Prosocial Behavior and Caring in Adolescence: Relations to Self-Understanding and Social Judgment

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HART, DANIEL, and FEGLEY, SUZANNE. Prosocial Behavior and Caring in Adolescence: Relations to Self-Understanding and Social Judgment. CHILD DEVELOPMENT, 1995, 66, 1346–1359. The relation of self-understanding and moral judgment to dedicated prosocial behavior is investigated. Participants were African-American and Latin-American adolescents who had been nominated by community leaders for having demonstrated unusual commitments to care for others or the community (care exemplars). The care exemplars, and matched comparison adolescents, were extensively interviewed over the course of 4–6 sessions in order to elicit self-understanding, moral judgment, and implicit personality theories. The care exemplars were more likely than the comparison adolescents to: (1) describe themselves in terms of moral personality traits and goals, (2) view themselves as having closer continuity to their pasts and futures, (3) think of themselves as incorporating their ideals and parental images, and (4) articulate theories of self in which personal beliefs and philosophies are important. There were no differences between the care exemplars and the comparison adolescents in developmental stages of moral judgment nor in the abstractness of their implicit personality theories.

Unusually altruistic behavior is as remarkable as morally deficient action, yet only the latter (particularly in the form of juvenile delinquency) has drawn the sustained attention of researchers interested in the moral development of adolescents. From a theoretical perspective, it is as important to understand the nature of altruism as it is to identify the features of egoism; although the two are loosely thought of as poles of a single dimension, it seems likely that prosocial behavior and egoism are constituted of distinct clusters of characteristics that may not be endpoints on the same continuum.

The research reported here is one step toward building an account of the altruistic personality in adolescence, an effort that is complemented by parallel investigations in the study of childhood (Coles, 1986) and adulthood (Colby & Damon, 1992; Oliner & Oliner, 1988). The particular focus of this study is on a group of African-American and Latin-American adolescents who have demonstrated unusual altruistic commitments in their care for others (hereafter these adolescents are called care exemplars). The achievements of the care exemplars are particularly admirable (the activities are described later) given that they occur in Camden, New Jersey, an economically distressed city (see Kerr, 1989, or Kozol, 1991, for descriptions). It may be extremely difficult for adolescents living in economically distressed cities to become caring persons (see Garbarino, Kostelny, & Dubrow, 1991). It was our belief that the psychology of dedicated altruistic behavior would be clearly revealed in such contexts. The specific goal of the research presented here is to investigate how care emblem adolescents understand their social worlds, with a particular focus on their understanding of themselves.
Social Understanding

Social cognition is composed of an understanding of (1) the self, (2) others, and (3) the relations and institutions that regulate interactions between self and other (Kohlberg, 1984). The care exemplars might differ from adolescents in their understanding of any or all of these domains. However, the importance of an understanding of self, or the self-concept, has been emphasized in a number of recent theoretical accounts of altruism, moral behavior, and care for others in both psychology (e.g., Blasi, 1983, 1984; Damon & Hart, 1992; Gilligan, 1982; Wegner, 1980) and philosophy (e.g., Taylor, 1989). Indeed, Flanagan (1991, p. 18) has argued from a philosophical perspective that the individual must believe that one’s self and identity are involved for a “kind of action, a principle, or a problem . . . to fall under the concept of ‘moralit’y.” Recent psychological work has yielded findings consistent with the position that the sense of self is intertwined with moral behavior; based on their intensive interviews of adults who had demonstrated sustained moral commitments in adulthood (e.g., Blasi, 1983, 1984; Damon & Hart, 1992; in press) report that moral motivation in their subjects results from the integration of moral goals into the sense of self.

Although appeals to constructs like “self-concept,” “sense of self,” and “identity” are increasingly popular among theorists of prosocial behavior, these constructs have been invoked without much specification of what they are taken to mean, nor with much systematic testing. Four different conceptual models of the self-concept drawn from social and developmental psychology are considered in this study.

Self-Concept as Content

The most common approach to the self-concept is to ask persons to describe themselves, and then to classify each of the resulting ascriptions using a content coding procedure (e.g., Livesly & Bromley, 1973; Peevers & Secord, 1973; see Damon & Hart, 1988, for a review). If certain types of elements are common in self-descriptions, then those elements define the self-concept and are expected to be related to self-evaluation and behavior as well. For instance, in a study of the self-descriptions of delinquent adolescents, Oyserman and Markus (1990) found that this group made fewer references to their academic aspirations and more references to future criminal activities than did a group of officially nondelinquent adolescents. In the context of prosocial behavior, we expect that those who describe the self in terms of moral personality traits, moral aspirations, and moral actions will be more likely to be involved in prosocial activities, and to evaluate the self in these terms, than others whose self-descriptions emphasize other qualities.

