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Figures of admiration in emerging adulthood: A four country study

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Abstract

Admiration is a social emotion that is developmentally formative in emerging adulthood; admired adults act as mentors, role models and sources of inspiration to this age group (Arnett, 2014). The present study explored who and what emerging adults admire, across four countries (UK, Iran, China and Russia). 525 participants provided written descriptions of an admired figure. Across all cultures, *Care and Generativity* was the most common theme. Cross-cultural differences emerged for *Limitations and Difficulties* (most prevalent in China), *Autonomy and Assertiveness* (most prevalent in Russia), *Intellect and Education* (most prevalent in Russia), and *Religion and Spirituality* (most prevalent in Iran). Males and females in the UK and Russia tended to select admired figures of their own sex, but in Iran and China both male and female participants selected more male figures. The findings suggest a common core to admiration in emerging adulthood, combined with culturally specific features.

Keywords

Admiration; emerging adulthood; role model; vignette; cross-cultural

Figures of admiration in emerging adulthood: A four country study

What kinds of qualities do emerging adults admire in their elders, and who is it that is typically considered worthy of admiration? These questions, which have had little attention in the research literature, were the focus of this cross-cultural study. According to the theory of emerging adulthood, the decade following the age of 18 is a developmental period defined by: heightened instability of identity; frequent transitions in residence, role and relationships; the deferral of commitments such as marriage and parenthood; idealistic optimism; and by an ambiguous adult status (Arnett, 2000). We contend that the social emotion of admiration plays a crucial role through this period; an admired older person can act as an encouraging, realistic and stable ideal of positive attributes, to be emulated or approached for guidance through this changeable and unstable part of the lifespan (Schlenker et al., 2008).

Admiration theory

Despite the centrality of admiration to literature and culture, there are relatively few research studies on admiration in psychology. Those studies that do exist are dispersed across social psychology (e.g. Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007), positive psychology (e.g. Algoe & Haidt, 2009), personality psychology (e.g. Schlenker, Weigold & Schlenker, 2008) and developmental psychology (e.g. Chang, Greenberger, Chen, Heckhausen, & Farruggia, 2010). However there exist other constructs that overlap in meaning with admiration and thus can inform predictions about it, including prestige (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001), heroes (White & Brien, 1999), idols (Raviv, Bar-Tal, Raviv & Ben-Horin, 1996), superstars (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997), role models (Campbell & Wolbrecht, 2008) ‘non-parental very important persons’ (Chang, Greenberger, Chen, Heckhausen, & Farruggia, 2010; Chen, Greenberger, Farruggia, Bush, & Dong, 2003) and significant others (Nartova-Bochaver, 2001).

Algoe and Haidt (2009) theorise that admiration is an ‘other-praising’ emotion elicited by observing and feeling praise for exemplary skilled behaviour in another person, which in turn leads to a desire for proximity to the admired figure. They base their theory on an evolutionary model of prestige, in which prestige is a form of implicit social credit conferred to older individuals who excel in a given domain (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001). Because prestigious persons are emulated and communicated about more frequently than others, they act as a common exemplar for behaviour. This facilitates social learning and group bonding, which in turn provides a selective advantage to the group.

Algoe and Haidt (2009) distinguish admiration from elevation, the former being engendered by skill, and the latter being elicited by morality and virtue. In a series of studies, participants were asked to engage in a variety of admiration-priming and elevation-priming tasks, such as (a) describing a particular event from their past during which they observed someone overcoming adversity through skill or exemplifying virtue, (b) watching videos of individuals showing skill or virtue, (c) keeping a diary of times they observed others showing admirably high skill or being virtuous, and (d) writing a letter to someone about an act for which they felt gratitude or admiration. It was found that admiration-priming generally led to increased motivation to publicise the admired person’s skill and to gain proximity to them, while elevation-priming led to a heightened motivation to be more prosocial and kind to others.

Algoe and Haidt (2009) focused on exemplary levels of skill as the basis of admiration, however other researchers suggest a stronger link between the traits of the admiring person and admired person. For example, Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick (2007) state that for admiration to manifest, in addition to the perception of high skill, feelings of emotional warmth must be felt towards the person. They found that without such warmth, perceived high-level skill can actually lead to envy and resentment. Furthermore, admiration is not only

a function of the attributes of the admired figure, but also of the personality and goals of the observer. Research has also found that whether or not a skilled individual is admired depends on the traits, goals and perceptions of the person who observes them. Those who consider themselves high in integrity are more likely to admire integrity in others (Schlenker, Weigold & Schlenker, 2008). In terms of goals, if a skilled person is perceived performing a task that has relevance to one's *own* goals (e.g. a young person training to be a professional dancer who observes a highly skilled dancer), *and* if their ability level is perceived as attainable in principle, then such a person becomes admired (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997). However, if the outstanding person is perceived as showing an unattainable level of performance and/or a skill that is not relevant to the observer's own goals, they do not act as positive and motivating role models (LeBoeuf, & Estes, 2004; Lockwood, Jordan & Kunda, 2002; Hoffner, Buchanan & Virginia, 2005).

