Cracking the Code of Genocide: The Moral Psychology of Rescuers, Bystanders, and Nazis during the Holocaust

Kristen Renwick Monroe
University of California, Irvine

What turns neighbors into genocidalists? Why do some stand by, while others risk their lives to help? A narrative analysis of interviews with rescuers, bystanders, and Nazi supporters during World War II focuses attention on self-image, worldview, and cognitive categorization as critical influences. Rescuers, bystanders, and Nazis demonstrated dramatically different self concepts, yet identity constrained choice for all groups. A critical aspect of identity is relational: the sense of self in relation to others. Worldview, canonical expectations, and idealized cognitive models are critical determinants, with the ethical importance of values emanating not from particular values but from the integration of these values into the speaker’s sense of self. Finally, cognitive categorization carries strong ethical overtones. The dehumanization that spurs perpetrators and the sense of moral salience that drives rescuers work through the cognitive classification of “the other.”

KEY WORDS: genocide, identity, worldview, categorization

What causes genocide? Traditionally, three sets of factors are found to create the confluence of forces that erupt into genocide, defined here as the intentional destruction of a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group. Genocide is defined by the Genocide Convention as “the intentional destruction, in whole or in part, of a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such.” Groups such as Genocide Watch usually include political mass murder, ethnic cleansing, and other genocide-like crimes when they speak of genocide.
genocide to answer three questions. (1) What causes ordinary people to become

genocidalists? (2) How do bystanders differ from rescuers and from supporters and

perpetrators of genocide? And (3) what causes some people to risk their lives and

those of their families to save strangers?

A narrative interpretive analysis of in-depth interviews with bystanders,

Nazis, and rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust reveals the intricate but critical

importance of psychological factors in explaining behavior during genocides.

Findings underscore the importance of cognitive categorization and the way part-

icipants see themselves in relation to others. Differences in the speakers’ self-

images, worldviews, and cognitive classifications are associated with both actors’

lack of choice and their divergent responses to the suffering of others. Bystanders

see themselves as passive people, lacking in control and low in efficacy. The Nazi

self-image is as victims who need to protect themselves and their community.

Rescuers consider themselves connected to all human beings through bonds of a

common humanity. The rescuers’ idealized cognitive model of what it means to be

a human being is far more expansive and inclusive than the model employed by

bystanders or Nazis. Moreover, the groups integrated different values into their

basic sense of self. Bystanders and Nazis placed higher value on community and

utilized ingroup/outgroup distinctions. Rescuers employ broader categories and

are inclusive, not exclusive in their classification system. Beyond this, the personal

losses and trauma experienced by rescuers made them more sensitive to the plight

of others; analogous losses led bystanders and Nazis to retreat into themselves and

adopt a defensive posture.

The worldviews of the different groups manifested similar distinctions. Both

bystanders and Nazis exhibited worldviews colored by fatalism and a sense that

human beings are buffeted by the winds of history. This fatalism is related to their

perceived lack of choice in terms of helping others. Passive self-images and an

external locus for agency resulted in speakers accepting whatever life brought

them and the impression that the suffering of others was something over which

they had no control. Although rescuers expressed a similar lack of choice, their

sense of agency and the psychological mechanism driving their choice differed

dramatically. The rescuers’ choice options were determined and limited by their

strong sense of human connection and a cognitive classification process in which

all human beings are placed in the same category, and hence equal and worthy of

the same treatment. Because of their strong sense of human connection, rescuers

demed others’ suffering directly relevant to them; this perception left them no

option but to try to help strangers, even when doing so threatened the rescuers’

own safety or well being.
Social scientists have developed sophisticated explanations for both the macrolevel and the political-structural determinants of genocide.\(^2\) The consideration of the personal-psychological contributors to genocide is set in the context of work on just wars (Walzer, 1977/2002), humanitarian intervention (Crawford, 2002), human rights (Donnelly, 2003), and racism, stereotyping, and prejudice (Sears, Sidanius, & Bobo, 2000). Both scholarly works and journalistic accounts (Gourevitch, 1998) of genocide have engendered a lively debate over the rational underpinnings of this seemingly insane behavior. Once dismissed as the result of ignorance and ancient hatreds, genocide now is frequently explained as having an instrumental component, located in the desire of political leaders to gain power through manipulating or inciting a passive citizenry whose passions are diffuse and malleable (Fein, 1993; Valentino, 2004; Walter, 1999). Work drawing on genocidal violence, from Bosnia to Rwanda and Armenia, also focuses scholarly attention on the importance of the psychological, such as symbols and myths (Koenigsberg, 2005a), frequently expressed in stories that reveal who people believe they are (Kaufman, 2000, 2001).

**Identity.** Much of this work highlights the importance of identity or self image. At the group level, the legitimacy of a group’s claim to territory (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2003) or previous wrongs (Peterson, 2002) often plays a critical role in justifying genocide. Social psychological explanations, in particular, social identity theory’s emphasis on the ingroup/outgroup dynamic, are central to the classic description of the process by which group identities crystallize (Staub, 1989). Further work (Bar-Tal, 1990; Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005) described how this process makes each group the enemy of the other; groups then limit individual choice by telling members what is appropriate behavior. One contention is that genocide erupts when ethnic identities become reified and boundaries harden into politicized—as opposed to less polarizing cultural—identities (Mamdani, 2001, p. 22; Peterson, 2002, pp. 3–4). Still other analysts find that merely the creation of a group can result in members becoming caught up in a genocidal dynamic (Fujii, 2006), with this process heightened when identities are codified into formalized power sharing arrangements (Mamdani, 2001).

At the individual level, identity, the self, and character are long-standing scholarly ethical concepts,\(^3\) beginning with Aristotle’s emphasis on developing a moral character and reflected in contemporary philosophy as virtue ethics (Anscombe, 1958; Nussbaum, 1986; Slote, 1983). Adam Smith (1759/1853) made

---


\(^3\) Although these concepts carry diverse meanings, the empirical work on genocide utilizes them interchangeably. See Monroe (2004) or Lebow (2003) for discussion of terminology.
sympathy⁴ the foundation of moral sentiments and contemporary psychologists (Batson, 1991) have extensive findings attesting to the importance of putting one’s self in the place of another for a wide range of ethical activities. This rich literature on the moral psychology ranges from psychological experiments on justice and altruism (Reykowski, 2001), helping (Dovidio, 1984; Macaulay & Berkowitz, 1988), cooperation (Axelrod, 1984), whistle blowing (Alford, 2001), volunteering (McFarland, 2006; McFarland & Webb, 2004), and sharing (Blasi, 2003; Colby & Damon, 1992) at one end of a moral continuum and extends to work on prejudice and discrimination (Monroe & Martinez, 2007), ethnic violence (Kinnvall, 2004; Staub, 1989, 2003), genocide (Glass, 2001), and evil (Alford, 1997; MacIntyre & Grant, 2006) at the opposite ethical pole.

Research specifically on the diverse responses to genocide breaks into work on perpetrators, bystanders, and those who try to save the intended victims. While scholars frequently speak of rescuers, bystanders, or perpetrators as separate categories, the boundaries between the groups are more porous in reality than as analytical constructs. Hence, any analysis of differences between the three groups needs to note the extent to which bystanders occasionally rescue, rescuers relate instances when they did not help, and—perhaps the most bizarre phenomenon—stories of perpetrators who save one member of a group while massacring others (Browning, 1994; Fujii, 2006).

Rescuers. The earliest work on rescuers was descriptive and biographical, often in the form of memoirs by rescuers (Gies, 1987). The first social science works (London, 1970) to focus directly on rescuers’ motivations were correlational, asking about a wide variety of sociocultural influences, from religion and social class to education or gender. Over time, however, sociocultural correlates proved inconclusive; the predictors were too sensitive to the particular instance to be dispositive. Sociodemographic correlates of rescue behavior now appear to serve more as trigger mechanisms, stimulating what are the critical psychological forces driving rescue behavior (Monroe, 1996, 2004). This may explain the variance and disagreement in early studies since one trigger mechanism (e.g., religion or gender) could prompt rescue acts in one person while another trigger (e.g., duty, socialization or education) might activate them for another person, or for the same person at a different point in time.

As analysts zeroed in on the psychological component of rescue behavior, they tended initially to focus on general psychological factors, such as the thrill of adventure involved in rescuing or a sense of social marginality (Staub, 2003) in which the rescuer felt an empathic bond with the persecuted because of the rescuer’s own feeling of being an outsider (Ophuls, 1971). In 1986, survivor Nechama Tec identified what now seems the key personality factor: the sense of

⁴ Smith’s term “sympathy” corresponds to contemporary notions of empathy. The word empathy itself was not invented until the nineteenth century, as a term in art to denote entering into the artist’s way of seeing the world. In the twentieth century, empathy became employed among psychologists to refer to entering another’s head in order to understand them.
self. Tec argued that rescuers had a strong sense of individuality or separateness and were motivated by moral values that did not depend on the support or approval of other people so much as on their own self-approval. That same year, *The Courage to Care* further highlighted this personality factor, arguing that rescuers “had to do it because that’s the kind of people they were” (Tanay in Rittener & Myers, 1986). Significantly, this Academy award-nominated documentary included interviews from both survivors and rescuers. The fact that both groups found identity the same critical concept is noteworthy, since a methodological concern when dealing with memories, especially of traumatic events, has been whether past action, caused by an unknown factor, then may lead to rescue activity that in turn engenders the set of attitudes, personality, or perspective noted years later by the analyst as explanatory (Abramson, 1999; Langer, 1991; Monroe, 2004).

