

Adolescents' Application of the Virtues Across Five Cultural Contexts

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Little is known about adolescent applications of the virtues such as honesty, responsibility and courage across different cultural contexts. Using the Adolescent Intermediate Concepts Measure we analyze samples of adolescents (ages 12 to 20; $N = 9,112$) from 5 contexts: North Macedonia, Mexico, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Across samples, adolescents provide evidence of developmental growth in the ability to apply virtue concepts as assessed by responses to dilemma-based situations. Within these trends, participants found it easier to identify action choices that reflect the virtue concepts as compared to justifications for possible actions. Additionally, participants were better able to identify appropriate applications of the virtues as compared to inappropriate ones. Gender differences favoring females were noted across samples. Overall, similarities across settings were more striking than differences suggesting that there is value in viewing the virtues as a normative component of character development across the adolescent years.

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One may also observe in one's travels to distant countries the feelings of recognition and affiliation that link every human being to every other human being. (p. 1155a21-2; Aristotle, 1925)

—Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

Virtues have been used by philosophers and social scientists to explain a range of human characteristics, including the foundations of human flourishing, the elements of character, and the targets of moral education (Seligman, 2011). To so-called virtue theorists the virtues are “. . . understood as settled states of character, concerned with praiseworthy conduct in significant and distinguishable

spheres of human life” (Kristjánsson, 2015, p. 14). Perspectives such as these assume at least some similarity across cultures and contexts for the identification and understanding of virtue. Whether this similarity is due to historical and cultural interactions among Western, Eastern, and Asian cultures and ethical texts, the expansion of Western educational practices, or something fundamentally universal about what constitutes human flourishing, there is now growing support for viewing at least some of the virtues as having broad cross-cultural relevance and recognition (e.g., McGrath, 2014; Niemiec, 2013).

Although some virtues may be recognized and endorsed in a variety of cultural settings, it is less clear if the reflective application of the virtues to specific social problems also display common elements. It may be that individuals in various contexts have similar understanding of the virtues and yet have a setting-specific interpretation about how a virtue is best applied in real-life situations. To address this possibility, we focus on the application of the virtues and assess whether moral dilemmas identified by adolescents in the United States as relevant and realistic, are evaluated in similar ways within four additional, and distinct, cultural settings: The United Kingdom, North Macedonia (Macedonia), Mexico, and Taiwan. Although hardly an inclusive listing of cultural settings, these samples do provide information about virtue applications from cultures that differ in their social organization along a broad individualistic and collectivist dimension (e.g., Hofstede, 2001). In these broad-based conceptions of cultural

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