In the absence of a compelling model of moral functioning, the field of moral development has been languishing and is in critical need of resuscitation. Although in recent years some important conceptual insights have been advanced, corresponding empirical paradigms have been in short supply; and so the most promising theories remain largely unsubstantiated and without practical "legs." As a further consequence, moral educators have had few viable frameworks on which to base intervention efforts. This vacuity is primarily attributable to the once inordinate interest in moral rationality, an interest that initially gave spark to the field and fanned its flames for a time, but is an enterprise now reduced to a few smoldering embers.

This focus on moral cognition arrose through the magisterial contributions of Piaget (1932/1977) and Kohlberg (1969) who heralded the cognitive revolution within psychology. These structural-developmental theorists forcefully advocated the notion that the fundamental core of moral functioning entailed processes of deliberative moral judgment. Their models embraced the formalist assumptions of the philosophical mindset of the Enlightenment Era, which conceptualized human nature dualistically, pitting rationality against personality. Moral rationality was hoisted onto a pedestal, regarded as not only necessary to define the moral quality of situations, but also as imbued with sufficient oomph to motivate moral action. In striking contrast, however, emotions, personal desires, and other aspects of personality were tossed into the garbage "bag of virtues" (Kohlberg, 1981, p. 78), regarded as potentially contaminating influences that the moral agent must eschew in order to adhere to the purer dictates of reason.

The structural-developmental paradigm had an exceedingly good run, compared to the typical fate of most flash-in-the-pan psychological thecories. Part of its success can be attributed to the well-choreographed interplay between bold theory and compelling evidence, made possible by the development and refinement of a measure of moral reasoning (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987). Kohlberg's conceptual and empirical package established and legitimized the field of moral development, and then dominated its research agenda for over a generation, making significant and enduring contributions to our understanding of important aspects of the domain. But its limitations have become glaringly apparent, even to its most ardent acolytes. At a theoretical level, the conceptual skewing (with its singular focus on moral rationality and resulting neglect of moral personality) represents an untenable and unnecessarily narrow demarcation of what is undoubtedly a broader and more complex domain. At an empirical level, the now abundant evidence cumulatively indicates that moral cognition lacks passable predictive validity—what is more commonly known as the "judgment/action gap" (Straughn, 1986) —with moral reasoning typically explaining a mere 10% of the variability in moral action (Blasi, 1980; Walker, 2004). The moral reasoning construct seemingly does not provide the motivational compulsion for moral action and does not fully account for the breadth of moral functioning. So the field, once flourishing in the house of this construct, now ventures timidly and with speculation over what lies beyond, in the great outdoors.

Perhaps it is time to take a look at the potential relevance to moral functioning of the oft-disparaged aspects of personality, an appeal now being voiced with increased conviction (Blasi, 2004; Campbell & Christopher, 1996; Walker & Hennig, 1997. Also see McAdams, this volume, for arguments regarding the viability of the construct of moral personality). To be explicit about our intent here: it is not to supplant an emphasis on moral cognition with a similarly skewed emphasis on moral personality; rather our objective is to augment our understanding of moral cognition with an appreciation of the personological factors associated with moral action in order to provide a more balanced and comprehensive explanation of moral motivation and functioning. Processes of moral cognition, both intuitive and deliberative, are essential to an appropriate understanding of moral functioning; however, they are simply not sufficient. To be clear, we are advocates for an era of construct plurality for the moral domain (Primer & Walker, 2008).

The primary purpose of the research presented in this chapter is to explore the personality variables associated with moral action in an attempt to identify those which are morally relevant and which hold some promise for bridging the judgment/action gap. One potential strategy here would involve using existing empirical templates to address the new questions surrounding moral personality; an alternate strategy would be to develop new
measures, directly derivative from theory. The benefit of the latter strategy is its targeted precision at the constructs of interest, whereas the former strategy skips some of the methodological labor of measure development for what may be the same predictive reward. A conceptual and empirical discussion of the relative merits of each approach remains important work for the near future. Notwithstanding, the two approaches should provide vastly congruent and complementary data.

The empirical strategy adopted here is that of the former. Implementing existing empirical paradigms, we undertook a systematic and comprehensive assessment of the personality of a sample of moral exemplars, people who had been identified as engaging in noteworthy moral action. Research on moral exemplars can be especially informative (Walker, 2002) because processes of moral functioning are cast in more striking relief, and because the holistic study of exemplars’ lives is particularly revelatory of the complexity and balancing of various virtues. However, exemplars are, by definition, relatively scarce, and so research with them is similarly infrequent and often methodologically constrained.

Typically, research with moral exemplars has entailed qualitative case-study analyses. Although such studies can yield suggestive and heuristic findings (Colby & Damon, 1992; Midlarsky, Jones, & Corley, 2005; Monroe, 2002; Oliner, 2003; Oliner & Oliner, 1988), the lack of objective measures makes it difficult to discern the meaning of posited constructs and the lack of appropriate comparison groups makes it impossible to determine to what extent the moral exemplars are, indeed, atypical (and exemplary). There is some exemplar research that has employed systematic methodology and comparison groups (Hart & Fegley, 1995; Matsuba & Walker, 2004, 2005; Reimer & Wade-Stein, 2004), but those studies often entailed a rather circumscribed assessment of psychological functioning, were conducted with adolescent and young adult samples (a portion of the lifespan when aspects of the moral personality are relatively nascent and unconsolidated), and/or focused on a single type of moral exemplarity (volunteering).

This facet of much previous research – the focus on one type of moral exemplarity – prompts the observation that most theoretical conceptions of moral functioning similarly posit a singular ideal of moral maturity or moral excellence. Kohlberg’s (1981) principles of justice and Gilligan’s (1982) ethic of care illustrate the point. But the move beyond stage sequences and the newfound interest in the moral personality raise the questions of whether it is defensible to posit multiple ideals of moral excellence, and whether different varieties of moral personality might indeed be discernable (Flanagan, 1991; Walker & Hennig, 2004).

This preamble allows us to sketch out the design of our research project: it entailed the broad-band assessment of the personality of two quite different types of moral exemplars (namely, brave vs. caring), who not only were contrasted with each other, but also with matched comparison groups comprised of “ordinary” individuals.

Herein lay the two research questions that frame our project: First, can mature moral functioning be exemplified in different ways, challenging the univocal models that have dominated the field? The extent to which brave and caring exemplars evidence psychological profiles that are both unique and adaptive would be indicative of different manifestations of moral excellence. For example, we expect that caring exemplars will evidence a more communal and nurturing profile, and the brave exemplars a more agentic and dominant one (as suggested by naturalistic conceptions, Walker & Hennig, 2004). Second, is there a foundational core to moral functioning? The extent to which these quite different types of moral exemplars share personality characteristics, characteristics that also distinguish them from comparison groups, would reference the basic aspects of the moral personality. Thus, our intent is to examine both what differentiates contrasting types of moral exemplars and what commonalities they share.

A critical methodological issue for our enterprise concerns the veridical identification of moral exemplars (Wolf, 1982). Of course, the identification of exemplars requires that their moral actions be known to others and recognized; inevitably, those whose good deeds are inconspicuous, for whatever reason, will be omitted from study. Also, moral exemplars are frequently controversial figures (those involved in social activism, for example), garnering mixed evaluations: one person’s hero can be another’s villain, and, furthermore, none of these is completely unblemished. The approach to this issue taken by some researchers (Colby & Damon, 1992) has been to rely on the evaluations of experts to identify exemplars; however, experts tend to define a domain more narrowly than do laypeople and to favor particular ideological frameworks (Sternberg, Conway, Ketron, & Bernstein, 1981). Other researchers (Matsuba & Walker, 2004), in contrast, have tapped folk conceptions of moral excellence by asking laypeople to identify moral exemplars, but that approach leaves the nominating criteria somewhat unclear and unsubstantiated. Some researchers (Oliner & Oliner, 1988) have simply chosen to study moral exemplars of specific interest (e.g., Holocaust rescuers) or to access samples of convenience. These various approaches illustrate the fact that people do identify different types of moral exemplars (Walker, Pitts, Hennig, & Matsuba, 1995).
BRAVE AND CARING EXEMPLARS

In the present research, our approach was to compare two contrasting types of exemplars (brave vs. caring) whose moral actions were fairly unambiguous and noncontroversial. Both bravery and care are well represented in philosophical writings as emblematic of moral excellence (Miller, 2000; Noddings, 1984). Our brave and caring exemplars were identified in the same way through the Canadian honors system: initial nominations came from members of the general community; these nominations were vetted by an independent advisory committee; if approved, people were recognized by a national award conferred by the governor-general of Canada (the de facto head of state).

The brave exemplars in our study were recent 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 attempts despite considerable danger. The caring exemplars were recent recipients of the Caring Canadian Award, a parallel award that recognizes volunteers who have demonstrated extraordinary and long-term commitment in providing care to others or in supporting community service or humanitarian causes. The sample involved 25 brave and 25 caring exemplars, drawn from all ten Canadian provinces. Interestingly, these two groups of exemplars did not differ in the distribution of gender or ethnicity, nor in level of education; however, the caring exemplars were considerably older than the brave exemplars, a finding that potentially complicates any interpretation of personality differences between them. This age disparity might be expected, given that the brave exemplars were recognized for heroism in dangerous contexts where younger adults are more often involved, whereas the caring exemplars were recognized for long-term volunteer service and were, consequently, somewhat older.

One of the notable design strengths of our study was the inclusion of carefully matched comparison groups. This feature allowed for much stronger conclusions about the association between personality and moral action than would have been appropriate in previous research. Comparison participants were drawn from the general community and were closely matched, on a case-by-case basis, to exemplar participants on four demographic variables (gender, ethnicity, level of education, and age). Thus, there were 25 comparison participants individually matched to brave exemplars, and 25 comparison participants individually matched to caring exemplars, for a total sample of 100. More detailed information regarding the sample for this project, its methodology and results, is reported by Walker and Frimer (2007).

THE EMPirical PARADIGM OF MORAL PERSONALITY

Our intent was to provide an extensive examination of the personality of moral exemplars by using multiple measures and a broadband assessment. McAdams's (1995b; this volume) three-level typology of personality description provided the empirical paradigm that guided our assessment. Each level of the typology has its particular advantages (and limitations) but, in concert, the three levels provide a comprehensive profile.