Admiration in relation to gender, age and culture

As well as being a function of evolution and individual traits, we argue that admiration is also related to culture, age and gender. There has been little research on the relationship between admiration and gender, however one study on a related phenomenon – that of *wishful identification* – provides a tentative basis for extrapolating predictions for this study. Wishful identification involves aspiring to be like a specific exemplar person, which is also often the case with admiration. Hoffner and Buchanan (2005) studied wishful identification with TV characters that young adults wanted to be like, and found that females tend to wishfully identify with female characters, and males with male characters. In an earlier study, Hoffner (1996) found this same-gender preference to be stronger for boys, suggesting that it is more socially acceptable for females to emulate boys than vice versa. This gender difference may in turn reflect a cultural phenomenon; the prominence of androcentric values in selecting role models and mentors (Méndez-Morse, 2004). The *kinds*

of values that men and women admire may differ too, for example in matters of moral values, females tend to emphasise care while males emphasise justice Gilligan, 1982; Skoe & Gooden, 1993; Skoe, Pratt, Matthews, & Curror, 1996.

The aforementioned Hoffner and Buchanan (2005) study also provides important data on the age of wishfully identified figures. It was found that male figures were on average 9 years older and female figures were on average 8 years older than the young adult who selected them. Only 5% of wishfully identified characters were younger than the reporting participant. If this generalises to admiration, interpreted through the Algoe and Haidt (2009) evolutionary theory, this preference for older persons may relate to the increased in perceived prestige and maturity that comes with passing into midlife and beyond.

In terms of the relation of admiration to age, we theorise that admiration is disproportionately important during adolescence and emerging adulthood, relative to younger and older age groups. Adolescence and emerging adulthood are the peak periods of personality change (Roberts, Walton & Viechtbauer, 2006), and change is directed towards an ideal. As young people form goals and plans to change their personality traits towards these ideals (Woods, Nofle, Nartova-Bochaver & Robinson, 2013), admired figures who exemplify positive traits, skills and values can act as templates for what a positive change will look like when achieved (Schlenker et al., 2008). Mentors can act as admired figures in the absence of direct family or friends acting in this role (Arnett, 2014; Dondero, 1997).

Admiration and its relation to culture is a topic that has been rarely examined, but related research on the perceived functions of ‘important non-parental adults’ may generalise (Chen et al., 2003; Chang et al., 2010). Chen et al. (2003) asked Chinese and American adolescents to nominate a non-parental adult who had an important role in their life and asked them why they were important. Chinese participants reported learning as being the primary function of their nominated adults, while for American participants, helping with personal

issues was the primary function. Also, Americans rated their important adults as higher in warmth than Chinese. So, while Algie and Haidt's (2009) evolutionary-based theory implies that certain key features and admired attributes should be found across diverse cultures, if the above research generalises to admiration, there are likely to be variations in admired attributes that reflect cultural values.

The present study

The present study looked at admiration in four countries; the UK, Iran, China and Russia. These four were selected for their wide distribution on the cultural value dimension of collectivism - individualism (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov; 2010). According to national ratings published online by the Hofstede Centre¹, individualism ratings are highest in UK followed by Russia then Iran and lowest in China. On the assumption that cultural values are reflected in admired attributes, the UK was expected to show more admired attributes that pertain to individual success, followed by Russia and Iran, and China the least. While there are pertinent differences between the cultures, there are common demographic changes that pertain to young adults that are manifest across all four countries. For example, all four countries have witnessed an increase in average age at first marriage to over 25, and a corresponding increase in first-time parenthood age (Egel & Saleh-Isfahani, 2010; Frejka & Sardon, 2006; Jacka, Kipnis & Sargeson, 2013; Mostaghim & Alpert, 2012; OECD, 2011; Nelson & Chen, 2007; Saleh-Isfahani & Taghvatalab, 2009; Wallop, 2011). These various changes are indicative of the extended pre-committal exploration of emerging adulthood, which may well increase the importance of admired figures as focal points for development through the increasingly unstable years of young adult life. In short, we predicted that there would be *both* systematic similarities *and* cross-cultural differences in admiration themes across the four cultures.

¹ <http://geert-hofstede.com>

Algoe and Haidt (2009) theorised that admiration is a response to perceiving exemplary skill in others, while elevation is elicited by moral virtue. However Schlenker et al. (2008) found that virtuous attributes were most frequently cited as admired. We compared the relative frequency of attributes that refer to skill and virtue respectively to explore which of these findings was supported cross-culturally. In light of these divergent findings in the literature, we elected not to make a prediction about the outcome.