Self-Concept as a Semantic Space

It is also possible to model the self-concept as a network of multiple representations that are arrayed in a semantic space that also includes representations of important others (e.g., Hart, Stinson, Field, Ewert, & Horowitz, in press). Research of this type proceeds by eliciting descriptions of various representations of self and important others. A number of different representations of self have been studied by developmental and social psychologists: the actual self (e.g., “person you are now”), the ideal self (“the person you would ideally like to be”), Bybee & Zigler, 1991), the undesired self (e.g., “the kind of person you hope never to be”); Ogilvie, 1987), ought selves (e.g., “the person your mother expects you to be”); Strauman & Higgins, 1988), temporal selves (e.g., “the person you were five years ago,” “the person you will be in five years”; Hart, Fegley, & Brengelman, 1993; Markus & Nurius, 1986), and social selves (e.g., “what are you like when you are with your mother? with your best friend?”; Ashmore & Ogilvie, 1992; Hart, 1988b). Descriptions of these representations of self are elicited in this study, as well as descriptions of parents, best friends, and despised peers and adults.

The location of these representations in the subject’s semantic space is determined by assessing the similarity of all possible pairs of representations. If two representations are described in similar terms, they can be described as being close to each other, or in close proximity, in the subject’s semantic space; if the two representations are described in very different ways, they can be imagined as being arrayed in very different locations, or distant from each other, in the subject’s semantic space. Proximities among representations can be analyzed with Multi-Dimensional Scaling (MDS). MDS yields two products of interest here. First, it generates a spatial plot of the location of the various representations for the sample taken as a whole (the group stimulus space). This provides a sense of how the representations might be related to each other, and suggests as well the general dimensions shared by all subjects along which the representations are
It seems likely that one of these general dimensions will be characterized in terms of social evaluation (Kim & Rosenberg, 1980), with the undesired self at one end of the dimension and the ideal self at the other.

It is also possible to capture individual differences through MDS. In one variant of MDS (the Weighted Euclidean or INDSCAL model; see Young & Harris, 1990, for an excellent discussion), subjects are postulated to differ from each other in the extent to which each of the general dimensions is salient in his or her semantic space. Although there has been little scaling research done with adolescents (despite its appropriateness for developmental research; see Kagan, 1983), it seems likely that there may be differences between exemplars and other adolescents in the salience of dimensions. One source of evidence for this hypothesis is found in Oyserman and Markus's work (1990). They found that nondelinquent adolescents were more likely than delinquent adolescents to envision as possible for the self both the positive and the negative poles of common characteristics (e.g., academic success and academic failure). Oyserman and Markus argued that this articulation of the negative and positive poles provided greater direction to behavior than could be derived from conceptions of only one pole or the other. This argument can be extended to the subjects of this study. The unusually idealistic behavior of the care exemplars could be related to distinctions among representations of self along the dimension of social evaluation, anchored at one end by the undesired self and at the other by the ideal self. In other words, this dimension would be particularly salient in the judgments of the care exemplars.

**Self-Concept as a Hierarchy of Selves**

Many social psychologists (e.g., Markus & Wurf, 1987) have argued that it is useful to envision the various representations of self and others a person might have as arranged in a hierarchy. These various representations overlap to varying degrees, with some representations subsuming others; for instance, the ideal self may be a part of the actual self. The extent to which these representations overlap is thought (Rosenberg, 1988) to provide important clues to the organization of the self-concept.

Rosenberg and his colleagues (Ogilvie, 1987; Robey, Cohen, & Gara, 1989; Rosenberg & Gara, 1985) have demonstrated the utility of this approach in several studies. Like researchers in the semantic space approach, descriptions of various representations of self and others are elicited. However, patterns of similarity among the representations are used to identify set relations among representations rather than proximities. For instance, if two persons or selves (A and B) are described with the same, or nearly the same descriptors, then A and B can be said to belong to the same set. If A and B are described with very different descriptors, they belong to disjunctive sets. Finally, if A is described with all (or nearly all) of the descriptors that characterize B, but A includes many descriptors that are not characteristic of B, then A can be said to incorporate, or to be superordinate to, B. To determine these set relations, each subject's patterns of similarity among representations are analyzed using hierarchical classification (using the HICLAS computer program; De Boeck, 1986). Although both MDS and hierarchical classification make use of similarity information, the two types of analysis yield different types of information (Davison, 1983).

Motivational inferences can be derived from the location of the actual self in the hierarchy, particularly by reference to the persons or selves that are subordinate to (or in the same set as), the actual self. Those persons or selves that are incorporated by the actual self are presumed to be more central to one's current identity—and consequently more influential on behavior—than those persons or selves in disjunctive sets (Rosenberg, 1988).

Three predictions from within this framework can be made about the care exemplar adolescents. First, it is expected that the actual selves ("what I am really like") of caring adolescents would incorporate their ideal selves ("what I would like to be"). In many accounts of prosocial behavior (e.g., Baldwin, 1902; Kohlberg, 1984), the ideal self serves both to draw the individual toward morally appropriate behavior and steer a course away from opportunistic, instrumental action. If the ideal self is incorporated into the current self, and therefore is more important to the sense of identity, prosocial behavior may be more likely.

