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Research Report #7

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Hart, D. & Fegley, S. (1995). Prosocial behavior and caring in adolescence: Relations to self-

understanding and social judgment. *Child development, 66*(5), 1346-1359.

1. **Need.** Research usually conducted on delinquents; needs to be a body of research on altruism.
2. **Purpose.** To examine “care exemplars” (adolescents who show above average commitment to others) and to see how they understand themselves and their environments.
3. **Sample.** Taken from Camden, NJ. Nominations were solicited from church and youth groups for “care exemplars”; sample drawn from those nominations. N=15, all African- or Latino-American youth. A comparison group was also drawn.
4. **Methods.** Respondents were asked to describe themselves; responses were coded by two different people using a coding system previously used. Each participant completed an identity matrix to describe who they have been, are, and want (or not want) to be. These were compared against a list of descriptors evaluating for moral traits. Finally, two interviews were conducted for self-understanding and moral judgment.
5. **Results.** Descriptions of exemplars showed more positive, moral, caring traits. Exemplars had higher levels of self-understanding but showed no difference in moral judgment.
6. **Conclusions.** Exemplars expect and experience much more stability in their identity. Caring activities of the exemplars are related to their sense of self. Exemplars are more oriented towards their ideal selves than the comparison group. Not as concerned about fitting in with social group.
7. **Limitations.** Only used certain racial groups and a small sample size; authors think study will generalize anyway because of previous findings. Cross-sectional, not longitudinal, and self-reported.
8. **Implications.** Further research on other populations to see if findings hold across populations. Also research from other geographic areas for the same purpose.