowerment) and four reflecting communion (love/friendship, dialogue, caring/help, and unity/togetherness). Overall scores for agency and communion were derived by summing over the four themes reflecting each category and over the six sections. Interrater reliability was calculated at the level of coding within sections: For redemption, agreement was 91% and $\kappa = .82$, whereas for contamination, agreement was 91% and $\kappa = .71$.

**Early advantage.** Early life advantage is regarded by McAdams et al. (1997) as an important component of the sculpting of individuals’ identities. Four aspects were coded here: (a) family benefit, (b) sensitization to the needs of others, (c) helpers and enemies, and (d) quality of attachments. These aspects were coded in the five “early life” sections of the interview: the childhood and adolescent sections of the life-chapters part of the interview and the earliest memory, childhood memory, and adolescent memory sections of the critical-events part. Coding of each of these aspects is described in the following paragraphs.

Family benefit entails some clear indication that the participant had “a special advantage, blessing, or positive identification that singled him or her out in a positive way in the family” (McAdams et al., 1997, p. 683). The simple presence/absence of family benefit was coded over all five relevant sections of the interview (following McAdams et al., 1997). Interrater reliability was substantial, with 96% agreement and $\kappa = .66$.

The second variable tapping early life advantage, sensitization to the needs of others, assesses the extent to which a participant reports being exposed to the needs of others in early life, and thus reveals the salience of formative experiences that expand one’s perspective of care for others. Following McAdams’ (1994b) manual, the extent of early awareness of the needs of others was rated over all five relevant sections of the interview, using a 0- to 2-point scale. Interrater reliability was ICC = .83.

Early life advantage may also be indicated in the life narrative by the presence of helpers (people who influenced the participant in an explicitly positive way) and by the absence of enemies (people who were detrimental to the participant’s well-being). Thus, the frequency of explicitly identified helpers and enemies over the five relevant sections of the interview was coded, follow-

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2 Concern with physical health was excluded from our coding of this category because our primary interest was in psychological strivings.

3 Note that the manual for redemption specifies the addition of “bonus points” for indications of enhanced agency, enhanced communion, and ultimate concerns—a procedure not followed here in order to keep the coding of redemption and contamination sequences comparable and because themes of agency and communion were coded separately.
The fourth variable that taps early advantage assesses childhood attachments in six different relationships: mother, father, grandparents, siblings, friendship/school, and church/religion. Over the five relevant sections of the interview, the quality of attachment for each relationship was coded on a 0- to 2-point scale, following McAdams et al. (1997). If a particular relationship was not mentioned at all, then it was assigned an intermediate score of 1. The overall attachment score was given by the mean of these six ratings. Interrater reliability for coding the overall quality of attachments was ICC = .70.

Moral reasoning. Finally, in order to address the issue of the judgment–action gap, participants’ stage of moral reasoning development was coded, based on their responses to a series of probes regarding their real-life moral conflict. Although the well-validated Moral Judgment Interview (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987) is perhaps the standard assessment of moral reasoning development, concerns have been raised that its classic hypothetical dilemmas are unfamiliar, irrelevant, constrained, devoid of contextual information, emotionally unengaging, and of limited generalizability (Baumrind, 1978). The alternate approach of having participants recall and discuss an actual moral conflict from their personal experience ensures that the dilemma is regarded as a moral one that is relevant to their lives. Evidence from a number of studies (see Walker, 1988, 1996; Walker, Pitts, Hennig, & Matsuba, 1995) indicates that levels of moral reasoning are typically consistent between real-life and hypothetical dilemma contexts but, more importantly, that reasoning about real-life conflicts has greater predictive validity (in making meaningful distinctions among groups of individuals and in predicting their behavior) than does reasoning regarding less relevant hypothetical dilemmas.

In scoring moral reasoning regarding the real-life conflict, first, moral judgments were identified—statements that were prescriptive, provided a reason, and were considered valid by the participant. Then, these various moral judgments were matched to criterion judgments in the moral stage scoring manual (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987), relying primarily on general stage structure definitions for each criterion judgment rather than on the dilemma-specific critical indicators. These moral judgment scores were used to determine the percent usage at each stage. Level of moral reasoning development was indexed by the weighted average score, which is given by the sum of the percent usage at each stage weighted by the stage number. Interrater reliability was ICC = .83.

Interview Fidelity

In that the interviews were conducted by Lawrence J. Walker (who was unavoidably aware of participants’ group identity), it is possible that exemplar and comparison participants may have inadvertently been led to respond differently during the life-review interview through, for example, systematic variability in the extent of questioning or in interpersonal warmth. This potential source of bias was examined by independent assessments of the fidelity of the interviews.

There were a total of six variables tapping interview fidelity. Three variables were based on a naïve coder’s reading of only the interviewer’s words from the interview transcript: (a) the number of interviewer prompts, (b) the quality of these prompts, and (c) a guess as to the participant’s group classification (as exemplar or comparison). The variable tapping the quality of the prompts was an overall assessment of the interviewer’s effectiveness in eliciting life events and other aspects of participants’ life stories and in getting them to express how they understood themselves and their lives. The quality of the prompts was rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). Because of the difficulties associated with proving the null hypothesis (i.e., that the coder would be unable to guess participants’ group on the basis of the interviewer’s prompts), the coder was offered an incentive payment of $5 for each correct guess.