Second, parents and parentally related selves (e.g., "person my mother expects me to be") should frequently be incorporated within the actual selves of care exemplars. Previous research suggests that identifica-
tion with the father during adolescence predicts sons’ moral development in adulthood (Hart, 1988a), and that those who aided Jews in Nazi-occupied countries during World War II or who became deeply involved in the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s had parents who were unusually concerned for others (Olmer & Olmer, 1988; Rosenhan, 1970). The unusual prosocial behavior evidenced by our care exemplars—donating hundreds of hours at a social service agency, leading youth groups, and so on—would be unlikely in the absence of strong role models in the form of parents; in turn, these representations must be integrated into the actual self if they are to provide incentive and guidance to ongoing behavior.

Finally, the actual selves of care exemplars are less likely than those of age-matched adolescents to integrate representations of the self expected by the best friend and the representation of the best friend. This is because adolescence is typically a time of growing peer influence, and the waning of that of parents. In previous research it has been found that adolescents perceive their actual selves to be most fully realized in the presence of their friends (Hart, 1988b); this would be reflected by the incorporation of the self expected by the best friend into the actual self. This is the pattern to be expected from typical adolescents.

However, this pattern is less likely to be the case among the care exemplars. Best friends are unlikely to expect one to be a “goody-goody,” a person who spends many hours helping others out; consequently, to do these sorts of activities one must disavow, to an extent, the importance of peer expectations for the self.

Self-Concept as Theory

A final approach to the self-concept emphasizes the individual’s construction of a theory about the self. Generally, researchers have attempted to identify the organizing principles, or theories, with which persons of different ages organize information about the self. Damon and Hart (Damon & Hart, 1986, 1988; Hart & Damon, 1986; Hart, Lucca-Irizarry, & Damon, 1986) have identified three types of theories, each constituting a developmental level, that adolescents might hold about themselves. At Level 2 (Level 1 is commonly found only among young children) the self is defined in relation to normative physical or social standards, or “how good” the self is compared to others. For instance, a Level 2 description of self might be, “I’m a fast runner and a good reader.” At Level 3 the organizing principle of self-understanding is social acceptance and integration. The individual at Level 3 is centrally concerned with “being liked” and “fitting in.” A typical self-description characteristic of this level might be, “I’m a friendly person, which is important because it means people will like me.” At Level 4, self-understanding is organized in the context of systematic beliefs and life plans. Qualities of the self draw their meaning from their connections to important values and goals. For instance, an adolescent might describe the self “as nice to others, which is important because I believe it is important to respect others.” It is this latter type of theory, although rare in adolescence (Damon & Hart, 1988), that is predicted to be common among the care exemplars. This is so because their commitments to care for others are likely to derive from an orientation to deeply held beliefs about the value of such action (Damon, 1984).

Other Domains of Social Cognition

Although the focus of this research is on the understanding of self, developmental sophistication of interpersonal understanding and person perception are also assessed. The measure of interpersonal understanding used in this study is the Moral Judgment Interview, designed by Colby and her associates (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987) to assess Kohlberg’s (1984) developmental stages of moral reasoning. Cognitive complexity in person perception is assessed by determining the extent to which dimensions beyond general evaluation can be detected in each subject’s trait vocabulary (see Kim & Rosenberg, 1980, for a discussion). Subjects for whom distinctions among traits can be captured by a single good—bad dimension can be said to be less cognitively complex (Schneider, Hastorf, & Ellsworth, 1979) in person perception than subjects for whom distinctions among traits reflect two dimensions or more.

To summarize, the study presented here examines the relation of unusual caring behavior among urban African-American and Latin-American adolescents to the self-concept and other forms of social understanding. The self-concept is operationalized in four different ways, drawing upon literature from social and developmental psychology.
Method

Subjects
The process of identifying the care exemplars involved (a) forming criteria by which they could be identified, (b) soliciting nominations, and (c) selecting a sample from the pool of nominees. Criteria for identifying care exemplars were drawn from two sources: (1) suggestions offered by church and youth group leaders from Camden who were very familiar with the city and its adolescents, and (2) previous research on care and morality (e.g., Colby & Damon, 1992; Coles, 1986; Kohlberg, 1984). The set of preliminary criteria was reviewed by an advisory board formed of youth group and religious leaders, as well as two psychologists with expertise in Latin-American and African-American culture and deep familiarity with the city. This review led to a final set of overlapping criteria of the prototype of the ideal caring adolescent. This prototype was intended to help persons in the community identify and nominate appropriate adolescents.

