



Show Me Who You Respect and I Will Tell You What Your Culture Is

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Abstract

Television shows can vary greatly between cultures, and it is possible that they may display what moral values are most important to a culture. In order to evaluate whether this is true the first author conducted a content analysis of the valence of moral values in French and Spanish television shows. This study analyzed the French show *Lupin* and the Spanish show *La Casa de Papel* which are both from the genre of crime and evaluated the valence of how the moral values of group loyalty and respect were depicted. Based on data from previous studies, the hypothesis was that the Spanish show would portray group loyalty as positive more often than the French show and would portray respect for authority negatively more often than the French show. The hypothesis was supported with regard to respect for authority but not group loyalty, which suggests that the hypothesis could be true but further research would be needed.

Keywords: morality, content analysis of film, morality as cooperation

Valence of Moral Principles in French and Spanish Television

Media and family members socialize children from a young age by teaching them about morality and what is right and wrong according to the views of their culture. Although, according to many theories of moral development, basic moral principles are universal, some differences in the degree to which people of various countries prioritize some moral values over others exist (e.g., Grusec, 2011; Curry et al., 2019). It is also likely that some of these cultural differences in moral values may be reflected in the media of their respective cultures, such as TV shows. For example, a content analysis of American popular children's movies by Gehman et al., (2021) revealed that the heroic characters were depicted as abiding by and promoting more individualizing moral values (i.e., care and fairness) and less so of binding moral values (i.e., loyalty, authority, and sanctity) compared to the villains. The villains, on the other hand, were promoting or endorsing binding moral values more and less individualizing foundations. These

findings are not surprising given that the Western countries and the United States are known to be more individualistic and less collectivistic (Green et al., 2005). These moral values and beliefs grow throughout a person's life and can be reflected in the media they create.

The present content analysis was designed to investigate the valence of the depictions of loyalty and respect to authority in the French crime television show *Lupin* and the Spanish crime television show *La Casa de Papel* (Degeorges et al., 2021; Pina et al., 2017). Crime shows were chosen because loyalty and respect of authority would be salient moral concerns in these types of shows. Specifically, the characters in crime shows tend to break a social norm of obeying the law and will likely display the values important to the culture to make the audience sympathize with the characters. The moral values of loyalty and respect in this study were based on the theory of morality-as-cooperation (Curry et al., 2019). Morality-as-cooperation defines morality through seven moral values which are family values, group loyalty, reciprocity, bravery, respect, fairness, and property rights. The moral principles of respect for authority and group loyalty were of particular interest due to hypothesized differences in cultural endorsement of those morals in France and Spain.

Although Spain and France are both Western countries, and are considered individualistic in their cultural orientation, Green et al., (2005) found that France is more individualistic and more competitive than Spain. Tossell et al., (2022) found that people of Spain endorse group loyalty to a greater extent and that Spanish people believe themselves to have a strong conviction to be loyal to a group. Furthermore, France and Spain differ in the poverty rates which could affect how people view characters that are shown to be in similar economic situations (Giarda & Moroni, 2017). Data from 2012 showed that Spain had a poverty rate of 20.8% while France had a poverty rate of 14% (Giarda & Moroni, 2017). Spain was also found to have a higher degree of poverty persistence than France, meaning that Spanish citizens are more likely to live in an impoverished situation and will also find it harder to escape poverty. In addition, the Spanish government has had difficulties with corruption which has led to increased distrust in the government from Spanish citizens (Villoria et al., 2012). Overall, weak economy can affect the way people relate to people in power or authority. A study by Herrmann, Thoni, and Gächter (2008) supports this theory. Specifically, the study conducted several experiments in which subjects from different countries played a public goods game. This game entailed choosing to either keep game tokens for themselves or contributing them for a group project. The rule is that

the more tokens are invested by the participants in the game the more everyone can earn money at the end. This study found a notable difference between participants of different countries. Specifically, more participants from countries with weaker institutions and economies “punished” the group members who contributed equally or even more. They called this an “antisocial punishment”. The explanation was that people of these countries may have more distrust in other people, and thus, exhibit more antisocial punishment.

