STUDY OF ADOLESCENTS' HEROES IN FIVE COUNTRIES

Introduction

The study of adolescents' ideals, heroes, and role models has a long history. Since the pioneer studies conducted by Darrah in 1898, researchers have studied the models and ideals of adolescents in a variety of ways. The first studies show that adolescents admired historical and literary figures (Darrah, 1898; Chambers, 1903). Those heroes were replaced throughout the past century by other popular figures such as athletes and actors as they became more widely known thanks to popular media. In the second half of the century, researchers found that some adolescents started to reject the notion of having a hero and expressed their desire to be themselves. This type of response was named the "myself" choice by Simmons and Wade (1984), and it seemed to continue to be a preferential response throughout the rest of the century. One of the aims of our study is to explore if XXI century adolescents, raised in a historical time in which technology is developing at a vertiginous pace and in which different cultures have achieved unprecedented levels of interconnectedness, continue to propose themselves as ideals and if this preference is related to higher levels of self-esteem. We also aim to explore who the adults that adolescents admire are, as well as whom they reject or would never chose to be.

The adolescents' ideals

During the first half of the past century, the "myself choice" was not frequent and did not receive much attention from researchers (Hill, 1930; Havighurst, Robertson, and Dorr, 1946; Havighurst and Taba, 1949). Teigen et al. (2000) noted that, despite the diversity of populations studied, the results showed surprisingly similar patterns in regards to age and gender differences. Younger

children tended to choose ideals among personally known people, while public figures selected more public figures. A significant percentage of girls chose ideals from the opposite sex, something that did not occur with boys.

A drastic change occurred in the sixties, when the "myself" response became the most popular choice in the studies conducted by Eppel and Eppel (1966) and Bull (1969). This last author interpreted the increase in this type of response by young people in a positive light, and he even argued that it was an indication of psychological health, self-awareness, and personal autonomy. Over a decade later, Simmons and Wade (1984) found that almost 20% of their sample chose to be themselves, and these researchers also thought that this type of response was an indication of the positive development of adolescents. They suggested that the "myself" choice shows little or no discrepancy between the actual self and the ideal self and this would be an indication of high self-esteem

A different interpretation of the significance of the myself choice was proposed by Bromnick and Swallow (1999). These researchers replicated the findings of Simmons and Wade (1984) regarding the "myself" response and found an increase in the percentage of students who made this choice. These authors speculated that their results might reflect an historical trend towards greater value placed on the self in young people. Furthermore, they also suggested that the "myself" choice could be seen as a consequence of the "value gap". This gap would be the result of the loss of value bases, which are understood as moral entities that are right and good on their own, without further justification (Baumeister and Muraven, 1996). One of the ways in which culture has responded to the "value gap", according to Baumeister (1991), has been to elevate the self into a major value base. This type of response might be especially important in adolescence

because it is likely that the need to see the self as valuable is particularly relevant in a time of identity development (Baumeister and Muraven, 1996).

A later study conducted by Teigen, Norman, Bjorkheim, and Helland (2000) found that the "myself" choice reached 15%, and the response "nobody" (which researchers suggested could have a similar meaning) reached 10%. These responses were popular for both boys and girls. These authors suggested that the increase in these types of responses, as well as its recognition by researchers, might be due to the self-acceptance ideology promoted by humanistic psychology in the 1960s. More recent studies (Gibbons and Stiles, 2004) have proposed that the ideas of the adolescents about their ideal man or woman could reflect, in part, their own future possible selves (Gibbons and Stiles, 2004).

It is important to note that a review of previous research on the topic reveals that a variety of terms have been used to talk about people admired by teenagers, which could lead to some confusion about what is meant by those terms. This can be illustrated by mentioning a few examples. Freedman-Doan and Eccles (1996) used the term "hero" both for personally known adults and for public figures. Biskup and Pfister (1999) chose the term "role model" to talk about heroes, idols, and people from the immediate circle. Anderson and Cavallaro (2002) used the terms "hero" and "role model" interchangeably when talking about people admired and respected by adolescents. Yancey (2002) used the term "role model," which included public figures and personally known people. In the more recent work of Gash and Bajd (2005) and Gash and Domínguez (2009), the chosen term is "hero," which is used both for family members and other people from the immediate circle, as well as for public figures.