The first important systematic analysis of rescuers supported these findings, establishing personality as the critical force driving rescue behavior. *The Altruistic Personality* (Oliner & Oliner, 1988) was the largest survey of rescuers ever conducted, including 406 rescuers, 126 nonrescuers, and 150 rescued survivors throughout the Third Reich. The Oliners isolated the importance of identity, particularly the kind of broad, inclusive identity that connects to a shared humanity. This particular conceptualization of identity was essential for engendering cooperation and strong communal connections. An altruistic personality, in which habitual behavior, encouraged by parents or other significant role models, led to habits of caring that effectively became structured as an altruistic personality. This finding supports philosophical work on virtue ethics (Nussbaum, 1986) about the development of character and suggests these habits included tolerance for differences among people and a worldview characterized by the Oliners and their collaborators as “extensivity” (Reykowski, 1987, 2001). The psychological importance of reinforcing empathic and humane behavior was reinforced by Fogelman (1994), who found a series of correlational factors associated with rescue behavior but who also stressed psychological factors related to the sense of self. In terms of identity, Fogelman found rescuers undergo a transformative encounter which effectively creates a different persona, a rescuer self, that allows otherwise normal people to lie, cheat, or even kill if necessary. This transformed self is critical for Fogelman, providing rescuers the ability to maintain the kind of double life Lifton (1976) identified for perpetrators. This transformation, however, while designed to help save life, often involved the rescuer in unethical behavior, such as lying or even murder.

My (2004) work on rescuers also emphasized the self-concept, but highlighted the importance of the rescuers’ perceptions of themselves in relation to others, suggesting it was not simply character but also the rescuer’s perceptual relationship toward the person in need that was critical. I found identity perceptions created a sense of moral salience, the feeling that another’s suffering was relevant for the actor, and hence necessitated action to help alleviate that suffering.
I located the power of this psychological phenomenon in the mind’s need to categorize and classify information, with people thus being classified into friend or foe, member of an ingroup or an outgroup. For rescuers, the boundaries of this classification system were broad and inclusive, including all humanity. Later analysts developed this concept into a psychological scale that usefully predicted volunteer activity (McFarland, 2006; McFarland & Webb, 2004) and altruism (Monroe & Martinez, 2007) in both the United States and Poland (Hamer-Gutowska & Gutowski, 2006).

Bystanders, Supporters, and Perpetrators. The self-concept seems critical for all groups in a genocide. Staub (1989), Bar-Tal (2000), and Glass (2001) noted the importance of the self for perpetrators and suggested passive bystanders distance themselves from victims by justifying the acts of perpetrators. Gobodo-Madikizela (2003) reinforces findings (Bar-Tal, 1990) on bystanders’ lack of choice, linking this to the actor’s sense of ontological security (Giddens, 1991; Kinnvall, 2004). An individual’s own feelings of vulnerability are reinforced by the system’s delegitimization of the “other” and the creation of the enemy as someone to fear, by viewing one’s self as a victim of circumstance, poverty, or fear, or by living in an environment that is a “high-pressure crisis system,” such as South African apartheid or the Caribbean during slavery (Hochschild, 2005). In such systems, bystanders find few resources to resist the political repression justified as necessary to control the enemy. (Browning’s 1994 analysis of non-Nazi reserve-order policemen in Poland illustrates how this process turns bystanders into perpetrators.)

I (1994) used categorization theory to identify the subtle process of recategorization through which a perpetrator distances a neighbor, slowly turning a friend and fellow citizen into “the other” who is now seen as threatening and against whom violence as self-defense thus becomes justified. Work on perpetrators of sectarian violence during the Lebanese civil war found this distancing and dehumanization of “the other” that occurs during war and ethnic violence (Kreidie & Monroe, 2002). It traces a direct line between such categorization and the deterioration of minor felt hurts and underlying prejudice into open acts of willful violence and brutality. Fein’s (1993) work on moral exclusion—assumptions about who belong and should be protected—reinforces my (2001) concept of moral salience, which suggests how the cognitive process of categorizing others—as “friends” or “foe”—thereby creates (or fails to create) the feeling of moral salience that requires action, not just generalized feelings of concern or sympathy. The distinction between “us and them” thus occurs for both rescuers and perpetrators and suggests (Staub, 1989) people do not begin with sharp cognitive distinctions. People learn about differences and cognitively create differences by devaluing others. People who are “different” become further devalued,

---

5 Afrikaners’ attitudes towards the Blacks illustrate the broader notion that bystanders also see themselves as victims of circumstance, poverty, or fate. See interviews with Eugene de Kock, Gobodo-Madikizela (2003).
ignored, dehumanized, and eventually even killed because it is perceived to be the “right” thing to do. Witness the public health officials during the Holocaust who acted to protect the good German body politic from the foreign vermin who infested it (Lerner, 1992). Ironically, this insight may provide the clue to how the cognitive categorization process can be reversed, moving toward more positive views of “the other,” as part of a process of reconciliation. Porous group boundaries (Sapolsky, 2006), an individual’s embeddedness in the group (Staub, 2003), and the ability to separate from, criticize, and deviate from group-proscribed behavior may constitute critical factors in reconciliation.6

Society’s ability to set the moral tone for individuals is related to the concept of cognitive stretching, a process whereby the previously unimaginable becomes accepted as the norm.7 But for some people, “(t)he horror is so unimaginable that the imagination refuses to accept its reality. Something fails to click and some conclusions are simply not drawn” (Andreas-Friedrich, 1947, pp. 116–117). Individuals who cannot accept the new moral tone either resist (as rescuers did) or retreat into psychic numbing, as did bystanders during apartheid (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2003), or the doubling phenomenon noted among Nazis, experienced as “a form of desensitization . . . an incapacity to feel or to confront certain kinds of experience, due to the blocking or absence of inner forms or imagery that can connect with such experience” (Lifton, 1976, p. 27). The “psychological cutting off of one’s sense of reality” fits nicely into the concept of cognitive stretching, the process whereby an individual is confronted with some political act so far outside the ordinary frame of reference that there literally has to be a widening of the cognitive parameters before the individual can grasp what is occurring.8 Perpetrators report being “on automatic . . . in an emotional block . . . (You) cross the border and enter the surreal . . . everything becomes a sort of a blur, but you have to move” (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2003, p. 76). This stretching thus includes the “doubling” (perpetrators who operate as a dual self, with one part of the self disavowing the other) and the denial of both bystanders and perpetrators (Arendt, 1963) who insist they were innocent cogs in a giant machine whose purpose was unknown to them.

Rationality and moral psychology. Ironically, a rationalized component of this psychology surfaces in bystander testimony. Wives of both apartheid and Nazi

---

6 What Staub calls blind patriots, for example, say, “I love my group no matter what” while constructive patriots say, “Because I love my group, I will critique it so it will become even better.” Sapolsky’s (2006) work on porous boundaries also includes animal altruism.

7 “In a community of people depressed by their circumstances, beset by life’s struggles, thwarted in their hopes, how do you bring such an act into the range of possible choices? How do we even make it thinkable?” (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2003, p. 75); “How can conscience get suppressed to the point where people can allow themselves to commit horrible acts against others? Should one ask as well what kind of society or ideology enables such suppression?” (p. 52).

8 Gobodo-Madikizela (2003) describes perception of events during the entire apartheid period as “something happening outside the boundaries of reality” (p. 75). This underlines the broader importance of this phenomenon.
supporters describe happily remaining “officially” in the dark despite suspicions about what their husbands were doing. They tacitly, if not openly, supported the regimes’ terror because their lives were good: “Whites say they didn’t know, but did they want to know? As long as they were safe . . . had . . . nice houses . . . third cars and . . . swimming pools . . . they had no problem . . . (W)hy did they never question this?” (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2003, p. 111) Basically, then, bystanders and—to a certain extent perpetrators—live in a “self-willed, protective twilight between knowing and not knowing, refusing full realization of facts because they are unable to face the implications of these facts” (Yahil, 1990, p. 545). As Primo Levi (1965) said: “Those who knew did not talk; those who did not know did not ask questions; those who did not ask questions received no answers; and so, in this way, the average German citizen won and defended his ignorance” (p. 381). Both survivors and scholars note that bystanders frequently feign ignorance to dodge responsibility. Both bystanders and perpetrators resort to denial, rationalization, and righteous anger at the victims for causing the mess in the first place (Lifton in Falk, Kolko, & Lifton, 1971, pp. 419–429). All these explanations are an advance on the initial focus on the psychopathology of perpetrators (Adorno et al., 1958; Bullock, 1962, 1991), and help explain the important question: why ordinary people—not just psychopaths—engage in genocide.

Research Methodology

I examine the themes in this literature by focusing on six central concepts: the self concept, worldview, moral salience, ethical perspective, cognitive stretching, and categorization.9 As I examine the moral psychology of people who lived through the Holocaust, I ask: Does everyone have an ethical perspective, or just rescuers? If everyone does have a general perspective, how does the ethical content differ for bystanders, rescuers, and Nazi supporters? These are central questions that can yield insight into genocide, ethnic cleansing, and related forms of prejudice and discrimination.

To detect the self-image and empathic worldview of subjects, I utilized a narrative interpretive analytic methodology (Bar-On, 2006; Patterson & Monroe, 1998) designed to analyze the psychology of ordinary people as they speak about their behavior. Their words best reveal the mind of the speaker, her self image, worldview, and way of seeing and making sense of the world (Geertz, 1973). I spoke with many people who lived through the Nazi period, 100 informally and 60 in prearranged interviews. To facilitate clarity of presentation while still revealing the complex nature of the moral psychology, however, I needed to focus on fewer people and reveal more of their conversations. I thus chose one unusual set of “matched” case studies that disclose the intricate nature of the “thick” ethical

---

9 This approach follows Blasi’s (2003) work on the integration of values, Reykowski’s (2001) work on worldview, and my (2004) relational aspect to self-perceptions as influencing moral choice.
concepts facing people who lived through the Holocaust (Thacher, 2006; Williams, 1986).

