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On: 20 December 2011, At: 11:44

Publisher: Routledge

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## The Journal of Positive Psychology

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:  
<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rpos20>

### Maturity is explicit: Self-importance of traits in humanitarian moral identity

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Available online: 20 Dec 2011

To cite this article: Kevin S. Reimer, Christina Young, Brandon Birath, Michael L. Spezio, Gregory Peterson, James Van Slyke & Warren S. Brown (2011): Maturity is explicit: Self-importance of traits in humanitarian moral identity, *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, DOI:10.1080/17439760.2011.626789

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2011.626789>



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## Maturity is explicit: Self-importance of traits in humanitarian moral identity

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(Received 13 January 2011; final version received 21 September 2011)

Development of humanitarian moral identity may correspond with the growing self-importance of moral traits. This study considered the extent to which moral traits become explicit in novice and expert humanitarian moral identity narratives. Eighty humanitarian caregivers from *L'Arche* communities were given self-understanding interview prompts to assess temporal (i.e., past, present, and future) and relational expectations. Humanitarian responses were compared to four paragraphs comprised of moral traits (i.e., just, brave, caring, and religious) using a computational knowledge representation model known as *latent semantic analysis* (Landauer, T., McNamara, D., Dennis, S., & Kintsch, W. (Eds.). (2007). *Handbook of latent semantic analysis* (University of Colorado Institute of Cognitive Science). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum). Consistent with predictions, humanitarian experts displayed more explicitly self-important moral traits than novices on future and romantic partner expectations. Findings suggest that humanitarian development is associated with simulation related to future goal achievement and moral action modeled by close intimates.

**Keywords:** explicit; humanitarian; implicit; *L'Arche*; moral identity; moral trait

### Introduction

Research on moral action remains divided between competing explanations of behavior. One faction underscores the primacy of moral rationalization and judgment (Pizarro & Bloom, 2003; Turiel, 2006). A second camp emphasizes rapid moral appraisals cued by emotion (Haidt, 2001; Haidt & Bjorklund, 2008). A third concern highlights narrative self-conceptions arising from episodic memory and concerned with promoting or protecting the welfare of others – an aspect of personality known as *moral identity* (Hart & Matsuba, 2009; McAdams & Pals, 2006; Monroe, 2002; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2009; Reimer, 2005; Reimer & Wade-Stein, 2004). Moral identity indicates continuity between self and positive-behavior, evident in classic studies of nominated humanitarian exemplars and Holocaust rescuers (Colby & Damon, 1992; Hart & Fegley, 1995; Monroe, 2002). A key issue in this literature relates to how moral identity is associated with moral action, particularly in humanitarians. An influential perspective suggests that moral identity is manifested through the self-important activation of moral traits (Aquino, McFerran, & Laven, 2011; Aquino & Reed, 2002). Developmental maturation presumably reflects

successful deployment of moral traits across varied social contingencies. For humanitarians, this process becomes self-important and potentially influential of personal goals with expectations for moral action.

Evidence for this perspective is growing. Moral traits are associated with personality in significant ways (Aquino et al., 2011; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2009; Walker & Frimer, 2007; Walker, Frimer, & Dunlop, 2010). The origins of moral trait influence are visible in adolescent experience. A recent study found that *caring-dependable* and *principled-idealistic* moral trait factors were associated with frequency of adolescent volunteerism, becoming increasingly prominent with age and experience (Reimer, Goude-lock, & Walker, 2009). The development of humanitarian moral identity might be considered through implicit–explicit expression of moral traits. With the benefit of goal achievement through humanitarian practice, self-important moral traits may become more explicit in moral identity narratives (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Reimer et al., 2009; Walker et al., 2010). This study considered trait explicitness in the moral identity narratives of *L'Arche* caregivers – humanitarians caring for the developmentally disabled over years and decades with negligible compensation

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(Reimer, 2009). Anticipating a comprehensive description of the work, we review literature detailing self-important moral identity and moral traits.