Other terms found in the literature are "ideal" or "ideal person," used by Simmons and Wade (1984) instead of "hero" or "role model." According to these authors, questionnaires on which adolescents are asked about the type of person that they would like to be like are commonly known as "ideal person tests." Duck (1990) also used the term "ideal," along with others like "model," "role model," "ideal model," or "ideal self." Bromnick and Swallow (1999) used the terms "ideal" and "ideal self" as a different category than "heroes," while Teigen et al. (2000) used only the term "ideal."

In our study we used the term "ideal person" to refer to the person that adolescents would choose if they were able to be somebody else. We used "rejected person" to refer to the person they would never choose to be, and the term "hero" to talk about the most admired person not known personally. And we used "personally known adult" to refer to people with whom the adolescent had personal contact.

Our research can provide some insight into how the changes of modern society are reflected in teenage preferences by studying the ideals and heroes of adolescents from five different geographical locations around the globe. Another objective of our study is to confirm whether the proposed historical trend toward a greater value placed on the self continues to be reflected in "myself choices" in the beginning of the 21st century, and to test the suggested hypothesis that links "myself choices" with higher self-esteem.

Self-Concept and self-esteem

Self-concept and self-esteem are two closely related constructs. From a general perspective, self-concept is the individual's beliefs about him or herself, while self-esteem refers to the person's self-evaluation (Baumeister, 2005). In this

way, a person's self-concept is composed of multiple mental schemes based on roles (e. g., student), hobbies (e. g. practicing sports), or expectations about the future (e. g., desire to become a pianist) that provide a global understanding of the individual and of several spheres of his or her daily life (e.g., Sáez, 2013). In the literature on self-concept we can find different theoretical approaches such as the self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987), the regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1998) or the possible selves approach (Markus and Nurius, 1986) that attempt to explain the underlying processes in self-concept formation and modification. Specifically, Markus and Nurius (1986) coined the term "possible selves" to refer to self-representations about the future. Possible selves consist of what the individual hopes to become and also what he fears he might become. According to these authors, many of these possible selves are the direct result of previous social comparisons with other relevant people. In particular, they argue that individuals are free to create any variety of possible selves, yet the pool of possible selves derives from the categories made salient by the individual's particular socio-cultural and historical context and from models, images, and symbols provided by the media and by the individual's immediate social experiences.

On the other hand, self-esteem refers to the individual's evaluation of everything included in the self-concept (e.g., Steinberg, 1999). Gender differences in adolescent self-esteem have been reported in the literature and reveal that boys have higher self-esteem than girls (Kling, Hyde, Showers, and Buswell, 1999; Robins et al., 2002). Research also shows that people with higher self-esteem are happier, are better able to cope with trauma and stress, and are less vulnerable to mood changes as a consequence of external events (Baumeister et al., 2003; Baumeister, 1998; Hogg and Vaughan, 2002).

Literature on role models has shown links between having a role model and higher self-esteem, along with other positive aspects such as better academic scores, fewer behavioral problems at school, higher levels of physical activity and lower levels of early or high-risk sexual activity (Yancey, Siegel, y McDaniel, 2002; Yancey, Grant, Witt, Kravitz-Wirtz, y Mistry, 2011). Furthermore, some factors seem to affect the link between having a role model and the level of self-esteem, such as the perceived similarity. Self-perceived likeness of role model to participant is significantly related to self-esteem, according to the study conducted with adults by Wohlford, Lochman and Barry (2004). Renaud y McConnell (2007) found that those with greater actual-ideal self-discrepancies reported lower self-esteem.

Method

Participants

The sample was comprised of 825 high school students (427 boys and 397 girls). One student did not indicate his or her gender, and his or her responses were included in the analysis except for gender comparisons. Their ages were between 13 and 19 years old (mean age = 15.75; SD = 1.26). They were all students in grades 9-12 in private schools located in five countries: Spain, USA, China (Hong Kong), Qatar, and Malaysia. The main nationalities represented in our sample are the ones corresponding with those countries. The number of students who took the survey in each country and corresponding percentage, regardless of the students' nationality, is as follows: Spain (268 students, 32.5%), United States (170 students, 20.6% of the sample), China (Hong Kong) (134 students, 16.2%), Qatar (143 students, 17.3%), and Malaysia (110 students, 13.3%).

This is the breakdown of students by nationality and the percentage they represent from the total sample: Spanish: 245 (29.7%), American: 172 (20.8%). Two teenagers of the 172 Americans were studying in a country other than the U.S. Chinese (includes China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan): 105 (12.7%). One teenager of the 105 Chinese students was studying in a country other than China. Qatari: 106 (12.8%), Malaysian: 55 (6.7%), other nationalities: 142 (17.2%) representing 44 other nationalities.