The first level of personality description reflects dispositional traits – the dimensions of personality that are broad, stable, decontextualized, and implicitly comparative. The second level is that of characteristic adaptations – the motivational, developmental, and strategic aspects of personality functioning that are more particular to contexts. The third level is that of integrative life narratives – the aspects of personality involving the psychosocial construction of a personal identity and a framework for deriving a sense of unity, purpose, and meaning in life.

To assess personality at all three levels, we used several measures. At the level of dispositional traits, we had participants complete Wiggins's (1995) Revised Interpersonal Adjective Scales in which they rate the accuracy of 124 trait terms in describing themselves. This personality inventory taps the circumplex dimensions of dominance and nurturance. These two modalities involve the granting or withholding of power/status and of affection/affiliation, respectively, and are widely held to be fundamental in human functioning.

At the level of characteristic adaptations, we were particularly interested in the goal motivational aspects of personality and so had participants complete Emmons's (1999) Personal Strivings List. On this measure, participants are asked to reflect on and then to write down a list of at least ten to fifteen of their personal strivings or goals, that is, the things they are "typically trying to do." The notion that moral desires – rather than cognitive competencies – are what fundamentally motivate moral action suggests the probable relevance of personal strivings to the moral domain. We coded participants' personal strivings for five major categories of motivation that were thought to be particularly germane: (a) power (concern with influencing others); (b) affiliation/intimacy (concern for maintaining relationships and commitment to another); (c) generativity (concern for the next generation and of giving of oneself for others); (d) spiritual self-transcendence (a divine awareness and other concerns that transcend the self); and (e) identity/personal growth (concern for greater self-understanding and self-development).
At the third level of personality description, we assessed integrative narratives of the self in the context of a lengthy life-review interview (McAdams, 1995a), in which participants were essentially asked to construct the story of their life. The initial part of the interview was rather open-ended: here, participants were prompted to describe in some detail the main chapters of their life story. Then they were asked to focus, in turn, on several specific events that were critical in their life story (a high point, low point, turning point, earliest memory, important childhood memory, important adolescent memory, and important adult memory); they were asked to share not only concrete details but also, more important, the significance of the event and what it conveyed about who they are as persons. Appropriate parts of the life-review interview were coded (relying on various coding schemes provided by McAdams) for seven relevant personality variables: (a) themes of agency (self-mastery, status/victory, achievement/responsibility, and empowerment); (b) themes of communion (love/friendship, dialogue, caring/help, and unity/togetherness); (c) overall affective tone (degree of pessimism vs. optimism); (d) redemption/contamination sequences (the construal of life events either such that an initially negative state is salvaged in some way, or such that an initially positive state is irreconcilably tainted by a negative outcome – redemption vs. contamination, respectively); (e) sensitization to the needs of others (the extent to which the participant indicates being exposed to the needs of others in early life); (f) helpers/enemies (the presence of people who, in early life, influenced the participant in an explicitly positive way and the relative absence of "enemies" who were detrimental); and (g) the security of childhood attachments in various relationships. The latter three variables (sensitization to the needs of others, helpers/enemies, and attachments), as a cluster of themes, comprise what McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, and Mansfield (1997) conceptualize as early-life advantage, the recollection of a highly positive childhood that was formative of prosocial goals and commitments.

The measures and personality variables assessed in this study are outlined in the left-hand columns of Table 10.1. It was anticipated that the multiple personality measures and the broad range of personality variables assessed would facilitate a comprehensive examination of the moral personality.

### Table 10.1: Summary of findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Level of personality description</th>
<th>Personality variable</th>
<th>Different personality profiles*</th>
<th>Foundational core**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Revised interpersonal Adjective scales</td>
<td>Dispositional traits</td>
<td>Dominance</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal Strivings List</td>
<td>Characteristic adaptations</td>
<td>Power</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life-Review Interview</td>
<td>Integrative life narratives</td>
<td>Agency</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Affectove tone</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Redemption/contamination</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Sensitization to the needs of others</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Helpers/enemies</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Attachments</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*For the findings regarding different personality profiles, a ✓ indicates that caring exemplars scored higher than brave exemplars at p ≤ .001, whereas a † indicates a marginally significant difference with .001 ≤ p ≤ .04.

**For the findings regarding the foundational core of the moral domain, a ✓ indicates that both groups of exemplars scored higher than their comparison groups at p < .001.

One of the main questions framing our research was whether mature moral functioning can be manifest in different moral personalities, challenging the contrary notion implicit in theories that posit singular visions of moral excellence. The brave and caring exemplars in our project, although identified and recognized in similar ways, had engaged in quite different forms of moral action. So we now turn to an overview of their personality profiles and then flesh out these differences with illustrative material.

The interpretive challenge in making such a comparison is the confound, noted earlier, between the type-of-award variable and age – the brave exemplars were almost a generation younger than the caring exemplars. Thus, any personality differences revealed between brave and caring exemplars might be attributable instead to a developmental or cohort effect. To address
the possibility of this confound, two preliminary analyses were undertaken with the comparison-group participants (who are demographically identical to the exemplars): one examined the correlations between age and each of the personality variables for the comparison-group participants; the other examined personality differences between the brave and caring comparison groups. Both sets of analyses consistently revealed nonsignificant effects, indicating that the age difference between the exemplor groups does not present an interpretive obstacle.