### *Self-important moral identity*

Moral identity arose as an alternative to exclusively rationalist accounts of moral action. In a seminal proposal, Blasi (1984, 1990, 1993) argued that rationalist judgments should be augmented to include 'softer' aspects of personality such as the self. Deontological or consequentialist reasoning was unlikely to explain the total variance between moral appraisal and action. The proposal outlined an innovative *self-model* of moral maturity emphasizing the importance of personal responsibility and continuity between self, values, and goals. The model included three components. First, individuals grow to prioritize moral values as a matter of character or *identity*. Second, agents are able to understand and integrate the importance of *responsibility* for moral actions associated with social obligation. Third, maturity includes *integrity* or self-consistency between moral judgments and actions. Making robust connections between character and behavior, the proposal influenced research concerned with the personalities of individuals known for persistent humanitarian commitment – persons believed to harbor elements of the self-model in *moral identity*.

Two early studies advanced the proposal in noteworthy ways. Colby and Damon (1992) famously documented the narratives of renowned humanitarians. Despite effecting remarkable change through service, humanitarians were found to have ordinary intelligence. Social influences impacted personal values and goals conducive to moral identity. Unexpectedly, religious faith was prominent in the self-referencing values and goals articulated by a majority of study participants. Admired others galvanized humanitarians to confront moral issues that became incrementally conjoined with the self. In a related study, Hart and Fegley (1995) considered the developmental contours of moral identity through nominated exemplar adolescents from Camden, New Jersey. Relative to comparison adolescents from the same neighborhoods, the authors found that exemplars incorporated a larger number of values into self, demonstrated a more stable sense of self through time, and closely aligned the self with ideals consisting of moral goals. Consistent with adult humanitarians, adolescent exemplars scored no differently from everyday matched comparisons on the moral judgment interview (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987). While descriptively powerful, the studies left unresolved questions regarding how moral identity is potentially influential of moral action.

A promising line of explanation relates to the role of moral traits in moral identity (Aquino et al., 2011;

Aquino & Reed, 2002). Adopting argument for spreading activation networks in the representation of social knowledge, Aquino and Reed (2002) suggested that moral identity becomes consolidated where sets of moral traits are linked with other moral traits and subsequently associated with the self. Durable association between moral traits and self implies a temporally stable character that dynamically interacts with social contingencies. Presumably, the self-importance of moral identity relates to consistent deployment of moral traits across contingencies. With maturational development, strongly self-important moral traits may become enduringly associated with particular moral actions (Hart & Matsuba, 2009). This argument seems plausible given findings that humanitarians reference self-important values and associate those values with moral goals (Colby & Damon, 1992; Monroe, 2002; Walker & Frimer, 2007). It remains to be seen whether development aligned with humanitarian achievement includes transition from implicit to explicit understanding of self-important moral traits in moral identity.

### *Self-important moral traits*

How might moral traits be operationalized for implicit–explicit evaluation in humanitarians? Aquino and Reed (2002) developed self-report scales based on 12 moral traits (i.e., *caring*, *compassionate*, and *fair*). While these demonstrate good construct validity, they are limited in scope. Research on moral prototypes suggests a richer and more expansive context for considering how ordinary people conceptualize moral excellence (Narvaez et al., 2006; Quinn, Houts, & Graesser, 1994; Smith, Türk Smith, & Christopher, 2007). This study builds on *prototype theory* asserting that cognitive categories are best understood through prime examples or 'core constructs' rather than definitional boundaries (Cantor, Mischel, & Schwartz, 1982; Fehr, 1988; Rosch & Mervis, 1975). A key study by Walker and Pitts (1998) elicited dozens of prototype descriptors by accessing common understandings for a hypothetical, morally mature person. Descriptors implied a prototypical representation of moral maturity distributed across two dimensions into six themes. *Principled-idealistic*, *dependable-loyal*, *has integrity*, *caring-trustworthy*, *fair*, and *confident* themes were oriented along a *self–other* dimension underlining the importance of agency and care, and an *external–internal* dimension considering expectations for moral behavior and conscience. Separate prototype categories were identified for *religiousness* and *spirituality*, respectively. When presented as moral traits, adolescents from underserved, multicultural neighborhoods validated these themes as prototypically moral (Reimer et al., 2009). Older adolescents robustly associated

*caring-trustworthy* and *principled-idealistic* themes with action in volunteer service.