In order to perform comparisons among countries, we used the students who were originally from the country in which the survey was conducted. The other 145 students were only used for analysis in which countries were not being compared and therefore their nationality was not relevant.

Ours is a sample of convenience, as is usually the case in this type of cross-cultural research (Gibbons and Stiles, 2004). This means that the sample was selected based on the access that the researcher had to it. However, although we could have had access to other countries, we decided to choose those that represented distinctly different cultures. Our aim was to increase the cultural diversity of the sample. It is interesting to note that even though the countries in our study were not selected based on the proposed dimensions of cultural variability of individualism and collectivism (Hofstede, 1980), they represent good examples of different degrees of these dimensions: the highly individualistic culture of the United States, the collectivistic societies of China, Malaysia, and Qatar, and the case of Spain, which is collectivist compared to European countries but individualist compared to other areas of the world.

Materials

Students were presented with a ten-item questionnaire, three pages long, designed specifically for our study by combining items used in previous research and adding new ones and a self-esteem scale. On the first page, students were asked to provide personal information (age, gender, nationality), and after that the first two items were presented. The first item inquired about whom the adolescents would choose to be if they could be somebody else. The wording of this item was the adaptation made by Bromnick and Swallow (1999) from the earlier work of Simmons and Wade (1984) and was designed to allow participants to express freely who their ideal person was ("If you were able to be somebody else, who would you choose?").

The second item inquired about the least ideal person or rejected person by asking: "Who would you never choose to be?"

On the second page students were asked about the adult known personally that they admired the most and the three things they admired about him or her, and about the most admired adult not known personally but who is famous, and the three things they admired about him or her. These items used the same wording as Freedman-Doan and Eccles (1996), which was also used by Bromnick and Swallow (1999).

The last page of the questionnaire was devoted to the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965).

The questionnaire was applied in Spanish in Spain, and it was applied in English in the other countries, since that was the language of instruction in the schools where the data was collected.

Students were informed that the questionnaire was part of a research project on adolescence and assured of the anonymity of their answers.

Categories for the analysis and coding

The categories were determined based on the previous work of Bromnick and Swallow (1999). These authors determined their categories based on the earlier work of Simmons and Wade (1984) and Freedman-Doan and Eccles (1996). Given that our sample was older than those used by the aforementioned authors, it was necessary to add some categories to allocate more mature responses and to enrich the interpretation of the results. The use of such categories is also found in earlier studies (Campbell, 1962, Duck, 1990, Teigen et al, 2000). Specifically, we had to add the following categories for the ideal self question: description, life and occupational aspirations, socially or historically relevant people. For the hero question, we had to add the category of socially or historically relevant people.

Two raters coded the responses. Extensive work was done in advance in content analysis and in order to develop agreement on coding. An inter-rater reliability test was performed on a random sample of 15% of the surveys and the concordance rate found was 86%.

Results

Adolescents' Choice of Ideal Person

The first item on the questionnaire asked, "If you were able to choose to be somebody else, who would you choose?" The responses were categorized into "myself" choices, descriptions, occupational aspirations, family and friends, athletes, actors and TV entertainers, singers, and socially or historically relevant people. "Myself" choices refer to those responses in which the adolescent rejects

the idea of being somebody else or expresses his or her desire to be himself or herself. "Descriptions" are responses in which no specific person is named but instead a composite of desirable traits is described (e.g.: "a person who is confident and smart"). "Life and occupational aspirations" refers to another category in which no specific person is named and instead the student mentions an occupation, profession, or situation that he or she would like to have (e.g.: "I would want to be a teacher" or "a millionaire"). Table 1 shows the frequency of responses. The categories of "family and friends", "athletes", "actors and TV entertainers", "singers", and "socially or historically relevant people" all refer to specific people named by students. If a teenager said, "I would like to be a basketball player", that response was included in the "life and occupational aspirations" category, but if the choice was "I would like to be Michael Jordan", the response was included in the "athletes" category because it mentioned a specific person.

These categories were further collapsed to choosing to be yourself, naming a specific person, or describing an abstract ideal person or situation. The most frequent response was the "myself" choice (34.2%), followed by a named person (29.5%), and a description of an abstract ideal person or life and occupational aspirations (28.7%) without naming a specific person. This means that 62.9% of adolescents do not mention a specific person when asked about their ideal person.

