ТЕМАТИЧЕСКИЕ СООБЩЕНИЯ

INNER BEAUTY AND MORAL BEAUTY IN RUSSIA AND THE USA

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Inner beauty and moral beauty are very important concepts across many cultures, perhaps because inner and moral beauty motivate humans to behave at their best. No studies, however, have examined the similarities and differences between inner and moral beauty; and no studies have done so cross-culturally. Using a free association task and semantic differentials, common foundations and cultural nuances were explored with 248 Russian and 222 American participants. Kindness stood-out as a universal core association in both cultures and for both types of beauty. Differences for inner beauty showed Russians emphasizing spirituality, while Americans prioritized emotional connections. Similarities regarding moral beauty included kindness and honesty; whereas differences showed Russians emphasized ethical principles and Americans underscored emotional understanding and altruistic giving. The Evaluation dimension of the semantic differential suggested a more positive assessment of these two types of beauty among Russians and may reflect stronger belief in the impact of moral and inner beauty on individual behavior. The study revealed a higher degree of convergence between moral and inner beauty among Americans (for both free association and the Euclidian distance in the semantic space), suggesting a closer link between internal qualities and moral attributes for them. In summary, across both cultures, it appears that inner beauty is viewed as kindness expressed through love, compassion, and care, and moral beauty as kindness expressed through honesty, justice/fairness, and integrity. Measures of positive mental health and trait appreciation of beauty indicated that American participants had higher levels of mental health and stronger appreciation of beauty.

Key words: inner beauty, moral beauty, culture, kindness, honesty, free associations.

Since ancient times, the perception of beauty has been a subject of interest in various fields, and in the modern era this includes psychology and cultural studies. While physical beauty is often emphasized in both the ancient and contemporary worlds, the concepts of inner and moral beauty are at least as important, if not more so (Aristotle, 2002; Diessner, 2019).

The concepts themselves have been interpreted differently across philosophical and psychological traditions. Sharp (1893) explored moral beauty as harmonious character promoting the good of humanity. Maeterlinck (1897) viewed inner beauty as the natural language of the soul. Modern psychological work defines moral beauty as virtuous action (Haidt, 2003), while inner beauty is treated in philosophy as a broader construct including, but not limited to, moral excellence (Ferrucci, 2009; Doran, 2021; Paris, 2022). Some researchers have conflated these terms (Diessner et al., 2008, 2013; Cheng et al., 2021; Xiang et al., 2020), while others argue that inner beauty provides a broader frame for understanding moral beauty (Kidd, 2019).

As Lomas (2020) highlights that language plays a crucial role in shaping how individuals of different cultures map their outer and inner worlds, it is likely that American and Russian cultures conceptualize inner and moral beauty in different ways, and understanding these distinctions could illuminate how each culture

The study was pre-registered and the data are available at https://osf.io/zdufh/. We have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

engages with these forms of beauty and their impact on well-being. Our linguistic analysis using Google Ngram indicates that in American English "inner beauty" has become more common than "moral beauty" since the late 20th century, while in Russian "inner beauty" ("внутренняя красота") consistently appears more frequently than "moral beauty" ("нравственная красота"). These trends may reflect cultural framing differences (Sacks, 2020).

As no studies have been published which systematically examined the possible distinctions between inner beauty and moral beauty, no cross-cultural studies have examined possible differences in framing either moral beauty or inner beauty between cultures, the present research addresses this gap by investigating:

1) cross-cultural differences in free associations to "inner beauty" and "moral beauty" between Russian and American samples;

2) semantic differential profiles of both concepts;

3) relationships with engagement with beauty and positive mental health.

Our preregistered research questions can be found at OSF (https://osf.io/8quv3/?view_only=ba18686d53054a8f98cb2a9a91326df3).

METHOD

Participants

We recruited participants from both Russia and the United States through social media sites. Six participants from Russia were excluded from the analysis due to their age being below 18 years, resulting in a final total sample size of 470 individuals. Our sample consisted of 222 US participants, of which 189 were women (85.1%), and of 248 Russian participants, of which 189 were women (76.2%). Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 82 years (M = 40.65, SD = 16.04). The Russian sample was younger (M = 35.15, SD = 14.11) than the US sample (M = 46.80, SD = 15.85), $t_{Yuen}(274.48) = 6.48$, $p < .001$. The institutional review board of Novosibirsk State University approved this study, form #4, September 4, 2023.

Procedure

To control for the potential influence of the order in which participants responded to free association questions, and semantic differential questions, about inner and moral beauty, a web-based randomization process was implemented. Participants were randomly assigned to order A or order B.

1. Random Order A: Participants first completed the section on inner beauty, including free associations and the semantic differential scales. Afterward, they proceeded to the section on moral beauty.

2. Random Order B: moral beauty → inner beauty.

This randomization ensures that an equal number of participants experience both orders, allowing for the control of sequence effects and enhancing the validity of the study's findings

Measures

• *Online Questionnaire* (Google Forms): The online format ensures the anonymity of participants; the demographic questions were asked at the end of the questionnaires.