A potential shortcoming with this approach is the possibility that morality includes more than one prototype. In a follow-up study, Walker and Hennig (2004) explored typologies of prototype knowledge for *just*, *brave*, and *caring* constructs. The study incorporated similar sampling and analytic strategy, noting themes within each moral prototype category. Descriptors for hypothetically just individuals included themes of *fairness*, *rationality*, *conscientiousness*, *principled commitment*, and *honesty*. Descriptors for hypothetically brave individuals included *self-sacrifice*, *confidence*, *dedication*, *heroism*, and *fearlessness*. Descriptors for hypothetically caring individuals included themes of *love-empathy*, *honesty-dependability*, and *altruism*. Results suggested that variability in moral action could be described using moral traits derived from cultural consensus. Within a Western context, aspects of excellence captured in *just*, *brave*, and *caring* prototypes function as moral traits potentially influential of real-world action. Clarification of the issue presents challenges for empirical researchers who must find ways to reconcile moral trait assessment with the complexity of moral identity narrative in humanitarians recognized for persistent commitment.

Along these lines, a recent study considered the relationship between moral traits and self-understanding schemas in adolescent moral identity (Reimer et al., 2009). This study outlined schemas of nominated exemplar and comparison adolescents from underserved urban neighborhoods. Moral identity narratives of self, action, goals, pride, and distinctness were compared with prototypical moral traits taken from Walker and Pitts (1998) using a computational knowledge representation model. Similarity comparison allowed variables to be configured into schema maps. Exemplar youth schemas were found to integrate action and personal goals in moral identity. This finding is consistent with other work, indicating that chronically accessible trait knowledge characterizes morally mature individuals (Narvaez et al., 2006). Where moral traits presumably become self-importantly explicit in exemplar action, individuals experience reinforcement connected with positive outcomes. Such episodes may become established as schemas to the extent they confer purpose and meaning, critical elements in McAdams' (2006a, 2006b) account of identity maturation. Questions remain regarding which moral traits are most robustly affiliated with humanitarian moral identity.

### Study overview

This study considered the extent to which moral traits become explicit in the moral identity narratives of humanitarians. In addition, the project attempted

to specify which prototypical moral traits were associated with humanitarian moral identity. *L'Arche* (French, 'the Ark') is an international, ecumenically religious federation of homes for the developmentally disabled founded by renowned Québécois–Canadian humanitarian Jean Vanier (Reimer, 2009; Reinders, 2010). American *L'Arche* caregivers (also known as *assistants*) live in community with the disabled for diminutive compensation excluding benefits or retirement. In the absence of remuneration, caregiver turnover is high – more than half of incoming caregivers leave their communities before 1 year of service. These 'novices' typically struggle with the burden of humanitarian commitment. One study found that goal systems of *L'Arche* novices emphasized the relevance of empathy, theory of mind, and interpersonal fairness to self (Walker & Reimer, 2005). Not surprisingly, these reflect demands of getting along with others in close quarters. Collectivist priorities of *L'Arche* often create dissonance with novice identity, requiring individuals to re-evaluate autonomy goals in self-understanding.