Letters were then mailed to the heads of churches, social agencies, schools, and youth groups in the city of Camden describing the study and asking for nominations of any adolescents who met one or more of the following criteria: (1) involvement in community, church, or youth group activities that benefit others; (2) unusual and admirable family responsibilities; (3) a willingness to help those in need; (4) volunteers time to help others; (5) emotional and social maturity; (6) leadership; (7) open-minded about others; (8) a willingness to look beyond the difficulties of living in Camden to a better future; (9) compassion; (10) a sense of humility about his/her aid to others; and (11) commitment to friends and family. Approximately 1 week after the letters were mailed, the persons to whom they were addressed were contacted by phone and asked to nominate adolescents who fit the criteria outlined in the letter. If the contacted person nominated an adolescent, an attempt was made to meet the nominator in order to learn more about the nominated adolescent.

Approximately 95 adolescents were nominated as care exemplars by members of the community. Only those who had met criteria 1, 2, or 4, and hence had clearly demonstrated the altruistic caring behavior of central interest in this study, were considered further. The final sample of 15 care exemplars (M = 15.5 years old, SD = 1.9) was selected in order to (1) have African-American and Latin-American, male and female, adolescents (the final sample includes two African-American males, six African-American females, three Latin-American males, and four Latin-American females), and (2) represent as adequately as possible the diversity of caring in the city of Camden. Our sense is that we failed in fully meeting the second goal. In particular, we suspect that there are many adolescents in the city with unusual family-care responsibilities, although few adolescents were nominated on this basis. Furthermore, two adolescents who were nominated for the study for their unusual family care responsibilities were unable to participate because of their family duties. Consequently, adolescents who manifest unusual caring in family contexts are undoubtedly underrepresented in the care exemplar sample. Except for the two aforementioned adolescents, those who were invited to enter the study did so. The activities of the care exemplars in the final sample included: involvement with a community garden, leadership in organizing school caring activities, neighborhood political organization efforts, working on behalf of the Special Olympics, civil rights group participation, volunteer nursing home aide, and a leadership position on a city of Camden board with responsibility for teenagers.

A comparison group of adolescents was formed by matching each subject in the care exemplar sample with an adolescent of the same age, gender, ethnicity, and neighborhood. All of the matched comparisons were well-functioning adolescents who were attending school; many were involved in school activities, others in summer academic programs, and still others were involved with their churches. Both groups of adolescents were paid $10 an hour for their participation.

Procedure
Self-understanding and self-conceptions were elicited in several ways.

1 The initial plan was to match subjects for parental SES using the Duncan Scale of Occupational Prestige. However, because many of the adolescents in the study were living in extended-family homes (with grandparents, aunts, uncles, and so on), the Duncan scale was often very misleading. Consequently, we chose instead to match adolescents as best as possible for neighborhood. Moreover, social class stratification in Camden is extremely restricted, given its past and current economic situation.
Free-description of self.—Each adolescent was asked to describe him- or herself in response to a single broad question (What kind of person are you?) and four more specific probes (What kind of goals do you have for yourself? What kind of emotions do you typically experience? What are your typical activities? and, What is your personality like?). Responses to these questions were coded with a content-coding scheme used in previous studies (Hart, 1988b; Hart et al., 1993). The coding scheme was slightly modified to address the specific hypotheses of this study by making distinctions between altruistic (moral, caring) and nonaltruistic typical activities, personality traits, and goals (an inspection of the protocols of six subjects suggested these distinctions could be made). The coding scheme is presented in Table 1.

Interrater reliability was assessed by having two raters code the responses of 10 subjects. The two raters agreed on the assignment of a response to a particular category for 139 of the 161 codable responses (86% agreement rate). To control for differences in verbal productivity, the percentage of a subject's responses in a particular category, rather than the raw number, is used in the analyses.

Identity matrix.—Each adolescent completed an identity matrix. The identity matrix is a procedure developed by Rosenberg and his colleagues (Rosenberg & Cara, 1985) and requires several sessions. In the first session, the adolescent is asked to generate descriptors for a variety of facets of the self and for a range of other people. The facets of self that adolescents described were: temporal selves (What were you like 4 years ago? Two years ago? What will you be like in 2 years? In 4 years? As an adult?), ideal selves (What kind of person would you ideally like to be now? As an adult?), despised

| TABLE 1 |
| Categories for Coding Descriptors of Self |

A. Physical
1. General (e.g., "blue eyes")
2. Size
3. (+) Attractiveness (e.g., "pretty")
4. (-) Attractiveness (e.g., "ugly")

B. Active
1. Capabilities (e.g., "can jump rope")
2. Activity level (e.g., "lazy")
3. Moral, caring typical activities ("helping others")
4. Nonmoral typical activities ("play baseball")

C. Social
1. General personality (e.g., "wild")
2. (+) Moral personality [descriptors explicitly referencing moral or caring behavior; e.g., "honest," "moral," "trustworthy"]
3. (+) Nonmoral personality ("funny," "friendly," "loving," "mature")
4. (-) Moral personality ("untrustworthy," "dishonest")
5. (+) Nonmoral personality ("shy," "obnoxious")
6. (+) Communication (e.g., "talkative")
7. (-) Communication (e.g., "quiet")
8. Relationships and status (e.g., "have a lot of friends")