• *Free Association Task*: Participants were presented with the concepts of "inner beauty" and "moral beauty" and were asked to provide spontaneous associations or words that come to mind when thinking about these concepts (Deese, 1966). Specifically we asked participants, "Write a list of associations of the phase '**inner beauty**', and likewise for "**moral beauty**" (bolding in the original).

• *Semantic Differential Scale*: We employed semantic differential scales to evaluate participants' attitudes and perceptions towards inner and moral beauty. Semantic differential scales serve as instruments for measuring affective responses associated with various concepts, objects or events (Osgood et al., 1957). For our investigation, we focused on two target concepts: "inner beauty" ("внутренняя красота" in Russian) and "moral beauty" ("нравственная красота" in Russian). Participants provided ratings for these target

words across twelve 7-point bipolar scales. Nine of these scales were borrowed from Osgood's three classical dimensions, which he determined by factor analysis, and encompass Evaluation (*pleasant – unpleasant*, *unhappy – happy*, *good – bad*), Potency (*little – big*, *hard – soft*, *weak – strong*), and Activity (*fast – slow*, *quiet – loud*, *active – passive*). These three factors/dimensions have shown cross-cultural validity (Osgood et al., 1975). Additionally, three supplementary bipolar scales, selected by our research team, were also employed to capture more substantive aspects of the target concepts (*personal – social*, *intuitive – rational*, *merciful – just*).

• *Engagement with Beauty Scale*, EBS-R (Diessner et al., 2008); this scale measures the level of engagement with, or appreciation of, beauty. The EBS-R allows for the assessment of perceiving and appreciating beauty separately in relation to nature ($\alpha = 0.83$ in the current study), art ($\alpha = 0.90$), morality ($\alpha = 0.89$) and ideas ($\alpha = 0.89$). For total score $\alpha = 0.92$. The EBS-R has recently been expanded in Russian to include a fifth subscale concerning human physical beauty and adornment (EBS-R-R); and we administered this scale in our study. However, as this new 5th subscale has not been validated on an English-speaking sample, we will not include it in our analyses.

• *Positive Mental Health Scale*, PMHS (Lukat et al., 2016): This scale measured participants' mental health status. It assesses mainly emotional, but also psychological and social aspects of well-being. In our study the $\alpha = 0.88$.

Statistical Analysis

Taking into account non-normality and the presence of outliers for many variables, statistical analysis was conducted using robust statistical methods with trimmed means (Wilcox, 2021) and non-parametric Spearman rank and Kendall's Tau correlations.

In addition to robust and non-parametric statistics, for the purpose of computational reproducibility, all calculations were replicated using a Bayesian framework. The interpretation of the Bayes factor was based on a traditional scale (Lee, Wagenmakers, 2013). Poisson sampling scheme was used in the analysis of contingency tables (Jamil et al., 2017). Bayes factors for the rank sum test and the signed rank test were calculated based on a data augmentation algorithm with 5 chains of 1000 iterations. To avoid overloading the text, our paper includes only Bayes factors. Details of the calculations, including effect sizes and confidence intervals, are available at https://osf.io/8quv3/?view_only=ba18686d53054a8f98cb2a9a91326df3.

Robust and non-parametric analyses were conducted with jamovi, version 2.3.28 (The jamovi project, 2023). The Bayesian analysis was conducted in JASP, version 0.18.3 (JASP Team, 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Analyses of Free Associations

For the analysis and visualization of free associations, we used the VOSviewer software, version 1.6.19 (van Eck, Waltman, 2010). The frequency of associations on the generated maps of associations is represented by the size of the circles, and the closer the circles are to each other, the more frequently the corresponding associations occur together. Distinct clusters are indicated by different colors (see Figures 1 and 2).

Due to possible priming effects, when participants are prompted with one concept before another, their responses to the second concept may have been influenced by the first concept and the semantic differential scales (i.e., if a participant responded with their free associations first to inner beauty it may influence their responses to moral beauty, and vice versa). To mitigate this potential bias, we tailored our analysis by constructing visualization maps based on responses exclusively from participants who encountered each specific concept first. Top-10 associations are listed in Table 1. The responses from the second half