**Data**

This procedure produced four related data sets from people whose actions during the war classed them as rescuers, bystanders, or Nazi/Nazi supporters.\(^\text{10}\) (1) General conversations with more than 100 people are treated as background data, used primarily to suggest topics on which to focus specific questions in more structured interviews. (2) Thirty formal interviews come from structured interviews that were taped and/or filmed, transcribed, and approved by the speaker for full public quotation. (3) Thirty informal interviews come from an additional 30+ people who gave structured interviews but who did not want their interviews fully recorded, wanted parts kept “off the record” or used only as background, or who did not want to be quoted directly in print. These 30+ informal interviews fall mostly, but not exclusively, into the category of bystanders and Nazi sympathizers. (4) The nature of a narrative analysis necessitates extensive quotations from a few individuals, to reveal the full nuance of the conversation, including ambiguities, ambivalence, and statements that show exceptions to overall conclusions. Narrative offers an advantage over surveys—which present short answers to preformed questions from more individuals—but it requires careful selection of case studies to ensure that the few cases presented capture the critical characteristics in the general sample. The goal is to make the cases chosen truly reflective of the larger groups they represent.\(^\text{11}\) To do this, I selected five of my 30 formal interviews to construct a

---

\(^{10}\) There are many complications for social scientists seeking methodological purity using real-life or natural data. For example, there’s no way that anyone could ever draw a technically random sample of rescuers, perpetrators, etc. since that would require a complete list of all the individuals in those categories and then taking a random subsample from that. I began with the Yad Vashem list of certified rescuers and sampled randomly from this list, adjusting the sample only to avoid over concentration in terms of characteristics such as gender or nationality. Interviewing bystanders and Nazi supporters is more complicated and, with rare exception, one relies on self-identification. In methodological terms, these participants would most appropriately be called a targeted sample—some researchers might refer to them as a nonprobability sample or a sample of convenience—of people willing to speak with researchers about their activities, motivations, etc., during the war. Although it’s impossible to ascertain how representative they are of the population of bystanders/Nazi supporters as a whole, all the individuals in these two groups provide extremely useful information about an understudied group that rarely comes forward for research.

\(^{11}\) See Thacher (2006) for a discussion of the ability to generalize from case studies when addressing normative issues. The kind of “matched” case studies utilized here are particularly revealing of the worldview of the people speaking (Geertz 1973), with such case studies widely held to be especially valuable in illuminating the subjective meaning people’s actions carry for them. For more general discussion on the value of case studies in social science, see Weber’s discussion of the value of interpretive case studies in contributing to our understanding (*verstehen*) through identifying the motivations and worldview that inform social action (Weber, 1978, pp. 7–8). Thacher argues that the normative case study is especially useful for analyzing “thick” ethical concepts, such as moral courage, that will carry both descriptive and evaluative dimensions that are difficult to disentangle (see also Williams, 1986, pp. 129–144). Essentially, I was trying to find a level of nonexperimental design control that we don’t usually find in studies using naturalistic data. There’s a fine line to walk...
fourth set of data—I call these matched case studies—and focus my analysis here on this data set. These matched case studies come from five interviews gathered using a respondent-driven snowball sample technique beginning with one particularly articulate Dutch rescuer. I chose these five interviews because the speakers’ remarkable sociodemographic similarities allowed better isolation and thus discernment of the influence of personal-psychological factors influencing the speakers’ quite different responses to the plight of the Jews in the Third Reich.

I began with a 19-year-old rescuer, serving as a Dutch cavalry officer when Germany invaded Holland. Tony was bourgeois, with conservative social values between experimental and natural data. There is an inevitable messiness inherent in analyzing data in the “real world,” just as there is a sterility and artificiality potential in experiments that can control for such background factors. Further, experimental data must omit the kind of extreme altruism or moral courage that much of the literature has focused on (Oliner & Oliner, 1988) and which Institutional Review Boards quite properly prohibit. To address these related methodological problems, I began with a sample of rescuers certified by Yad Vashem. (The Oliners and Fogelman also used this technique, so it’s widely accepted.) I then used a combination of respondent-driven/nominee samples, where the person sampled provides the name of someone who resembles them on certain background characteristics but who differs in one critical regard, in this case activity toward Jews during World War II. This provided a way to find “comparable” bystanders and Nazi supporters who had at least a few critical background characteristics in common with the rescuer. This is an imperfect technique but probably the best way to control for background similarities in a nonexperimental context. I was curious how much of the self-serving justification of memoirs autobiographies would exist in the narrative interviews obtained through an interview process when there were personal introductions made and a more neutral context provided. I tried a number of techniques to determine how extensive was the overlap between interviews and other forms of data from bystanders, rescuers or perpetrators; for example, I was able to test for differences between memoirs and my interviews in the few cases where rescuers or Nazis had written memoirs. I made a close textual analysis—again using different coders—and found differences in tone and emphasis but not substance. In general, the memoirs were simply more self-conscious and self-serving. This issue has been addressed by others, most eloquently by Langer, who makes a strong case that oral testimonies provide a truer reflection of the moral ambiguity that exists in situations of incredible moral and physical stress, such as the Holocaust.

The technique utilized to obtain these interviews resembles a respondent-driven (sometimes called a nominee) sample, a special form of snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a technique commonly used in sociology to develop a research sample through asking existing study subjects to recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances. (Hence the name “snowball,” since the sample group appears to grow like a rolling snowball.) It is widely accepted for use with politically controversial or hidden populations that are difficult for researchers to access, e.g., drug users, commercial sex workers, or, as in this case, people who might not like their Nazi or bystander past to become widely known. Because sample members are not selected from a sampling frame, snowball samples are subject to numerous biases. (For example, people who have many friends are more likely to be recruited into the sample.) Can we make unbiased estimates from snowball samples? The variation of snowball sampling known as respondent-driven sampling has been shown statistically to allow researchers to make asymptotically unbiased estimates from snowball samples under certain conditions. The respondent-driven sampling also allows researchers to make estimates about the social network connecting the hidden population. On these technical statistical issues, see Salganik and Heckathorn (2004) or D. D. Heckathorn (1997, 2002). Because of the small size of my sample, and because this technique is not widely utilized in political science or political psychology, I have referred to this smaller sample as simply a “matched case study” obtained through a respondent-driven/nominee sample. Nor do I make claims about statistical estimates for this case study.

Results from the Dutch cases accord with findings from the broader sample of respondents in all countries.
and strong support for the Dutch monarchy. Tony credits some of his empathic worldview to his wartime experience; unlike other soldiers, Tony’s military unit was held captive after the Dutch surrender because Tony’s commanding officer destroyed sophisticated equipment the Germans wanted. During this time, Tony and his friends began what he characterized as naïve, peaceful attempts to get information to the Dutch government in exile. When the Germans learned of this, Tony’s entire unit was rounded up and executed. Tony escaped only because he was spending the night with his girlfriend. Tony lived in hiding throughout the war, with a warrant issued for his execution. Yet despite his perilous situation, Tony worked in the Resistance and saved both Jews and Allied servicemen.

I asked Tony to provide names of people with similar background characteristics. Tony’s cousin, Beatrix (a pseudonym), shared many background characteristics and spent much time with Tony’s family after her mother died. In terms of behavior, however, Beatrix was a bystander, living through the war as someone politically uninvolved. Tony also introduced me to a Dutch collaborator (Fritz), who shared Tony’s conservative prewar opinions in favor of the monarchy and traditional Dutch values, although Fritz was working class, not bourgeois like Tony and Beatrix. Unlike Beatrix or Tony, Fritz joined the Nazi party, and even wrote propaganda for the Nazi cause and married the daughter of German Nazis. When interviewed in 1992, Fritz indicated he was appalled at what he later learned about Nazi treatment of Jews. Nonetheless, he retains his belief in National Socialism and felt the movement was betrayed by Hitler. I thus classify Fritz as a disillusioned Hitler enthusiast who remains a supporter of National Socialism and Nazi ideology.

Finally, Tony used contacts at the Institute for War Documentation to obtain an interview with Florentine Rost Van Tonningen. Widow of a top Dutch Nazi during the Hitler period, Florentine is a defiant Nazi, dedicated to telling people “the truth about what really happened.” Florentine’s brother headed the Dutch SS, and her husband was Head of the Dutch National Bank.14 Offered the chance to be secreted to South America after the war by the Nazi leadership, Florentine and her husband elected to stay in Holland to bear witness about the war. Florentine never knew how or when her husband died, and believes—probably correctly—he was beaten or defenestrated while imprisoned by the Allies in 1945. Florentine remains a virulent Nazi, traveling as much as her health permits to speak in favor of the Nazi cause. She expressed fierce pride in her job as former leader of the Dutch Nazi Youth for Women and is devoted to the memory of both Hitler and her husband. Her interview makes gripping, if chilling, reading, offering rare insight into the mind of an enthusiastic supporter of genocide, racism, and ethnic cleansing.15

---

14 This position is equivalent to both U.S. Secretary of the Treasury and head of the Federal Reserve Board.

15 Another Nazi sat in on the interview with Florentine, and he occasionally made comments as part of the interview. I have labeled these as Young Nazi, to differentiate his remarks from Florentine’s.
These four cases are Dutch, a national emphasis that offers an advantage of substantive significance. Many discussions of the Holocaust focus on characteristics deemed particularly Germanic, such as authoritarianism or efficiency, in explaining this genocide. Highlighting Dutch cases underscores the fact that the psychological roots of genocide are deeper and more pernicious than is suggested by work focusing on Germany. If Quislings, bystanders, and Nazis existed in Holland, with its well-deserved reputation for tolerance and humanitarian treatment of refugees (Ghitis, 2005), they can exist anywhere. Nonetheless, these four Dutch cases form only a subset of the broader sample. To demonstrate that they reflect findings from the overall sample, I occasionally supplement analysis of the case studies with quotes from formal interviews with other rescuers, bystanders, and Nazi supporters.

Four coders read all formal interviews and noted the factors they found influential in explaining the subject’s wartime behavior. Coders were asked to focus on: background characteristics, values, socialization, trauma leading to empathic awareness of others, choice; categorization, self-image, and worldviews. Coders highlighted all phrases relating to these key concepts and entered these into the N-Vivo computer program for coding qualitative data. (For example, a bystander might say: “My parents never loved me” or “My mother died when I was 10.” This phrase would be highlighted and then placed in the analytical category for “family” as part of a general category of “background.” A statement such as: “There was nothing I could do to help the Jews” would be designated as relevant for “choice,” and so on. Quotes were stored under each category for which they were relevant.) Once all texts have been analyzed, the N-Vivo program can list all quotes classified under each category. Each analytical category contains all the separate quotes and their speakers’ names, to facilitate analysis. The general categories utilized here were quotes that lend insight on: altruism, values, trauma, family background, group identity, religion, self-views, social views, worldviews, choice, and categorization. Only quotes on which there was uniform coder agreement are considered in the analysis.

16 The Authoritarian Personality (Adorno et al., 1950) represents early work in this vein. Hitler’s Willing Executioners (Goldhagen, 1996) represents recent work following the same tack.

17 All quotes come from the 30 formal interviews plus two quotes from Florentine’s autobiography (Rost van Tonningen, 1990).

18 N-Vivo is simply a tool designed to facilitate handling large amounts of qualitative data in a systematic manner. It facilitates the examination of texts by topic and assists in more rigorous and systematic searching for patterns. It also helps compare coding of different analysts and aids in testing theories or explanations that are grounded in the data. This system was used for all the case studies and transcribed interviews.

19 There are two interesting methodological arguments to note. (1) Does the Holocaust constitute an event so dreadful that ordinary language and the conceptual categories of traditional ethics cannot adequately address it? (2) Can we generalize about ethical behavior by studying a small group of participants in just one genocide? While recognizing that any genocide demands sensitivity when making normative statements about participants, and recognizing that contextual influences will vary from incident to incident, just as they do from one individual to another, the essence of social science nonetheless argues that close psychological analysis of participants in one genocide can
Findings

Analysis yields six major findings concerning the moral psychology surrounding genocide. (1) Self-image is the central psychological variable, with rescuers, bystanders, and Nazi supporters revealing dramatically different self-concepts. (2) Identity constrains choice for all individuals, not just rescuers. Understanding identity helps decipher the speaker’s ethical perspective and reveals how values provide content and moral specificity to a general perspective and empathic worldview. (3) Character and self-image are not all. A critical ethical aspect of identity is relational, having to do with the speaker’s sense of self in relation to others and to the world in general. Hence, we need to decipher the speaker’s worldview. (4) The ethical importance of values works through the fashion in which values are integrated into the speaker’s sense of self and worldview. (5) Personal suffering, in the form of past trauma, heightens awareness of the plight of others for rescuers; for bystanders and Nazis, however, it increases a sense of vulnerability manifesting itself in a defensive posture and heightened ingroup/outgroup distinctions. Finally, (6) speakers’ cognitive categorization systems carry strong ethical overtones. The dehumanization that accompanies genocide works through the reclassification of “the other” and is closely related to a sense of moral salience, the feeling that another’s suffering is relevant for oneself.

The Self-Concept

The most important predictor of wartime behavior was the speaker’s self-concept. Rescuers had a strong sense of themselves as people who were connected to others through bonds of a common humanity. This was immediately and strikingly volunteered by Tony (rescuer), in response to my first question. Significantly, my query was only to “tell me about yourself,” a question I assumed would elicit a mere factual recitation of demographic facts, such as “I was born in Amsterdam. My father was a dentist.” etc. Instead, Tony began by saying:

I was to understand that you’re part of a whole; just like cells in your own body altogether make up your body, in our society and community, we all are like cells of a community that is very important. Not America. I mean inform our understanding of participants in related events, just as understanding the linguistic structure of one Spanish speaker can inform us about the language patterns of other Spaniards. Furthermore, as data from other genocides or genocidal activity suggest, the Holocaust was not unique. On-going genocides and instances of ethnic cleansing demand our best efforts to crack the code of genocide. Close attention to cognitive processes makes smaller case studies critical in completing our knowledge of how psychological shifts can move individuals from rescuers to bystanders, or from bystanders to perpetrators. See Arendt (1963), Levi (1989; Chapter 1), Monroe (1996, 2004), Abramson (1999), or Langer (1991) inter alia for discussion of methodological issues involved in interviewing Holocaust participants or even constructing moral dialogues about the Holocaust and related genocides.
the human race. You should always be aware that every other person is basically you. Always treat people as though it is you. That goes for evil Nazis as well as for Jewish friends in trouble. Always see yourself in those people, for good or for evil both.

In contrast, bystanders saw themselves as people who were weak, low on efficacy, with little control over their situation. At several points during her narrative, Beatrix (bystander) states she is not a nice person, is alone, and would not know what to do if her children did not now take care of her. Again significantly, this self-image described is elicited in response only to the request to “tell me about yourself.”

Beatrix: I don’t like so much to say it, but I am always doing the wrong things.
Q.: Always doing the wrong things. What do you mean by that?
Beatrix: Just what I say... I don’t think I am a very easy woman.... I am not aggressive. I am—shy is not the right word but I am not very sure. I don’t know how to say... I think to do the right things, and then always do them the worst things.

Throughout her narrative, Beatrix describes herself as someone adrift, without direction or purpose, saying: “I am alone... When you are alone, you don’t have anyone to talk to. Some people say, ‘Why don’t you go back to Utrecht?’ I don’t know. I mustn’t think about it. It’s very...” (Beatrix trails off, shrugging helplessly). Beatrix seemed world-weary and somewhat nihilistic, a sharp contrast with her rescuer cousin, who at 80 had recently adopted a three-year-old.

Beatrix: I have no beliefs... If I don’t die tomorrow, I would be lucky.
Q.: Are you tired of living?
Beatrix: Yes, I have had quite enough of the whole thing.

In contrast to the passive bystander self-image, the Nazis’ self-image is—ironically—that of a victim, of a people besieged by threats to their well being, who must strike preemptively, in order to protect their ontological security and that of their community against Jewish threats.20 Frequently adopting the metaphor of disease, Nazis make genocide a kind of immunology, designed as preemptive action to rid the body politic of unclean elements.21 Consider the following quote, from two unrepentant Nazis, which reveals the Nazi self-image as victims threatened by Jews.

---

20 This confirms prior findings (Falk, et al., 1971; Lifton, 1976; Koenigsberg, 2005a, 2005b; Staub, 1989).
21 Koenigsberg (2005b) argues: “At the core of Nazi ideology was the idea of Germany as an actual body suffering from a potentially fatal disease caused by Jewish-organisms. Just as a human body might contract a disease and die, so might the German body politic” (p. 2).
FLORENTINE: Read the Talmud and you read what the Jews think about us. They say we are nothing!
Q.: We are nothing?
FLORENTINE: Oh no, we are animals.
YOUNG NAZI: We are animals in human form. We are nothing. They can crook us; they can steal from us, anything. They can never lend us money without getting a credit interest. To a Jew, they are not allowed to do this, but to the Christian goyem, no problem. We are animals. When you understand what the Jewish think of us, then you can understand why they treat us like this.
Q.: So you think the Christians have treated the Jews too, uh, too well throughout history? Is that what you are saying?
YOUNG NAZI: We are too nice. We are defenseless against them. If you see all the people hanged at Nuremberg, I think then you know it! So I believe Hitler. I believe in Hitler. We are so open! We have worked with people who haven’t been lying, with people who did not spread hate. Oh, it was terrible. They (Jews) want to hang the Germans at Nuremberg on Purim as proof of their own people’s power. They are powerful. They made up the Holocaust! But this is a religion nowadays. Ya. Nobody thinks anymore about other people. Only Jews died in the war, it looks like. (He turned to lecture me.) You be careful you don’t tell the world these truths or it will be hard! It will be too much for you.

Identity Constrains Choice

Despite their different self-images, for all the individuals interviewed identity constrained choice. Identity set a cognitive menu of options available for the speaker. Acts not on the cognitive menu are not considered, just as sushi is not an option in an Italian restaurant. For the Nazis, their victim self-image meant they felt compelled to strike preemptively, to protect themselves because they genuinely felt like a people under attacks from vile, base elements in society. For rescuers, their lack of choice emanated from their view of themselves as connected to all humankind. Tony was not unique in this regard; other Dutch rescuers echoed Tony’s sentiments.

Q.: You used the phrase, “You had to do it.” Most people didn’t do it though. How did you feel you had to do it, when other people did not?
JOHN: I had to do what everyone should do. (John shrugged.) I do it.
Q.: But why did you have to do it?
JOHN: Because I have to help those in need, and when people need help, then you have to do it.
Q.: When you say you had to do it, that implies to me that there wasn’t a choice for you. Did you . . . (John interrupted)

JOHN: No. There is no choice. When you have to do right, you do right. (John, Dutch rescuer)

For bystanders, rescuers, and Nazi supporters, self-image required them to act in a certain fashion. For rescuers, self-image created the altruistic personality in which the habits of caring—whether induced through religion, socialization, or innate forces—became part of a spontaneous way of life.22 This is evident as rescuers explain their lack of choice.

JOHN: I had the privilege to be born into a family that had the idea of serving your neighbor. They taught us that ideal. I remember my father say, “There’s an old lady. Help her to carry her bag.” This kind of thing. At the same time, with my own mind I have the idea that I have the guardianship of my brothers. I have to help others. Don’t be selfish. Help others. With this concept of ideals, when the moment arrived that you had to do something, okay, you have to do it. It was my duty. I claim to be a person to help others. Then I do it.

Q.: Did you ever sit down and think about the costs and the benefits and the risks involved in what you were doing?

JOHN: I don’t think so. I think that it came as a natural reaction from the inside. Like a mother. Normally, you don’t teach a mother how to love her baby. She has that naturally. So your instinct that you develop in yourself is to react that way. It was a quite natural development, not, “Should I do it or not?” (John, Dutch rescuer)

For rescuers, any cost-benefit analysis became secondary to the manner in which values became integrated into the rescuer’s sense of self, with a hierarchy of values influencing rescue activities, a phenomenon noted (Blasi, 2003) in work on other moral exemplars.

JOHN: I remember my father saying, “Always do what your conscience tells you.” For your conscience, there is no big problem, “Am I right or not?” Another thing, I always learned to be truthful, to say the truth, never to lie. But when I came before the Gestapo, it was for me very natural to lie, to say, “I don’t know where are there (Jewish) people.” Only after the war, did I say, “Was it right or not?” My story is the story of many people in Holland. When the Nazis ask—“Do you have Jews here?”—very naturally, you lie. Only afterward do you ask, “Am I right or wrong?” Even now, I ask myself (John shrugged), and I don’t know.

22 This influence corresponds to that described theoretically by virtue ethics and identified empirically as a critical factor by Oliner and Oliner (1988).
Q.: But at the time . . . ?
John: No question. No problem if it’s right or wrong. It was right! It is right. They are human beings . . . I wasn’t lying to save my life but to save other people.
Q.: So there is a higher value for you than telling the truth?
John: Sometime in life you have to make a choice between higher values. This is a very difficult question. I can’t say to anyone else.
Q.: What was the highest value for you, the value guiding you during this time?
John: Love your neighbor. You have to help (Dutch rescuer).

It is not just the rescuers who find nothing unusual about their acts, although the phenomenon is particularly striking when we consider that these people were risking their lives for strangers. But an analogous phenomenon occurs for bystanders. Bystanders also believed they had no choice; this belief was closely related to their self-image as people who had no ability to help. The mechanism driving bystander psychology, however, differed significantly. The bystander self-image is one of low self-esteem, as was evident at several points during Beatrix’s interview.

Q.: How would you describe yourself?
Beatrix: I don’t like so much to say it, but I am always doing the wrong things.

This negative self-image was reinforced at several points throughout our interview, including the end, as I thanked Beatrix and, totally out of the blue, she volunteers the same negative self-concept.

Q.: I can’t think of anything else to ask. Is there anything else you’d like to tell me?
Beatrix: No.
Q.: Thank you.
Beatrix: The difficulty is that I . . . I’m stupid; I can’t say certain things at the right moment.
Q.: No, you’re not stupid at all.
Beatrix: I know I am, but . . . (Beatrix trailed off, shrugging.)

The inability to assert herself, to be someone who makes a difference, the self-image as an ineffectual person who must accept whatever life hands her, goes back a long time for Beatrix and seemed to constitute a central part of her identity.

Beatrix: You have to accept it.
Q.: There was nothing you could do to change?
Beatrix: No. There was nothing to do. I remember when my mother (was) operated on, my father told me to bring her a book—something like that—but I was not allowed to enter her room. I took the book. The nurse came. “Your mother asked if you will come in.” I said, “I am not allowed.”

Q.: Yes, but your mother asked if you would come in.

Beatrix: I said, “I am not allowed.” Very early the next morning the hospital called my father. My mother had died. My father went only with my brother. I wasn’t allowed to go.

Beatrix’s case illustrates a critical difference between rescuers versus bystanders and supporters of genocide: an internal locus of control over their fate (rescuers) versus an external locus (bystanders and genocidalists). The differences in agency were striking. Beatrix’s father, and later her husband, made Beatrix’s decisions. Beatrix described herself as someone who was quite happy being “kept,” living her life as a pre-Ibsen Nora in a pampered, protected dollhouse arranged for her by others. For perpetrators, the prime movers were even more removed, often expressed as the forces of history.

Beyond this difference in agency, we find the striking fact that identity constrains choice for all people. The question then becomes: How does identity’s influence on behavior work to limit choice? What is the psychological process driving this constraint? The evidence suggests the incorporation of key values into the rescuers’ sense of self effectively created boundaries in the self image and then limited and foreclosed debate about transgressing these values. It is the speakers’ self-images and worldviews that appear to account for both the lack of choice and the divergent responses to the suffering of others. But while prior works noting this phenomenon (Blasi, 2003; Colby & Damon, 1992; Tec, 1986) examined only moral exemplars, I found it occurs for all people.23

Consider the contrast between Tony and his bystander cousin. Beatrix clearly benefited from the displacement of the Jews; her husband bought his practice from a Jewish doctor, whose home Beatrix then moved into when the doctor immigrated to South Africa, presumably to escape the Nazis. Beatrix notes these facts but seems oblivious and unconcerned by them, unaware of any connection between her own prosperity and this Jewish doctor’s misfortune. Because she does not make a cognitive connection between the two situations, she does not feel the plight of the Jews requires any action on her part. The suffering of others holds no sense of moral relevance or salience for Beatrix, or for other bystanders.

Beatrix: We just arrived in Utrecht and lived in a very little house for some months because the surgeon who sold the practice to my husband

---

23 Neither Blasi nor Colby and Damon analyze rescuers.
wanted to help him get started. Then he fled to South Africa. I am not sure, but maybe he had something... Jewish, I’m not sure....

Beatrix expressed the same vague, moral insensitivity toward what the Nazis were doing when she volunteered information about building an attic hiding space for her husband:

It was a very old-fashioned home, and so we made a part in the attic where you could go away to hide.

Q.: Was there anyone you were hiding?
Beatrix: No.
Q.: Did you know any people who were Jewish at that time?
Beatrix: Yes.
Q.: But nobody approached you...
Beatrix: No, because there were a lot of Jews who stayed there and didn’t want to hide. After some times, they were taken away too because a lot of Jews lived normally, and had only to wear the Star of David.

Q.: Did you know what was going on? What was your impression of what was happening? Did you...
Beatrix: Did I know?
Q.: Yes. What did you think was the situation for the Jews?
Beatrix: They went to a camp in the neighborhood, I can’t say the name.

I knew it...
Q.: What kind of camp was it?
Beatrix: Those camps. There was no gas, but they had a very bad life.
Q.: So it was a work camp?
Beatrix: Yes.
Q.: Did you know about the concentration camps during the war?
Beatrix: Yes.
Q.: Did you know that the Jews were being gassed?
Beatrix: Yes. I can’t tell you who told this, but my husband heard a lot when he worked in the hospitals...

Q.: How did you react?
Beatrix: You couldn’t do anything.
Q.: There was nothing you could do.
Beatrix: No. No. (Long silence.) All the Jews I knew were already away. (More silence.) No.
Q.: So there was nobody you knew who was still here. They had all gone.
Beatrix: Basically, yes. I knew no one, but still there were Jews, and they had their sign. But no. (Silence.)
Q.: Did you just feel that you were kind of helpless in this situation to do anything, to stop it from happening?
Beatrix: You could not do anything. You could hide them. But you have help in the house. We had too much people around because we had a practice at home . . . you couldn’t do anything.

Beatrix’s passivity seems unlinked to any sense of horror at the Nazi behavior. Her sense that she could not affect change contrasts sharply with her rescuer cousin Tony’s sense of agency: “People get depressed because there’s not much they seem to be able to do about things like the Holocaust. Well, I firmly believe that people can do something about it!” For rescuers, identity necessitated choice, the choice to help. Rescuers thus saw opportunities others did not notice. Why is this the case? To answer this question, consider differences in worldview and cognitive classification of others.

**Worldview**

The normative behavior of all people—not just rescuers—is influenced by how they see the world. Two explanatory concepts are particularly useful here: canonical expectations and idealized cognitive models, Idealized cognitive models (Rosch, 1978; Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991) explain the general significance of the cognitive process of categorization, focusing on “prototype effects” in categorization. People appear to learn categories from prototypical examples, not from abstract rules or qualities. They then think about categories by referring to such examples. Categories appear internally structured; some members are prototypical, central, or representative of the category, while others are marginal or peripheral. (We think first of a general model of a “chair” and then in terms of subcategories, such as lawn chair or arm chair.) The normative aspects of this cognitive sorting remain largely unexplored. A glimpse of the potential significance for political analysis is evident if we consider the normative connotations attached to a word such as “mother” as an idealized cognitive model versus “working mother, single mother, and welfare mother.” Each term conveys different normative overtones and suggests something potentially normatively significant about the individual speaker and the speaker’s culture.24

The second useful theoretical concept was the idea of canonical expectations, developed to capture the normative importance of ideas we carry—as individuals, group members, or part of a culture—about what “should occur in the normal course” and by the actor’s sense that “such normal behavior is right and proper” (Monroe, 1996, p. 11). For example, we expect our parents to love and care for us, despite evidence that many parents are not capable of such care. Similarly, certain societies expected astrologers to guide their political leaders or expected to sacrifice their leaders to the gods in times of trouble. (The political significance of canonical expectations hits at the core of discussions over the citizen’s expecta-

---

24 See Rosch (1978) and Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1991) for details.
tions on the proper role of government regarding providing healthcare, police, fire protection, education, etc.)

Both canonical expectations and idealized cognitive models should be subsumed under the speaker’s worldview, so I tried to discern speakers’ ideas about what is normal and desirable. Doing so revealed several important findings. In particular, the speakers’ expectations about what constitutes the good life and what it means to be a human being were closely related to their ethical actions during the war. Consider the bystander view. The good life for Beatrix is defined in terms of material goods, servants, and leisure time: “I’ve been, my whole life, very lucky. (Beatrix smiled.) I had a very good life. I always was comfortable. My husband worked very much. But I had time to go and play tennis, squash and all sorts of things. I had two helps (sic) in the kitchen and one help for his breakfast, too.”

As we recall Beatrix’s discussion of her lack of choice and her inability to do anything to help Jews, we can appreciate the ethical significance of her idealized cognitive model. In explaining her helplessness, Beatrix said, “You could not do anything. You could hide them (Jews). But you have help in the house.” In this instance, then, Beatrix’s model of the good life—having the leisure time afforded by economic affluence and “help” in the house—meant she could not save Jews. Her concept of the good life led Beatrix to make a choice without consciously being aware of it. Her desire for the good life, and her implicit and unexamined belief that this particular model was canonical, constrained the choice options on her moral menu.