Because transcripts of the interviewer’s prompts may not well reflect affective cues, coding of the audiorecordings was also conducted. It would be inappropriate to have a naïve coder simply listen to the entire interview because, as is reported in the Results section, participants’ responses are transparently revelatory of their group status (in terms of motivational themes, affective tone, redemption and contamination episodes, etc.), so it was necessary to edit out participants’ responses from the recording (replacing each response with a uniform tone signal), thereby leaving only the interviewer’s prompts. Given the labor-intensive nature of this audioediting process, it was conducted for only a portion of each interview. The portion selected for coding was the first three critical events (high, low, and turning point). This portion was selected because it is particularly rich in interviewer prompts and because much of the coding of personality variables was concentrated here. On the basis of another naïve coder’s assessment of the audio excerpts for each interview, three variables of interview fidelity were tapped: (d) the interviewer’s warmth (rated on a 5-point scale), (e) the interviewer’s interest (also rated on a 5-point scale), and (f) a guess as to the participant’s group classification (again, there was a $5 incentive for each correct guess).

To assess the extent of interviewer bias, two sets of analyses were undertaken. First, a one-way (group: exemplar vs. comparison) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted for the four quantitative variables (number of prompts, quality of prompts, interviewer warmth, interviewer interest). According to Wilks’s lambda criterion, this analysis was not significant, multivariate $F(4, 95) = .52, p = .72, \eta^2 = .02$, and neither were any of the univariate analyses of variance (ANOVAs), $F(1, 98) \leq 1.02, ps \geq .32, \eta^2s \leq .01$. Second, analyses (using a binomial test) of the two coders’ guesses of participants’ group classification, one based on a reading of the interviewer’s prompts and the other based on the audiorecordings, indicated that they did not differ from chance levels in identifying participants ($z = 1.10$ and $1.30, ps = .27$ and .19, respectively). Thus, there is no evidence of interviewer bias compromising the fidelity of the life-review interview.

Results

Overview and Data Reduction

The presentation of the results is organized in terms of the three issues that frame this research: (a) Do personality variables help to
bridge the gap between moral judgment and action? (b) Is there a foundational core to moral functioning, as might be indicated by personality differences between moral exemplars and their comparison groups? (c) Do different types of moral exemplars—brave versus caring—evidence divergent personality profiles that would be suggestive of different ideals of moral maturity?

This study involved a broadband assessment of personality functioning and a consequently large number of variables. In the multivariate analyses that follow, it is necessary to have more cases than dependent variables in every cell; thus, some data reduction was essential. This was typically accomplished by combining conceptually related variables. First, affiliation and intimacy strivings both focus on relational concerns and are, not surprisingly, empirically related ($r = .66$); thus, they were combined (by summing) into a single affiliation/intimacy category of personal strivings. Second, identity and personal growth strivings both focus on self-development and are empirically related ($r = .68$); thus, they were summed into a single identity/personal growth category. In terms of variables at the self-narrative level of personality analysis, redemption and contamination represent contrasting ways of construing life experiences (and indeed, they are negatively related, $r = -.44$), and so a third reduction was achieved by creating a single redemption/contamination variable—the number of contamination sequences subtracted from the number of redemption sequences. This new variable can be interpreted as a dispositional tendency to “spin” life events in positive ways. Similarly, a fourth data reduction was accomplished by creating a variable that represented the frequency of early life helpers less the frequency of enemies (although conceptually related, these variables were empirically unrelated, $r = -.09$). The fifth and final reduction of data pertained to another aspect of early life advantage. Explicit intimation of family benefit was found to be quite rare in this sample ($n = 5$). Although these instances were exclusive to moral exemplars, a pattern that approaches significance, $\chi^2(1, N = 100) = 3.37, p = .07, \phi = .23$, the low incidence of family benefit and its dichotomous coding preclude further analysis, and so this variable was dropped. This process of data reduction winnowed the number of personality variables to 14 (which are listed in the tables that follow).

The intercorrelations among these personality variables are reported in Table 1. In general, these variables are positively but moderately correlated. There is no evidence of multicollinearity (given that all pairwise $r_{ls} \leq .69$; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001), which suggests that a broadband assessment is important for capturing important and varying aspects of the moral personality.

**Do Personality Variables Help to Bridge the Judgment–Action Gap?**

This study was premised on the notion that moral judgment does not sufficiently account for moral action and that personological factors may go some way toward bridging the judgment–action gap. The present data can examine this notion. It should be noted that this analysis is not an attempt to adjudicate the relative importance of cognitive versus personality factors for moral action; that would hardly be a fair test because our assessment of personality is considerably more comprehensive than that of cognitive moral judgment. Furthermore, the present study does not address the causal nature of the relationship between moral reasoning and action. Rather, the issue here is simply whether the enterprise of examining aspects of the moral personality actually holds some promise. This question was examined via binomial logistic regression, with the dependent variable being the dichotomous classification of moral action (exemplar vs. comparison). Separate logistic analyses were conducted for the brave and caring groups because each type of action may be associated with different personological profiles.