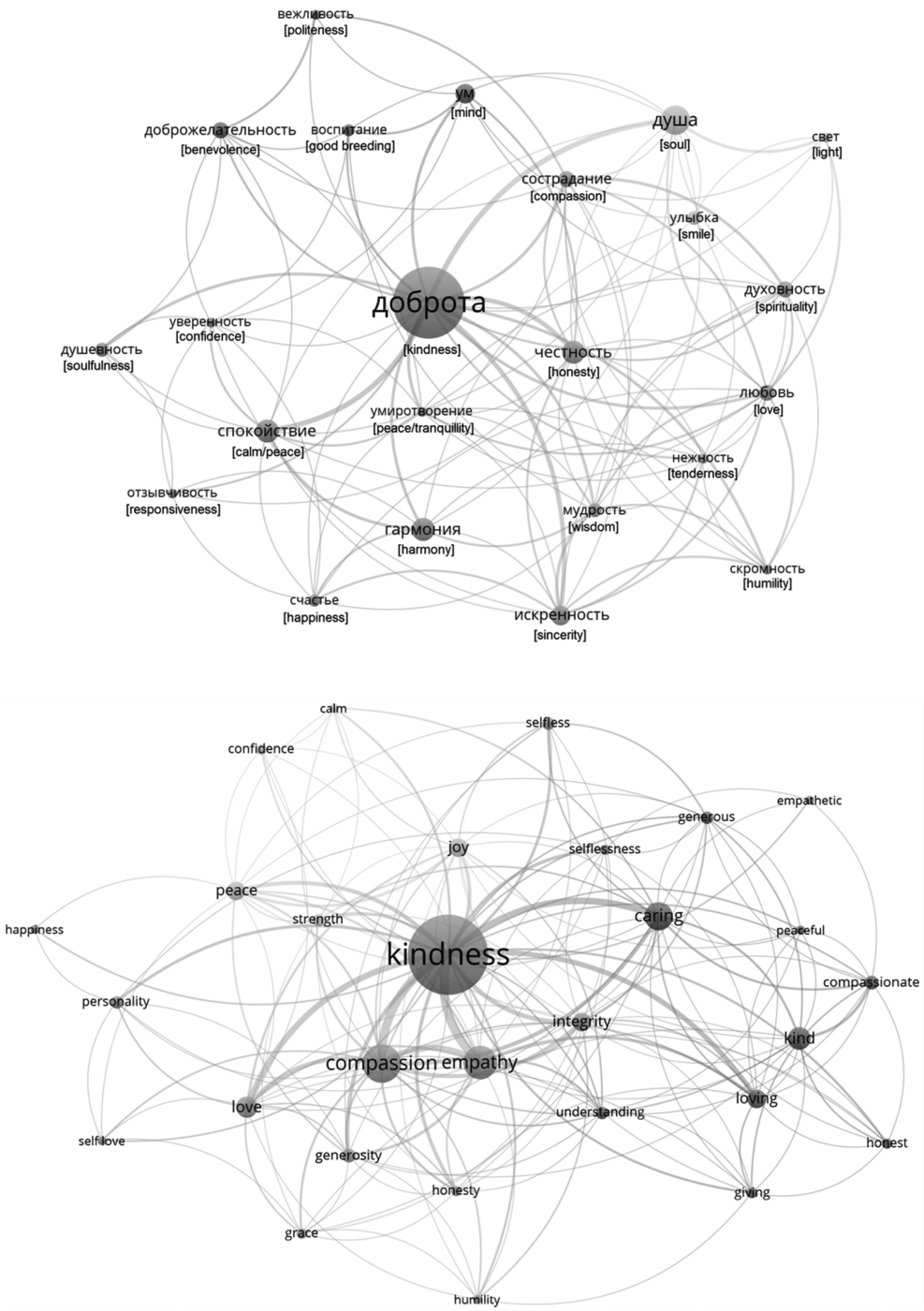

Fig. 1. Free Associations Maps for Inner Beauty in Russia and the USA

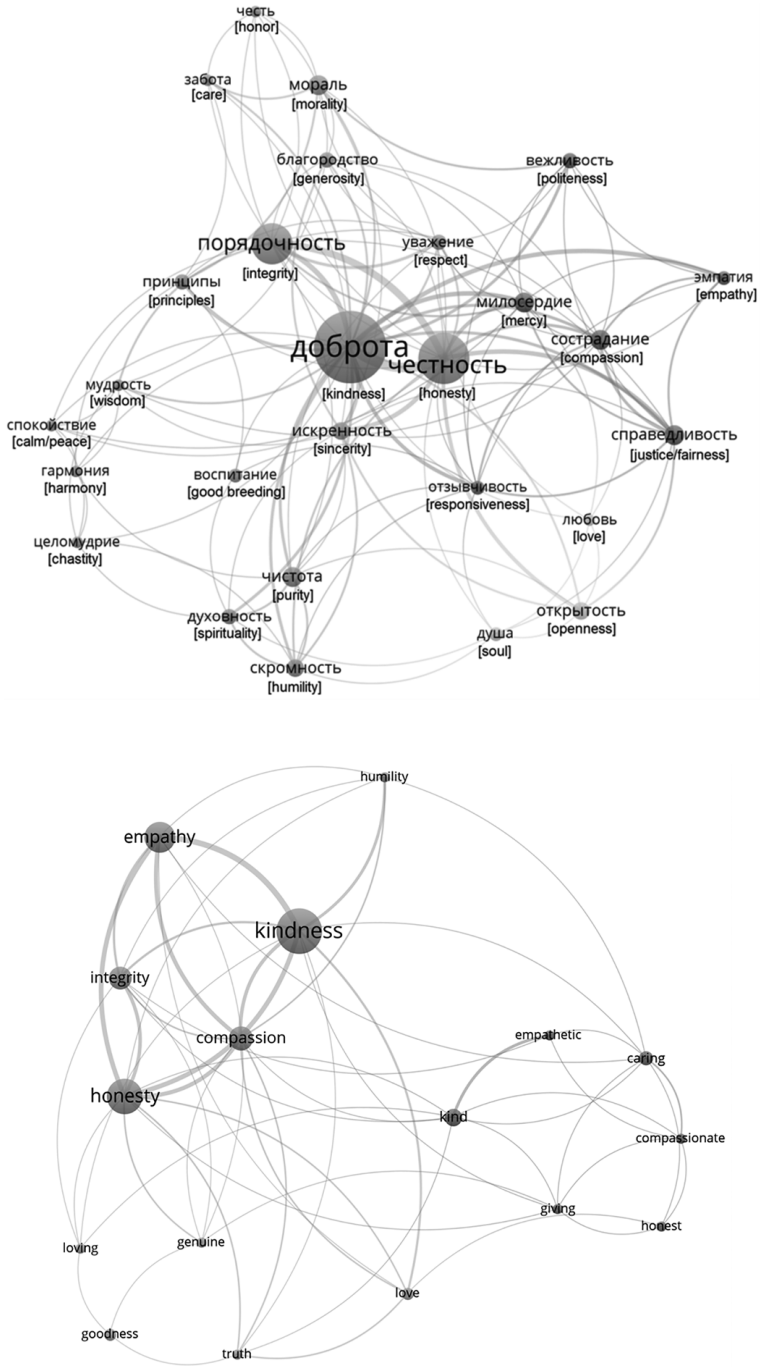

Fig. 2. Free Associations Maps for Moral Beauty in Russia and the USA

Table 1

The occurrences and total link strength of the top 10 associations to inner and moral beauty

Inner Beauty						
	Russia ($N = 120$)			USA ($N = 114$)		
N	Association	Occurrences	Total Link Strength	Association	Occurrences	Total Link Strength
1	kindness	45	169	kindness	62	312
2	soul	15	60	compassion	25	136
3	honesty	11	61	empathy	21	110
4	harmony	11	53	caring	17	102
5	calm/peace	11	43	kind	13	69
6	sincerity	9	70	love	12	73
7	mind	9	23	integrity	10	69
8	love	7	65	peace	10	66
9	compassion	7	48	loving	10	63
10	spirituality	7	42	joy	10	53
Moral Beauty						
	Russia ($N = 128$)			USA ($N = 108$)		
N	Association	Occurrences	Total Link Strength	Association	Occurrences	Total Link Strength
1	kindness	40	170	kindness	26	94
2	honesty	26	103	honesty	19	65
3	integrity	20	47	empathy	16	58
4	justice/fairness	8	61	compassion	12	52
5	compassion	8	59	integrity	11	41
6	mercy	8	52	kind	8	33
7	morality	8	39	caring	6	36
8	purity	8	34	goodness	5	35
9	sincerity	7	47	love	5	24
10	humility	7	38	giving	4	34

Note. Total Link Strength is a metric used in network analysis and refers to the overall strength or significance of connections within a network; in this case, how frequently words occur together with other words. Above, "Inner Beauty" refers to the participants that free associated words with inner beauty before doing so with moral beauty; and "Moral Beauty" refers to those encountering the moral beauty prompt first.

of the participants were used for a more detailed analysis (see Table 2).

We applied a threshold of 4 occurrences, resulting in associations ranging from 17 to 30 for different maps. The association strength method was used for normalizing the strength of the links between items.