This unconscious choice is evident when we contrast bystanders’ views of the good life with that of rescuers. For rescuers, the good life is closely related to making others happy. Rescuers consistently articulated the same idealized cognitive model for a human being.

Q.: You were talking about the meaning of life before. You were speaking, if I may use that term, about what it means to be a human being. What does it mean to be a human being to you?

JOHN: I have some privileges; we get in turn some responsibilities. To have the abilities of speech, of hearing. I am thankful for what I have. My responsibility is to share with others, because otherwise life would not be possible. I have seen in my life people who are selfish, and not happy. People who have power, and money—everything—and they don’t have enough. Never enough. They are not happy. I have seen people who are unselfish, and happy, people who don’t have very much, and are happy with what they have. My ambition, my aim is to be happy. So, how can you be happy? By being selfish? (John shook his head, indicating disapproval.)

Q.: You would not have been happier if you had simply taken all your family and sat out the war in Switzerland? After the war, you could
have said, “At least my family is intact. I love them, I’ve been a good person, I haven’t done anything wrong.” You would not have been happier doing that?

**JOHN:** No. You have not only to not do what is wrong. You have to do what is right. (Dutch rescuer)

John captures a critical difference between rescuers and bystanders. It is not enough merely to do no wrong. “You have to do what is right.” This statement carries particular poignancy since John’s sister was killed because she worked in the network John established to take Jews to Switzerland and Spain. But John’s worldview was very clear on how people should act if they wanted to be happy, and this worldview was related to his view of life as a gift that entails responsibility, a kind of trust.

**JOHN:** You have to think about more than yourself. You have to think about yourself, certainly. You have to eat, and have a home. But you must not concentrate on that. It is not my aim, it is not my rule to say, “I, I, I”. I have seen others around me—Salvation Army people—they are very happy. Why? Because they are helping. Happiness comes through helping other people. I am convinced of that.

**Q.:** When you spoke of being given certain gifts, and how these gifts entail certain obligations and duties, you mentioned as gifts things such as the ability to speak and hear, things every human being is born with. Yet, you speak of these as gifts. Are you suggesting that merely having the gift of life entails certain responsibilities?

**JOHN:** Yes, I think so. I am happy that I can fulfill my responsibilities.

Many other rescuers echoed this description of life as a gift, a trust in which privilege conveys responsibility. A Danish rescuer showed me his autobiography, written before our interviews and thus a totally unprompted reflection of his worldview.

**KNUD:** If I was looking for an explanation of life on earth—what’s the purpose, or why are we here—my answer would suggest our life experience here on earth is an indescribable, beautiful, phenomenal gift to mankind, a gift to be shared equally with fellow human beings, in peaceful coexistence, harmonious, loving, altruistic, non biased, non violent, and non exploiting acts. (Life) is a great gift from nature.

**Q.:** Does the fact that we received this gift carry with it an idea of trust?

**KNUD:** It is absolutely a trust.

Other differences in worldview between rescuers and bystanders were equally striking. The bystander worldview was tinged with fatalism and lack of efficacy,
with human beings remarkably lacking in agency. All bystanders revealed a sense of passivity, a feeling that the world was run by forces somehow beyond their control. This bystander worldview was intimately related to bystanders’ response to the suffering of others. Bystanders did not believe they could do anything to help anyone because they had so little control. “But what could I do? I was one person alone against the Nazis,” was their plaintive refrain. Events seemed somehow beyond them, as illustrated by Beatrix’s discussion of the Jews, where she openly acknowledged knowing that Jews were being gassed in concentration camps, but said: “You couldn’t do anything.”

Q.: There was nothing you could do?

Nazi supporters demonstrated a similar lack of individual agency; but for Nazis, it is historical forces beyond human control that drive world events. Florentine illustrated the Nazi view of the world as shaped by blood bonds and forces beyond any one individual’s ability to control. Florentine’s sense of individual efficacy thus emanates—with great certainty—from her belief that she is attuned to the will of history. Kurt—a Nazi soldier I’d locate somewhere between a bystander and a Nazi supporter—also refers to historical forces in explaining his lack of choice. For Kurt, the German creation of an Eastern front was a mistake since it violated the traditional historic land of the Slavs. Kurt reveals the same sense of historical inevitability found in Florentine’s interview but he differs from Florentine in arguing that this part of the war was a mistake. When asked about his actions at several points, he became agitated, angrily insisting he had no choice in the matter.

Q.: You didn’t have any choice?
Kurt: No. There was no choice.
Q.: Did you feel you were caught up in history? You keep mentioning these other things repeating themselves.
Kurt: Ya. Why do we do this again? See, how often the Goths went over and pushed the Slavs back from their border.
Q.: But I’m hearing you express a sense of futility at doing it again, and yet you kept on doing it. Does it never occur to you (not to go)?
Kurt: Can I change this? I have no power to change this!

This contrasts with rescuers, whose efficacy resembles the traditional Western liberal concept of individuals who control their destiny. Beyond this difference, we find a further, significant divergence in worldview. Only rescuers had integrated the value of human life into their worldview. Only rescuers felt it was natural that others would help their fellow human beings. For everyone else, the tragic calamity of the Holocaust was something judged so far beyond their control that it was not even remarked upon. For example, Beatrix commented that the Jews did not
“have a very good life” in the camps; this was the closest she came to expressing any regret or sorrow for the Jews. It was striking how consistently this pattern held for other bystanders.

Values

Values enter the moral psychology in complex ways. First, it is the way values are integrated into our self-image that is critical. Second, these findings confirm the importance of an altruistic perspective (Monroe, 2004), but they broaden this finding to suggest the altruistic perspective is merely one end of a more expansive moral continuum. Everyone has what might be called an ethical perspective. Perspective might be akin to frames for glasses; individual prescriptions for lenses for the glasses vary, making one person’s ethical perspective humane and another’s insensitive, but all people have the frames. The way all people saw the world played a critical role in determining their treatment of both Jews and Nazis.

Is it possible that this ethical perspective simply reflects the differences in the values that are plugged into the general worldview? If so, are the critical differences in moral behavior the result of differences in values, not worldviews? The answer to this question is complicated. Values are not critical in the sense that most people pay lip service to many of the same values. (Most people, for example, express pride in family and pride in country.) Among the four cases highlighted here, there was little observable difference in terms of religion.25 Furthermore, all the people interviewed—except rescuers—bemoaned what they considered the deterioration in social and moral values. Few spent time discussing values. Ironically, it was the virulent Nazi (Florentine) who spoke about values more than anyone else. She described herself as idealistic, and her life certainly demonstrates an incredible commitment to the ideals she holds dear. This highlights the difficulties in thinking about values—in general terms—as influences on moral choice. Ordinarily, we think of being an idealist as a positive thing. But if the ideals are Nazi ideals, this is hardly something most of us would consider positive from an ethical point of view. Considering Nazis and their values thus reveals the difficulty in speaking generally about values. We need to know the content and specificity of values. When we take such an approach, there seemed surprisingly little significant difference on the dimension of expressed values among rescuers, bystanders, and Nazi supporters. This suggests the obvious. Most people want to feel they’re doing good, even genocidists. People do not consciously arrange themselves along a moral continuum with the goal of defining themselves as evil-doers or people who ignore the needs of others.26

25 No one identified themselves as a religious person, but no one self-identified as an atheist either. All the speakers were about the same on this dimension. In the larger pool of interviews, I found no predictive pattern from religious influence.

26 Gourevitch (1998) notes the same phenomenon in the 1994 Rwanda-Burundi genocide. “(P)eople do not engage in genocide as if it were a crime. . . . People don’t go forward to kill saying “This is the
We thus must consider the question of fundamental values or, more precisely, the question of which core values one holds dearest. I return to the concept of canonical expectations and to the content of the values that are such a part of the person’s life that they are accepted as a given, an unremarked upon part of the moral terrain. Here we find critical group differences in values, with striking divergence in idealized cognitive models and the values associated with these models. All the rescuers interviewed had one value at the foundation of their ethical system, whether or not this ethical system is consciously held or is merely an implicit part of who they are. That value is the sanctity of life. Rescuers consistently mention this in their discussion of the Holocaust. This core value expressed itself in the puzzled response that ran like a *leitmotif* when rescuers explained why they risked their lives to save strangers: “But what else could I do? They were human beings, like you and me.”

In contrast, not one of the other speakers mentions the sanctity of human life. Bystanders were surprisingly comfortable talking about what they had done during the war, where they had gone, and how the war had affected them. They volunteered information that they knew “absolutely on the minute” (Beatrix) what was going on with the Jews, knew of the concentration camps, and had done nothing to help. (Fritz, a Dutch Nazi collaborator who says Hitler betrayed National Socialism, described himself as “an ostrich” that put his head in the sand to avoid knowing what was happening to the Jews.) But only one bystander expressed any remorse or sorrow at the incredible human tragedy occurring all around them. This seems a significant omission. The kind of moral insensitivity captured in Beatrix’s discussions of Jews is typical of most bystanders.