First, for the brave groups, level of moral reasoning was entered in the first block of the logistic regression as a control variable, but it contributed nothing to the prediction of moral action (Nagelkerke $R^2 = .00$; i.e., the brave exemplars and their comparison group were identical in level of moral reasoning). The 14

### Table 1
**Intercorrelations Among the Personality Variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td>2. Nurturance</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>3. Power</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>7. Identity/personal growth</td>
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<td>-.21</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.19</td>
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<td>8. Agency</td>
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<td>.10</td>
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<td>-.03</td>
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<td>.15</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.23</td>
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<td>.41</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.38</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>.01</td>
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<td>.01</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.00</td>
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<td>.45</td>
<td>.32</td>
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<td>.14</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.55</td>
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</table>

*Note.* This study entailed no particular hypotheses regarding the interrelationships among these variables, so significance tests regarding these correlations are not reported. If a researcher were interested in examining a particular relationship, then it could be noted that at an alpha level of .05 and with an $N$ of 100, an $|r| \geq .20$ would be significant. However, if a researcher were merely interested in an exploratory examination of the entire matrix of 91 correlations, then it would be prudent to control the experimentwise error rate and use a Bonferroni-adjusted alpha level of .0005, in which case, the critical value of $|r|$ is .34.
personality variables were then entered in the second block, and they significantly improved the prediction of moral action (Nagelkerke $R^2 = .68$), block $\chi^2(14, N = 50) = 35.42, p < .001$. The hit rate for correct group classification improved from 52% (chance level) on the basis of moral reasoning alone to 86% with the inclusion of personality variables.

For the logistic regression analysis for the caring groups, level of moral reasoning was similarly entered in the first block where it was a significant ($p = .005$) predictor of moral action (Nagelkerke $R^2 = .20$; with caring exemplars evidencing higher levels of moral reasoning than their comparison group). Personality variables were then entered in the second block, and they improved the prediction of moral action (Nagelkerke $R^2 = .87$), block $\chi^2(14, N = 50) = 44.38, p < .001$. The hit rate for correct group classification changed from 76% on the basis of moral reasoning alone to 92% with the addition of personality variables.

Thus, these logistic regression analyses provide unequivocal support for the basic premise of the study, that aspects of moral personality do serve to bridge the explanatory gap between judgment and action.

Is There a Foundational Core to the Moral Domain?

One of our primary hypotheses concerns personality differences between moral exemplars in general and their comparison groups. Such differences would be suggestive of the foundational core of morality because the exemplars here reflect quite different types of action, and so any commonalities between them likely reference basic aspects of the moral personality. In addressing this issue, a Group (exemplar vs. comparison) × Award (brave vs. caring) analysis was conducted. The rationale for this analytic approach is as follows: If, for any particular personality variable, a significant main effect of group is revealed that is not qualified by an interaction, then that would be considered a core variable because the contrast between exemplar and comparison participants does not vary between the brave and caring groups. If, however, a main effect of group is qualified by an interaction between group and award, and if subsequent analyses indicate that the same contrast between exemplar and comparison participants is not found for both award groups, then that variable would not be considered core because the effect is not evidenced consistently across different groups of people who have acted morally.

This hypothesis was initially examined by a 2 (group) × 2 (award) between-subjects MANOVA over the 14 personality variables. According to Wilks’s lambda criterion, this omnibus analysis revealed significant effects for group, award, and their interaction, multivariate $F$s(14, 83) = 4.13, 2.36, and 2.14, $ps = .001$, .008, and .018, $\eta^2$s = .41, .28, and .27, respectively. Univariate ANOVAs were conducted to determine for which of these personality variables group differences existed. In order to control the experimentwise error rate, a Bonferroni adjustment of the alpha level was adopted, which yielded, for these individual analyses, a critical $\alpha = .0035$.

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) on these 14 personality variables for both the exemplar and comparison groups. The table also presents the inferential statistics associated with the group effect from the univariate ANOVAs. Both exact probability level and an index of effect size (partial $\eta^2$) are reported so that readers are better empowered to assess the reliability and magnitude of the observed effects. In order to be reasonably conservative in reporting findings, our criterion is that an effect must not only attain an appropriate level of significance but also must entail an effect size that is medium or larger (defined as $\eta^2 \geq .06$).

These analyses revealed significant group differences on seven personality variables, all favoring exemplars and all at the life-narrative level of personality description, with $ps < .001$.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Exemplar $(n = 50)$</th>
<th>Comparison $(n = 50)$</th>
<th>$F$ (1, 96)</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>$\eta^2$</th>
<th>sdc</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dominance*</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.01</td>
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<td>Nurturance*</td>
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<td>11.49</td>
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<td>10.62</td>
<td>2.72</td>
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<td>Power*</td>
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<td>2.61</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>.97</td>
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<td>Affiliation/Intimacy*</td>
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<td>2.70</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>.19</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3.32</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>2.02</td>
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<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual self-transcendence*</td>
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<td>2.04</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>.18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identity/personal growth*</td>
<td>4.50</td>
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<td>3.64</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td>.19</td>
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<td>Agency*</td>
<td>5.38</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>1.96</td>
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<td>&lt;.001</td>
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<td>Communion*</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>21.42</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
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<td>Affective tone*</td>
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<td>2.56</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>19.63</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
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<tr>
<td>Redemption/contamination*</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>38.57</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs of others*</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>13.19</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helpers and enemies*</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>18.40</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
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<td>Attachments*</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>20.15</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note.  sdc = standardized discriminant coefficient.

* Dimension scores.  b Frequencies.  c Rated on a 5-point scale.  d Rated on a 3-point scale.

Table 2

Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for the Exemplar and Comparison Groups
and effect sizes of $\eta^2 \geq .12$. In general, exemplars had stronger themes of both agency and communion than the comparison participants, a more optimistic affective tone pervaded their life stories, their life experiences were more likely to be construed redemptively, and there was strong evidence of early life advantage in terms of sensitization to the needs of others, the presence of helpers (and the relative absence of enemies), and more secure attachments.