Multi-word expressions were retained to preserve semantic nuance, and adjectives/nouns were not merged due to significant cross-cultural differences in their usage. In the associations of the American sample, adjectives occur much more frequently than in the Russian sample, 34.76% compared to 11.88%, $\chi^2(1) = 371.43$, $p < .001$. Correspondingly, nouns are notably more prevalent in the associations of Russian participants, 86.15% compared to 59.21%, $\chi^2(1) = 464.67$, $p < .001$. Reflecting this distinction on the maps and tables was deemed valuable.

Table 2

The occurrences and total link strength of the top five occurrence associations when the concept "moral beauty" was presented second (after the inner beauty prompt)

	Russia ($N = 120$)			USA ($N = 114$)		
N	**Association**	**Occurrences**	**Total Link Strength**	**Association**	**Occurrences**	**Total Link Strength**
1	justice/fairness	23	82	honest	15	55
2	honesty	22	89	fair	15	54
3	kindness	12	59	just	14	47
4	morality	12	58	integrity	12	38
5	integrity	12	23	honesty	11	32

Associations for inner beauty show both shared and distinct perspectives between Russian and American participants. Similarities include virtues such as "kindness", "love" and "compassion," meaning that these qualities are universally recognized as central to inner beauty. Both cultural groups acknowledged the importance of inner tranquility, with terms like "peace" and "calm". However, there are also notable differences. Russian participants use terms like "soul", "harmony", "mind" and "spirituality," suggesting a focus on spiritual and intellectual dimensions in their conceptualization of inner beauty. In contrast, American participants emphasize the role of emotional connection and happiness, incorporating associations like "empathy", "caring" and "joy."

