



# Cultural Differences in Perception of Heroes: Greece, India, and the USA

Smaragda P. Spyrou, Alexa M. Bertrand, Dr. Scott T. Allison  
 Department of Psychology, University of Richmond, VA

## Abstract

**Hypothesis:** The cultural background of an individual will have a significant effect on their perception of heroes.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how one's cultural background may affect one's perception of heroes. The results of Study 1 revealed significant cultural differences in ratings of heroic traits. Study 2 employed a trait-sorting and hero-sorting task to explore underlying categories of traits and heroes across cultures. The results again revealed substantial cultural differences, suggesting that heroes, heroic traits, and heroism in general are all constructions of one's culture and nationality.

## Method – Study 1

### Participants:

N=223

### 3 conditions

Raised and living in:

- Greece, N=55
- India, N=68
- USA, N=100

Chosen based on Hofstede scale PDI, IDV, and MAS indices. Recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk. Randomly selected within each country.

### Design:

Qualtrics Survey (Demographics & Attention Check questions included)

### Questions:

- Write the names of 3-5 **heroes**.
- Your first/second/.../fifth hero was:
- Describe your hero's personality. What are, in your opinion, their most important **traits**?
- Rate them on the following characteristics: Brave, Moral Integrity, Conviction, Courage, Self-Sacrifice, Protecting, Honest, Selfless, Determined, Saves Others, Inspiring, Helpful, Altruistic, Proactive, Humble, Strong, Risk-taker, Fearless, Caring, Powerful, Compassionate, Leader, Exceptional, Intelligent, Talented, Personable. (Kinsella et al., 2015)

## Method – Study 2

### Participants:

N=76

### 6 conditions

- Greece
  - ↳ Heroes, N=7
  - ↳ Traits, N=8
- India
  - ↳ Heroes, N=16
  - ↳ Traits, N=15
- USA
  - ↳ Heroes, N=15
  - ↳ Traits, N=15

US and Greece participants were individuals known to the researchers. India participants were recruited through Amazon mTurk.

### Design:

USA participants were given physical **flashcards** with 1 hero/trait on each card and asked to sort them into piles. Greece and India participants were assigned the same task, but used virtual flashcards through [optimalworkshop.org](http://optimalworkshop.org) instead. For all countries, the heroes and traits given for sorting were selected from the data of the first survey, based on frequency of appearance. Participants were permitted to have at least one term in each category they created, with maximum restriction the total number of terms given to them.

## Results

1. There was a statistically significant effect of participants' country on participants' ratings of heroes on each of the 26 traits.

Sample results:

Dependent Variable	Country	Mean
AvgBrave	America	6.260
	Greece	6.333
	India	5.333

2. Participants rated their heroes on the 26 traits on a scale of 0='Not at All' to 6='Very much'. The middle, or baseline rating, was 4='Neutral'. We found that heroes were rated significantly higher than the average on each of the 26 traits by participants of all 3 countries.

Sample results:

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
AvgBrave	28.392	222	.000	1.99552	1.8570	2.1345

### 3. Patterns:

- a) Greece > USA > India:  
E.g. Brave, Courageous, Self-sacrifice...
- a) USA > Greece > India  
E.g. Moral Integrity...
- b) USA > India > Greece  
E.g. Proactive...

### 4. Relationship between country and Hero categories:

There was a statistically significant effect on the categorization of heroes based on the country of the participants. Specifically, US participants named the fewest cultural heroes, followed by Greece, with India naming the largest number of cultural heroes. Below are the means for each country, with 0=Cultural and 1=Personal

Country	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
America	.1935	.39599	217
Greece	.0619	.24213	113
India	.0000	.00000	243
Total	.0855	.27989	573

### 5. Relationship between Hofstede Indices and Hero categories:

There was a statistically significant effect between the Power Distance Index (PDI) and hero categorization. Specifically, higher PDI predicts more cultural heroes being named. The Masculinity Index (MAS) had the reverse effect. Higher levels of MAS predicted more personal heroes being named. There was no statistically significant effect by the Individualism Index (IDV). Below are the means for each Index. (0=Cultural, 1=Personal)

PDI				IDV				MAS			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N		Mean	Std. Deviation	N		Mean	Std. Deviation	N
40.0	.1935	.39599	217	35.0	.0619	.24213	113	56.0	.0000	.00000	243
60.0	.0619	.24213	113	48.0	.0000	.00000	243	57.0	.0619	.24213	113
77.0	.0000	.00000	243	91.0	.1935	.39599	217	62.0	.1935	.39599	217
Total	.0855	.27989	573	Total	.0855	.27989	573	Total	.0855	.27989	573

## Results (Continued)

### Heroes

USA	GREECE	INDIA
Political Heroes	Superheroes	Actors
Celebrities	War Heroes	Non-Actors
Superheroes/Family	Heroes of Antiquity	Spiritual/Political Activists
Religious Activists	Family and Friends	
Athletes		
Military Heroes		
Activists		
Revolutionaries		
Science Pioneers		

### Traits

USA	GREECE	INDIA
Community	Altruism	Piety
Conviction	Values	Magnetism
Agency	Agency	Agency
Activism	Conviction	Charisma
Wisdom-Enlightenment	<b>Efficacy</b>	Leadership
<b>Extraversion</b>	<b>Strength of Character</b>	
<b>Values</b>	<b>Martyrdom</b>	
<b>Self-sacrificing</b>	<b>Charisma</b>	

Categories in **bold** were less distinct.

## Discussion

Our findings suggest a significant effect of culture and nationality on our choices and perceptions of heroes along with essential heroic traits. This study offers new insights into Heroism Science as it is the first of its kind to focus on cross-cultural judgments. Thus, there is still more research to be done to establish additional and more specific relationships between other cultural metrics and aspects of heroism.

## References

- Kinsella, E. L., Ritchie, T. D., & Igou, E. R. (2015). Zeroing in on heroes: A prototype analysis of hero features. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 108(1), 114-127. doi:10.1037/a0038463
- Hofstede, Geert (2001). *Culture's Consequences: comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: