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

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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
6 conditions
Raised and living in:
- Greece, N=55
- USA, N=100
- India, N=68

Design: Qualtrics Survey (Demographics & Attention Check questions included)

Questions:
- Write the names of 3 heroes.
- Your first/second/…/fifth hero was:
- Describe your hero’s personality.

Method – Study 2

Participants: N=76
6 conditions
- Greece, N=16
- India, N=15
- USA, N=15

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 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:

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:

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Cultural</th>
<th>Personal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 not statistically significant effect by the Individualism Index (IDV). Below are the means for each Index. (0=Cultural, 1=Personal)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>Greece</th>
<th>India</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PDI</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDV</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAS</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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