The associations for moral beauty also reveal both intersections and divergences. A shared core encompasses virtues such as "kindness", "honesty" and "integrity," reflecting a universal acknowledgment of these qualities as fundamental to moral beauty. Additionally, "compassion" is also a shared virtue in both cultural groups.

As for differences, Russian participants underscore morality, justice/fairness, purity, and mercy as integral components of moral beauty, suggesting a focus on moral purity and adherence to ethical code. The distinctive presence of "mercy" in Russian associations highlights a nuanced cultural emphasis on compassion in action, emphasizing the outward manifestation of kindness. In contrast, American participants integrate empathy, love, caring and giving into their associations for moral beauty. This suggests a cultural emphasis on emotional understanding and altruistic giving as essential facets of moral beauty in the American perspective. The associations of Russian participants more explicitly reflect obligations to society, while the American set of associations expresses a greater emphasis on interpersonal relationships.

In general, as evident from the data presented in Table 1, associations for inner and moral beauty overlap by 70% among American participants, whereas for Russian participants the overlap is only 40%. This indicates that there is a higher degree of convergence in the perceptions of inner and moral beauty among Americans compared to Russians. The higher overlap among American participants suggests a closer link between internal qualities and moral attributes in their conceptualization of beauty. In a sense, it implies a degree of synonymy between these concepts. As one of the American participants notably expressed, "I seem to take moral beauty the same as inner beauty". On the other hand, it appears that for Russian participants moral beauty is more closely tied to the adherence of ethical principles, while inner beauty extends beyond a strict moral framework, incorporating elements of spirituality and intellectual harmony.

Interestingly, despite the association "kindness" holding the top position for both Russian and American participants, its significance or "weight" is not identical. While among Americans, 70.2% name at least one

association containing the morpheme "kind" ("добр" in Russian) to "inner beauty", only 47.5% of Russian participants do so, $\chi^2(1) = 12.39$, $p < .001$, $V = .230$, $OR = 2.601$, 95% *OR* CI [1.519, 4.453], $BF_{10\ Poisson} = 157$. The Bayes factor $BF_{10\ Poisson} = 157$ indicates extreme evidence for an alternative hypothesis, which means that the data are approximately 157 times more likely to occur under H_1, that suggests differences between two groups, than under H_0.This disparity is not mirrored when considering associations with the morpheme "kind" ("добр") in the context of moral beauty. For moral beauty, 41.7% of American participants and 39.1% of Russian participants provide such associations, and the difference is not statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 0.17$, $p = .684$, $V = .026$, $OR = 1.114$, 95% *OR* CI [0.661, 1.878], $BF_{10\ Poisson} = 0.3$. These findings suggest that, for Americans, kindness plays a much more central role in defining what constitutes inner beauty. At the same time, for Russian participants, almost as significant as kindness is the spiritual dimension of inner beauty. Associations containing the morpheme "soul" or "spirit" ("душ" or "дух" in Russian) are provided by 38.3% of Russian participants, whereas only 10.5% of American participants make similar associations, $\chi^2(1) = 24.25$, $p < .001$, $V = .322$, $OR = 5.284$, 95% *OR* CI [2.618, 10.665], $BF_{10\ Poisson} = 80361$.

Additionally, it is evident that, for both Americans and Russians, kindness is a less crucial element for moral beauty compared to its importance in defining inner beauty. Instead, the central, albeit not fully articulated, elements of moral beauty in both cultures appear to revolve around honesty, justice, fairness, and integrity. This becomes particularly noticeable when analyzing the associations provided by participants who received the concept of "moral beauty" as a second prompt after "inner beauty". On the one hand, the responses of these participants are influenced by priming effects. On the other hand, their answers might reflect an attempt to highlight the distinctive aspects that differentiate moral beauty from inner beauty. For moral beauty as a second prompt, only 18.4% of American participants and 21.7% of Russian participants provide associations with the morpheme "kind" ("добр"), $\chi^2(1) = 0.38$, $p = .536$, $V = .040$, $OR = 1.225$, 95% *OR* CI [0.644, 2.329]. $BF_{10\ Poisson} = 0.3$. The most popular responses are presented in Table 2.

For both cultures, concepts of justice/fairness and honesty are deemed more crucial than kindness when moral beauty was the second prompt. Interestingly, justice/fairness is absent in top-20 associations provided by American participants who received the term "moral beauty" as their first prompt. The emergence of this association in the responses of the second group of participants may be connected to at least two factors. Firstly, as previously noted, participants might be inclined to highlight distinctive traits that differentiate moral beauty from inner beauty. This could lead to an elevated emphasis on justice/fairness as a key aspect of moral beauty. Secondly, the presence of the semantic differential scale "merciful/just" could have activated the idea of justice among the second group of participants. This scale might have prompted a more explicit consideration of justice as a component of moral beauty.

