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"This is who we are!" National identity construction and the 2014 FIFA World Cup

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Abstract

Drawing on the literature on American nationalism and the social identity perspective, this study examines the effects of mediasport on nationalized attitudes, using both rhetorical and experimental approaches. First, a rhetorical analysis examined the nationalistic themes featured in the game promotional ad of the US vs. Ghana soccer match in World Cup 2014, linking these themes to the republicanism/liberalism paradox in American political thought. Using the social identity perspective, we predicted the effects of these themes on US participants' nationalized attitudes, and tested our hypotheses using an experiment. Experimental findings indicate that exposure to nationalistic rhetoric indirectly increases uncritical patriotism, critical patriotism, and support of militarism attitudes via self-enhancement gratifications. Additionally, exposure to nationalistic rhetoric also indirectly influences uncritical patriotism via social uncertainty reduction gratifications. Our study demonstrates the utility of a mixed-method approach, and points out directions for future research on the (re)construction of social identities through mediasport.

Keywords: nationalism, social identity, sport, World Cup, social identity gratifications

"This is Who We Are!" National Identity Construction and the 2014 FIFA World Cup

The 2014 FIFA World Cup television viewership records highlight the growing

popularity of soccer around the world, especially in countries where interest in the sport has

traditionally been lower (e.g., Canada, U.S.). Specifically, FIFA reported the 2014 World Cup

represented "a 'watershed' moment for football in the United States," reaching an all-time high

viewership by topping the viewing figures for the 2014 NBA Finals (FIFA, n.d.). The match

between the United States and Ghana became ESPN's most-viewed men's soccer match (Zucker,

2014), totaling 11,093,000 viewers across the country (Forbes, 2014).

Both rhetorical and social scientific sports communication research maintains that there

are group-based implications of international mediasport, including the Olympics and the World

Cup (e.g., Billings, Brown, & Brown-Devlin, 2015; Meân, 2010). Put differently, both research

streams find that international sporting events, unlike more popular domestic sporting events in

the United States such as the Super Bowl, serve as a site for (re)constructing and negotiating

group identity. The World Cup is uniquely positioned to foster conceptions of national identity

because each nation is competing on equal footing in the same event, unlike other international

contests such as the Olympics in which different countries thrive in different sports. Whereas

U.S.-specific sports such as baseball and football often divide Americans based on regional and

local identities, the World Cup can foster a shared sense of nationalism and belonging.

Indeed, survey research finds a positive association among international mediasport

viewing (i.e., the Olympics) and conceptions of nationalism (Billings, N. A. Brown et al., 2013).

Such findings complement rhetorical work suggesting that media texts associated with

international sports function as "crucial" components to our understanding of national identity

and political thought (Butterworth, 2010, p. 136). This previous work provides valuable insight

into the role of sport in identity construction. Yet, in our study, we use a novel mixed-method

approach that integrates rhetorical criticism and social scientific experimentation to study

exposure to both the games themselves along with a 90-second promotional ad for the World

Cup 2014 soccer match between the United States vs. Ghana. Victory Pictures produced this

ad—an ad steeped in symbols of U.S. nationalism and shown immediately before the match

(Suddath, 2014). We believe that this mixed-method approach is advantageous because

nationalism research has long suggested that national identities are rhetorically constructed

(Anderson, 1991). To truly understand the potential effects of exposure to these messages,

scholars need to have a firmer grasp of the rhetorical dimensions underlying the media text.

Our work seeks to make two distinct contributions to this growing area of media and

sports. First, this study builds on existing survey evidence by strengthening the causal

relationship between viewing international mediasport and nationalized attitudes (e.g., Billings,

N.A. Brown, et al., 2013). Second, our work provides evidence that mediasport's ability to

influence nationalized attitudes is based in part on gratifying two of the underlying dimensions of

social identity motivations—uncertainty reduction and self-enhancement (Reid & Hogg, 2005).

To do so, we first provide a rhetorical analysis of the promotional segment that highlights

American exceptionalism and its rhetorical ability to unite, divide, and motivate viewers. We

then connect the insights from this analysis to the social identity literature and experimentally

test the effects that such content had on American viewers.