Based on the findings from the wishful identification study by Hoffner and Buchanan (2005), we predicted that within-sex admiration would be more common than opposite-sex admiration in all four countries. Another sex difference that was predicted was based on findings pertaining to gender difference in the importance attached to virtues of care and justice (Skoe, Pratt, Matthews, & Curror, 1996). We predicted that in all cultures, males would admire justice and integrity more often than females, while females would admire care, generativity and empathy more than males.

With regards to participant age, we proposed that adults in midlife would be more likely to be nominated than those in early adulthood or later life. This was based on the notion that prestige confers admiration (Henrich & Gill-White, 2001), and that midlife is, for most people, the peak of financial and productive prestige of the lifespan (Robinson, 2012). Older adults likely lack the status of adults in midlife (Robinson & Stell, 2015), and thus a u-shape relationship between age and admiration is probable, with the highest frequency of admired figures being midlifers and smaller numbers of younger and older adults.

Method

Participants

525 participants completed the study. The age range was 18-28 for all four countries. Participants in all countries were required to have lived in the country of residence since the age of 10 or earlier. Recent immigrants were thus excluded so that that findings presented

were reflective of the country's culture rather than a different country of origin. The sample numbers for each country, gender, mean age and age range are shown in Table 1, along with the percentages of students in the sample.

Students were recruited through advertisements and announcements at contributing universities, all of which were based mainly in large urban areas. In Russia, recruitment was conducted in Moscow, and contributing students were from Moscow State University of Psychology and Education. In China, recruitment was conducted in Beijing, with students being from Beijing Normal University. In the UK, recruitment was conducted in London, with students being from the University of Greenwich. In Iran, recruitment was conducted predominantly in Tehran and Yazd, with students from the University of Tehran and Yazd University. Students recruited non-student participants by recommending the study to friends in their country. No course credit was received by participating students, and participation was anonymous and voluntary in all countries.

[Insert Table 1]

Materials

Admired Older Adult (AOA) Vignette

An open-ended vignette was selected as the method to describe the admired figure. This was selected instead of a forced-choice or rating scale approach, in order to avoid restricting the ways participants could respond. This was considered optimal given the wide potential variety of possible response phrases and words across the different cultures. It was selected over more in-depth qualitative approaches as it could be collected anonymously, online and from a relatively large sample within an acceptable time frame for the funded study.

Participants were asked to nominate a person who they admire and who is older than them, and write for five minutes in their native language about this person. The instructions in English were as follows:

“Here we would like you to write a brief description of an adult who is older than you, and who you particularly admire. Ideally the person should be someone known personally to you such as a parent, grandparent, friend, work colleague or teacher, but if you can’t think of someone you know who is appropriate, you can choose a famous or historical person to describe. First, please think for 30 seconds about which person you would like to nominate. Once you have decided on the person, please answer the following questions. Approximately how old is this person? (if you are not sure, give your best estimate)

Are they male or female? (Male / Female)

How do you know this person? (*Answer options: mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, brother, sister, other relative, friend-male, friend-female, teacher or lecturer, work colleague or boss, famous person – political, famous person – religious, famous person – film or TV, other*).

In a paragraph, please describe what it is about this person that you admire. Please refer to any relevant characteristics, achievement, values or beliefs that you admire and like, and say why you do. Please take about 4 to 5 minutes to do this, and write as much as you can in that time.

Procedure

English versions of the questionnaires and instructions were translated into Farsi, Chinese and Russian by qualified translators, and the translations were reviewed and checked by bilingual academics before being programmed into the online survey tool. Participants completed questionnaires online in their native language. Following completion of data collection, open-ended written responses from Iran, China and Russia were translated into English by bilingual individuals, and then checked and edited by a professional proof reader and English academic, prior to commencing analysis.

Coding of open-ended AOA vignette data

To develop a list of codes for the purposes of thematic analysis, a deductive-inductive hybrid process was used. Firstly, categories from Schlenker et al.’s (2008) study of admired heroes was used as an initial deductive framework (*Commitment to Principles; Honesty; Spirituality; Impartiality; Beneficence; Determination; Intellectual skill; Social skill; Power; Positive attitude; Forgiveness; Materialistic success; Other*). We used these themes as a starting point for the development of a scheme, and then had two researchers analyse 60 cases (15 randomly selected from each countries) to develop these themes with the aim of devising

a revised set that encompassed as much as possible of the material within the vignettes. Having created their theme lists, the two researchers then met, compared theme lists and verbally developed an integrated final scheme. Based on these processes, we devised a set of 12 themes, 10 of which were categorised into 3 meta-themes of *Skill*, *Virtue* and *Other*. All themes and meta-themes are shown in Table 2.