In any case, considering the responses of the first group of participants, it is evident that, for Americans, the idea of justice and fairness as distinctive features of moral beauty arises when juxtaposed with inner beauty. In contrast, for Russian participants, these concepts are present from the outset, although not as central. It is worth noting that, when discussing inner beauty, kindness remains the most popular association for both those who had inner beauty as their first prompt or their second prompt. For inner beauty as a second prompt, 41.7% of American participants and 34.4% of Russian participants provide associations with the morpheme "kind" ("добр"), $\chi^2(1) = 1.33$, $p = .250$, $V = .075$, $OR = 1.364$, 95% *OR* CI [0.804, 2.313], $BF_{10\ Poisson} = 0.6$. This suggests a consistent recognition of kindness as a central element of inner beauty in both cultural contexts.

Finally, the average total link strength for the top-10 associations related to inner and moral beauty is approximately the same for Russian participants (63.4 for inner beauty and 65 for moral beauty). However, among American participants, there is a substantial difference, with the average total link strength for moral beauty being more than two times lower than that for inner beauty (47.2 for moral beauty and 105/ for inner beauty). The comparable average total link strength for inner and moral beauty for Russian participants suggests that they perceive both concepts with a similar level of interconnection and importance. The associations within each set of concepts are cohesive and exhibit consistent strength. The exceptionally high average total link strength in American participants for inner beauty suggests that the qualities associated with inner beauty are very tightly woven together, forming a well-defined set of attributes.

Merging of associations into a single term adds an additional layer of analysis. For instance, combining closely related associations such as "свет в душе" (light in the soul), "свет изнутри" (light from within), "светлость" (luminosity), and "внутренний свет" (inner light) with the overarching concept of "свет" (light) for Russian participants places the association "light" in the top-10 for inner beauty. With this, it becomes evident that the concept of inner beauty encompasses a luminous essence for them.

Similarly, merging "selfless" and "selflessness" for American participants raises this association into the top-10 for inner beauty, highlighting the link between inner beauty and altruism in American culture. However, it is important to note that the differing frequency of adjectives used by American and Russian participants may indicate that moral beauty and inner beauty exist at different levels of abstraction for them. It seems that in Russian culture these concepts are more abstract and serve as general principles. In American culture, they appear more concrete, as the use of adjective associations (kind, caring, loving, etc.) explicitly points to individuals possessing specific qualities or engaging in particular behavior.

Semantic Differential

Using the average scores of adjectives within each semantic differential dimension (Table 3), we plotted data concerning the positioning of the concepts of inner and moral beauty in a three-dimensional semantic space (Figure 3).

The Euclidean distance between inner and moral beauty is smaller in the American sample ($\bar{x} = 3.48$, $\bar{x}_{tr} = 3.20$) compared to the Russian sample ($\bar{x} = 4.56$, $\bar{x}_{tr} = 4.41$), $t_{Yuen}(281.91) = 5.97$, $p < .001$, $\xi = 0.379$, 95% ξ CI [0.252, 0.493], $BF_{10} = 573$. These findings align with the percentage of matching associations, indicating a closer relationship between these concepts for American participants.

There are no discernible differences in the dimension of Activity, but for both Evaluation and Potency, the means in the Russian sample are higher than in the American one (Table 4).

Table 3

Means of the Dimensions of the Semantic Differential

Country	Type of Beauty	Means (SD)		
		Evaluation	Activity	Potency
Russia ($N = 248$)	Inner Beauty	2.14 (1.09)	0.07 (1.03)	0.59 (1.01)
	Moral Beauty	1.79 (1.23)	0.19 (1.07)	0.78 (1.20)
the USA ($N = 222$)	Inner Beauty	1.26 (1.38)	0.16 (0.89)	–0.04 (0.96)
	Moral Beauty	1.05 (1.24)	0.32 (0.80)	0.13 (1.13)

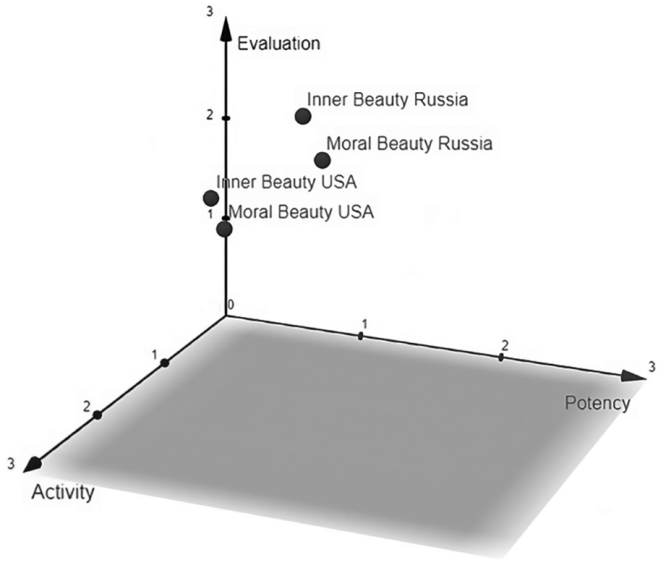

Fig. 3. Positions of the Concepts of Inner Beauty and Moral Beauty in Semantic Space

Notably, the data reveals that the highest means for both Russians and Americans are observed in the dimension of Evaluation (positive/negative). This resonates with the results by Demuthova and Demuth (2023), where the dimension of evaluation was highlighted as having the most significant impact on the assessment of the concept of beauty.