By contrast, a number of 'expert' humanitarian caregivers persist for years and decades in *L'Arche*. Expert goal systems temper idealism with recognition of personal limitations and increased capacity for self-reflection (Walker & Reimer, 2005). In this regard, *L'Arche* caregiver experts resemble humanitarians of earlier studies (Colby & Damon, 1992; Monroe, 2002). From a developmental perspective, the self-important relevance of moral traits to humanitarian commitment presumably traces the prominence of those traits in novices and experts. Relative to novices, experts might be more explicit in referencing moral traits as self-important, enabling them to persist in places like *L'Arche* where humanitarian commitment lacks pecuniary incentive. The ecumenical, spiritual climate of *L'Arche* also implicates religiousness as a prototype category potentially affiliated with moral identity development. Consequently, we hypothesize that *L'Arche* humanitarian experts will demonstrate more explicitly self-important moral traits (i.e., *just*, *brave*, *caring*, and *religious*) in moral identity narratives when compared to novices.

## Method

### Sample and procedure

The sample included 80 *L'Arche* humanitarian caregivers recruited from communities across the United States. Novice and expert groups were identified on the basis of time spent caring for the developmentally disabled in *L'Arche*. Novices ( $N = 39$ ) were classified as having spent 1 year or less in *L'Arche*. Experts ( $N = 41$ ) were current assistants with three or more years of

caregiving experience. Of the 80 caregivers, 53 were female. The sample was well educated (71% bachelor's degree or higher) and predominantly Caucasian (65%) with the remainder reporting as Asian (8%), African (6%), or no response (17%). Compensation parity in *L'Arche* meant that socio-economic status was level across the sample, with caregivers receiving under \$600/month for their service. Novice and expert groups did not significantly differ on gender, education, or ethnicity. Consistent with humanitarian developmental status, a disparity was noted for age. Novices were considerably younger (age;  $M=30.69$  years,  $SD=10.23$ , age range=19–62 years) relative to experts (age;  $M=41.56$  years,  $SD=11.75$ , age range=27–70 years). In accordance with the Belmont report, an institutional review board approved the research protocol.

The recruitment process employed precautions against coercion of potential participants. Researchers contacted local *L'Arche* directors for residential rosters of caregivers. Invitation letters were directly mailed to caregivers with no mention of study endorsement by *L'Arche* leadership. Interested participants responded by mail and were scheduled for face-to-face interviews. Following resolution of consent, participants were verbally administered a list of self-understanding prompts and provided with a \$25 token of appreciation. Responses were audio recorded and transcribed. To protect participant identities, codes were assigned to each transcript with elimination of identifying material in the response set. The code key and data were archived on a single laboratory computer. Audio recordings were deleted following transcription.

### Study prompts

To test the main study hypothesis, we sought self-understanding prompts making no reference to preceding decisions, actions, or humanitarian commitment. Previous research on humanitarian moral identity utilized a range of interview prompts to access self-understanding (Colby & Damon, 1992; Hart & Fegley, 1995). Prompts in those studies were designed to tap temporal representations of self (i.e., past, present, and future). Other prompts were designed to elucidate self as embedded within relational schemas endowed with behavioral expectations (Sedikides & Brewer, 2002). We adopted prompts from these studies in *core self* (*what kind of person are you?*), *temporal self* (*what were you like 10 years ago? What will you be like in 10 years?*), and *relationally expected self* (*what kind of person does your partner/best friend/parents expect you to be?*).

### Analytic strategy

We hypothesized *L'Arche* experts would reference more explicit moral traits in moral identity narratives when compared with novices. Implicit–explicit assessment has become increasingly common through measures such as the *implicit association test* (IAT; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998; Greenwald, Poehlman, Uhlmann, & Banaji, 2009). While IAT remains a robust option for tapping implicit knowledge, it is unable to consider implicit semantic associations in natural language such as moral identity narratives. The main study hypothesis required an empirical, unsupervised approach to knowledge representation in narrative (i.e., interview prompt responses). Some years ago, Hart and Fegley (1995) attempted to measure distances between knowledge variables in natural language as a means to determining relevance to self. The process required participants to rate their own narratives on bipolar trait vocabularies. While innovative, the system was laborious and difficult, necessitating that individuals make associations between parcels of knowledge in ways taxing to memory. Worse, the procedure relied upon participant ratings, introducing an element of subjectivity into judgments made between knowledge variables (Reimer & Wade-Stein, 2004).