Having dealt with the potential confound between the award variable and age, we now turn to a direct comparison of the personality profiles of brave and caring exemplars. Analyses revealed pronounced differences (with $p < .001$ and with large effect sizes of $\eta^2 \geq .20$) between the two types of exemplars on three personality variables - nurturance, generativity, and affective tone - variables, incidentally, representing all three levels of personality description. Weaker differences on four other variables - affiliation/intimacy, communion, sensitization to the needs of others, and quality of attachments - were also suggested by analyses (the differences on these four variables were marginally significant when using an alpha level adjusted for the experiment-wise error rate, but all $p < .05$ and with medium effect sizes of $\eta^2 \geq .09$). These findings are summarized in Table 10.1.

Strikingly, each one of these personality differences favored caring over brave exemplars. Contrary to our hypothesis, the brave exemplars did not "outscore" the caring exemplars on even one personality variable. But before drawing conclusions about the "banality of heroism" (Franco & Zimbardo, 2006), we will later reveal that the brave exemplars were by no means common. The present findings suggest, however, that brave personalities are somewhat less exemplary than caring ones. In retrospect, this is not surprising in that the caring exemplars were recognized for long-term commitment to caring action, whereas the brave exemplars were recognized for a single heroic act. Situational pressures could have had a stronger causal role in bringing out exemplary moral action from only somewhat exemplary individuals.

We now illustrate some of the empirical differences between brave and caring exemplars. One consistent theme running through this pattern of personality differences was the strong communal orientation to others demonstrated by caring exemplars, as shown by their elevated scores on personality traits reflecting the nurturance dimension, on both generativity and affiliation/intimacy strivings, and on themes of communion in their life narratives. For example, on the warm-agreeable trait terms most closely associated with the nurturance dimension of the interpersonal circumplex (e.g., kind, accommodating, charitable, sympathetic), caring exemplars scored over one standard deviation higher than the brave exemplars.

In terms of goal motivation as expressed in personal strivings, caring exemplars had over twice as many generativity strivings as did brave exemplars and over 50% more affiliation/intimacy strivings. In previous research, McAdams et al. (1997) found that outstanding teachers and community volunteers evidenced higher levels of generative concern than comparison participants, implicating the relevance of generativity for moral action. In Emmons's (1999) conceptualization, generativity entails not only a desire to create something, leave a legacy, and have an enduring influence, but also a desire to give of oneself to others and, more particularly, for purposeful interaction with the younger generation. Such generative concern is illustrated by a few examples of the personal strivings of caring exemplars in this study who were responding to the prompt, "I typically try to ...":

- make my community a better place to be.
- do at least one good deed daily - often anonymously.
- create a role model for my kids and other youth.
- enrich everyone around me with unerring faith, hope, and positive thinking.
- make time to advocate for women who are from a "low-income" bracket.

The moral motivation in such personal concerns is transparent and seems to be an important component of the caring exemplars' framing of their lives.

A strong orientation toward affiliation and intimacy also was found to characterize the goal motivation of caring exemplars. This relational theme encompasses a range of strivings including the seeking of acceptance and security in relationships, establishing and maintaining friendships, commitment to and concern for another, positive interpersonal affect, and reciprocal communication and sharing. Midlarsky et al.'s (2005) finding of exceptional empathic concern among Holocaust rescuers, and Matsuba and Walker's (2004) finding that their young-adult moral exemplars scored highly on the other-model dimension of adult attachment, are consistent with our finding of a higher level of affiliation/intimacy strivings among caring exemplars. A few examples of such relational strivings in the present data are:

- call lonely friends as often as possible.
- be sensitive to the physical and emotional needs of my wife.
- entertain others and create a happy environment.
- be liked and be needed.
- live in harmony in human relationships particularly in the home.

Such goals, seemingly fundamental in the lives of caring exemplars, frequently focus on altruistic concerns and the nurturing of relationships.

This notion of an enhanced orientation to others was also evidenced by considerably more frequent themes of communion in the life stories of caring exemplars than in those of brave exemplars (by a ratio of 3:2). McAdams's (1993) conception of communion encompasses several ideas, including ones referencing love and friendship, meaningful and mutual dialogue among people, the provision of care and help for another, and experiences of being a part of a larger community. In outlining the major chapters in their life story, and in identifying and making sense of significant life events, caring exemplars were more likely to incorporate communal themes in their self-understanding. Note that this orientation to others was pervasive across the levels of personality analysis, seen not only in terms of dispositional traits and characteristic adaptations, but also at the deeper level of integrative life narratives.

In addition to these four personality variables tapping an orientation to others, caring exemplars also had a generally more optimistic affective tone to their life narratives than did brave exemplars (whose interviews tended to more mixed or neutral in affective tone). Dispositional optimism has frequently been implicated in adaptive coping and better adjustment (Peterson, 2000). The case studies analyzed by Colby and Damon (1992) suggested that hopefulness and positivity were important factors underlying extraordinary moral commitment. Although it is difficult to convey the overall affective tone of someone's life story with a few excerpts from an interview, the following ones illustrate the pervasive optimism of one caring exemplar in our study (who was recognized for her extraordinary community service):

I grew up ... with a lot of love and maybe some hardships; you know, holes in the socks and things like that. And we laugh about it now, but that was how it was. And not a lot of extras — no extras, really, at all. But always feeling ... that I was sort of a child of God, that I was looked after, that I didn't have anything to worry about; and that feeling has stayed with me all my life. So, you know, I grew up, as we say, without a whole lot, but it was a great childhood.