D. Psychological
1. General (e.g., "reflective," "understanding")
2. (+) Intellectual (e.g., "smart")
3. (-) Intellectual (e.g., "stupid")
4. Preferences (e.g., "I like baseball")
5. (+) Emotions (e.g., "happy")
6. (+) Identity-related emotions ("finding myself")
7. (-) Emotions (e.g., "sad")
8. (-) Identity-related emotions ("confused")

E. Goals
1. Academic ("finish high school," "go to college")
2. Moral, caring ("help others," "be an honest person")
3. Occupational ("be a professional athlete")
4. Other
self (What kind of person do you not want to be now?) social selves (What kind of person are you with your mother? With your father? With your best friend? With an adult that you admire?), expected selves (What kind of person does your mother expect you to be? Your father? Your best friend? An adult that you admire?), and the actual self (the description of this facet of the self was described in the previous section). Each adolescent also was asked to offer descriptors for the mother, father, best friend, an admired adult, a despised peer, and a despised adult. Not every facet of self or person was described; six (four exemplars, two comparison group) adolescents had no fathers or little knowledge of them and consequently could not describe their fathers, what they were like with their fathers, or what their fathers expected of them. One exemplar could think of no adult she disliked, another exemplar could not describe what she was like with her best friend, and two exemplars could not identify an adult who they especially admired (and therefore could not describe the admired adult nor what the self was like with that person).

Descriptors were elicited for each facet of self and each person described above. To elicit these descriptors, the adolescent was first asked a general question (What kind of person is ____?) and then several more specific ones (What kind of personality does ____ have? What kind of goals does ____ have? What kind of emotions does ____ typically experience? and, What are ____’s typical activities?). The purpose of this session is to elicit fully each adolescent’s vocabulary used for making attributions about persons. For each subject, a list of the descriptors offered in this task was formed, removing all the duplicates.

Next, each adolescent was asked to rate each descriptor on his or her list in terms of 11 bipolar content properties, three of which are aimed at moral evaluations (honest—dishonest, caring—uncaring, moral—immoral), and eight of which are drawn from perception (intelligent— unintelligent, mature—immature, popular—unpopular, effective—ineffective, friendly—unfriendly, attractive—unattractive, different—conforming, most likable—least likable). These ratings are collected in order to determine whether dimensions beyond general evaluation can be detected in a subject’s trait vocabulary.

In the next session, each subject’s list of descriptors provided in the first session were arrayed on one side of the matrix, and the persons, selves (past, present, future, ideal), and perceived perspectives (what my mother thinks of me, etc.) that were described are placed on another. Then the adolescent was asked to judge the applicability of each descriptor to each person or self on a scale of 0 (not applicable at all), 1 (sometimes true of this person, self, or perceived perspective), or 2 (usually true of this person). The matrices ranged between $140 \times 22$ to $60 \times 17$, depending on how many descriptors were offered and how many of the selves and important persons could be described; for instance, if an adolescent did not have a father, then the self with father, the self expected by the father, and the father were not described.

Self-understanding interview.—First, each adolescent responded to the portions of the Self-Understanding Interview (SUI; Damon & Hart, 1988) related to self-definition and self-evaluation. The SUI consists of a series of clinical-interview questions such as, “What kind of person are you?” “What makes you proud about yourself?” The subject’s initial responses to these questions usually consist of a variety of features and characteristics of the self (e.g., “I’m friendly and smart”), much as might be obtained using any free-response procedure. These features and characteristics are considered to be the content of self-understanding. The interviewer attempted to elicit fully the adolescent’s theory of the self by asking the adolescent to explain the meaning of each of the initially offered features and characteristics, using questions such as, “What does that mean?” or “Why is that important to you?” Interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed. Responses were coded by a rater blind to the age, gender, and classification (exemplar or comparison) of the subjects.

Responses to the SUI were coded using the system developed by Damon and Hart (Damon & Hart, 1988). This system permits the coding of the theory of self-understanding. The units of thought coded in the interviews are called chunks. A chunk is constituted of an initially offered feature and all the responses to the probe questions related to that feature. Each chunk was coded as representative of a developmental level for the theory of self. This was done by matching each chunk with prototypical responses for each developmental level in a
The developmental levels are a measure of the type of theory that the adolescent holds about the self. With the subjects in our study, three levels are evident: Level 2, Level 3, and Level 4 (full descriptions of these levels can be found in Damon & Hart, 1988). The most sensitive summary measure for the entire interview is the highest level score evidenced across the interview (Damon & Hart, 1988). To assess interrater reliability, two raters coded 20 interviews, and agreed on the highest level for an interview in 90% of the instances (kappa = .89).