We sought to avoid these problems by comparing moral traits (i.e., *just*, *brave*, *caring*, and *religious*) to humanitarian moral identity narratives using *latent semantic analysis* (LSA; Landauer, McNamara, Dennis, & Kintsch, 2007). LSA is a computational knowledge representation model familiar to cognitive science and psycholinguistics. The model calculates metrics of semantic similarity between texts, including natural language from interview prompts (Dam & Kaufmann, 2008; Reimer & Wade-Stein, 2004). Similarity measures are based on a global cache of knowledge in English, typically an 11 million word 1st year collegiate reader. Using singular value decomposition, LSA transforms the reader into a high-dimensional semantic space where vectors are assigned to texts as approximations of meaning. Target words/vectors are afforded meaning by association with conceptually related words/vectors (i.e., near neighbors). To illustrate, the term ‘horse’ most frequently occurs in the LSA collegiate reader space with ‘saddle’ followed by ‘bridle,’ ‘bareback,’ and ‘whinny.’ Similarity judgments are made by comparing vectors in the collegiate reader space to experimental inputs such as humanitarian interview responses. Judgments are based on the cosine angle between vectors resulting in a covariance matrix (–1 to +1). Higher cosine values indicate greater similarity between texts. The model is capable of making fine distinctions in knowledge comparison, such as the ability to grade undergraduate

psychology essay exams with excellent reliability compared to human evaluators (Landauer et al., 2007).

Relevant to the abstract nature of moral traits and identity narrative, LSA demonstrates capacity for superordinate comprehension. The model ‘understands’ metaphor by differentiating categories of non-literal and literal meaning. In one series of experiments, Kintsch (2000) demonstrated that the metaphor *my lawyer is a shark* contains a non-literal, metaphorical word (shark) that refers to a superordinate category of animals known for ruthlessness. Using LSA, the metaphorical properties of shark (i.e., vicious, aggressive, and tenacious) were attributed to the lawyer, successfully aligned with intended metaphor. By contrast, metaphorically irrelevant properties of the shark (i.e., gills, fins, and teeth) were not prominent in LSA output (Kintsch, 2000). The model manages metaphorical meaning by making non-literal or literal categorizations in a manner similar to humans.

This study used LSA to compare moral traits (i.e., *just*, *brave*, *caring*, and *religious*) with novice and expert humanitarian self-understanding responses (Walker & Hennig, 2004; Walker & Pitts, 1998). To accomplish this objective, moral traits were formatted as paragraphs for comparison with humanitarian moral identity interview narratives. These comparisons would serve as proxy for implicit–explicit assessment. To illustrate, *just* traits ‘good judgment’ and ‘listening to all sides’ were formatted in a self-attribution sentence (*I make good judgments by listening to all sides*). Moral trait paragraphs were assembled for each domain (i.e., *just*, *brave*, *caring*, and *religious*) using 16 descriptors with the highest mean prototypicality ratings (Walker & Hennig, 2004). When moral trait paragraphs were compared with humanitarian moral identity narratives, we expected higher LSA cosine values to reflect more explicit trait knowledge. LSA comparisons were facilitated with moral trait paragraphs as columns and humanitarian interview narratives as rows in a standard data matrix. Moral trait paragraphs for this study are provided in Appendix section.

## Results

LSA cosine means and standard deviations were calculated for semantic comparisons between moral trait paragraphs and humanitarian moral identity narratives by interview prompt (i.e., core, temporal, and relationally expected selves). To assess for group differences, 2 (novice/expert)  $\times$  4 (moral prototype text) analyses of variance (ANOVA) were separately conducted with the first three prompt categories (i.e., core self, temporal past self, and temporal future self) as the dependent variable. No differences were noted between novice and expert humanitarian groups on

Table 1. ANOVA of LSA cosines comparing moral prototype texts to novice and expert responses (i.e., core, past, and future selves).