Since almost a third of the adolescents (29.5%) chose a specific person as their ideal, it is interesting to look into these responses in greater detail. One differentiation that can be made is between personally known people and famous people. There were more adolescents who chose famous people (19.8%) over personally known people like relatives, friends, or acquaintances (9.7%). As can be seen in Table 1, the percentages of famous people chosen were as

follows: athletes (7.4%), socially or historically relevant people (6.2%), actors, actresses, TV entertainers (4.5%), singers or musicians (1.7%). Lastly, 6.8% of the responses did not fit any of the previous categories and were included in a miscellaneous category (e.g.: "I would choose to be God", or "a fish"). Only 0.8% of adolescents didn't answer or said that they didn't know what to answer.

Table 1.

Frecuency of responses to the ideal person question

	Frequency	Percentage
Myself	282	34,2
Description	160	19,4
Family / Friends	80	9,7
Profession / Occupation	77	9,3
Sports	61	7,4
Social relevance	51	6,2
Movies / TV	37	4,5
Music	14	1,7
Blank / Don't know	7	,8
Others	56	6,8
Total	825	100,0

Gender Comparisons

Regarding the gender of the ideal person, it was masculine in 71.2% of the 264 responses in which it was possible to determine the sex, and was feminine in the other 28.8%. Results showed that adolescents were more likely to choose same-

sex ideal persons ($\chi2$ (1, N = 264) = 149.2; $p < .001$). There were more girls than boys who chose ideals from the opposite gender. Only 4 boys chose a woman as their ideal while 27 girls chose a man.

There were no statistically significant differences when comparing the gender of the ideal person by nationality of the student, but Spanish adolescents seemed to choose men less frequently than expected given the distribution of responses across the sample.

There were statistically significant differences in ideal person choice by gender ($\chi2$ (2, N = 684) = 33.01; $p < .001$). For this analysis, responses for the ideal person were categorized into three more inclusive categories (Myself, Description/Occupation, Named person). 44.3% of boys chose a named person, 39.9% chose to be themselves, and 15.7% chose a description or occupation. The most frequent response for girls was the "Myself" choice (42.5%), followed by descriptions or occupations (31.1%), and named person (26.4%).

Comparisons by Nationalities

Because the adolescents in the sample were surveyed in different countries, it was possible to differentiate between students who attended school in their home country and those who were international students. Accordingly, comparisons by nationality were examined across these groups. The comparisons of ideal person choice by nationality showed that there were statistically significant differences ($\chi2$ (28, N = 825) = 109.20; $p < .001$) based on students' country of origin. Spanish teenagers choose to be themselves or a description more frequently than expected, and choose another person less frequently than expected. Teenagers from the U.S. choose family and friends, athletes, music stars,

actors and entertainers more often than expected, while they chose to be themselves, a description or a socially relevant person less often than expected. Chinese teenagers chose socially relevant people more often than expected, and all the other options less often than expected. Adolescents from Qatar chose family, friends and socially relevant people more frequently than expected. They chose to be themselves, athletes, music and movie stars almost as frequently as expected. They chose descriptions less frequently than expected. Adolescents from Malaysia chose socially relevant people and famous people from sports, music, and entertainment more frequently than expected. They chose to be themselves, a description, family members or friends less often than expected.

When the responses were further collapsed to indicate myself, description, or other person, there were still statistically significant differences based on students' nationality, $\chi2$ (10, N = 762) = 52.93, p < .001

The most striking result was the ideal person choice pattern of Spanish teenagers, since it was the opposite of the pattern shown by all the other nationalities, including the International group. Adolescents from Spain are the only ones who chose to be themselves or chose a description more frequently than expected, while they chose a named person less frequently than expected. The "myself" response was chosen by 45.1% of Spanish teenagers, while none of the other nationalities reach 40% (these percentages do not include all the responses to the ideal person question but only the ones that fall under the three inclusive categories). The second highest percentage corresponds to the Chinese adolescents (36.6%), and the lowest is for the Americans (30.5%).

Named persons as ideals were chosen by 14.8% of Spanish adolescents, which was half or less than half of the percentage of these choices made by

adolescents from the other countries. Descriptions were chosen by Spanish teenagers 40.1% of the times, while the percentage for the other nationalities ranged between 20 and 30%.