The higher Evaluation score in the Russian sample (BF_{10} = 208497 for inner beauty and BF_{10} = 7933 for moral beauty) is indicative of a stronger positive evaluation of moral and inner beauty in the Russian cultural context. Perhaps, cultural norms and traditions might prioritize these attributes, leading individuals to view them more positively. Or, maybe, the way language is used to describe moral and inner beauty might differ between the two cultures. Also the Evaluative dimension of the semantic differential and social desirability show a "converging similarity" in how individuals respond (Ford, Meisels, 1965). So, this convergence may contribute to the higher Evaluation scores. In other words, the higher Evaluation scores for moral and inner beauty in the Russian sample implies that, within Russian culture,

Table 4

Differences between Russian and American Participants on Semantic Differential Dimensions for Inner and Moral Beauty (Robust t-tests)

Concept	Dimensions	t_{Yuen}	df	*p*	ξ	95% ξ CI	
						Lower	Upper
Inner Beauty	Evaluation	7.32	201.99	< .001	0.485	0.382	0.574
	Potency	6.11	261.97	< .001	0.449	0.315	0.566
	Activity	1.33	276.03	0.186	0.092	0	0.234
Moral Beauty	Evaluation	7.12	274.82	< .001	0.482	0.335	0.561
	Potency	6.01	249.67	< .001	0.382	0.276	0.502
	Activity	1.38	277.77	0.170	0.094	0	0.229

Table 5

Differences between Russian and American Participants on PMHS and EBS-R (Robust t-tests)

Scales	Trimmed Means (0.2)		t_{Yuen}	df	*p*	ξ	95% ξ CI	
	Russia	USA					Lower	Upper
PMHS	18.04	20.52	5.19	279.35	<.001	0.332	0.198	0.446
EBS-R, total	107.63	118.87	6.14	276.24	<.001	0.390	0.265	0.511
Natural	21.71	25.25	7.95	281.68	<.001	0.515	0.382	0.613
Artistic	19.49	21.49	3.38	279.21	<.001	0.238	0.096	0.364
Moral	32.04	36.87	7.26	276.01	<.001	0.486	0.383	0.593
Ideas	18.27	21.39	5.55	276.55	<.001	0.385	0.245	0.489

these qualities are likely considered a bit more socially desirable.

The higher Potency (strong/weak) score among Russian participants (BF_{10} = 17302 for inner beauty and BF_{10} = 1527 for moral beauty) could reflect a cultural belief that moral and inner beauty have a more significant impact in shaping individual behavior. Our findings align with research in the field of affective neuroscience, which suggests that positive words are also characterized by high Potency values (Schacht, 2013). In our study, Evaluation is positively correlated with Potency, both for inner (r_s = .45, p < .001) and moral (r_s = .43, p < .001) beauty.

In addition to the nine scales that constitute the three classical dimensions of the semantic differential, participants were also asked to evaluate moral and inner beauty using three *substantive* scales: personal–social, intuitive–rational and merciful–just. Analyzing participants' responses to these scales suggests that the concept of moral beauty in Russian and American cultures is more similar than the concept of inner beauty.

Across all three scales, the scores of Russian and American participants do not differ for moral beauty, while there are significant differences across all three scales for inner beauty. Russian participants perceive inner beauty as more personal (t_{Yuen}(262.45) = 4.59, p < .001, ξ = 0.282, 95% ξ CI [0.164, 0.385]), more intuitive (t_{Yuen}(266.31) = 2.38, p = .018, ξ = 0.147, 95% ξ CI [0.025, 0.259]), and more merciful (t_{Yuen}(240.06) = 3.00, p = .003, ξ = 0.208, 95% ξ CI [0.053, 0.324]) compared to their American counterparts. As the lower bound of the confidence interval for the effect size is near zero for the intuitive and merciful scales, it suggests that the observed differences in these dimensions between Russian and American may not be valid.

Engagement with Beauty and Positive Mental Health

We found that the differences in free associations between Russians and Americans did not predict engagement with beauty nor positive mental health outcomes or predicted them quite weakly. American participants, however, demonstrate higher levels of positive mental health, aligning with findings from prior research that compared Russians and Americans (Schönfeld et al., 2017), and also higher on all four EBS-R subscales (Table 5). Kendall's Tau correlations were calculated between EBS-R subscales, PMHS scores, and the total number of words provided in associations by participants with age partialled out (Table 6).

In both samples, positive mental health is associated with engagement with natural, moral, and ideational beauty, but not with engagement with artistic beauty. All four types of engagement with beauty are significantly associated with the total number of words participants provided for the concepts of "moral beauty" and "inner beauty" (see Table 6). This suggests that sensitivity to various aspects of beauty contributes to a richer and more extensive set of associated words.