What about the integration of values into one’s sense of self, a phenomenon critical for other moral exemplars (Blasi, 2003; Colby & Damon, 1992)? I found a sharp contrast here. Both rescuers and Nazis had strong value systems, and both groups had integrated their critical values into their sense of who they are. But Florentine’s values are a passionate commitment to the Nazi cause, racial purity, cultural separatism, and to what she refers to as the “old values and old religion,” an Aryan way of doing things that excludes people who are “different.” These values are so much a part of her that she gave up her children for a few years after the war, refusing to admit—because she genuinely did not believe—she and her husband had done anything wrong. She also describes her decision not to be secreted to South America, along with other top Nazis, as an act of idealism, one designed to “tell people the truth” about the war. She retains immense pride in her Nazi identity and activities.

end of the world and I’m a pig and I will kill you.” They go forward and they say “This is the beginning of a better world and I am a purifier and I will kill you. This is going to bring harmony.” It’s an exercise in community building, it’s this us-and-them and we will purify ourselves by eliminating you.” (2002 interview with Gourevitch, by Harry Kreisler of the Institute of International Studies at UC Berkeley. http://Www.globetrotter.Berkeley.edu/people).
Rescuers also evidence strong integration of core values. But rescuer values are different, centering on a commitment to the sanctity of life; indeed, this value plays a key part of the rescuer worldview and sense of self. For all rescuers, the idea that we should value human life is so deeply ingrained into who they are that they assume—despite overwhelming wartime evidence to the contrary—that everyone shares this commitment. The self-image and self-perceptions are critical in terms of rescuers’ actions. Because rescuers hold so deeply the value that all life is sacred, they have a commitment to help others. This in turn creates a feeling of responsibility, a sense of moral imperative or the feeling that we all should do this, we all should take care of others.

The integration of critical values into one’s sense of self—and the content of the values held dear—constitutes a critical part in the moral psychology. Values matter most when they are integrated closely into the speaker’s sense of self. But we also must focus on the specific content of the values integrated into the personality. This is strikingly evident when we contrast Dutch rescuers (Tony) with Dutch Nazis (Florentine). Tony’s core values center on the sanctity of life. Not just human life; all living things. Tony makes no ingroup/outgroup distinctions and does not construct separate categories or classifications for human beings depending on their ethnicity, religion, nationality, etc. He notes succinctly, “You cannot put labels of nationality or race on people.” Like other rescuers, Tony refused even to deny the humanity of the Nazis, saying: “I’ve always been interested, ever since World War II, in understanding what caused this Nazi monster to come to be. I finally realized, every time you see the monster, you basically are looking in the mirror.” (Dutch rescuer)

Tony’s basic values are intimately woven into his sense of who he was and result in his drawing boundaries that include all people in his community of concern.

**TONY:** To survive, (we must act) as a species rather than as an individual. We have to develop harmony among each other and as a planet. That’s the only chance to fulfill our destiny. We are as much together as the cells in our body are together. They are individual. They each strive for their own little survival yet somehow they also will sacrifice themselves at times for the whole. Whether that is conscious or not, none of us has any way of knowing. We cannot today exist as individuals. Oh, maybe one or two of us can go off in the wilderness and exist. But as a modern day American, European, or Chinese, there is no way to survive in this world unless we see ourselves as part of a whole in some way. The big difficulty is to do that without falling into the trap of totalitarian government.

**Q.:** How do we do that, Tony?

**TONY:** Just the same way the body does it. It’s an instinctive voluntary way of sensing, setting your goals so your happiness is not necessarily
based on collecting the most you can possibly collect. It’s knowing your happiness is based on your sympathetic vibrations with your environment, with nature, with the other mankind around you.

In contrast to Tony’s view of the world as a cohesive and caring unit, Florentine’s values are family and fatherland. To my surprise, Florentine described her values using the language of communitarians.

Florentine: When we were growing up, Father made sure we came to love and value Germany and Austria as well as our own country. All kinds of German youth groups were forming. We enjoyed our endless conversations with the German youth, when we would visit our family or visit elsewhere. They shared so much comradeship, pride and devotion. Everyone seemed happy and full of hope for their country. This kind of love for the nation was missing in the Netherlands. We did have a group called the AJC in Holland. Their members, however, were mainly children from lower-class families who did not feel any nationalism but were taught class struggle and free love. This was something we could not relate to. We also disliked the Boy Scouts. We searched for something deeper. We wished for a strong and positive youth. We longed for comradeship, for the happiness our eastern neighbors displayed, the sense of love and pride we desperately needed here in the Netherlands. This was our dream.

These values were linked in Florentine’s mind to her sense of who she was.

Florentine: Within the NSB (Dutch Nazi Party) a group called the Youth Storm was formed. This was a visibly nationalist group, to instill in our youth a feeling of nationalism, love of country and devotion to their own kinds. As members, we wanted to serve the country with honour and camaraderie, with order and discipline. Our slogan was “With Trust in God, All for our Fatherland.”

Florentine viewed the nation as an extended family, with Hitler as the all-knowing father. “Hitler has shown it is possible to live in harmony with family, with work, and with respect for the other. He shows the whole world that it would be possible.” The symbolic importance of family, community, and the importance of the group relates closely to Florentine’s categorization schema, which resulted in strong ingroup/outgroup distinctions, with the Jews being placed outside the circle of humanity.

27 These quotes come from Florentine’s autobiography (Rost van Tonningen, 1990), not our interviews.
Florentine’s statement about “respect for the other” raises an interesting issue. What encourages such treatment? Can empathic involvement with “the other” encourage people to see their humanity? Does our own suffering make us more sensitive to the suffering of others, or does it increase our sense of vulnerability and trigger a defensive posture? To answer this, I asked about past traumas to test the idea that experiencing loss might engender compassion in others who also experienced need. I found a mixed impact from past traumatic experiences. Tony’s worldview was definitely shaped by his wartime experiences, which Tony credits with opening his eyes and making him reexamine many of his attitudes and preconceptions. But while Tony’s traumatic experiences made him respond more sympathetically to other people, analogous trauma made bystanders and Nazis pull into themselves and become more suspicious and untrusting, not more sensitive to others’ needs. Consider a Nazi soldier’s conversation about post-World War I violence in Berlin.

KURT: In Berlin, there was shooting going on and there I saw the first man killed in my life. I was four and a half, I think. I can remember. He was fleeing in the church. On the steps on the church, he was gunned down. He was not a Communist; just a civilian. He was killed by these of the trucks, by the Communists.

Q.: What kind of impression does that have on a four-year-old child?

KURT: I dream at night quite often about this and always protected my back against the wall because I was trained when someone is fighting, you go back on the wall, so you are protected from the back and then you fight on the front. Even as a little boy you learn this.

Kurt’s sense of insecurity was unrelated to his objective economic situation, since his mother was a wealthy woman and Kurt enjoyed affluence even in the difficult economic period after Germany’s World War I defeat.

Tony’s response to early, childhood trauma is quite different.

Q.: When you were growing up, was there any destabilizing event in your past, anything traumatic?

TONY: Not terribly much. My father and mother were always fighting, ever since I was a little tiny kid. My mother was Latin, very possessive. My father made the mistake once. So many men do it. Just a little fling with some cutie somewhere, which didn’t mean that he didn’t love my mother. But my mother found out about it and for the next 30 years, she talked about it constantly. “I should have left you, but....” She was always going on about it, to the point that, in retrospect, it’s funny. But at the time, as a kid, it wasn’t. “Look at your father and see what he did to me.” She was always telling me that.
Tony described other childhood traumas, noting that their effect was to make him realize you should “not give a damn about what people think of you and just do what you think is right.”

TONY: In some ways it was a very happy childhood, in others not. My mother was a social climber. She would have liked to have been part of the aristocracy or the upper-upper classes. She was (into) money and status symbols. I was never into that. I was a lonely child. Because I was an only child, my mother was very protective and I was a mama’s boy for quite a while. To give you an example, when I finally went to high school, which was my first moment of liberation, she insisted I wear my sailor suit. This was as bad as wearing a sailor suit to high school nowadays! But it had an odd effect. It did teach me to live through situations that are painful. To not give a damn about what people think of you and just do what you think is right. But I had a very rough time in high school in the beginning because of that.

The trauma of war opened Tony’s eyes to the situation of others, making him reach out to help.

TONY: The beginning of World War II was a really odd liberation. I suddenly had to leave the wealthy, upper middle-class family and go into hiding. That was an eye-opener. I was told right away by a friend, “Look, if you’re ever in trouble in town and there’s a raid on the street and you have to go into a house somewhere, if you’re anywhere near the red-light district, go to any of the houses of the prostitutes. They’ll hide you. They don’t like the system. They’ll hide you.” And they would. They were risking a death penalty for that. But those women would always hide you. They were the people I had looked down upon socially before that. I ended up working with a variety of much lower-class people than I would ever had associated with in my previous existence. That was a great eye-opener, to find that these people were in no way different.

This shift in Tony’s view of others had tremendous ethical significance, evident when considering the diverse patterns of cognitive categorization exhibited by rescuers, bystanders, and Nazi supporters.

Categorization

Turn now to the final critical piece of the puzzle: the psychological process of categorization. Cognitive categorization is something everyone does, if only to negotiate through the myriad stimuli presented to us every day. (We sort colors into
shapes of objects, for example.) Cognitive and social psychologists (Tajfel, 1981; Turner, 1982, 1987) concerned with identity have long recognized that all people classify others in relation to themselves. (We group people into friends, strangers, etc.) Analysts have only recently begun to explore the importance of these classifications for ethical behavior (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999), but it seems possible that this fundamental part of our psychological make-up as human beings has far-reaching implications for treatment of others.

I asked whether the ethical perspective—the way in which we see the world and others in relationship to us in the world—is defined by this categorization process since we know differences in this ethical perspective are closely related to differences in behavior. Following the linguistic analysis of Lakoff (1987), I wondered whether the deep structure of consciousness, rhetoric, and cognition results in metaphors that can produce “hot cognition” or “hot buttons” capable of turning ideas into action. I found some evidence of this in interviews with Nazis, such as Florentine, who consistently resorted to the metaphor of disease to explain acts against Jews. But the ethical consequences of the cognitive categorization process were evident in all the people I interviewed.

Genocidalists and their supporters—such as Florentine—see themselves as a people under attack. There is a bitter irony to this, for in the genocidalists’ worldview, the Jewish victims of genocide are seen as threats. The following conversation with two Nazis illustrates how Nazis believed the Jews were threatening their world and had to be destroyed, much as the rest of us would destroy cockroaches invading our home. This excerpt follows a discussion suggesting Jews have no culture of their own and are different from Aryans; it reveals a typical Nazi ingroup/outgroup categorization.