For two of these variables (affective tone and needs of others), however, the significant main effect for group was qualified by an interaction between group and award, $F(1, 96) = 10.02$ and $7.42$, $ps = .002$ and .008, $\eta^2$s = .09 and .07, respectively. Subsequent analyses of simple main effects for the affective tone variable indicated a significant difference between exemplar and comparison participants only for the caring group ($M$s = 3.53 and 2.49, $SD$s = 0.75 and 0.61, respectively), $F(1, 96) = 28.85$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .23$, and not for the brave group ($M$s = 2.80 and 2.63, $SD$s = 0.73 and 0.65), $F(1, 96) = 0.80$, $p = .37$, $\eta^2 = .01$. The same pattern was found for the needs-of-others variable: a significant difference between exemplar and comparison participants only for the caring group ($M$s = 0.96 and 0.12, $SD$s = 0.93 and 0.33, respectively), $F(1, 96) = 20.20$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .17$, and not for the brave group ($M$s = 0.36 and 0.24, $SD$s = 0.64 and 0.60), $F(1, 96) = 0.41$, $p = .52$, $\eta^2 = .00$. Thus, these two variables should not be considered core to the moral domain because the effects are unique to one type of moral exemplarity. This reduces the foundational core of the moral personality to five variables: agency, communion, redemption/contamination, helpers and enemies, and attachments.

The relative predictive power of these 14 personality variables in distinguishing moral exemplars from comparison participants was examined by a discriminant function analysis (DFA). This analysis indicated (consistent with the results of the MANOVA) that there is a strong association between group classification and this set of predictors, with a canonical correlation of $R_C = .62$ and a hit rate (correct group classification) of 78%. The standardized discriminant coefficients for the 14 personality variables are presented in the last column of Table 2 and indicate that redemption/contamination, agency, and attachments are the strongest predictors for distinguishing exemplar and comparison groups. These coefficients indicate the unique explanatory power of each predictor, after removing any shared explanation, so they should be interpreted while being mindful of the intercorrelations among these personality variables (presented in Table 1).

*Agency and communion interaction.* McAdams (1993) has argued that high levels of both agency and communion represent a particularly adaptive personality (recall Wiggins’s, 1995, parallel arguments regarding dominance and nurturance). Analyses just reported indicate that such high levels are associated with moral exemplarity. To investigate the further suggestion that there might be an interactive effect between these two motivational themes, logistic regression analyses were conducted, entering both agency and communion in the first block (as control variables) and then determining whether their interaction (entered in the second block) would improve predictability of group status (exemplar vs. comparison). These analyses indicated that the interaction term did not add to the regression equation for either the brave or caring groups, block $\chi^2$s(1, $N = 50$) = 1.55 and 0.67, $ps = .21$ and .41, respectively. The Nagelkerke $R^2$ only changed from .21 to .25 with the addition of the interaction term for the brave groups and from .40 to .41 for the caring groups. That is, although agency and communion make strong, independent contributions to moral exemplarity, there is no evidence of a synergistic interactive effect that further enhances functioning.

**Gender differences.** Gender differences are not of particular interest in the present study and cannot be examined fully because of the relatively small numbers within each group. In order to provide some test, however, a 2 (group: exemplar vs. comparison) $\times$ 2 (gender) MANOVA was conducted over the 14 personality variables. This analysis revealed an effect for group (which was fully explored in the previous Group $\times$ Award MANOVA), an effect for gender, and an interaction effect between group and gender, multivariate $F$s(14, 83) = 3.68, 2.86, and 1.82, $ps = .001$, .001, and .05, $\eta^2$s = .38, .33, and .23, respectively. An examination of the univariate ANOVAs indicated that no main effect of gender attained significance at the Bonferroni-adjusted alpha level; however, it could be noted that men scored higher than women on agency ($M$s = 4.77 and 3.50, $SD$s = 2.75 and 2.45), $F(1, 96) = 6.52$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 = .06$. Similarly, an examination of the univariate ANOVAs indicated that no Group $\times$ Gender interaction effect was significant at the adjusted alpha level; however, two interactions could be noted: on the personal strivings variable of affiliation/intimacy and the early life advantage variable of needs of others, $F$s(1, 96) = 6.33 and 6.25, respectively, both $ps = .01$, $\eta^2$s = .06. Subsequent analyses of simple main effects to locate the locus of these interactions revealed that female exemplars had stronger strivings than any other group for affiliation/intimacy and, likewise, a greater sensitization to the needs of others.

**Summary.** In summary of this section, these analyses revealed pronounced differences between moral exemplars (both brave and caring) and ordinary individuals on several personality variables. The differences were strongly evident in terms of motivational themes of both agency and communion, the propensity to transformatively redeem critical life events, the identification of helpers (and the absence of enemies) in one’s early life, as well as secure attachments. These differences were evident despite the dissimilar types of exemplarity involved and thus reference the foundational core of moral functioning.

**Are There Different Personality Profiles of Moral Exemplarity?**

Another major hypothesis of this research examines whether contrasting types of moral exemplarity are associated with different personality profiles. If so, then such patterns would indicate that mature moral functioning can be exemplified in different ways, embodying different values and virtues, and thereby can challenge univocal models of moral excellence. The comparison of brave and caring awardees, who have engaged in