Cosine	Just		Brave		Caring		Religious	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>1. Core self</i>								
Novice	0.60	0.07	0.54	0.07	0.61	0.06	0.38	0.07
Expert	0.60	0.05	0.55	0.06	0.61	0.05	0.39	0.06
<i>2. Past self</i>								
Novice	0.53	0.11	0.50	0.10	0.50	0.10	0.30	0.05
Expert	0.55	0.10	0.51	0.09	0.52	0.09	0.34	0.06
<i>3. Future self</i>								
Novice	0.54	0.09	0.51	0.09	0.51	0.08	0.30	0.06
Expert	0.60*	0.09	0.58*	0.10	0.57*	0.08	0.35*	0.06

Note: \*Denotes significance at  $p < 0.01$ .

*core* self or *past* self dimension. However, significant main effects were observed between groups on *future* self  $F(1, 62) = 10.77$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.15$ ,  $p = 0.002$ . Mean LSA cosines of *L’Arche* humanitarian experts were higher than novices for all moral trait categories (i.e., *just*, *brave*, *caring*, and *religious*). Mauchly’s test of sphericity indicated significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) variance inequality across the different levels of the ANOVA. As a consequence, the Greenhouse–Geisser correction was utilized. Results detailing novice and expert comparison of moral traits with LSA are presented in Table 1.

Owing to multiple relationships embedded within the *relationally expected* self-construct (i.e., varied patterns of current relationship), we assessed group differences by running a 2 group (novice/expert) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) over the four moral trait categories on each prompt. Regarding prompts for the *relationally expected* self-construct, no group differences were noted for expected-friend or expected-parent comparisons. However, a significant main effect was noted for expected-partner/trait comparison,  $F(4, 22) = 4.28$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.44$ ,  $p = 0.01$ . Mean LSA cosines of humanitarian experts were higher for caring and religious moral trait categories. These findings are provided in Table 2.

## Discussion

This study considered the extent to which moral traits become explicit in the moral identity narratives of novice and expert *L’Arche* humanitarian caregivers. The main hypothesis that expert humanitarians would demonstrate more explicit moral traits relative to novices was confirmed on two dimensions of self-understanding. Regarding expectations for future self, all moral trait categories were self-important for

Table 2. MANOVA of LSA cosines comparing moral prototype texts to novice and expert responses (i.e., relationally expected self).

Cosine	Just		Brave		Caring		Religious	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>1. Expected self (friend)</i>								
Novice	0.57	0.11	0.54	0.11	0.53	0.09	0.32	0.05
Expert	0.59	0.09	0.56	0.09	0.55	0.08	0.34	0.08
<i>2. Expected self (parent)</i>								
Novice	0.48	0.08	0.51	0.11	0.52	0.08	0.31	0.07
Expert	0.51	0.09	0.55	0.10	0.55	0.11	0.34	0.05
<i>3. Expected self (partner)</i>								
Novice	0.56	0.09	0.54	0.09	0.51	0.08	0.30	0.05
Expert	0.62	0.11	0.57	0.10	0.59*	0.09	0.35*	0.06

Note: \*Denotes significance at  $p < 0.05$ .

expert *L'Arche* humanitarians. These findings suggest that moral traits become relevant to future-oriented simulations, values, and goals essential to sustained humanitarian action. Additionally, the prominence of romantic partner expectations in study findings underscores the salience of moral traits in the modeled behavior of close intimates.