Q.: Why do you think Hitler and the Nazis are so hated by people?
Florentine: Because the media made a devil out of him.
Q.: The media?
Young Nazi: And who controls the media? You know that! (Jews.) Why are they so worried about Hitler? Because Hitler came in with completely new ideas, which was against the Jews controlling everything through money and banks.
Florentine (nodding assent): Ya.
Young Nazi: Remember, the Jews of the world united. In 1933, there was a big front-page article in the newspaper that they (Jews) were going to boycott Germany. In Germany, they did one boycott of Jewish things one time. That was blown up like you wouldn’t believe. But no one talks about the Jews boycotting Germany! The Jews inside Germany didn’t want anything to do with Jews outside. They were forced—by the outside Jews—in trouble. Because if the Jews outside Germany declare war on Nazi Germany, on the SS, they make enemies of the Jews inside Germany.
This conversation continued, suggesting Jews tried to isolate Germany during the Third Reich, devised the post-war myth of the Holocaust, and continue their conspiracy today by inventing AIDS and the E-coli bacterium.

Q.: Do you think Jews were involved in inventing E-coli? Is that what you are suggesting?

YOUNG NAZI: Oh, listen, the Jews! (Florentine shrugged, making a face of disgust.) I don’t blame everything evil on the Jews. I blame many silly people who are in the plan, who want the glory. Even Clinton is surrounded by Jews, Ya. His wife is from Jews originally. Even the Pope is a Polish Jew originally. You know that?

Q.: No, I didn’t know that.

FLORENTINE: Oh, there are many things people don’t know! But that’s the thing. It’s all nicely kept (quiet).

The political significance of Florentine’s cognitive categorization was evident in her arguments for separate cultures, in which Jews should keep to themselves and not mix with non-Jews. This cultural separation was critical to the Nazi cognitive categorization schema. Placing Jews in a separate racial category allowed Nazis to psychologically distance themselves from the Jews, and then dehumanize and mistreat Jews. Ironically, I first noticed the ethical importance of categorization via conversations with an ethnic German rescuer, whose time in concentration camps provided close contact with the genocidal mentality.

OTTO: I interviewed many SS guards. I was always intrigued by the question: how could seemingly normal people become killers? Once I got an interesting answer. In a camp in Upper Silesia, I asked one of our guards, pointing at the big gun in his holster, “Did you ever use that to kill?” He replied, “Once I had to shoot six Jews. I did not like that at all, but when you get such an order, you have to be hard.” Then he added, “You know, they were not human anymore.” That was the key: dehumanization. You first call your victim names and take away his dignity. You restrict his nourishment and he loses his physical beauty and sometimes some of his moral values. You take away soap and water, then say the Jew stinks. Then you take their human dignity further away by putting them in situations where they even will do such things which are criminal. Then you take food away. When they lose their beauty and health and so on, they are not human anymore. When he’s reduced to a skin-colored skeleton, you have taken away his humanity. It is much easier to kill non-humans than humans.

Rescuers were quick to note that this phenomenon is not unique to the Holocaust, occurring elsewhere, especially during wars. As Tony commented: “We
have to watch for the old ‘yellow gooks’ mentality. It is much easier to shoot at or burn the ‘yellow gooks’ than to shoot and burn some other farm boy just like yourself.” In contrast, the rescuer categorization process is one in which all people are included in the same category and because of that, all are treated the same. The power of this was reflected most strikingly in the rescuers’ discussions of the Nazis and in their insistence that genocide’s roots can find fertile soil anywhere; it is not specific to one culture or one country.

TONY: “All over the world, there’s a certain attitude. It’s not any one nation. It’s not because they are German.”

For rescuers like Tony, all people are the same; it is culture and education that causes people to do bad things. “Human nature is very much the same all over the world. It is tempered and arranged by culture.” Tony then noted his similarity with some of the Dutch Nazis, linking this similarity to his forgiveness of them, under a kind of “there but for the grace of culture or education, go I” mentality.

TONY: I differentiate in my own mind between what I consider righteous and what I consider bad. Not whether it’s done by a German, an American, a Jew, an Arab; that’s irrelevant. The people are the same. It’s the culture. It’s education. People could all get together if they wanted to. But education works so strongly against it. There’s propaganda in education. I give you a perfect example of the impact of educational propaganda, when the German Army lost. The SS has been pretty wiped out by this time. They wanted to fight to the end but there was only a small group of them left in the Gestapo. The Resistance wanted to attack the Gestapo buildings—there were about 100 guys still in there—and wipe them out. We had a little talk about it and I said, “Look, this is nonsense. They’re well fortified there. They have plenty of arms. If we attack them, we’re going to lose a lot of people. The war is over. Why do we have to do that?”

They said, “Well, they’re shooting at people.” I said, “Let’s solve it in a different way. They are just as scared as we are. I don’t like the Gestapo but why doesn’t somebody go over and talk to them?” They said, “Yeah, who wants to do that!” “Okay. I’ll go. I don’t think, if I go alone and unarmed and I dress in such a way that they don’t know whether I’m a German or a Dutchman, I’m sure I can get to ring the doorbell and I’ll talk to them.” I did exactly that. They didn’t shoot at me. I got in. I said, “Look, I’m a liaison officer from Allied Headquarters to discuss your surrender so that there’s no unnecessary bloodshed.” I lied a little bit there. I was introduced to the commanding officer, who was a 20-year-old dressed up as a Gestapo lieutenant. I asked him, “Hey, where’s the commanding officer? He said, “Oh, he got on a plane and escaped to Germany.” It turned out that the
entire staff had escaped. “Well, what are you doing here?” (He shrugged.) “Somebody has to be in charge of the men.” “Well, I think I can talk to you,” I told him. It turned out that he was a guy who had been raised in the Hitler movement since he was a small boy. He was totally impregnated with all these ideas of Nazism. He was basically not even a bad guy. He was a little like one of the marines at My Lai. But he was following orders. When I left, he said, “I wish so much you guys had fought with us. You were Dutch. You should know about this. We could have made this a better world. You’ll see. The Americans are going to come here and they’re going to take over your economy. The Russians are going to move in and they’re going to take all of Eastern Europe.”

I thought, “He’s absolutely right.” I still didn’t believe in his philosophy. But I could see how he had ended up being what he was and I could not hate the guy. He was the product of his environment. This knowledge doesn’t mean I don’t think they shouldn’t go to jail or be hung if they commit certain crimes. But I can also understand it. It’s like a bad dog. You mistreat it and it bites people. You have a dog and you treat it well and he’ll grow up to be a loving, caring dog. To me it has nothing to do with race, religion, or anything else. It’s people.

Classifying people into the same category seems to encourage similar treatment of them. Why? People are entitled to the same rights we are because they are “just like us.” Classifying people as different makes it easier to justify mistreating them, just as African slaves were not viewed as fully human by America’s founding fathers because of difference in skin color, or as women’s anatomical differences meant they were not men’s equal and thus needed not be accorded the same legal rights.

**Conclusion**

A narrative analysis of interviews with rescuers, bystanders, and Nazi supporters during the Holocaust highlights the importance of psychological factors related to differences in wartime behavior. Findings focus attention on six critical psychological differences in the diverse responses to genocide. (1) Self-image is the critical psychological variable, with rescuers, bystanders, and Nazi supporters demonstrating dramatically different self concepts. (2) Identity constrains choice. Understanding identity can help decipher the speaker’s ethical perspective and reveal how values provide content and moral specificity to a general ethical perspective. (3) A critical aspect of identity is relational, focused on the sense of self in relation to others and the way the speaker views him- or herself in relation to the world. Hence, we need to decipher the speaker’s worldview and the ethical significance of that worldview, including the speaker’s sense of agency. (4) The
main ethical importance of values comes not from subscribing to certain values but rather through the integration of these critical core values into the speaker’s sense of self and worldview. (5) Personal suffering may increase sensitivity to the misery of others but it also may heighten a sense of vulnerability and encourage defensiveness. Finally, (6) a speaker’s cognitive categorization system carries strong ethical overtones. The dehumanization that accompanies genocide works through the reclassification of “the other.”

These findings speak more generally to the psychology underlying responses to the suffering of others. They suggest what forces move us beyond generalized feelings of sympathy, sorrow, or even outrage to a sense of moral imperative, a feeling that another’s distress is directly relevant for us and thus requires our intervention and assistance. They suggest why some people take positive action to help, when most of us ignore others’ misery, thereby providing indirect or tacit support for the conditions that engendered such misfortune. These findings can lend insight into the psychological forces driving responses to both other genocides and to the forms of ethnic violence and prejudice that precede and foster genocides. When such work is set in the broader context of research on moral choice, it can bring into focus the psychological dimension of ethics to shed light on one of the central themes in normative political science: how we treat others. I encourage other scholars to test these results in different contexts.28

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Funding for this project was provided by the Center for Global Peace and Conflict Studies and the UCI Interdisciplinary Center for the Scientific Study of Ethics and Morality. Valuable comments were obtained from audiences at the 2005 Guetzkow-Heyns-McKeachie Lecture at the University of Michigan and at talks at the University of Nebraska, the Holocaust Memorial Museum (Detroit), George Washington University, Duke University, Simon Wiesenthal- Pepperdine University Institute for Law and Ethics, and meetings of the ISPP and the APSA. My special thanks go to Fred Alford, David Easton, Jim Glass, Lee Ann Fujii, Cecelia Lynch, Rose McDermott, Janusz Reykowski, Ervin Staub, Etel Solingen, David Winter, and the anonymous referees. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Kristen Monroe, University of California, Irvine, Department of Political Science, 3151 Social Science Plaza A, Irvine, CA 92697. E-mail: KRMonroe@uci.edu

28 Miller (2005) suggests the differences we found here might apply to donors and nondonors of body parts, and the hospital ethics boards that must approve such donations. Miller’s work deals with unrelated donors of kidneys but his research suggests analysts interested in this general problem might test our findings in the context of medical donations in a wide variety of areas.
REFERENCES