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Note that the interaction effect for the needs-of-others variable does not quite attain the adjusted alpha level of .0035. The locus of this interaction is examined here, nevertheless, in order to provide a conservative assessment of the variables that constitute the core of the moral domain.
Table 3
Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for the Brave and Caring Exemplar Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exemplar group</th>
<th>Brave (n = 25)</th>
<th>Caring (n = 25)</th>
<th>F (1, 48)</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>η²</th>
<th>sdc</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dominance</td>
<td>0.45, 8.85</td>
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<td>.04</td>
<td>.26</td>
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<td>Nurturance</td>
<td>2.85, 11.67</td>
<td>12.93, 8.97</td>
<td>11.73</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td>3.04, 1.97</td>
<td>4.40, 3.01</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>.065</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliation/intimacy</td>
<td>5.20, 3.21</td>
<td>7.96, 4.50</td>
<td>6.24</td>
<td>.016</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generativity</td>
<td>2.16, 1.49</td>
<td>4.48, 2.96</td>
<td>12.25</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality</td>
<td>1.24, 1.30</td>
<td>2.04, 2.54</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity/personal growth</td>
<td>5.08, 4.05</td>
<td>3.92, 3.27</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency</td>
<td>4.92, 2.23</td>
<td>5.84, 3.44</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communion</td>
<td>2.64, 1.73</td>
<td>4.12, 1.99</td>
<td>7.90</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective tone</td>
<td>2.80, 0.73</td>
<td>3.53, 0.75</td>
<td>12.41</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redemption/contamination</td>
<td>1.76, 1.76</td>
<td>2.44, 1.33</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs of others</td>
<td>0.36, 0.64</td>
<td>0.96, 0.93</td>
<td>7.03</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpers and enemies</td>
<td>1.08, 1.26</td>
<td>1.92, 2.31</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachments</td>
<td>1.29, 0.35</td>
<td>1.48, 0.29</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>.065</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. sdc = standardized discriminant coefficient.

quite different forms of moral action, represents an attempt to address this issue.

One difficulty in appropriately interpreting analyses that compare the two types of moral exemplars involves the confound between the award variable and age, mentioned earlier in describing participants; in particular, brave exemplars were, on average, younger than the caring exemplars. Thus, a significant finding could be interpreted either as indicating personality differences between brave and caring exemplars or as a simple reflection of a developmental and/or cohort effect. The relevance of this potential confound was assessed in two ways. First, the correlation between age and each of the 14 personality variables was determined for the comparison-group participants. These correlations were uniformly nonsignificant (r = .24 – .12, .10 ≤ p ≤ .95). Because age is unrelated to any of the personality variables, any revealed differences between the brave and caring exemplars are unlikely attributable to age. Second, even though age may not be correlated with any of the personality variables in this sample, it remains possible that there are personality differences between the brave and caring comparison groups (which overlap in age distribution), a finding that would make interpretation of differences between brave and caring exemplars somewhat tenuous. Thus, personality differences between the brave and caring comparison groups were directly tested via a one-way MANOVA over the 14 personality variables. This MANOVA was not significant, multivariate F(14, 35) = 1.54, p = .15, η² = .38, nor were any of the univariate ANOVAs, F(1, 48) ≤ 1.63, p ≤ .21, η²’s ≤ .03. Thus, there is no evidence that age is a confounding factor here.

Having dispensed with the potential confound between age and the award variable, we now turn to a comparison of the personality profiles of brave and caring exemplars. This issue was examined by a one-way (award: brave vs. caring) MANOVA for the exemplar groups, over the 14 personality variables. According to Wilks’s lambda criterion, this omnibus analysis was significant (in striking contrast to the MANOVA for the comparison groups), multivariate F(14, 35) = 2.69, p = .009, η² = .52, indicating that the two types of exemplars are distinguished in terms of one or more personality variables. Univariate ANOVAs were conducted (with a Bonferroni-adjusted α = .0035) to determine on which variables the brave and caring exemplars differed.

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) on these 14 personality variables for the brave and caring exemplar groups. The table also presents the inferential statistics from the univariate ANOVAs (F ratio, exact p level, and partial η²), as well as the coefficients from a DFA that indicate the relative predictive power of the personality variables.

These analyses revealed highly significant differences between the brave and caring exemplars on three personality variables—reflecting all three levels of personality description—with all p values ≤ .001 and with large effect sizes of η² ≥ .20. Compared with the brave exemplars, caring exemplars scored higher on the nurturance dimension of the interpersonal circumplex, expressed more generativity strivings, and had a more optimistic affective tone in their life stories.

6 Despite the seeming appeal of analysis of covariance in handling the age confound in our design, that approach to controlling preexisting differences in a nonrandom design is inappropriate because it violates the core assumption that covariates must be statistically independent from group categorization (G. A. Miller & Chapman, 2001). An analysis of covariance is valuable and appropriate as a “noise reduction” technique but not when groups differ meaningfully on the potential covariate. If a potential covariate is a defining characteristic of the groups, then removing variance associated with that variable would corrupt the grouping variable itself.

7 The relatively small number of men and women within each exemplar group precludes examination of gender differences in a multivariate analysis. The possibility should be noted, however, that the slightly imbalanced number of men and women among the brave exemplars may be contributing to the observed differences between the brave and caring groups.
It may also be observed in Table 3 that effects that approached significance at the adjusted alpha level (with \( \alpha = .007 \) and with medium effect sizes of \( .09 \leq \eta^2 \leq .14 \)) were found for four other personality variables—affiliation/intimacy strivings, the motivational theme of communion, and the early life advantage variables of sensitization to the needs of others and quality of attachments—with caring exemplars scoring higher on all these variables than the brave exemplars. These somewhat weaker effects do provide further coloration of the differing personality profiles and are noted simply as a guide to future research.