We will expand these observations. First, humanitarian experts exhibited more explicit moral traits in self-understanding when referencing future expectations. *Temporal self-appraisal theory* (TSA) indicates that individuals represent the self in past, present, and future iterations (Ross & Wilson, 2002). In TSA, the present self is potentially impacted by hypothetical simulations affiliated with future self representation, where the future self influences motivations, decisions, and behavior as a matter of goal pursuit (Perunovic & Wilson, 2009). The explicitness of moral traits in *L'Arche* experts underscores the importance of future simulation to consistent achievement of humanitarian goals. This falls in line with Narvaez's (2008) contention that moral expertise involves goal articulation linked with real-world action. Given the connection between goals and actions observed in adolescent humanitarians, acquisition of expertise suggests an explicit realization that moral goals have positive, real-world implications worthy of future pursuit (Reimer et al., 2009). For experts, this is not fanciful idealism. The high cost of humanitarian service for *L'Arche* experts is evident through goals emphasizing struggle as a matter of *finding balance* (i.e., *find balance between work, prayer, and play*) and *self-care* (i.e., *take a nap, go for walks, sit calmly for 20 min*) (Walker & Reimer, 2005). The demands of sustained humanitarian expertise are sufficient that future appraisals may require association of moral traits with goals capable of furnishing reward. In the absence of remuneration,

evaluative processing of goals proceeds through alternative conceptual architectures emphasizing purpose and meaning (Colby & Damon, 1992; Reimer, 2009; Walker & Frimer, 2007; Walker et al., 2010).

Second, humanitarian experts manifested more explicit caring and religious traits in self-understanding aligned with expectations of a romantic partner. Differences were moderate between novice and expert *L'Arche* humanitarians on these knowledge categories. One line of interpretation highlights the social context of self-understanding (Balswick, King, & Reimer, 2005; McAdams, 2006a, 2006b; McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, & Mansfield, 1997). Presumably, romantic partners provide reinforcement for humanitarian action, particularly through co-articulation of caring and religious priorities. This influences expert self-understanding in ways adaptive to expectations shared within the relationship. But there may be more to the story. A considerable majority of romantic relationships in *L'Arche* involve pairings of caregivers. That is, expert *L'Arche* humanitarians frequently become involved with other expert *L'Arche* humanitarians. Beyond immediate reinforcement afforded through shared expectations, individuals may provide uncommon humanitarian examples to their partners. This suggests that humanitarian development might involve (or even require) real-world examples of moral action. Indeed, qualitative accounts of humanitarian experts make rugged connections between real-world actions and tacit behavioral expectations associated with others who model excellence (Colby & Damon, 1992; Monroe, 2002).

Taken together, study findings indicate a role for self-important moral traits in the development of humanitarian moral identity. Progression from novice to expert humanitarian achievement in *L'Arche* implies recurrent engagement between implicit and explicit processes, linking explicit processing critical for identity (i.e., future simulation and goal pursuit) with decisions that eventuate into action. Persistent commitment over years and decades without economic reward requires a consistent trajectory of action-oriented decisions aligned with humanitarian interests. Moral identity in this instance of real-world humanitarian action may implicate a self-important, recurrent process linking conceptual and emotional representations. Recognizing potential complexities associated with the relationship between appraisal and emotion in decision-making, a recent proposal implicates bidirectional exchange in *recurrent multilevel appraisal* (RMA; Spezio & Adolphs, 2008). RMA blends elements of the *somatic marker hypothesis* (SMH; Damasio, 1994, 1999) with *appraisal theory* (AT; Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003; Lazarus, 1991; Scherer, 2003) to account for action-oriented decision. Briefly, SMH argues that emotions categorize events by constructing links with known categories on the basis

of prior experience. AT takes a different view, contending emotion plays a less important role in decision. From this perspective, appraisal is completed and subsequently followed by emotion. Both theories assume unidirectional influence. That is, neither accommodates the possibility that emotion and appraisal are reciprocally engaged toward contingency selection recognized as a self-important decision.

RMA proposes recursive exchange between appraisal and emotion that may prove useful for understanding the genesis of moral identity in *L'Arche*. Emotions might integrate elements of attention (i.e., memory retrieval, learning, and planning) and moral traits associated with future-oriented simulation or relational expectation (Reimer et al., 2011). Emotions are linked with goals associated with moral prototype knowledge that become increasingly explicit with developmental maturation. Exchange between emotions and goal-comparative appraisals orients humanitarian disposition toward outcomes emphasizing persistent care in the absence of material benefit. Moral identity may become established with schemas linking emotions and appraisals of self-important goals featuring moral traits. RMA suggests humanitarian excellence arises from dynamic exchange between different emotions and appraisals – aligning goals toward a patterned course of action consistent with the self. RMA makes accommodation for self-important moral traits while affirming the offline salience of emotions in humanitarian action. Future research on moral identity might consider directional association between emotion and appraisal across a spectrum of humanitarian interests.