These differences may further lead to differences in the content of fictional narrative. For example, the Spanish media may be more inclined to portray the government and law enforcement in a less positive light. Based on these reviews, it was hypothesized that there would be a difference in the valence (i.e., positive or negative depiction) of the moral acts of respect for authority and group loyalty in French and Spanish television. Specifically, the depictions of characters in French media that are meant to be sympathized with will be depicted as capable and self-reliant and therefore group loyalty will tend to be depicted more negatively (Green et al., 2005). In contrast, media from Spain would be expected to mirror the values held by the citizens which would result in a higher prevalence of group loyalty being depicted in a positive way. Spanish shows may also show a higher prevalence of respect for authority being depicted with a negative valence due to the distrust of the government stemming from corruption (Villoria et al., 2012). The predictor variable will be culture while the criterion variable will be valence of moral values.

Methods

Research Design and Procedures

The first 10 episodes from the French show *Lupin* and the Spanish show *La Casa de Papel* were selected for the present study. Both shows are in the genre of crime and have relatively similar story lines (Degeorges et al., 2021; Pina et al., 2017). *Lupin* follows a man who steals from people who have made their money through unethical means through elaborate plans. He commits the crimes to support himself and to try to help his family. *La Casa de Papel* follows a group of criminals who conduct an elaborate heist in order to bring themselves out of poverty and to avoid having to commit crimes again to support themselves and their families. The genre of crime was chosen because the stories should entail themes of loyalty and authority more so than other genres. It was expected that the characters would encounter many situations where

they would have to demonstrate their preferences for the values of group loyalty and obeying/respecting authority. Thirty-five minutes of each episode were coded. The first author coded each instance of any character with at least one line displaying one of the chosen moral values. Both verbal and nonverbal expressions of the values were coded.

Variables and Measures

In this study morality was defined using the theory of morality-as-cooperation (Curry et al., 2019). Positive and negative valence were defined as whether an action was presented in a positive or negative light. An example of an action with a positive valence is if a person puts themselves in danger to protect someone in their group. This would be recorded as an action with positive valence for group loyalty. The valence of an action was determined by how other characters responded to the action and the way it was presented. When coding, *Lupin* was coded as 0 while *La Casa de Papel* was coded as 1. A second coder was trained and coded two episodes from each show to measure inter-rater reliability/agreement between two coders on the valence of moral acts.

Valence of Group Loyalty

Group loyalty was conceptually defined as favoring one's group/group members through various actions. In operational terms, group memberships in the two shows were either being part of a police force or a criminal group/gang. Once the act of group loyalty was observed, the coder had to determine its valence. Positive group loyalty valence was coded when the act of loyalty was done in a positive manner, for example to save an outsider of the group to help a group member (e.g., another gang member or a police officer). If an act of loyalty was done but it hurt other people, for example, by killing an innocent person to help the group member (either another police officer or a gang member) it was coded as negative. The definition of group loyalty excluded loyalty to familial groups.

Cohen's kappa agreement in the valence of loyalty of act, was $\kappa = 1.00$, $p < .005$, which represents a perfect agreement between the coders.

Valence of Respect for authority

The unit of coding was every instance of an act of loyalty or respect of authority. Respect for authority was conceptually defined as respect towards an authority figure. It was operationally

defined as any action that demonstrated respect or deference to a person or an authoritative group. This definition included expressions of respect towards a person with knowledge in a certain subject and expressions of respect towards the government. An action would be coded as a positive expression of respect for authority if a character obeyed an authority depicted as good or disobeyed an authority depicted as bad. For example, if a character obeys the orders of a good authority like a police officer, or disobeys the orders of a bad authority such as a gang leader or corrupt police officer, both would be coded as positive. An action would be coded as a negative expression of group loyalty if a character obeyed a bad authority or disobeyed a good authority.