Regarding the gender of the ideal person, it is worth noting that girls from China, Qatar, and Malaysia chose male figures more frequently than expected and female figures less often than expected.

Adolescent's choice of rejected person

The most frequent response (23.6%) was undesirable characteristics such as being dishonest or selfish, without mentioning someone specific. Next, adolescents chose public figures such as Hitler, Bin Laden, or George Bush (18.4%). Being in a disadvantaged situation like being poor, homeless, or sick, was chosen by 17.7% of participants. 14.7% chose other undesired situations such as being a teacher or from the opposite gender. Next, students mentioned evil activities such as being a terrorist or a criminal (7%). 5,9% of participants chose the option "someone who is not me", 5,6% mentioned personally known people, and 3,2% did not respond or did not know who to chose. 3,9% of responses could not be included in any category.

Table 2.

Frequency of responses to the rejected person question

	Frecuencia	Porcentaje
Undesirable personal traits	195	23,6
Public figures	152	18,4
Disadvantaged situations	146	17,7
Undesired situations	121	14,7
Evil activities	58	7,0
Someone who is not me	49	5,9
Personally known people	46	5,6
Blank	26	3,2
Others	32	3,9
Total	825	100,0

Gender

Adolescents also chose more males when asked about the rejected person. 80.5% of the 210 answers in which it was possible to determine the gender correspond to men, and 19.5% to women. It was also more likely for adolescents to choose someone from their gender [$\chi2$ (1, N = 210) = 25,004, p < .001]

Comparison by Nationalities

Comparisons of rejected person by nationality show statistically significant differences [$\chi2$ (40, N = 825) = 114,724, p < .001]. Spanish teenagers presented a different pattern of responses than the rest and were the only ones who chose

undesirable personal traits as the most frequent response (38.4%). There was a wide variety of people chosen as rejected person. The most frequently chosen were Osama bin Laden (5), y Hitler (4).

The main choice for American teenagers was disadvantaged situations (24,1%), while for Chinese and Qatari adolescents was public figures (29,8% and 32,1%). Malaysians chose disadvantaged situations and undesirable traits more frequently (20.4% for each).

Adolescents' choice of Heroes

Three of the categories in which the famous people were grouped have very similar percentages: athletes (21.7%), actors, actresses, entertainers (21.1%), and socially and historically relevant people (20.6%). Popular singers with 13.7% follow them. The percentage of teenagers that do not respond or say they do not admire anybody is 15.3%. 7.6% of responses were included in a miscellaneous category.

Gender comparisons

The gender of famous adults admired by teenagers was predominantly masculine. 73.3% of adolescents chose men as the most admired famous adults, and 26.7% chose women. Again, teenagers tended to choose same-sex admired adults [$\chi2$ (1, N = 673) = 203.565, p < .001]. Girls are almost equally likely to name a famous person who is male or female, though boys almost always named a famous male. Only 4.4% of the boys chose a woman as their admired adult, while 46.8% of the girls chose a man. Boys tend to pick sports stars and girls are more likely to pick TV/movie stars.

Comparisons by Nationalities

As we did with the ideal person analysis, in order to perform comparisons among adolescents from different countries, we only counted the cases in which the country where the questionnaire was administered and the nationality of the adolescent matched. The cases in which the country and the nationality did not match were included in a separate group called "International."

The comparisons by nationality showed that there were no statistically significant differences in the choice of hero, but there were different patterns of response. Spanish teenagers chose athletes, music starts and actors and entertainers more often than expected, and socially relevant people less often than expected. The American actress Angelina Jolie was the person elected the most times (11), followed by the soccer player Zinedine Zidane (9) and the Formula 1 driver Fernando Alonso (8). Teenagers from the U.S. chose athletes more often than expected, while all the other options were chosen less often than expected. The person who was chosen most often was the cyclist Lance Armstrong (6), followed by Martin Luther King (4). Chinese teenagers chose socially relevant people more often than expected, as they did with the ideal person. All the other options are chosen either less often than expected or the frequency is very close to the expected one. The person most frequently mentioned was Bill Gates (11). Adolescents from Qatar chose socially relevant people more often than expected, as they did with the ideal person, and also chose actors and entertainers more often than expected. The single person who received the most elections (13) was Oprah Winfrey, a television celebrity from the U.S., followed by Sheika Mozah (8),

first lady of Qatar, and Barack Obama (6). They chose athletes and music stars less often than expected. Adolescents from Malaysia chose music stars and socially and historically relevant people more often than expected, and the other options less often than expected. The hero chosen most times by Malaysians was Gandhi (7).