**Death of a Child**

There is a serendipitous finding to note at this point regarding caring exemplars. It was noticed in reviewing the interviews that a number of participants reported the death of one (or more) of their children—a particularly untimely and traumatic loss that is one of the more difficult life events with which to cope—and an event that is seemingly relevant to analyses of affective tone (as well as redemption/contamination sequences). Of the exemplars, 8 had suffered the death of a child, but only 2 comparison participants had. Such an event may be expected to be relatively uncommon among younger parents, as in the brave exemplar and comparison groups, and indeed that was the case (1 in each group); however, among the older caring groups, it was found that 7 (of 25) exemplars had experienced the loss of a child, whereas only 1 comparison participant had, \( \chi^2(1, N = 50) = 3.72, p = .05, \phi = .33 \). It is acknowledged, of course, that these are small numbers; nevertheless, this is a provocative finding. What is particularly remarkable here is that the caring exemplars, despite several experiencing the death of a child, had life narratives entailing a predominantly optimistic tone and a high frequency of redemptive sequences. These findings suggest that the caring exemplars were particularly able to find some meaning and to discern some benefit from a tragic event, and to foster a positive attitude toward life that facilitated coping with this and other challenges. It is not known, of course, whether they were predisposed to such optimism or whether this event triggered posttraumatic growth.

**Discussion**

This research was framed by the intent to explore aspects of the moral personality that contribute to exemplary action and thereby to broaden our accounts of moral functioning. This was accomplished through a broadband assessment of the personality—dispositional traits, characteristic adaptations, and life narratives—of two contrasting groups of moral exemplars who had received national recognition for their extraordinary action. The extent to which these quite different types of moral exemplars shared aspects of personality functioning points to the foundational core of the moral domain, and the divergent personality profiles evidenced by the brave and caring exemplars challenge the notion of a unitary model of moral excellence and instead point to multiple conceptions. In addition to a comparison of different types of moral exemplars and the broadband assessment of personality, another notable design strength of the present research was the inclusion of carefully matched comparison groups that allows more definitive conclusions than possible with much of the previous work in this area.

**Judgment–Action Gap**

The premise of this study was that moral cognition is insufficient to explain moral action and that personality variables may add substantially to the explanatory equation. In confirmation of this notion, analyses indicated that personality factors are not, in fact, collinear with moral reasoning and instead account for a unique and substantial portion of the variance in moral action—going a considerable way to bridging the judgment–action gap. Such findings provide new empirical support for the arguments of theorists (e.g., Blasi, 2004) that the enterprise of delineating aspects of the moral personality has validity and holds significant promise. Note that our intent in exploring aspects of moral personality was not to denigrate the role of moral cognition but rather to broaden our conceptualization of moral functioning. It is also important to acknowledge that Kohlberg’s (1984) moral stage approach, although dominant for some time, is not the only approach to the conceptualization and assessment of moral cognition. For example, there is some evidence that moral cognition that concerns a particular type of behavior (e.g., prosocial reasoning and altruistic behavior), may be better predictive of action than more generalized stages of moral reasoning development (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998; Thoma, 2006). Future research could use such alternate measures of moral judgment in exploring the relevance of cognitive versus personality variables in explaining moral action.

**Core of the Moral Domain**

The discussion of the main findings begins with the aspects of the moral personality that were common to both types of exemplars and that distinguished them from their comparison groups. It is important to recall that these personality similarities between the brave and caring exemplars were found despite the fact that the two groups differed by a generation in age and that the differences between the exemplar and comparison groups were found despite their close matching in terms of demographic variables. It is interesting to note that the differences between exemplar and comparison groups were most clearly evident in the life-narrative data and less so at the dispositional-traits and characteristic-adaptations levels of personality description, suggesting the greater sensitivity of the life-story approach and its utility for future research in this area.

Dispositional traits and characteristic adaptations do not capture well the complex patterns of self-continuity, coherence, and meaning that individuals construct over time and in the face of changing contexts and challenges. In contrast, a dynamic self-narrative better reflects how individuals work out a sense of identity and fashion a meaningful place in the psychosocial world (McAdams, 1993). It has been increasingly argued that moral motivation does not arise primarily from moral understandings or moral emotions, but rather from the formation of a moral identity (Hardy & Carlo, 2005; Walker, 2004). Blasi (1993, 2004) has been particularly persuasive in positing that identity is the central explanatory construct in moral functioning. His model has three major components: (a) the centrality of moral notions in self-understanding, (b) the sense of personal responsibility for moral action (a process of moral engagement), and (c) the realization that one’s integrity (self-consistency between judgment and action) is at stake in moral action. The personological processes and self-understandings that
are operative in, and constitutive of, the moral identity are opti-
mally assessed in terms of individuals’ self-narratives. The present
findings suggest that analyses at this life-story level of personality
description may be particularly revelatory of facets of this basic
construct of moral identity.

The evidence regarding the foundational core of the moral
domain indicated that moral exemplars in general tended to have
stronger motivational themes of both agency and communion in
their life narratives than ordinary individuals, consistent with
Walker and Pitts’ (1998) finding that the primary dimension in
naturalistic conceptions of moral excellence was organized around
such themes. The agentic aspects of personality here reflect the
fact that these exemplars, both brave and caring, are engaged in
action, in often challenging and adverse contexts. Such action
requires control and awareness of the self, a willingness to assume
responsibility and to pursue goals, and a sense of empowerment (as
was suggested by Colby & Damon’s, 1992, findings). The commu-
nal aspects of personality here reflect exemplars’ focus on
helping others, either in heroic rescues or volunteer service—an
unequivocal other-orientation. Of course, being both agentic and
communal in interpersonal interactions is regarded as a particu-
larly adaptive and well-adjusted personality style (McAdams,
1993; Wiggins, 1995), but how the inherent tension between these
motivational tendencies is resolved represents a topic for future
research.