[Insert Table 2]

Themes were attached to sentences within a vignette, thus multiple themes could be attributed to each vignette. The allocation of a theme inferred that some concept within the theme from the example terms in Table 2 or semantically equivalent terms was present in the sentence. Each theme was coded for each participant using a binary system: 0 if not present and 1 if it appeared once or more within a vignette. The following are two example vignettes with coded themes shown in brackets after each sentence:

“Inclusive and generous [Care and generativity]. She can regard things with equanimity [Wisdom and Humility]. She likes to share different aspects of her experience rather than forcing me to accept her value [Wisdom and Humility]. I need to depend on her because I lack these qualities [no code]. She has the tenacity that I do not have [Determination and Drive]. She has her own principles and bottom life [Justice and Integrity].” (CHINESE PARTICIPANT)

“My father-in-law is a very well-travelled and intelligent man and I admire this in him [Intellect and Education]. He perseveres in all he does [Determination and Drive]. He is a brave man who has led an extraordinary life, it amazes me what he has been through and come through [Resilience and Positivity]. He is a caring father and a wonderful grandfather [Care and Generativity].” (UK PARTICIPANT)

The average number of themes per participant was 3.75 across the whole sample, for the UK 3.64, for Iran 3.56, for China 3.72 and for Russia 4.16.

Having developed the final and agreed set of themes, to test for inter-rater reliability two researchers independently coded responses from 60 randomly selected participants across

all 12 themes. At the first attempt, the researchers showed an inter-rater reliability of 84% (using the Miles and Huberman (1994) calculation: number of agreements divided by total agreements plus disagreements). Following revisions of the coding scheme following this first reliability test, reliability was assessed again, and it had increased to 91%.

Results

Due to the number of significance tests run for the various subsequent analyses, the cut-off for significance was set at $p < 0.01$ rather than $p < 0.05$, to counteract the possibility of Type 1 error. While this is not as stringent as a standard Bonferroni correction, the latter is widely conceived to be problematically conservative, particularly for exploratory research such as the current study (Perneger, 1998), thus we concluded that $p < 0.01$ was satisfactory for our purposes; stringent but not overly so.

Age of nominee

The mean age for admired figures was computed for all four countries. For the UK and Iran, the mean was 47, for Russia it was 45 and for China it was 48. For male participants, the average age was 48, and for female participants it was 47. One-Way ANOVAs found no significant difference in age between countries or sexes.

It was predicted that adults in midlife would be more likely to be nominated as admired than individuals in early adulthood or later life. To facilitate this analysis, the age of the admired nominee was categorised into three groups: 39 or under, 40-59 and 60+. The percentages of nominees for each country who were in these three age groups are shown in Figure 1. In all four countries, the midlife category was the most prevalent. For each country, a Chi Square test and Phi (ϕ) effect size were calculated on raw frequency scores, to ascertain whether the difference between age group of admired figure was significant. In support of the prediction that adults in midlife would be disproportionately nominated as admired figures, the between age-group difference for each country was found to be highly significant. UK:

($\chi^2 = 24.8$, $\phi = .24$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.001$); Iran ($\chi^2 = 26.2$, $\phi = .26$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.001$); China ($\chi^2 = 79.7$, $\phi = .34$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.001$); Russia ($\chi^2 = 14.5$, $\phi = .17$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.001$).

[Insert Figure 1]

Sex of nominee

It was predicted that within-sex admiration would be more common than opposite-sex admiration for both males and females in all four countries, and therefore that there would be no association between country and frequencies of same-sex / other-sex nominees. The sex of admired figures, crossed by sex of the participant, is shown in Table 3. Columns 1 and 4 show the percentage of within-sex admired figures for males and females, and columns 2 and 3 show opposite-sex nominations.

We conducted two 4x2 Chi Square tests for female participants and male participants respectively (4 rows = countries, 2 columns = within-sex / opposite sex), and predicted a null result for each one. For male participants in all four countries, male admired figures were in the clear majority, ranging from 91% (Iran) to 71% (UK), and the Chi Square test for the male group was non-significant as predicted, showing the consistency of this pattern across males in all four countries. For female participants, female admired figures were in the majority in the UK (72%) and marginally in Russia (53%), however male admired figures were in the majority for female participants in Iran (58%) and China (63%). A 4x2 Chi Square test on the female data showed a significant association between country and same-sex / other-sex nominee ($\chi^2 = 25.1$, $\phi = .27$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.0001$), contrary to our prediction. These findings are given an interpretation in the discussion section.

[Insert Table 3]

Thematically coded attributes of admired older adults

Themes by country

Table 4 shows the within-country percentage prevalence of the 12 admired attribute themes for each country and total prevalence across countries. Themes are ordered in sequence in the table from the highest total prevalence to the least, for clarity of visual reference. Care and Generativity emerged as the most prevalent theme across all four countries, ranging in prevalence from 45.7% (Iran) to 60.4% (Russia). Its combined total prevalence rate of 54.5% for the whole sample shows that it featured in over half of all admired figure vignettes. Following Care and Generativity, the four most prevalent attributes were, in order, Resilience and Positivity, Determination and Drive, Success and Status and Intellect and Education.