Moral judgment interview. — Each adolescent responded to the moral judgment interview (MJI, Form A; Colby & Kohlberg, 1987). The interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed (unfortunately, the tape of the interview with one comparison subject was inaudible; this subject, and the matched care exemplar, are not included in comparisons of moral judgment stages, theories of self, or contents of the self). Responses were coded by a rater blind to the age, gender, and classification (exemplar or comparison) of the subjects. The summary measure used here is the weighted-average score (WAS-MJ) proposed by Colby and colleagues (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987). To assess interrater reliability, two raters coded 10 interviews. The correlation between the WAS-MJ scores assigned by the two raters was .89.

Results

Contents of Self-Understanding

The rank-order correlations between the percentage of characteristics coded in each category and group membership (comparison [coded as 1] and exemplar [coded as 2]) were calculated (correlations with group membership are equivalent to t tests for significance testing [Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1991] but permit easier inferences concerning effect sizes). Consonant with expectations, the self-descriptions of care exemplars had relatively more references to positive, moral, caring personality traits (6% of the descriptors in self-descriptions vs. 2%, $r_1 = .49$, $p < .01$ [one-tailed]) and to moral, caring goals (1% vs. 0%, $r_2 = .33$, $p < .05$ [one-tailed]) than did the comparison adolescents.

In addition to the predicted relations, the exemplars were more likely than the comparison adolescents to emphasize academic goals ($r_1 = .33$, $p < .05$ [two-tailed]) and nonmoral typical activities ($r_2 = .44$, $p < .05$ [two-tailed]) in their self-descriptions.

Semantic Space Analyses

Proximities among representations were calculated using the Jaccard Similarity Measure (JSM). The JSM was selected because it does not include the joint absence of a characteristic in the calculation of proximity. In order to use the JSM, judgments of descriptiveness were dichotomized, with judgments of 2 coded as the presence of the descriptor and 0s and 1s coded as the absence of the descriptor. Thirteen facets of self and others were described by all 30 of the subjects; proximities among these common 13 representations were calculated for each subject, and then analyzed with the ALSCAL computer program, using the INDSCAL model specification. The group stimulus space is depicted in Figure 1.

Dimension 1 appears to correspond to the predicted Social Evaluation dimension, with the undesired self and disliked peer at one end of this dimension and the remaining representations at the other. Dimension 2 can be viewed as a Change-over-Time dimension: the representations of self in the past are clustered at the right end of Dimension 2, while the representations of the self in the future and the representation of the mother are clustered at the left end. Finally, Dimension 3 might be imagined to constitute a Self—Peer dimension, with the disliked peer at the lower end and representations of self at the upper end.

2 The coding manual is available upon request from the first author.
3 The JSM offers the conceptual advantage of not including joint absences in the calculation of proximities. Other measures that do include joint absences may yield misleading results. For instance, if a subject judges only descriptors A and B to be characteristic of Representation 1 and only descriptors B and C to be descriptive of Representation 2, and descriptors D through Y to be uncharacteristic of both representations, a proximity measure that includes joint absences would result in a very high estimate of similarity (because both representations would share the absence of characteristics D through Y). Note that this is so even though the two representations were judged to contain only one characteristic in common. The JSM does not include joint absences, and consequently does not lead to inflated estimates of proximity for representations that are defined by few characteristics (in the above case, the JSM would be .33).
Comparisons between subjects can be made by examining the flattened weights that are generated by the MDS algorithm for each subject. Flattened weights reveal the relative importance for each subject of each dimension when it is compared against another dimension (the advantages of comparing flattened weights, rather than dimension weights, is discussed by Young & Harris, 1990). The first flattened weight reveals the relative importance for a subject of Dimension 1 versus the relative importance of Dimension 2. A large first flattened weight, then, would mean that for that subject, representations of self and others were more differentiated along the Social Evaluation dimension (Dimension 1) than along the Change-over-Time dimension (Dimension 2). The second flattened weight reveals the relative importance of Dimension 2 versus the relative importance of Dimension 3.

Correlations were then calculated between group membership and each of the two flattened weights. As predicted, the first flattened weight was larger for the exemplars ($r_{[28 df]} = .33, p < .05$ [one-tailed]); relative to the comparison adolescents, then, the exemplars rely more heavily on the Social Evaluation dimension to differentiate among representations of self and other, and make less use of the Change-over-Time dimension (Dimension 2; this is reflected in the positive correlation between group membership and Flattened Weight 1). The second flattened weight was larger for the comparison adolescents ($r_{[28 df]} = -.50, p < .01$ [two-tailed]). This indicates that exemplars are more likely than the comparison adolescents to differentiate among representations based on the Self–Peer dimension than upon the Change-over-Time dimension (the negative correlation between group membership and Flattened Weight 2).