The construal of critical events in life narratives also clearly
distinguished exemplars from ordinary people in the present study.
Both groups of exemplars were more likely to frame transforma-
tive life experiences in terms of redemption and less likely in terms
of contamination. It would seem that the ability and, frequently,
the conscious choice to discern or construct some benefit or
positive outcome from negative and difficult situations is a particu-
larly adaptive form of coping that sustains moral action (McAd-
ams, 2006). Salient in the present context, of course, are the
extraordinary moral actions in often adverse circumstances that
generated these exemplars national recognition. Although our ex-
emplars were not questioned regarding the actions that warranted
their award, about one third of them spontaneously made some
mention of it in the context of the life review. It was apparent that
the tendency for reframing—either of tragedies in which people
were injured or died or of situations in which people suffered
significant disadvantage or struggled with challenging obstacles—
was an important component of their moral personality. It was not
that the exemplars were minimizing or denying the challenges and
difficulties, rather that they were prone to adaptively reconstrue.

Finally, exemplars were distinguished from ordinary individuals
in terms of their reconstruction of the presence of scaffolding
helpers in early life. However, the finding that the frequencies of
helpers and enemies in participants’ life stories were not signifi-
cantly correlated makes interpretation of this variable somewhat
uncertain. There was also strong evidence of secure early life
attachments in significant relationships. Of course, it cannot be
determined from these data whether such recollections represent
actual experiences or construals in light of present understandings,
but it is revelatory that there were clear intimations of early
advantage. The present findings are more consistent and coherent
than previous research regarding aspects of early advantage (Mat-
suba & Walker, 2005; McAdams et al., 1997). Positive early life
experiences, such as having significant mentors and secure attach-
ments, may play a foundational role in the fashioning of a life
narrative, one that entails a sense of efficacy, optimism, prosocial
motivation, and an identity that has moral concerns at its core.

Thus, these findings regarding aspects of the moral personality
that are common to divergent types of moral exemplars point to
what could be regarded as the essential psychological core of the
moral domain. We turn now to the complementary proposition that
the moral personality can be evidenced in quite divergent forms.

Different Moral Personalities

Despite the commonalities just noted, the present data are un-
equivocal in revealing that the personalities of brave and caring
exemplars differ remarkably. Furthermore, the differences invari-
ably favored caring over brave exemplars, a finding that accords
with people’s naturalistic conceptions in which they more strongly
align caring with the moral domain than they do bravery (Walker
& Hennig, 2004). The brave exemplars were recognized for a
single act of heroism, and the convergence of powerful situational
factors undoubtedly contributed to what transpired. In contrast, the
caring exemplars were recognized for long-term commitment and
service. The maintenance of such activity probably depended to a
greater extent on the workings of deeply ingrained character traits
and motivation. It is, thus, not particularly surprising that the
personality of caring exemplars was somewhat more transparent
than that of brave ones. The familiar issue of the Person ×
Situation interaction is certainly signaled here, but the idiosyn-
cratic nature of the moral actions of the exemplars in this study
precludes further investigation. In future research, more systematic
exploration of the interaction of personal and situational variables
in the moral domain could be undertaken in experimental studies
that entail a greater degree of control.

Rather consistently, caring exemplars scored higher on commu-
nal aspects of personality than did the brave exemplars. This was
found on the nurturance dimension at the dispositional-trait level
of personality description (similar to Matsuba & Walker’s, 2004,
finding of strong self-attributions of agreeableness among their
caring exemplars) and on generativity strivings at the characteristic-adaptations level (consistent with the endorsement
of an other-model of attachment by the exemplars in Matsuba &
Walker’s study). In contrast to these findings regarding differences
between brave and caring exemplars in communal aspects of
personality, differences between exemplars in agentic aspects were

8 Mention of the award by these 16 participants (10 brave and 6 caring)
occurred solely in the context of the adulthood life chapter, the high-, low-, and
turning-point critical events, or the moral conflict. The award was
ever mentioned in the context of the five “early life” sections of the
interview (the childhood and adolescent chapters of the life story, and the
earliest memory, childhood, and adolescent critical events). Four variables
(family benefit, needs of others, helpers and enemies, and attachments), on
which clear and consistent group differences were revealed, were coded
exclusively in these five sections in which there was no mention of the
award and hence no possibility of unconscious coder bias. However,
because of the potential for coder bias on other variables, all analyses were
rerun, excluding data from sections of the interviews in which participants
mentioned their award. The pattern of results remained unchanged,
strongly suggesting that participants’ occasional mention of their award
was not a biasing factor in coders’ ratings.
not revealed, despite such intimations in people’s conceptions of bravery (Walker & Hennig, 2004), which may, of course, reflect some attribution error. Perhaps evidence of such agency among brave exemplars would be provided had they been identified for engaging in multiple acts of bravery.

Previous research regarding the role of affective tone in moral exemplarity has yielded mixed findings (Colby & Damon, 1992; Matsuba & Walker, 2005; McAdams et al., 1997; Oliner, 2003). It was found here that the life stories of caring exemplars were considerably more optimistic and positive in affective tone than those of brave exemplars, despite the higher proportion of caring exemplars who had suffered the death of a child. Sustained volunteer service with often disadvantaged individuals and in challenging contexts paradoxically seems to be associated with an attitude of hope and affirmation rather than by despair and disillusionment. If the passive infusion of one’s surroundings were a dominant mechanism governing affect, then we would expect that such volunteers would evidence the opposite pattern.