For each theme, 4x2 Chi Square tests were run, to explore whether theme prevalence across the four countries was significantly different (4 rows = 4 countries, 2 columns = theme / no theme. Raw scores associated with the percentages in Table 4 were entered into the test cells. Of the 12 lower-order themes, 5 showed cross-country significance. Three showed notably higher values in Russia that produced the cross-national differences: Autonomy and Assertiveness ($\chi^2 = 13.2$, $\phi = .16$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.01$); Intellect and Education ($\chi^2 = 12.1$, $\phi = .15$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.01$); *Physical Health and Attractiveness* ($\chi^2 = 8.9$, $\phi = .13$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.05$). *Limitations and Difficulties* ($\chi^2 = 42.9$, $\phi = .29$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.001$) also showed significance due to the higher prevalence in China, and finally *Religion and Spirituality* was significantly different across countries, mainly due to the higher values in Iran ($\chi^2 = 30.8$, $\phi = .24$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.001$). These cross-national thematic differences are theoretically interpreted in the discussion section.

[Insert Table 4]

Prevalence of lower-order admired attributes was compared across males and females. As Figure 3 shows, theme prevalence across the two sexes shows a markedly similar profile. It was predicted that care and empathy would be higher in females, and justice would be higher

in males; these a-priori constructs manifested in the coding scheme as *Care and Generativity*, *Empathy and Advice-giving*, and *Justice and integrity*. The only significant difference across all 12 themes was found for *Care and Generativity*, which was, as predicted, more prevalent in female than male participants ($\chi^2 = 10.3$, $\phi = df = 3$, $p=0.001$). Neither *Justice and Integrity* nor *Empathy and Advice-Giving* were significantly different across sexes.

[Insert Figure 2]

Meta-themes

The meta-themes, *Virtue* and *Skill* (see Table 2), were compared across genders. As predicted, female participants referred to *Virtue* attributes more often than male participants did ($t(523)=-3.25$, $p=0.001$). There was no difference between the genders shown for *Skill* attributes. There were no significant cross-country differences in *Virtue* or *Skill* themes.

Discussion

Admiration in young adults from the four different countries showed, as predicted, both cross-cultural commonalities and culture-specific features. In terms of common features, age showed a cross-culturally similar profile: The mean age of admired persons in all countries was between 45 and 48, and midlife was the life stage of the majority of admired figures in all countries. Thematic commonalities were also shown: *Care and Generativity* was the most prevalent theme in all four countries, while *Resilience and Positivity* and *Drive and Determination* were the second and third most frequent respectively in three of the four countries (UK, Iran, China), and were the fourth and fifth most prevalent themes for Russia.

The similarity across the countries of age mean fits with the evolutionary theory of admiration (Algoe & Haidt, 2009), which assumes admired figures are selected for their prestige and social productivity. Adults in the 40-59 age range of midlife are typically in the peak period of their career influence and income, and thus are most likely to be viewed as

prestigious by others. The proportion of adults over 60 is also comparable across countries; all countries had between 14% and 16% of admired figures in this category. However the midlife period appears to be a clear peak of the lifespan for admired figures in the minds of young adults. The second key cross-cultural commonality is found in the themes themselves: Despite the variability of the type of person nominated across cultures, the most frequently cited attribute for all countries is *Care and Generativity*. This supports the study of Schlenker, et al. (2008), which found the most common admiration attribute in their scheme was ‘Beneficence’ – a theme that has conceptual parallels with the *Care and Generativity* theme in the present study. The most common themes after care are all attributes classified within the Skill meta-theme, such as *Resilience and Positivity*, *Drive and Determination*, *Success and Status* and *Intellect and Education*. Thus in all four countries admiration is conceived across the sample as a combination of virtue and skill. From this we conclude that while Algoe and Haidt’s (2009) admiration/elevation distinction may be useful in experimental contexts, it lacks validity in framing cross-cultural understandings of admiration.

With regards to the sex of admired figures, it was predicted that within-sex admiration would be more common across all four countries than opposite-sex admiration, following the findings of Hoffner and Buchanan (2005) in relation to wishful identification. However we found that in Iran and China both male and female participants tended to nominate male admiration figures. This does however reflect previous findings suggesting a stronger same-gender basis for wishful identification in men, and in relation to cultural differences, may reflect a stronger androcentrism within Iran and China that places more prestige on males than females (e.g. CEDAW, 2014). This interpretation would support the interaction of cultural values and admired persons.