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**Figure 1**—Arrangement of representations of self and other in a three-dimensional space. Dimension 1 is represented by type size: those representations in small type should be imagined as projecting below the plane of the page (the remaining representations have essentially the same coordinates on Dimension 1, and can be imagined to be in the same plane as the page).
Set Relations

Each subject’s matrix was analyzed for the set relations among the objects using the HICLAS computer program (DeBoeck, 1986; DeBoeck & Rosenberg, 1988), with a five-rank solution specified (rank is roughly analogous to dimension in MDS analyses and corresponds to the number of bottom classes in the hierarchy; with increasing rank, the fit to the data necessarily increases, and in previous studies four to five rank solutions have been found to fit matrices of the sizes analyzed here quite well, e.g., Ogilvie, 1987, Robey et al., 1989, Rosenberg, 1988). The result of the analysis is the specification of the set relationships among the various objects (selves and others) included in the matrix.

Three types of set relationships were examined. First, the exemplars were predicted to differ from the comparisons in the extent to which the ideal self was incorporated by the actual self; in set terms, this would be true when the two selves are in the same set, or when the actual self is superordinate to the ideal self. For 66% of the exemplars, but only for 27% of the comparisons, the actual self incorporates the ideal self ($r_{28} = .34, p < .05$ [one-tailed]). It was also predicted that the actual selves of the exemplars, in comparison to those of the comparisons, would be more likely to incorporate selves related to the parents (self with either the mother or the father, self expected by the mother or the father) and representations of the mother and father. While nearly every exemplar’s actual self incorporated one or more of the parentally related selves or representations (93%), this was less likely among the comparisons (60%; $r_{28} = .39, p < .05$ [one-tailed]).

Finally, we suggested that the actual selves of the comparisons would be more likely than those of the exemplars to incorporate selves related to the best friend (self with the best friend, self expected by the best friend) or the representation of the best friend. This prediction too received support, with 80% of the comparisons, but only 47% of the exemplars, evidencing the predicted pattern ($r_{28} = -.34, p < .05$ [one-tailed]).

The incorporation by the actual self of the ideal self, the parentally related selves and representations of the parents, or the selves related to the best friend and the representation of the best friend was unrelated to age or to the other variables.

Theories of the Self

Theories of self are indexed by the highest developmental level score described earlier. While half of the exemplars had at least some Level 4 theorizing about the self, only one of the comparisons (7%) did so; this difference is significant ($r_{26} = .47, p < .01$ [one-tailed]).

Moral Judgment

There were no differences between the two groups in moral judgment. The mean WAS-MJ for the exemplars was 288 and for the comparisons, 297 ($r_{26} = -.10$).

Differentiation of Trait Vocabularies

To determine the extent to which each subject’s trait vocabulary contained dimensions beyond general evaluation, each subject’s object by features matrix was submitted to a multidimensional scaling (MDS) analysis. The input for the MDS analysis is a matrix of distances between the traits used by a subject (again, a decision was made to dichotomize the scores, with 0s and 1s grouped together; the JSM was then calculated). The multidimensional scaling algorithm (ALS-CAL) fits the features into a semantic space with the number of dimensions of this space specified by the experimenter. Like Kim and Rosenberg (1980), we have used a three-dimensional solution in these analyses.

The hypothesis considered here is that the care exemplars, in comparison to their matched comparisons, will be more likely to have semantic spaces in which the content properties are differentiated from general evaluation. This can be examined in multiple regression equations (with separate equations for each subject) using each trait’s coordinates on the three dimensions to predict its rating on each of the 10 content properties, controlling for general evaluation by entering the rating for the trait’s likableness first. The product of these analyses is the part multiple correlation between the three dimensions (controlling for general evaluation) and each content property. For each subject, then, 10 part multiple correlations are obtained (one for each content property except likableness). It is then possible to determine whether the exemplars have higher part correlations for a particular content property than do the comparison adolescents. No significant differences were found between the two groups for the part correlations for any of the 10 content properties. This suggests that the exemplars are no more cognitively complex in their person perception than are the comparison adolescents.
Discussion

To recapitulate, the purpose of this research was to study the understanding of self of African-American and Latin-American adolescents who had demonstrated remarkable prosocial behavior through their commitments to care for others. The formation of criteria for defining the nature of this type of prosocial behavior, as well as the identification of the adolescents who evidenced it, were done in conjunction with members of the community familiar with its youth. Each care exemplar was matched with a well-functioning adolescent of the same age, gender, ethnicity, and from the same neighborhood in order to permit comparisons on measures of self-understanding, moral judgment, and person perception.

Four different models of self-understanding and the self-concept, drawn from previous social and developmental investigations, were considered for their relevance in distinguishing between the care exemplars and their matched comparisons. The results were consonant with predictions from all four models. Together, these results yield a detailed view of the ways in which the self-concepts of the care exemplars are different from those of the comparison adolescents.

The open-ended self-descriptions of the care exemplars contained more references to moral personality traits and to moral goals (a prediction drawn from the self-concept as content model). It appears, then, that the caring activities of the exemplars are related to the types of characteristics that are attributed to the self. However, moral traits and goals constituted only a very small percentage of the self-ascriptions even among the care exemplars, and therefore the content of the self-concept has only weak connections to prosocial behavior, at least in this sample.