My [nursing] career has spanned 15 years in maternity and 25 in emergency room. And to me, it was such a privilege to be able to be there ... to be able to work in that kind of a situation I think allowed me to grow ... to really start to feel that I could give back to people. And it was easy for me; it was never a hardship; it still isn't. So those were really good years. ... When I went to work, I didn't even think about home or anything else. I went and I absolutely loved it, and I could laugh and cry and do whatever I had to do, but I loved every minute of being there. And some people don't understand that, but I did. And I don't think there was ever one shift where I didn't really enjoy it to the utmost. So again, that was something that was given to me and I recognize that.

Pervasive optimism in the context of long-term commitment to caring service should come as some surprise. After all, these volunteers often worked in situations that entailed destitution, desperation, and disenfranchisement. In spite of their elevated exposure to challenging environments, the caring exemplars in some sense defy their environments in exuding positivity. A purely contextual (as opposed to dispositional) explanation of moral exemplarity would have to posit the opposite finding of attitudes of discouragement and cynicism. The present data imply the working of an agentic personality that somehow transduces the negativity of difficult contexts into expressions of hope and affirmation.

One of the unanticipated findings of the study was that a disproportionate number of caring exemplars had suffered the death of one or more children. The death of a child is prototypic of the out-of-sequence, oftentimes traumatic events with which most people typically have great difficulty coping, even over the long term, often falling into anger or despair. But here, despite the fact that a sizable number of caring exemplars had had to contend with their own child's death, they were found to evidence optimism and positivity. It appears that these extraordinary people cope by discerning some meaning and benefit from a tragedy and by deliberately fostering a positive attitude toward life. The following interview excerpt with a caring exemplar illustrates this phenomenon. The daughter of this participant had been involved in aid work in a developing nation when she was stricken with a terminal illness.

By this time, she'd gotten ... me into a lot of things, into Amnesty [International] letter writing. ... And so, of course, when she told me that the cancer had metastasized, I guess I had tears, and she said, "Mom, there are lots of things worse than me having breast cancer ... like being in prison and being tortured." ... So doing voluntary work has been a godsend for me. You know, that I was motivated and able. People used to say to me, "It's not fair that [your daughter] should die so young. Look at all the good she could have done in this world. Look
at how she was helping people; and then she goes and, you know, gets cancer. Well, it's not fair.” And I'd always say, “No, [she] has accomplished more by her death than had she lived,” and I still see it that way.

One of the unanswered questions here is whether these participants were predisposed to such positivity throughout their life, or rather that it is a reflection of some element of posttraumatic growth.

The remaining variables that were found to distinguish the personality functioning of caring and brave exemplars involved two aspects of early-life advantage: the quality of childhood attachments and sensitization to the needs of others. Participants were never explicitly questioned regarding such relationships and experiences in the context of the life-review interview, so the coding very much reflects the spontaneous mention of significant people and events in childhood and adolescence. Quality of attachments was rated for six different relationships: mother, father, grandparents, siblings, friendship/school, and church/religion. Overall, in the life stories of caring exemplars, there was greater evidence for secure childhood attachments than in those of brave exemplars, suggestive of contexts of nurture, trust, and interpersonal connection.

The other early-advantage variable — sensitization to the needs of others — reflects the experience of exposure to people who require special care, an experience that prompts an expansion of one’s scope of concern. Such awareness of the needs and suffering of others was more pronounced in the recollections of caring than brave exemplars. Examples from these interviews include experiences of helping refugee families adapt, befriending a child afflicted with polio, dealing with the suicide attempt of a teenage friend, and visiting a lonely neighbor who was an invalid. Whether such early-life experiences were indeed formative of a caring personality, or rather that such memories are merely reconstructions as one attempts to impose meaning on one’s life, is indeterminate; nevertheless, this process is informative of the forging of a moral identity.

In summary, these analyses provide ample evidence for different moral personalities — brave and caring exemplars were found to have rather divergent personality profiles. Notably, however, when differences were found, they favored caring over brave exemplars: the personality of caring exemplars was considerably more “exemplary,” as embodied by the pervasive communal orientation of their character, the fundamental optimism, and the recollections of early-life advantage.

These findings resurrect the intractable issue of the agentic versus situational causes of behavior. In our study, the brave exemplars reacted heroically in a life-and-death rescue, and the operation of powerful situational factors was probably implicated in their action. The caring exemplars, on the other hand, had engaged in long-term volunteer service, and the instigation and maintenance of such activity were probably more dependent on deeply instilled aspects of character and motivation. However, we should be careful not to portray too strong a contrast between these two types of exemplars. Brave exemplars obviously also have a caring and strongly altruistic orientation: they did risk their lives to rescue another. Caring exemplars frequently have to be heroic and brave in confronting injustice, advocating for the disadvantaged, and overcoming challenges. Given the methodological difficulties in directly assessing motivation for moral action, most notably socially desirable responding, it will be difficult to generate data that can empirically inform the interaction between personological and situational factors.