Thus, it is clearly evident that these two types of moral exemplars are distinguished on several aspects of personality and do represent somewhat diverging profiles of personality functioning. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that the contrast may have been somewhat overdrawn here: Brave exemplars undoubtedly have a strong caring orientation toward others in undertaking a rescue, and caring exemplars frequently must be brave and heroic in their actions given the many challenges in confronting social injustice and in supporting community and humanitarian causes.

Limitations and Future Directions

The purpose of this study was to respond to the dualistic conception of moral functioning that has inordinately influenced the field, a conception that elevates rationality and denigrates personality. Our intent was to foster a broader and more inclusive understanding of the domain so as to better explain moral action. Our medium in addressing this objective was a comprehensive assessment of the personality of two quite different types of moral exemplars. There are two important and complementary implications that arise from the findings. One is that there is now ample evidence that there are multiple ideals of moral maturity, challenging the view that moral excellence has a singular form. Moral maturity can be evidenced with quite different psychological profiles. The other implication is that, nevertheless, there is a common core to different types of moral exemplarity that references the “basics” of moral development.

Of course, these conclusions ought to be tempered by an acknowledgement of the limitations of this research and an indication of future research directions. The assessment of the personality of the exemplars in this study was undertaken subsequent to their moral actions (of heroic rescues and long-term volunteer service), and no determination of the causal connection between personality and action was attempted, and none is implied (see Midlarsky et al.’s, 2005, discussion of this issue). Certainly it is possible that aspects of individuals’ personality may have instigated and sustained exemplary moral action. In this view, personality’s function would be analogous to that of an operator’s manual. However, the reverse pattern of causation is also plausible: Engaging in significant action and then receiving national recognition may have had transformative effects on individuals’ personality functioning. In this view, personality is more analogous to a documentary. A third possibility is that other variables may account for the relationship between moral action and personality. This likelihood was decreased in the present study by the inclusion of carefully matched comparison groups.

A methodological solution to the possibility that an award might influence personality would be to identify moral exemplars who have received minimal recognition for their action (akin to Matsuba & Walker’s, 2004, method of having directors of social service agencies nominate exemplary volunteers), but this approach only addresses the problem of recognition, not the psychological impact of engaging in significant action itself, and may yield less notable exemplars. Another solution would be to conduct prospective longitudinal studies to identify personality (and other precursors to moral action (see Hart’s, 2005, review of longitudinal surveys that predict community service); however, the relative rarity of moral exemplars means that this approach would be limited to perhaps less consequential moral actions. Another somewhat contrived option would be to somehow experimentally manipulate each of these variables: to manipulate moral action and then observe consequent changes in personality and, conversely, to manipulate personality and then observe changes in moral action.

The exemplars in this study were identified on the basis of the actions that garnered them an award. There was no assessment of their intentions or motivations in that regard; indeed, direct questioning of their intentions and motives would have been susceptible to socially desirable responding—hence, our more subtle approach to personality assessment. It is possible of course that, in some instances, motivation for these actions may have somehow been tainted or less than laudatory.

Although the exemplar- and comparison-group participants were individually matched on several demographic variables, it was not possible to match them in terms of the community in which they resided (although there was considerable dispersion in both groups); this represents a weakness of our study. It is possible that people living in various geographical regions may differ in important ways, including some aspects of personality.

The two types of exemplars studied here were comparable in many regards (identified through the same honors system, similar on several demographic variables), but they did differ in age. We found, however, that age was unrelated to these personality variables in adulthood. Future research should attempt to demographically match exemplar groups (to the extent that that is possible given inherent differences across types of moral action) in order to provide a clearer comparison of personality functioning. Furthermore, only two types of moral exemplars were compared in the present study, and those two types hardly exhaust the breadth of the moral domain. It is known that people do identify other types of moral exemplarity (Walker et al., 1995), and certainly there are a multitude of other morally relevant actions that could be considered. Perhaps the type of moral exemplar most deserving of scrutiny is the just exemplar, given its prominence in moral philosophy (Rawls, 1971), moral psychological theories (Kohlberg, 1984), and naturalistic conceptions (Walker & Hennig, 2004). Yet, it is not obvious how just exemplars would be unambiguously identified. Should they include judges, political or human rights activists, environmentalists, and so on?

Researchers have suggested that there may be some psychological handicap associated with fostering moral excellence of one
type or another (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2006); witness the not uncommon observation that various moral saints and heroes often manifest some flaw in their otherwise commendable characters. There was no particular evidence of maladaptive psychological functioning among exemplars in the present study, but the measures here were not intended to tap such aspects of personality (cf. research on Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Research is now beginning to appear in which the “shadow-side” of various moral virtues such as care is explored (Hennig & Walker, in press). This represents a profitable direction for future research that addresses the complexity of moral functioning. Although this study entailed a reasonably comprehensive assessment of personality, there certainly are other personality constructs that could have been tapped.

It also should be recognized that the moral exemplars here were drawn from a particular sociocultural context and that other contexts may identify different types of moral excellence that entail other profiles of psychological functioning. Finally, this study was conducted with adults, which highlights the need for research to analyze the formative aspects of these moral personalities in childhood and adolescence.

Conclusions

This study provides compelling evidence that personality variables significantly augment cognition in explaining moral action, substantiating the utility of the enterprise of delineating aspects of the moral personality. Several distinct personality differences between moral exemplars and ordinary individuals were revealed, despite the exemplar groups’ heterogeneity. These personality variables point to fundamental features of moral functioning that warrant more extensive conceptual and empirical attention as researchers progress toward a more comprehensive and coherent account of the moral domain. The divergent personality profiles of contrasting types of moral exemplars reinforce the notion that moral maturity can take multifarious forms and that the ensuing challenge is to flesh out the complexity of moral functioning.

References