Substantial differences were found between the exemplars and the comparison adolescents in the organization of the different facets of the self-concept in a semantic space. The comparison adolescents were much more likely than the exemplars to emphasize distinctions between immature representations of self (the self 2 years ago, the self 5 years ago) and mature representations (the self 2 years in the future, the self 5 years in the future, the self as an adult). Apparently the exemplars perceive greater stability and continuity in the self from the past into the future than do the comparison adolescents.

The investigation of the hierarchical set relations among the various representations of self and others indicated that the actual selves of the care exemplars were more likely than those of the comparisons to incorporate ideal selves, parentally related selves, and representations of parents. This suggests that the care exemplars, in comparison to the comparisons, are more likely to identify their actual selves with their ideal selves and with their parents. In contrast, the comparison adolescents were more likely than the care exemplars to have actual selves that incorporate the self-with-best-friend, the self-expected-by-the-best-friend, and the representation of the best friend. This pattern of results suggests that the care exemplars are more oriented toward their ideals and parental values than the comparisons, who, like suburban adolescents (Hart, 1988b), have hierarchies of selves in which peers are more prominent. It is possible that the pattern exhibited by the care exemplars, while apparently optimal for dedicated altruistic action, may have as its cost alienation from one's best friend.

The comparison adolescents were also similar to adolescents from white, middle-class, suburban contexts (Damon & Hart, 1988; Hart, 1992) in their theories of self. Together, these various groups of adolescents describe theories of self in which acceptance and integration into a social network are of paramount concern. Although clearly concerned with these issues, about half of the care exemplars, but only one of the comparisons, articulated a theory of self in which appeals to personal beliefs and philosophies are made. Because doing something as unusual as becoming deeply involved in caring activities probably makes it difficult to fit in well with one's peers, the formation of a theory of self according to which social integration is not the sole value may be necessary for sustained commitment.

The pattern of findings indicates that the differences between the care exemplars and the comparison adolescents cannot be reduced to a single factor like general maturity or developmental sophistication. The exemplars did not differ from the comparison adolescents in moral judgment (the type of interpersonal reasoning assessed in this study), which is not necessarily surprising. The sorts of activities exhibited by the care exemplars—donating large blocks of time to social service agencies, working in community gardens and soup kitchens, and so on—are not manifestations of the sophisticated...
weighing of values and interests that are evident at the higher stages of moral reasoning in Kohlberg's system. This is not to say that moral judgment development as captured by Kohlberg's well-known stage sequence has no bearing on action, but only to claim that for the types of behavior of interest here it is of limited influence. Similarly, the lack of differences between the exemplars and the comparison adolescents in the cognitive complexity of person perception might be predicted, because cognitive complexity bears no necessary relation to the types of activities in which the exemplars were engaged. However, this pattern of null findings concerning moral judgment and cognitive complexity of person perception does suggest that the exemplars are not simply "better" or "more advanced" than other adolescents.

Finally, it should be noted that the social cognitive approach taken here can be seen as a complement to, rather than a replacement for, efforts to locate the sources of prosocial behavior in stable personality traits (e.g., Graziano & Eisenberg, in press). Previous research has demonstrated that there is little relation between social perception and broad personality dimensions (Schneider et al., 1979). More recent research has indicated that there is essentially no relationship between the so-called "Big Five" personality factors (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness; see McCrae & Costa, 1990, for a description of the nature and derivation of these factors) and individual differences in emphasis of particular dimensions of perceptions of self and other (Hart, Field, Garfinkle, Singer, & Anderson, 1995). This pattern suggests that social perception constitutes a distinct correlate of prosocial behavior.

Although the research described in this article both demonstrates the interpenetration of moral commitment with the self-concept and the facets of the self-concept that are synthesized with moral action, it has several significant limitations. First, it is important for a full account of commitment to prosocial action to determine the extent to which the findings reported here characterize other populations. We believe that the social reasoning correlates of prosocial behavior described here will generalize to other groups; as noted in the introduction, parental identification and the integration of ideals into the self have been found to be characteristic of altruistic action in other studies (e.g., Colby & Damon, 1992; Oliner & Oliner, 1988) as well as the one reported here. However, a convincing answer to the question of generalization requires further research.

Second, this study is cross-sectional in nature and shares the limitations common to such studies. Only through longitudinal research will it be possible to determine whether the facets of self-concept described here precede, or follow from, altruistic action. Moreover, it is only by following a group of adolescent care exemplars over time that it will be possible to determine which factors lead to continued commitment.

Second, the focus of the research has been on the psychology of the adolescents, and not the communities in which they acquire their commitments. As we noted in the discussion of the selection of the subjects, most care exemplars were nominated by and associated with churches, schools, and social service agencies. In future research it would be quite useful to understand the ways in which these groups, each constituting a unique social institution with ties to the community, provide contexts within which strong moral commitments can develop and flourish.

References
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