Cohen's kappa agreement in the valence of respect for authority act, was $\kappa = 1.00$, $p < .005$, which represents a perfect agreement between the coders.

Results

The coding yielded a total sample size of 49 instances of group loyalty and 65 instances for respect. Two separate chi-square tests were calculated separately with valence of group loyalty and respect as two separate criteria variables. As shown in Table 1, no significant differences in the depiction of valence of loyalty between the two shows were found ($p=.617$). However, a statistically significant difference in the valence of respect between the two shows was found, $p<.000$ (see Table 2). Thus, the data for group loyalty did not support the hypothesis that cultural differences would be found; however, the results confirmed the hypothesis with respect as the moral value. Specifically, the data shows that the Spanish television program had a higher prevalence of presenting respect for authority with a negative valence than the French show.

Table 1. Culture of TV Show and Valence of Group Loyalty

Culture	Valence			χ^2
	Positive	Negative	Total	
France	14	19	33	0.250
Spain	8	8	16	
Total	22	27	49	

Table 2. Culture of TV Show and Valence of Respect

Culture	Valence			χ^2
	Positive	Negative	Total	
France	31	12	43	17.021**
Spain	4	18	22	
Total	35	30	65	

Note. **= $p \leq .01$.

Discussion

The original hypothesis was that there would be a significant difference in the depiction of the valence of group loyalty and respect in French and Spanish television. It was expected that Spanish television would show group loyalty with a positive valence more often than French television since previous studies had shown that Spanish citizens valued group loyalty more than French citizens (Green et al., 2005). The results of the analysis did not support the hypothesis regarding the valence of group loyalty. Instead, our analysis indicate that loyalty in both shows are represented almost equally as “bad” and “good”, based on the consequences of the characters’ actions. One notable difference was in the frequency of depictions of loyal acts. The Spain TV show had fewer instances of loyalty acts compared to the French TV show.

The hypothesis about the valence of respect for authority was supported. Specifically, the Spanish television show mainly portrayed respect for authority in a negative way while the French show portrayed it more in a positive way. For example, at one point in *La Casa de Papel* when a main character chose to work with the police in exchange for their own benefit, it was portrayed as a negative action with negative consequences. The character was rejected from the group and did not receive any benefits from their deal with the authorities. Whereas in *Lupin* when the main character chose to work with the police it was portrayed as a positive action that helped people and portrayed the police as competent and honest. The main character in the French show chose to work with the police because a character was harming people which lead the main character to work with the police even though it put him in a position to get arrested. His actions resulted in the character that harmed people being captured by the police and facing charges for his crimes which helped the police with ongoing investigations and benefitted the main character. Thus, this finding further supports the notion that weak institutions and economy may give rise to distrust in one’s government, which in turn, may lead to more negative depictions of people in power in fictional narratives.

The results of the study should be considered with caution due to significant limitations in the methodology. First, only one show from each country was analyzed and only a portion of the episodes was coded. Therefore, our findings only represent a portion of the narrative of the shows. Second, despite being both shows of crime and order, the plots vary to some degree which can explain either the lack of differences in the depiction of loyalty or the difference in the depiction of respect for authority. It would be worthwhile to conduct content analyses on a larger sample of TV shows and genres in order to provide stronger evidence for the differences.

Despite the aforementioned limitations, the results suggest that the content of story telling in TV shows reflect, to some degree, the cultural values of their people. However, our findings also point to the complexity of cultures and variations within countries that may sometimes be grouped together as individualistic or collectivistic.

Specifically, differences in the framing of certain moral values on TV can be different even between Western cultures with a higher degree of individualism. The difference in the valence of respect for authority between France and Spain can be attributed to the current economic and political climate of the two countries. There is evidence to suggest that people of countries with weaker institutions and rule of law may develop a higher distrust of their governmental institutions and even other people (Herrmann et al., 2008). Furthermore, the audience who watch these shows may be further influenced by the shows and develop even stronger attitudes about their government, people in authority, and cultural values.

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