There was no hero that was chosen by a significant number of students. The hero most frequently chosen was Gandhi (17), and he was also the only hero chosen in every country by at least one student. Angelina Jolie and Oprah followed with 15 choices. Bill Gates was selected 11 times, with at least one selection in every country except Qatar.

Table 3.

Frequency of responses to the hero question

	Frequency	Percentage
Sports	179	21,7
Movies / TV	174	21,1
Social relevance	170	20,6
Music	113	13,7
Others	63	7,6
None / Blank	126	15,3
Total	825	100

Personally known adults

64,1% chose their parents as the most admired personally known adults. 31% chose the father and 26.3% chose the mother, while 6.8% mentioned both parents. 19% chose other relatives and 13,6% other people not from the family.

Table 4.

Frequency of responses to the question about personally known admired adult

	Frequency	Percentage
Father	256	31
Mother	217	26,3
Parents	56	6,8
Brother	20	2,4
Sister	18	2,2
Grandfather	33	4
Grandmother	23	2,8
Other relatives	63	7,6
Teacher	50	6,1
Others	62	7,5
No one or blank	27	3,3
Total	825	100,0

Gender

Adolescents chose men more often than women (56.2% vs. 43.8%). It was more likely for both boys and girls to choose same-gender adults [$\chi2$ (1, N = 729) = 159,895, p < .001].

Table 5.

Personally known adult by gender

	Boys N (%)	Girls N (%)	Total N (%)
Father	182 (42.6)	74 (18.6)	256 (31.1)
Mother	59 (13.8)	157 (39.5)	216 (26.2)
Both parents	30 (7)	26 (6.5)	62 (6.8)
Brother	15 (3.5)	5 (1.3)	20 (2.4)
Sister	6 (1.4)	12 (3)	18 (2.2)
Grandfather	21 (4.9)	12 (3)	33 (4)
Grandmother	6 (1.4)	17 (4.3)	23 (2.8)
Other relatives	29 (6.8)	34 (8.6)	63 (7.6)
Teacher	27 (6.3)	23 (5.8)	50 (6.1)
Others	36 (8.4)	26 (6.5)	62 (7.5)
None / Blank	16 (3.7)	11 (2.8)	27 (3.3)
Total	427	397	824

Comparison by Nationalities

There are statistically significant differences when comparing the choice of personally known adult by nationality. [$\chi2$ (10, N = 798) = 39,945, p < .001]. For this

analysis we grouped adults in three categories: parents, other relatives, other adults not related to the adolescent). Spanish and Qatari adolescents tended to choose parents and relatives more often than other adults, while American and Chinese teenagers tended to choose other adults more frequently. Malaysian students chose parents and other adults more frequently than other relatives.

What are the qualities that adolescents admire in personally known adults?

The qualities more frequently chosen by adolescents were those related to taking care of people (32,6%). Next, adolescents mentioned personal or moral qualities (31,4%). Achieving goals or characteristics associated with achievement represented 16,9% of the responses, followed by skills and talents 9,2%. Last, participants mentioned physical qualities 1%.

What are the qualities that adolescents admire in personally known in their heroes?

The most frequent choice was personal or moral qualities (23%), followed by skills and talents (15,8%), taking care of others (14,7%), and achievements or qualities related to it (14,2%). Other choices were general admiration (3,5%), physical qualities (3,4%), wealth (2%), and activities (1%).

Self-Esteem Scale

Gender comparisons

The findings regarding the comparison between boys' and girls' self-esteem was consistent with previous research (Kling, Hyde, Showers, & Buswell 1999; Moksnes, Moljord, Espnes, & Byrne, 2010) and boys' scores (M = 30.64) in the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale were significantly higher than girls' (M = 29.66), $t(818)$ = 2.90, p =

.004.

Differences in self-esteem according to ideal person choice

A one-way ANOVA was used to determine if there were differences in self-esteem depending on the ideal person choice. Results showed that there were statistically significant differences in self-esteem [F (9, 811) = 4.51, p = .000]. Post-hoc comparisons revealed that teenagers who chose to be themselves scored higher in self-esteem (M = 31.37, 95% CI [30.83, 31.91]) than teenagers how chose a description (M = 28.59, 95% CI [27.82, 29.36]). The rest of the comparisons did not reveal any additional significant differences.