Prior research has also documented that engaging with moral beauty leads to positive

Table 6

Kendall's Tau Partial Correlations for PMHS, EBS-R, & Total Words (conditioned on age)

Total Sample ($N = 470$)						
Variable	**PMHS**	**EBS-R Total**	**EBS-R Nature**	**EBS-R Artistic**	**EBS-R Moral**	**EBS-R Ideas**
1. PMHS						
2. EBS-R Total	0.173***					
3. EBS-R Nature	0.157***	0.594***				
4. EBS-R Artistic	0.043	0.599***	0.396***			
5. EBS-R Moral	0.185***	0.611***	0.385***	0.310***		
6. EBS-R Ideas	0.172***	0.631***	0.392***	0.393***	0.381***	
7. Total *N* of Words	0.053	0.203***	0.210***	0.163***	0.172***	0.137***
Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$; Total *N* of Words = nouns + adjectives + verbs						

mental health and well-being, especially when moral beauty arouses the emotion of elevation (Pohling, Diessner, 2016). Likewise, a study with samples from Canada, Japan and Russia found that engaging with natural beauty is significantly positively correlated with four kinds of well-being: social well-being, emotional well-being, psychological well-being, and meaning in life (Capaldi et al., 2017). Other studies have found engagement with natural beauty to predict higher levels of life satisfaction and self-esteem (Zhang et al., 2014); and with a large sample from China it was shown that engagement with natural beauty moderates both the indirect and direct paths between nature contact and emotion regulation (Gu et al., 2023).

GENERAL DISCUSSION

It is evident that the line between the *inner* and *outer* can be blurry, and what is labelled as "inner beauty" is often recognized as beauty only when manifested in external actions. Kant (1790/1914), Lossky (1945/1998), and Haidt (2003) argue that beauty, whether moral or inner, is expressed through external events. This raises a fundamental question: can we truly describe inner beauty as *inner* if it can only be known as something *embodied-in-behavior*?

Moving beyond cross-cultural differences, which we have addressed in the results section, let us focus here on the broader implications. It appears that there may be a universal core to both inner and moral beauty shared by Russian and American cultures – kindness. However, does this mean that kindness exhausts the essence of these forms of beauty? If so, Tolstoy (1930) may have been correct in considering these concepts as just playing with words. We refrain from engaging in theoretical deliberations on this matter from a general philosophical standpoint. However, when considering the social representations expressed in our participants' associations, it appears that kindness, while forming the essential core of these forms of beauty, is not synonymous with them.

Stepping aside from cross-cultural differences, one might attempt to derive general yet highly schematic formulas. For instance, inner beauty could be conceptualized as *kindness expressing itself through love*, while moral beauty is *kindness expressing itself through honesty*. These are highly simplified formulations aiming to capture the common elements in the social representations of both cultures. These formulations could be expanded, for instance as follows: inner beauty is kindness expressing itself through love, compassion, and care, and moral beauty is kindness expressing itself through honesty, justice, and integrity. However, these refinements may be unnecessary as honesty grounded in kindness implies justice and integrity, and love, whose

core is kindness, is inconceivable without compassion and care.

It might be accurate to assert that in both cultures, inner beauty is more "static" compared to moral beauty. Inner beauty primarily manifests as a *form*, while moral beauty seems to require *action*. Associations by respondents, from both countries, with the concept of "inner beauty" include terms like peace, calm, and harmony (implicitly suggesting external symmetry), as well as *smile* (see Figure 1, Russia) – associations absent for the concept of "moral beauty". The idea of a "soul" (which is a form) is a more frequent association for both Russian and American participants concerning inner beauty than for moral beauty. The "static" nature is exemplified by one Russian participant associating "inner beauty" with a "statue from ancient times". While this "stillness" does not exclude active manifestations such as care, moral beauty is, in a sense, more active – kindness in moral beauty is expressed through behavioral acts such as mercy and forgiveness, and honesty and justice are difficult to conceive without their active demonstrations. As Cicero expressed it, moral beauty (*honestas*) "requires not only mental activity, but also some action" (1991, p. 8). The term *honestas* in Cicero's works is commonly translated into Russian as "moral beauty" (Ciceron, 1974). However, this translation may differ from English translations, where the term is often rendered as *honourableness*. Nonetheless, the Russian interpretation is not without grounds. For Thomas Aquinas, for instance, "in the moral order, *honestas* and beauty are formally the same" (Ramos, 2004, p. 329). The great scholastic philosopher drew on Cicero, who "equates *honestum* with virtue, and the *honestum* is the beautiful" (Ramos, 2004, p. 323). In the French translation of Cicero's *De officiis* by Testard *honestas* is also translated as "moral beauty" (Cicéron, 1965). It is intriguing to observe how ancient ideas about moral beauty and honesty can resonate and intersect with the social representations of contemporary individuals.

CONCLUSION

Despite some identified cultural differences, the results of our research demonstrated a significant congruence in how Americans and Russians understand inner and moral beauty. The shared emphasis on kindness as its foundational dimension is evident in both societies. It suggests the existence of a deeply rooted cultural code, perhaps embedded in the depths of human history or even having evolutionary roots. And while the question of the specific mechanisms underlying this universality remains open, it has all the potential to be a force that links diverse societies as united humanity. Could kindness be the very key to what it means to be a beautiful human being?

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