Four themes differed significantly in prevalence across cultures, all of which potentially reflect differences in cultural values. Firstly, *Autonomy and Assertiveness* was most frequent in Russia, followed by the UK, then Iran and then China. This may reflect the importance placed on self-determination in Russia and the UK, both of which have higher ratings of cultural individualism compared with Iran and China. *Intellect and Education* was highest in Russia, followed by China, then Iran and then the UK. While all cultures rate this theme fairly highly, we suspect that the difference between the countries may reflect the proportion of non-family admired figures such as teachers/lecturers and work colleagues, who are more likely to be admired for their intellect than mothers and fathers. An interesting finding was the disproportionately higher number of *Limitations and Difficulties* mentioned by China in comparison with the other three countries. We interpret this as a reflection of the dialectical ying-yang philosophy of China, which stipulates that all extremes are undesirable, even seemingly good ones, and that all optimal things show a balance between two polarities, so an admirable person's good qualities should be balanced out by some negative qualities too (Xinyan, 2013). Finally, *Religion and Spirituality* was mentioned in Iran more than the other countries. This reflects the fact that in Iran religion is a more explicit component of public life than in the other three countries, and that religious attributes are more immediately integrated within admired schemas. In contrast, China barely mentions religion at all, which reflects the reticence of referring to religion in public in China.

The findings from this study reflect the values of emerging adults in four different countries. Despite the differences of their cultural context and the prevalence of celebrity culture that stokes the perceived importance of fame and money, the most admired quality *in all four countries* was the capacity to care for others, and to be generative in giving one's time and resources to a positive social cause. This is a salient fact to consider, in the light of media-led stereotypes about self-centred youths, the rise in self-reported narcissism in this

age group (Twenge & Campbell, 2009) and the ‘dark side’ of emerging adulthood (Smith, Christoffersen, Davidson, & Snell Herzog, 2011). It suggests that views about the self-centredness and indulgent nature of young adults may not be the whole story, for the virtue of care is still considered the most desirable and admirable quality in older persons. Fame and fortune barely feature as admired qualities in the study, however that may have differed if we asked participants to name admired celebrities.

Implications of findings

A number of intervention schemes aimed at helping adolescents and emerging adults employ mentors. Admiration is vital in the mentoring process, as it creates an enduring respectful bond between mentee and mentor. Conversely if a mentor is not admired, then they are unlikely to be emulated or considered as a source of mature information. It is therefore of benefit to mentoring programmes to better understand the nature of admiration. For example, The Prince’s Trust (founded by Prince Charles in the UK) is a charity that employs a ‘Progression Mentor’ scheme, in which older adults mentor young adults who are considered at risk of unemployment, for 4-6 hours per month. This study suggests that resilience, a capacity for generous care, and determination are the most widely admired attributes, and this could be built into the structure of the mentoring programme to focus on ways of cultivating these qualities. Furthermore, the process of matching mentors and mentees in this scheme or other similar schemes could be enhanced if the young person were asked to write an admired older adult vignette similar to that used in the current study, which could be coded to list admired attributes, and then fitted to available mentors’ own perceived positive attributes.

Limitations and future directions

The sample used in the present study was aimed at being comparable across countries. We did this by sampling in urban areas in all four countries and having a majority student sample, most of which were psychology students. While this enhanced comparability of the

thematic findings, the representativeness of the sample is open to question. If we had sampled in rural areas or in lower socio-economic groups within the four societies, the findings may have differed. Further research will be able to confirm this.

The use of open-ended responses to study admiration has the benefit of gaining data that is directly crafted by the participant, rather than forced into a pre-existing structure that may have cultural bias. However it has inherent limitations too – the outcome of the coding process is nominal data, analysed by non-parametric tests. A corresponding line of research for the future that would address this issue would be using the thematic framework to create a psychometric questionnaire for rating admired adults – this would permit less labour-intensive research than the present study, would open up new avenues of investigation, and would also allow the use of parametric significance tests. Further useful next steps with such an instrument would be to compare young adults with other age groups such as adolescents and midlife adults, both within and across cultures, to explore generational differences while exploring the possibility of commonalities across all age groups and across countries. The relationship of admiration to positive outcomes could then be compared across cohort and culture to explore whether it predicts wellbeing and more.

The instructions that were given to participants with regards to writing their vignette mentioned that the “the person should be someone known personally to you such as a parent, grandparent, friend, work colleague or teacher”. This instruction may have biased responses towards these particular person categories, and, on reflection, instructions without any directional prompts would be needed, to explore whether this alters the thematic content and person-type prevalence.

In terms of the coding scheme, there is room for refinement and improvement in the future, for example the distinction between virtue and skill at the level of higher-order theme is not clear-cut (for example ‘hard-working’ could be seen as both virtue and/or skill), and

adding a third category of *Trait* may help to add clarity, as some of the themes categorised as Skill were arguably closer to traits, such as assertiveness, and experiences, such as education. Furthermore, the question of what is perceived as a virtue or a skill may be a cross-cultural variable.