A second analysis was made in which we grouped the responses in the three inclusive categories (Myself, Description, Named person). This analysis also showed that there were statistically significant differences [F (2, 756) = 13.4, p = .000].

Post-hoc comparisons revealed that teenagers who choose to be themselves have a higher self-esteem (M = 31.37, 95% CI [30.83, 31.91]) than the ones who choose a Named person (M = 29.89, 95% CI [29.27, 30.51]) or the ones who choose a description (M = 29.21, 95% CI [28.56, 29.87]).

Discussion

The analysis of the data regarding the ideal person seems to indicate that the "myself" choice continues to be a preferential response for 21st century teenagers when asked about their ideal person. More than a third of the adolescents in our sample chose to be themselves, which means an increase of 11% over the study conducted by Bromnick and Swallow (1999). Since our sample was comprised of teenagers from five different geographical regions around the globe, our results

seem to indicate that this type of response is a popular choice reflected across a variety of cultures, at least for teenagers from a medium or high socioeconomic status.

Unlike Bromnick and Swallow's study (1999), our results reflect two important aspects. The increase in the preference for oneself as the ideal person coincided with a remarkable decrease in the chosen public figures. There was also an increase in the number of responses that did not choose a specific person and instead described an abstract ideal person or mentioned life and occupational aspirations. One of the possible explanations for these differences could be the age difference between the samples used for both studies. The differences in the results could be an indication of the greater importance of public figures during early adolescence. However, the decline of public figures could also reflect a change in the way those figures are perceived by adolescents in a world overloaded with information. The development of information and communication media has brought about a closer scrutiny of famous people, which might erode their attractiveness as ideals. It is also not uncommon to see idols fall in disgrace, as was the case with the cyclist Lance Armstrong, and this potential disappointment could contribute to teenagers' decisions to look inwards when considering ideals.

We should also note that the emphasis placed on the self could be a consequence of a societal "value gap" as Baumeister (1991) asserts. This way, the increase in "myself" choices could be seen as a reflection of the self becoming a powerful source of meaning during a key period for identity development such as adolescence. A significant percentage of teenagers prefer not to turn to an outside

source as an ideal but instead choose to look inward. Another factor that could be contributing to the strengthening of the self is the identity transformations and identity confusion pointed out by Arnett (2002) as consequences of globalization processes. The self could be a safe choice in a rapidly changing world in which adolescents have to develop new cultural identities. Those globalization processes are also reinforcing the factors that are bringing about the "value gap" proposed by Baumeister, such as "the loss of consensus about values" linked to an increased diversity, and the replacement of "traditional values." As globalization continues to develop and strengthen, the self might continue to grow as a source of meaning, and this could explain the growing number of "myself" choices.

One of the most striking results from our study is the bias toward males in the choice of ideal and hero. The preference of male ideals and heroes has been a general trend in previous research (Balswick and Ingoldsby, 1982; Adams-Price and Green, 1990; Bromnick and Swallow, 1999; Melnick and Jackson, 2002; Gash and Domínguez, 2009; Estrada, Garcia-Ael, and Martorell, 2015) Our results seem to indicate that in the last 30 years society has not undergone changes in this regard: the gender of the ideal person was masculine in 71.2% of the responses in which it was possible to determine the gender, and 73.3% chose men as their heroes. According to Balswick and Ingoldsby (1982) the "latent sexism" in society could be responsible for this inequality. Also, this sexism could prevent women from becoming accepted as heroines at the same rate as men, even if some gains have been made in closing the gender gap.

Regarding the link between "myself" choices and self-esteem, our results supported the claim of a relation between this type of response and enhanced self-esteem. Boys and girls who chose to be themselves scored higher on global self-esteem than those who chose other people or descriptions of abstract ideal persons and life and occupational aspirations. On the other hand, the gender differences in self-esteem are in line with previous research and show that boys score higher than girls.

First, we must highlight that the strength of the "myself" response revealed in our study and its relation with higher self-esteem seem to fit well with previous research that shows that young people's positive self-views have increased over the generations (Twenge and Campbell, 2001, 2008; Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, and Bushman, 2008). "Myself" choices reveal little or no discrepancy between the real self and the ideal self and, consequently, self-esteem is high. On the contrary, any other option that is not "myself" reflects a greater discrepancy between the actual and the ideal self (Simmons and Wade 1984; Wohlford, Lochman, and Barry, 2004). Another factor that could be related to the focus on oneself is the use of new tools provided by technological development, such as social media, in which self-presentation and self-promotion play an important role. A recent study found that spending time on social networking sites profiles increases narcissism and self-esteem (Gentile, Twenge, Freeman, and Campbell, 2012).