One may be drawn to the apparent conclusion that the behaviors of the brave exemplars were merely situationally induced, whereas the personalities of the caring exemplars caused their behaviors. At this juncture, the suggestion that the brave exemplars were quite commonplace in their personality has some currency — but that would be a distinctly premature and, as it turns out, incorrect conclusion. The next section of this chapter will explore differences between exemplar and comparison participants and, not to give away the whole story, brave exemplars were found to score higher on several personality variables than comparison participants (confirming their exemplarity). However, it just so happens that caring exemplars also scored higher on the same variables.

FOUNDATIONAL CORE

The second major question framing our research asked whether we could identify aspects of the psychological core to moral functioning. Our analytic strategy was to determine the personality characteristics that these two contrasting types of moral exemplars clearly share, but which, at the same time, distinguish them from comparison-group participants. Such commonalities in personality functioning implicate some basic aspects of the moral personality.

We only counted a personality variable as core to the domain if analyses indicated, for that particular variable, that the brave exemplars differed from their comparison group, and similarly, that the caring exemplars differed from their comparison group. That is, both of these quite different exemplar types needed to evidence the same personality exemplarity. Our
analyses identified five personality variables as foundational — themes of agency and of communion, redemption/contamination sequences, helpers/enemies in early life, and quality of childhood attachments — with the differences between exemplar and comparison groups being quite pronounced (with all ps < .001 and with large effect sizes of \( \eta^2 \geq .16 \)). These findings are summarized in Table 10.1.

In the life narratives of exemplars, the central themes of both agency and communion were frequently voiced (with 68% more agency than the comparison groups and 82% more communion). Agency and communion represent a motivational duality that entails orthogonal psychological tendencies, ones that are relatively broad and multidimensional. The convergence of both agency and communion in psychological functioning is held to represent a particularly adaptive and well-adjusted motivational style (McAdams, 1993; McAdams, Hoffman, Mansfield, & Day, 1996): mitigating agency with communal concerns is a major life challenge (Bakan, 1966). The agentic aspects of (both brave and caring) exemplars’ personality reflect their significant engagement in action in often difficult and challenging circumstances. Such action demands self-control and self-awareness, independence, assumption of responsibility, relentless pursuit of goals, and a sense of empowerment. The communal aspects of exemplars’ personality reflect their application of agency to projects of helping, serving, and connecting with others. Such action demands a sustained orientation to others, concern for their welfare and well-being, interpersonal sensitivity and connection, openness, and positive emotionality.

The following excerpts from the interview with a caring award recipient (who was recognized for his extraordinary volunteer service with poor children in isolated communities) illustrate this conjoining of agency and communion:

[My wife and I] sat back Christmas Eve one year [and] looked at all the gifts under our tree. We'd got the kids to sleep, and all the other gifts had come out that had been hidden away. It was a true mass of gifts to be opened... We then realized how fortunate our kids were and how fortunate we were [and decided], that regardless of how the impact was going to be, or how minimal or how large it was going to be, we were going to start a program the following year [to collect and deliver gifts for disadvantaged children].

It was so refreshing to go back into a community as a police officer, especially when we went in in uniform... But, as opposed to going in and delivering bad news, ... here you are going in bestowing gifts, unsolicited gifts, and caring. It's not what the gift represents itself; it's not the doll or the truck. It's the fact that somebody's taken the time to organize something like this, actually physically wrap the gifts... We try and go back year after year after year. It's a true demonstration that you've made a commitment.

The agentic themes apparent here include a strong sense of achievement and responsibility, the empowerment induced by an influential authority figure, and the self-mastery that came through the transformation in self-awareness and the realization of new goals. The communal themes referenced here focus on empathic care and concern for the emotional well-being of others.

Another foundational personality variable that was common to both types of exemplars and distinguished them quite dramatically from comparison groups was the prevalence of redemption sequences (and the relative absence of contamination sequences). The life stories of exemplars were coded as having 66% more redemption sequences and 51% fewer contamination sequences than the accounts of comparison participants. McAdams (2006) argues that it is not the recalled events themselves that are important in assessing personality functioning, rather it is how such events are construed and what meaning is derived from them. In his conceptualization, a redemption sequence is one in which a demonstrably negative state leads to a positive one; the initial negative state is redeemed or salvaged in some way. In a complementary manner, a contamination sequence is one in which a positive state leads to a noticeably negative one; the initial positive state is irreconcilably contaminated or tainted by a negative outcome — the negativity overwhelms the previous positivity. The extant evidence (McAdams, 2006) indicates that redemptive construals are associated with psychological well-being and represent the most important and
pervasive theme among generative adults, whereas contamination is more consistently associated with measures of psychological distress.

Among the exemplars in our project, there was a strong tendency to reframe critical life events redemptively, as the following four descriptions reveal (the first two examples are from brave exemplars, the last two from caring ones):

The painful experience of his parents' divorce is construed as an opportunity for personal development: "I came to discover who I was, and what I wanted in my life, and what I didn't want in my life. But in that family structure, that was what I would say was really oppressive, it wasn't possible for me."