The reliance of this study on translation, and the inevitability of imperfect term-translation across languages, adds a potential limitation to the study. Translation was firstly required for the vignette instructions into Russian, Farsi and Chinese, and secondly for translating participant responses in these languages back into English. Thematic differences found between countries could potentially be a product of subtle changes in the meanings of translated words, including the word for admiration. In Chinese, admiration can be translated in two words – the first word is "钦佩", which is pronounced "qin pei". Its meaning is "a feeling of strong respect to some people regarding to their personalities or performance". The second word is "崇拜", which phonetically in English is "chong bai". It means "like, respect and would like to learn from someone", but can also mean "worship". Chong bai was used for the study, given the agreed closer meaning to admiration as operationalized for this study, but either would have been acceptable. In Farsi, there is a direct translation of admiration - تحسین, pronounced "tahseen", which meant a straightforward translation of that term for the Iranian sample. In Russian, it was less straightforward; admiration was translated using two terms; firstly восхищение, (vaskhishenye) meaning admiration and emotional connection, and secondly уважение (uvajeniye), which means respect. The meaning of admiration in the Russian questionnaire was combined from two terms. It is possible that the slight variation in meanings for the term admiration (and other terms) may have affected the chosen thematic attributes of the admired figures across the four samples. However the fact that there is much thematic consistency across countries suggests that the translations were satisfactory and coherent.

In conclusion we have furthered the understanding of admiration as a social psychological emotion and have developed a reliable scheme for coding its phenotypic manifestations across cultures. We believe that this is an important vein of research to continue, for admiration highlights a commonality amongst emerging adults in the four countries studied here, showing that despite cultural differences there are values that unite this cohort together. Further research may show that certain admired qualities are indeed psychological universals to be found across all cultures.

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Table 1. Participant N, female N, male N, mean age, % students for four countries

| | China | Iran | Russia | UK |
|------------|-------|------|--------|------|
| Total N | 152 | 127 | 111 | 135 |
| Female | 74 | 93 | 80 | 87 |
| Male | 78 | 34 | 31 | 48 |
| Mean age | 23.1 | 23.1 | 21.2 | 21.4 |
| % Students | 78% | 76% | 77% | 85% |

Table 2 – Two super-ordinate themes, ten codes and example terms categorised into themes

| Meta-theme | Theme (abbreviation in brackets) | Example terms categorised into theme |
|-------------------|---|---|
| Virtue | Justice and integrity (justice) | Principled, honest, impartial, trustworthy, reliable, high integrity |
| | Wisdom and humility (wisdom) | Wise, forgiving, humble, patient, seeing both sides of a situation, open-minded |
| | Religion and spirituality (religion) | Spiritual, religious, follows religion, close to God, follows scripture |
| | Care and generativity (care) | Supportive, caring, giving, generous, kind, self-sacrifice |
| | Empathy and advice-giving (empathy) | Empathy, sympathy, giving advice, understanding of others |
| Skill | Intellect and education (intellect) | Smart, intelligent, highly educated, knowledgeable, scientific |
| | Determination and drive (drive) | Conscientious, goal directed, focused, achievement-focused |
| | Resilience and positivity (resilience) | Resilient, calm, balanced, positive, sociable, confident, cheerful |
| | Autonomy and assertiveness (autonomy) | in control, autonomous, assertive, authentic, original, leader |
| | Success and status (success) | Material wealth, status, success in work, respected |
| Other | Physical attractiveness and health | Attractive, good looking, good dress sense, physically healthy |
| | Limitations and difficulties | Terms implying any deficiency or lack of the above attributes |

Figure 1: Distribution of age of admired figures by early adult (under 40), midlife (40 – 59) or older adulthood (60+) – percentages are within-country percentages

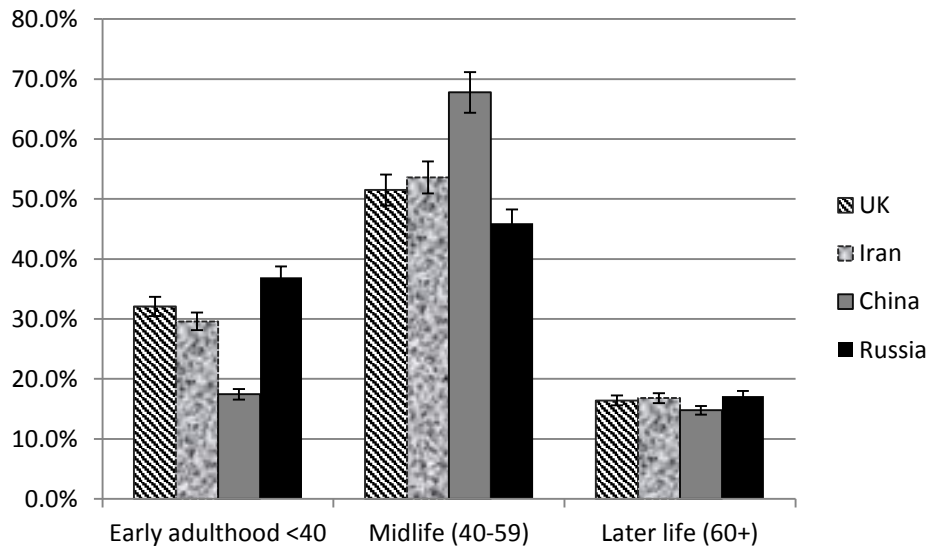


Table 3. Frequencies and percentages of male and female participants nominating male and female admired figures across all four countries

| | Female participant | | Male participant | |
|--------|---------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| | male nominee | female nominee | male nominee | female nominee |
| UK | 24 (27.6%) | 63 (72.4%) | 34 (70.8%) | 14 (29.2%) |
| Iran | 54 (58.1%) | 39 (41.9%) | 31 (91.2%) | 3 (8.8%) |
| China | 49 (62.8%) | 29 (37.2%) | 62 (83.8%) | 12 (16.2%) |
| Russia | 38 (47.5%) | 42 (52.5%) | 24 (77.4%) | 7 (22.6%) |