As mentioned earlier, the hypothetical relation between "myself" choices and higher self-esteem was proposed as a reason why "myself" responses were psychologically healthy. Several studies indicate that adolescents who score high on

self-esteem are more optimistic (Patton, Bartrum and Creed, 2004) and cope better with stressful situations (Elton, Burrows and Stanley, 1980; Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger and Vohs, 2003). They also tend to have more lucid conceptions of themselves relative to career interests and career decision-making than students scoring low on self-esteem (Gardner, 1981). Our study seems to support that there is in fact a relation between "myself" choices and high self-esteem, but more research will be needed to determine if this is an indication of positive psychological outcomes.

Regarding the famous heroes, athletes are still the most popular choice for adolescents with 21.7%, but, unlike the study of Bromnick and Swallow (1999), the percentages of the second and third categories of heroes (entertainers and personalities of social or historical relevance) are very close to those of the first one. It is remarkable that one of these categories (figures of social or historical significance) does not exist in the work of the British researchers.

The lack of significant differences in the choice of heroes by nationality of the participants could be interpreted in favor of the concept of global homogenization of adolescents, although it should be noted that the nationalities represented in the sample follow different patterns in their preferences, and this may be a reflection of the influence of different socio-cultural contexts in the choice of hero by young people. Athletes seem to have greater relevance for young Spaniards and Americans, while Qatari and Chinese seem more attracted to historically or socially relevant figures.

There does not seem to be a single hero who monopolizes a high percentage of elections, which could be interpreted as a result of the wide range of public figures to whom young people have access through technology. Previous generations had more limited and uniform access to information, while twenty-first century adolescents can explore and find information about a wide variety of public figures with ease.

To better understand the preferences of teens in their choice of admired adults it is helpful to know why young people admire their heroes. Without knowing why young people admire their heroes, we could easily assume that they like certain famous people due to their wealth and fame.

Adolescents manifest admiration, in the case of famous people, for personal or moral qualities such as courage or honesty, as well as for skills and outstanding capabilities of their heroes, their achievement of goals, and the help and concern for others. In the case of personally known adults, most admired characteristics are related, first, with the help and care for others, followed by moral or personal qualities, achieving goals and skills or abilities. These data show that, in most cases, the desired attributes do not correspond to attributes that might be considered shallow such as being attractive or being wealthy.

Not surprisingly, the characteristics associated with relationships with others have greater weight in the case of the known that the famous people since adolescents seem to place great value in the quality of the personal relationship with the adult, something that does not happen with famous people. It also seems

logical that teenagers are set on the talents, skills, and accomplishments of famous people, since most have become public figures because of them.

It is remarkable the low percentage of adolescents who base their admiration in the physical, fame, or wealth. Young people seem to appreciate more other characteristics that fall under the umbrella term of character strengths. This interest suggests that the heroes and role models could be used for educational programs to develop these strengths in adolescents.

Regarding the rejected person, teenagers seem to prefer to answer with abstractions rather than naming specific individuals. Only 24% of the sample mentioned a specific person, while 39.4% referred to situations or activities, and 23.6% to undesirable characteristics. One of the highlights with respect to rejected person data is the pattern of responses of Spanish adolescents since they are the only ones who choose undesirable personal characteristics more frequently than expected.

The differences by nationality could reveal underlying societal values. The most frequent choice of Americans corresponds to the painful personal situations such as being poor or suffering a disease, while Chinese and Qatari chose public figures. These data could be considered as reflecting animosities, concerns or fears prevailing in these societies. In the United States, where there does not seem to be a good social support network for disadvantaged people, teenagers express their fear of being in a situation of helplessness. In China and Qatar the main focus of concern reside in international politics, with former US president as the main person rejected.

The gender of the rejected person is predominantly male. Nearly 9 in 10 teens' elections corresponded to a male character in those cases where it was possible to determine the gender. Public figures who acquire more importance whether due to positive or negative aspects seem to be men.

In conclusion, our research provides interesting insights into 21st century adolescents from around the globe. Teenagers from different cultural traditions show a clear preference for being themselves, and this focus on the self is likely linked with the current context of globalization and technological development. Our study also provides support to the hypothesized relation between choosing to be yourself and higher self-esteem.