Would You Rather Be a Hero or a Celebrity? A Cross-Cultural Study of Celebrity Worship and Aspirations in Iran and Afghanistan: A Brief Report

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Abstract: The present study examined differences in the desire to become a celebrity versus a hero in Iran and Afghanistan and investigated whether admiration of one's favorite celebrity was associated with these aspirations. Participants completed an online questionnaire including a 7-item version of the Celebrity Attitude Scale (CAS-7) and measures of desire to become a celebrity or hero. In Iran, participants reported significantly greater interest in becoming a hero than a celebrity, whereas this difference was not significant in Afghanistan. CAS-7 scores were positively associated with the desire to become a celebrity in both Iran and Afghanistan. These findings suggest that the desire to be a hero, rather than a celebrity, extends well beyond American borders.

Heroes are generally characterized by their willingness to make personal sacrifices and take risks for the benefit of others, whereas celebrities usually achieve widespread public recognition through media exposure and fame. Importantly, being a hero does not necessarily entail becoming famous (Grabbe et al., 2024; St. Peters et al., 2026). This distinction raises an interesting question: when given the opportunity to become either a hero or a celebrity, which status would individuals prefer?

Grabbe et al. (2024) examined this question among American college students using brief measures of the desire to become a hero or a celebrity. Participants reported a stronger desire to become a hero than a celebrity. The authors also examined the association between celebrity admiration

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and these aspirations. CAS-7 scores were positively associated with the desire to become a celebrity, whereas no significant association was found between CAS-7 and the desire to become a hero. More recently, St. Peters et al. (2026) revisited this question using a stronger research design and again found stronger preferences for becoming a hero than a celebrity. They also replicated the positive association between CAS-7 and the desire to become a celebrity, providing additional support for the relationship between celebrity admiration and celebrity aspirations in American participants.

Would the same pattern be observed in other cultural contexts? The present study addresses this issue by replicating the hero-versus-celebrity question among participants from Iran and Afghanistan following the procedure used by Grabbe et al. (2024).

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

To facilitate data collection and obtain sufficiently large samples in each country, two data-collection groups were established within each country: one group for the celebrity condition and the other for the hero condition. Several data collectors withdrew from their groups due to personal reasons. Consequently, the number of responses obtained across the four groups was not equal, and some groups yielded fewer responses than initially anticipated. Nevertheless, an adequate number of participants was obtained for each of the four groups in both countries. The final samples comprised 658 Iranian participants (411 celebrity, 247 hero) and 236 Afghan participants (68 celebrity, 168 hero).

Measures

Admiration for one's favorite celebrity was assessed using the seven-item CAS-7 (Zsila et al., 2024). The response format for the CAS-7 is a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Sample items include "I share with my favorite celebrity a special bond that cannot be described in words" and "it is enjoyable just to be with others who like my favorite celebrity." High scores indicate stronger admiration. This brief version of the 23-item scale has been shown to have good reliability and validity (Ahadi et al., 2025; Zsila et al., 2024).

The desire to become a celebrity or a hero was measured using two parallel scenarios and two-item measures originally developed for the Grabbe et al. study (2024). In the celebrity condition, participants were asked to imagine having the opportunity to become a celebrity, defined as a person who becomes very famous through numerous television or other media appearances, and were further asked to assume that they would not become wealthy as a result. In the hero condition, participants were asked

to imagine having the opportunity to become a hero, defined as a person who goes out of one's way to perform a highly helpful act that might benefit others while taking a large personal risk to do so, with the additional assumption that they would not become wealthy or famous as a byproduct. Under each scenario, participants responded to two items: "How much would you sacrifice to be a [celebrity/hero], as defined above?" and "If you lived your entire life and never became a [celebrity/hero], as defined above, how much would that bother you?" Responses to the first item ranged from 1 (almost nothing) to 7 (almost everything), whereas the second item was also answered using the corresponding response scale. The two item scores were summed to create a total desire score ranging from 2 to 14, with higher scores indicating a stronger desire to become a celebrity (or hero).

Independent-samples t tests were used to compare participants' ratings of becoming a celebrity versus becoming a hero within each country. Levene's test found the homogeneity of variance assumption was violated, thus Welch's *t* test (equal variances not assumed) was used. Pearson correlations were calculated separately for the celebrity and hero groups in each country to examine associations between interest in the respective scenario and celebrity admiration. All tests were two-tailed.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics and comparisons of participants' interest in becoming a celebrity versus a hero are presented in Table 1. In Iran, interest in becoming a hero was significantly higher than interest in becoming a celebrity, $t(627.03) = -6.15$, $p < .001$. In Afghanistan, although the mean level of interest was also higher in the hero condition, the difference between the two conditions was not statistically significant, $t(99.31) = -1.41$, $p = .161$.

Table 1

Comparison of desire to become a celebrity versus a hero

Country	**Condition**	***n***	***M***	***SD***
Iran	Celebrity	411	5.88	3.52
	Hero	247	7.36	2.62
Afghanistan	Celebrity	68	7.90	4.36
	Hero	168	8.73	3.29

Pearson correlation analyses are presented in Table 2. In Afghanistan, CAS-7 scores were positively associated with both interest in becoming a

celebrity and interest in becoming a hero. In Iran, a significant positive association was observed between CAS-7 scores and interest in becoming a celebrity, whereas the association between CAS-7 scores and interest in becoming a hero was not statistically significant.

Table 2
Pearson correlations between CAS-7 scores and desire to become either a celebrity or hero

Country	**Condition**	***n***	***r***	***p***
Iran	Celebrity	411	.438	< .001
Iran	Hero	247	.107	.092
Afghanistan	Celebrity	68	.448	< .001
Afghanistan	Hero	168	.324	< .001

DISCUSSION

In Iran, participants expressed a significantly stronger desire to become a hero than a celebrity. This finding replicates the pattern reported by Grabbe et al. (2024) and St. Peters et al. (2026) in two American samples. In Afghanistan, however, the difference between the two aspirations was not statistically significant. It should be noted, however, that had the Afghan sample been as large as the Iranian sample, the mean difference (.83) might have reached significance.

The association between CAS-7 scores and the desire to become a celebrity was positive and significant in both Iran and Afghanistan. This finding is consistent with the results of Grabbe et al. (2024) and St. Peters et al. (2026). It is also consistent with earlier research showing a positive association between CAS scores and desire for fame (Greenwood et al., 2018; Zsila et al., 2018; Zsila et al., 2019).

In Afghanistan, CAS-7 scores were positively associated with hero aspiration, whereas this association was not significant in Iran. This finding requires further investigation.

This study relied on self-report data and had problems with the data collection process. However, it shows that the desire to be a hero, one who risks danger to help others, is stronger than the desire to become famous, usually for one's ability as an actor, singer, or athlete (Hitlan et al., 2021; Zsila et al., 2019). Furthermore, this hopeful difference appears well beyond American borders.

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