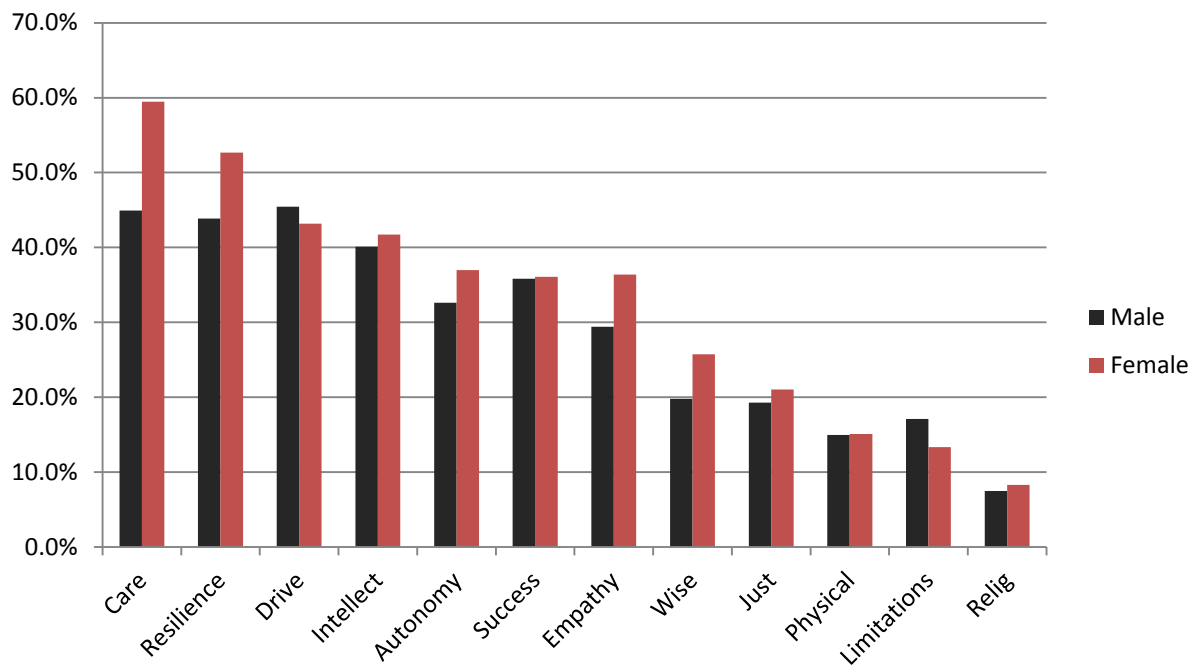
Note: Percentages are within country and sex

Table 4. Percentage prevalence (%) of themes within countries and for total sample (ordered from most to least total prevalence)

| | UK | Iran | China | Russia | Total prevalence |
|------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|--------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| Care and generativity (V) | 60.0 | 45.7 | 52.0 | 60.4 | 54.5 |
| Resilience and positivity (S) | 54.8 | 44.9 | 51.3 | 45.9 | 49.2 |
| Drive and determination (S) | 43.0 | 39.4 | 47.4 | 45.9 | 43.9 |
| Intellect and education (S) | 32.6 | 38.6 | 41.4 | 54.1 | 41.7 |
| Autonomy and assertiveness (S) | 38.5 | 30.7 | 27.6 | 47.7 | 36.2 |
| Success and status (S) | 34.1 | 40.2 | 34.9 | 35.1 | 36.1 |
| Empathy and advice-giving (V) | 37.8 | 33.1 | 30.3 | 35.1 | 34.1 |
| Wisdom and humility (V) | 20.0 | 24.4 | 23.0 | 27.90 | 23.8 |
| Justice and integrity (V) | 16.3 | 23.6 | 16.4 | 27.0 | 20.8 |
| Limitations and Difficulties | 10.4 | 5.5 | 30.3 | 9.0 | 13.8 |
| Physical health and attractiveness | 8.9 | 14.2 | 15.8 | 22.5 | 15.3 |
| Religion and spirituality (V) | 7.4 | 18.9 | 1.3 | 5.4 | 8.3 |

V = virtue attributes. S = skill attributes

Figure 2. Lower-order theme prevalence by gender



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