We acknowledge that accounts of humanitarian commitment are situated within centuries of philosophical discourse on moral action. With a nod toward this philosophical convergence within moral research, we make a final observation. This study considered self-important moral traits through the moral identity narratives of *L'Arche* humanitarian caregivers. Given that *L'Arche* humanitarians potentially associate caring action with the expectations of other humanitarians in relationships, the development of moral identity underscores the importance of tangible, mature examples. That is, acquisition of moral identity involves observation and learning associated with real-world exemplars – persons who regularly evidence the kind of excellence desirable to those with elevated moral aspirations. The prominence of goal pursuit in real-world humanitarian action suggests a teleological premise for behavior consistent with intuitively automated (i.e., habituated) dispositions that potentially grow to include explicit knowledge in self-important moral traits. To us, this sounds much like Aristotelian virtue (MacIntyre, 1981, 1988, 1990).

Study findings should be amended by a brief discussion of shortcomings and limitations. First, this study included humanitarians from a unique context

in *L'Arche*. As moral traits are comprised of multiple prototypes, we may expect humanitarianism to reflect a diversity of contexts and interests. Working with the developmentally disabled is some distance removed from humanitarian commitment to non-violent conflict resolution, civil rights, and environmentalism. The development of moral identity in this study may engage different, context-specific cognitive processes in response to local contingencies. Second, *L'Arche* humanitarians were sparsely distributed in small communities throughout the United States. This made it impossible to bring together study participants for a controlled laboratory protocol. While efforts were made to ensure continuity in the administration of study prompts, future work should explore ways of providing better control. Finally, this study used a novel methodology as proxy for implicit/explicit knowledge in self-understanding. Although familiar to basic and applied research in cognition, use of LSA should be considered exploratory and subject to further validation as an alternative to implicit–explicit assessments such as IAT. Limitations notwithstanding, this study identified a role for explicit moral traits in *L'Arche* humanitarian experts, particularly related to future-oriented simulations associated with goal pursuit. Self-important moral traits provide traction for a broad understanding of moral identity associated with real-world humanitarian excellence.

### Acknowledgments

The John Fetzer Institute and the Center for Theology & Natural Sciences supported this research. Data were analyzed in theses conducted by Christina Young and Brandon Birath at Fuller. The authors thank Lawrence J. Walker for consultation on the project.

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### Appendix: Moral trait paragraphs

(Just) I consider myself a just and fair person. I make good judgments by listening to all sides and being clear in my thinking. I usually feel truthful, honest, reasonable, and rational. In most circumstances, I am upright and true. I also try to have integrity in a way that is consistent. Many people consider me to be lawful, trustworthy, and honorable.

(Brave) I consider myself a brave and courageous person. I stand up for my beliefs even when I must take a risk, make sacrifices, or face danger. I usually feel fearless, determined, strong minded, strong willed, and gutsy. In most circumstances, I am unafraid and daring. Many people consider me to be gallant, intrepid, and heroic.

(Caring) I consider myself a compassionate and loving person. I care about others by helping and making time for them. I usually feel sympathetic, empathic, and concerned about the welfare of others. In most circumstances, I am kind, considerate, supportive, and nurturing. I also try to be comforting in a way that is genuine, and sincere. Many people consider me to be good hearted.

(Religious) I consider myself a religious and faithful person with strong beliefs. I believe in a higher power and try to know and please God by going to church, praying a lot and worshiping a lot. I usually feel devout, committed, and dependent on God. I also try to be active in church life and read the Bible regularly. Many people consider me to be dedicated, devoted, and knowledgeable about religion.