In the aftermath of the murder of her best friend, a young woman describes being able to deliver the eulogy at the funeral as a high point, her most significant achievement. "This was how I really felt about her, and I got the opportunity to say it, and people got to hear it, and a lot of people said ... 'That was incredible, it was beautiful,' and the boys hated me because I made them all cry."

A positive benefit of a diagnosis of breast cancer is understood as reenergizing her creative side. "Out of that, you know, has come this wonderful, well, it's almost like a happy reunion with my art and realizing the gift that came from the tragedy."

The sudden death of his son induces a positive change in values. "Things that may have seemed important don't seem so important anymore. It certainly gets your priorities a little straighter and it gives you a different sense of what you value."

These accounts illustrate the capability, and often the conscious choice, to discern or to construct some benefit or positive outcome from adversity. Redemptive construals of transformative life experiences - this process of benefit-finding - represent a particularly adaptive form of personality functioning that can often foster and sustain moral action in challenging and difficult contexts.

Finally, two related features of early-life advantage (quality of attachments and helpers/enemies) also figured prominently in the foundational core of the moral personality, reflective of people's retrospective construal of formative relationships through their childhood and adolescence (McAdams et al., 1997). These intimations of a childhood that was positively valenced in terms of secure and scaffolding relationships were inferred from incidental references to significant people in participants' life stories since there was no explicit probing in this regard. Exemplars' relationships overall were rated as being significantly more secure than those of comparison participants, suggestive of nurturing and steadfast contexts for development.

In terms of the explicit identification of helpers and enemies in the narratives, the frequency of enemies (those who are described as detrimental and oppositional) was relatively low and did not differ significantly between groups. However, the frequency of helpers in the recollections of exemplars was almost three times that of comparison participants. A helper is someone whose actions are construed as scaffolding or benefiting the respondent in an explicitly positive way. A sampling of the helpers mentioned by our exemplars included: a mother who taught responsibility and self-sufficiency, a principled father who instilled a moral standard, a loving grandmother who showed the meaning of "grace," a caring aunt who paid for surgery to repair a congenital deformity, a neighbor who provided daily encouragement, a stimulating teacher who encouraged intrinsic learning, and a coach who fostered excellence in every aspect of life.

These positive childhood experiences, involving secure attachments and influential mentors, suggest an early realization of being particularly advantaged in some way, and may be pivotal in the fashioning of an identity that entails a sense of efficacy, prosocial motivation, and a strong commitment to moral concerns.

In summary, then, we were able to discern some conspicuous commonalities in the personality functioning of brave and caring exemplars, indicative of the psychological core of the moral domain. These commonalities were found despite their considerably different types of moral action and their typically different stages in the adult lifespan. Our evidence regarding the foundational core is that it frequently entails the convergence of agency and communion, adaptive aspects of personality that seem instrumental for moral action. Further, the redemptive reframing of significant life events in order to construct some positive benefit seems to be a coping strategy that sustains prosocial commitment in the face of difficulties. And, finally, a life narrative that references a highly positive childhood, conferring some early-life advantage, seems integral to an identity that is pervaded by moral concerns. We cannot determine from our data, of course, whether such recollections of an advantaged early life are indeed reflective of actual experiences or instead represent construals of one's life in terms of present understandings. Regardless, such intimations do reflect important components of the moral personality.

The differences between exemplar and comparison participants were most obvious in the life-narrative data, in the forging of a personal identity.
Blasi (1993, 2004) and Frimer and Walker (2008) have argued that a moral identity is a fundamental explanatory construct in moral functioning. The aspects of personality captured at lower levels of personality description (viz., dispositional traits and characteristic adaptations) may not as readily tap the complex processes of self-continuity, self-coherence, and identity formulation as individuals develop and confront changing contexts and new challenges. Such personological processes, operative in and constitutive of a moral identity, are seemingly best assessed in terms of individuals’ self-narratives.

**Toward Bridging the Judgment/Action Gap**

This project was premised on the well-established observation that moral judgment fails to be a viable contender in adequately explaining moral action, with the proposition that personality variables might serve to help bridge the judgment/action gap. Our design allowed a test of both the premise and the proposition. In addition to the personality variables described earlier, participants were prompted to discuss a real-life moral conflict in the context of their life review, and their reasoning in handling this dilemma was coded for moral stage (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987; Walker et al., 1995), yielding a standard index of moral judgment.

To test the premise about the explanatory power of moral cognition, we conducted logistic regression analyses, using moral reasoning as a predictor of moral-action status (as exemplar or comparison). For the brave groups, moral reasoning did not predict moral action whatsoever (with Nagelkerke $R^2 = .00$); that is, brave exemplars and their comparison group were indistinguishable in terms of level of moral reasoning. For the caring groups, moral reasoning was a significant but weak predictor of moral action ($R^2 = .20$); with caring exemplars somewhat more advanced in moral reasoning than their comparison group. Thus, our data are consistent with the claim that moral cognition, at best, only weakly predicts behavior.

To test the proposition about the potential relevance of personological factors to moral functioning, we again conducted logistic regression analyses, entering moral reasoning in the first block as a control variable, and then entering the 14 personality variables in the second block to determine whether they added to the explanatory equation. For the brave groups, the addition of personality variables significantly improved the prediction of moral action from $R^2 = .00$ (with moral reasoning alone) to $R^2 = .68$ (with the addition of personality variables). For the caring groups, the addition of personality variables similarly improved the prediction of moral action from $R^2 = .20$ to .87 – almost completely accounting for the variability in the data. Thus, these analyses yield unequivocal support for the hypothesis that aspects of the moral personality do augment moral cognition and substantially close the judgment/action gap.

**Coda: Bringing Things Together and Moving Them Forward**

Our research project was framed as an attempt to encourage a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of moral functioning: trying to break out of the rationalistic fetters that have bound the field and to consider empirically the moral relevance of aspects of personality. Indeed, our evidence is that moral cognition does not well explain morally exemplary action, a conclusion previously suggested by Colby and Damon’s (1992) case studies. In contrast, however, several personality variables clearly distinguished moral exemplars from comparison participants and were found to substantially close the explanatory gap between judgment and action.

Our focus on two types of moral action – heroic rescues and caring service – fireless complementary aims: to identify contrasting ideals of moral maturity, on the one hand, and to identify the personological core to moral functioning, on the other. We anticipated finding divergence in their personality profiles, with each exemplar group evidencing adaptive advantages relative to the other. Instead, the caring exemplars scored a shutout victory over: the brave exemplars. This must be interpreted in the context of the finding that both the brave and caring groups outscored comparison participants. A tentative proposition thus seems warranted: that the brave and caring exemplars, as well as their comparison groups comprised of “ordinary” individuals, lie on a single axis of “personological exemplarity.” In other words, the brave exemplars were more adaptive than their comparisons, and the caring exemplars were more adaptive still. This model of exemplarity stands in contrast to the notion of a branch point, where high moral functioning can equally be manifested in different ways. But before such a proposition is accepted, an even-handed replication is necessary, one in which contrasting types of exemplars have engaged in comparable amounts of morally exemplary action.

Of course, bravery and care do not begin to exhaust the realm of moral exemplarity – the just exemplar being a notable omission from our design, given its prominence in ethical theory and in everyday conceptions (Rawls, 1971; Walker & Hennig, 2004), while other examples abound. The empirical
study of other types of moral action may implicate psychological processes
left unexplored at present.

Despite the wide-ranging differences in the personality profiles of our
brave and caring exemplars, they also shared several commonalities that
also distinguished them from ordinary individuals. These commonalities
evince the psychological essentia of the moral personality. Most notably,
this foundational core includes the converging motivational duality of
agency and communion, the redemptive reframing of life events, and an
identity that references a beneficially formative childhood.

A frequent observation is that achieving excellence in one aspect of char-
acter may come at some cost, that a shadow-side or psychological handi-
cap may somehow be implicated (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2006). We found no
evidence of psychological impairment associated with moral exemplarity
in our study, but our measures were not particularly designed to assess mal-
adaptive aspects of personality. A profitable direction for future research
will be to flesh out the complexity in the balancing of various virtues, to
explore how a personal strength can also entail a vulnerability, and how
weakness can promote growth. Another research question prompted by
the present findings is the extent to which moral exemplarity differs from
"generic exemplarity" in other domains: think of academic or entrepre-
neurial achievement as contrasts, for example. Likewise, the dissimilar-
ties in psychological functioning between moral exemplars and immoral
ones (such as psychopaths) may be particularly informative of the processes
underlying moral behavior.

A final consideration in our concluding thoughts concerns the critical
issue of psychological causality. Here the question, posed starkly, is: Does
moral personality function analogously to an operator's manual, causing
exemplary moral action; or does involvement in significant action prompt
a reworking of one's personality, with personality being more analogous to
a documentary? This is certainly not an easily resolved question (Midlarsky
et al., 2005). There is abundant evidence in social psychological research to
indicate both that attitudes affect behavior and that engaging in behavior
induces attitude change (e.g., see Bem's, 1972, self-perception theory).
In our study, no determination of the causal connection between personality
and action was attempted and, hopefully, none was implied in our discus-
sion. At this point, it sufficed for us to demonstrate that some personality
variables were associated with exemplary action. Our assessment of ex-
emplars' personality was, of course, done subsequently to their heroic rescues
or long-term volunteer service (and the recognition that such action gar-
nedered); and neither such actions nor the award were likely to have been
inconsequential events in most people's lives and self-understandings. An
alternate methodological approach would be to conduct prospective lon-
gitudinal studies in an attempt to identify the phenomenological precursors of
moral action, but this approach would require large samples, and it is not
apparent what outcome index of moral action would be most appropriate.

The impetus for our research project was to salvage the foundering ship
that has become the moral development enterprise. In describing and
empirically validating the signature moral personality variables, we hope
to have provided abundant ammunition to empirical researchers. The far-
reaching theorizing on the topic of moral personality and character of
recent years may now duly come to fruition. With more clearly delineated
means of testing theory, we anticipate widespread flag-raising, and new and
exciting armada of moral psychological research. The empirical cannons lie
trembling in anticipation; the time approaches for determining the weak-
hulled from the seaworthy, the old-fashioned way.

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