Nationalism and the World Cup

Theoretical underpinnings. How we talk and write about nations influence how we

think about them. Anderson (1991) famously described nations as "imagined communities . . .

conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship" (p. 7). This definition suggests that rhetoric plays a

formative role in constituting the meaning of the nation-state. The symbolism attached to nations

and national identities is so powerful that millions of people have been willing to kill and die

"for such limited imaginings" (p. 7). Such communities are "distinguished not by their

falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (p. 6). Anderson's perspective

assumes that nations are as much of a byproduct of language, symbols, and myths as they are of

institutional structures and physical borders. Put differently, examining the nation-state from

Anderson's perspective means recognizing both the material *and* rhetorical constructions of

geographic borders, government structures, patriotic images, and the like. It means

understanding how leaders and citizens rhetorically define what it means to be part of a national

community. In the United States, this nationalist rhetoric draws on cultural and patriotic symbols

to marshal power and articulate these identity constructions.

Our perspective derives from theories of U.S. nationalism and features four parts. First,

the rhetoric of U.S. nationalism facilitates emotional connections among audiences under a

broad, amorphous sense of national pride. As Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles (2006) explained,

"texts of nationalism typically offer a mythic ideal of individual and collective identity" (p. 15).

Second, these emotional reactions to nationalist rhetoric serve a normative role for

American citizens. Nationalism rhetoric directs and inspires behaviors that help in reducing

uncertainty in human interactions. Rhetorics of nationalism offer a familiar and comforting path

for behavior in social settings. Such nationalism rhetorics help forge national identities that act as

sources of unity, "pride," and division (Jackson. 2013, p. 215). A common behavior dictated by

nationalistic rhetoric is that citizens must heed the call for defending the nation-state from

external threats. Militaristic and masculine imagery are fused with nationalistic rhetoric. The end

result is the "valorization of war" that promotes patriotic pride through the domination of others (Tickner. 2001, p. 49, 56).

Third, the rhetoric of U.S. nationalism often excludes and marginalizes others. The rhetoric of U.S. nationalism reinforces a sense of U.S. exceptionalism that defines America's special place in the world and diminishes the national identities of others. In the process, national identities can enhance an individual's sense of self-worth, self-esteem, and confidence. Yet, as Tudor (2006) argues, media coverage of sports and of soccer can also divide nations, creating us v. them binaries.

Fourth, images of U.S. nationalism are circulated by media via the spoken word (e.g., songs, speeches) and visual symbols (e.g., pledges, salutes, photographs). These forms of nationalism are integrated in different forms of mass communication and popular culture (e.g., film, ads). Castelló, Dhoest, and O'Donnell (2009) explained that nationalism discourses circulate through media, while Bernstein and Blain (2002) argued that sports are essential components of media framing in nationalism discourses.

Discourses of U.S. nationalism ultimately reveal the paradoxes inherent in U.S. political thought (Beasley, 2004). This identity paradox is evident in the tensions between theories of republicanism and liberalism, representing distinct strands of nationalist ideology. First, republicanism promotes the common good over the selfish interests of the individual. This strand of nationalism is conceived as an "ideology" that promotes the "autonomy" of the nation-state and unifies its citizens through a rhetoric of shared "identity" (Smith, 2000, p. 3). U.S. identity thus depends on a sense of patriotism uniting large groups of people behind shared conceptions of nationalism. It depends on institutions reifying such beliefs. And it relies on a resistance to criticism of these beliefs. Through mediated texts, commitments to republican political thought

help build emotional attachments among individuals and the nation-state, instilling a patriotic

fervor that resists criticism of these important institutions and the individuals who represent

them. Patriotism is advanced through these collectivist commitments. Nationalism rhetoric is

consequently unifying and foundational to the rhetoric of war and sports as soldiers/players

selflessly give of themselves for the advancement of the national team (especially team-based

sports. Sports and militarism, for example, share rhetorical tropes, such as "fighting in the

trenches," "defeat the enemy," "death match," and "fighting for every inch."

Conversely, liberalism is grounded in individualism and the promotion of individual

rights. Liberalism expresses more resistance and hostility to interference from institutions and

forges a much more independent spirit. In the nineteenth century, liberalism and athletics were

often fused because the two shared a commitment to "competition, self-help, struggle and effort"

(Anderson, 2010, p. 68). Conceptions of republicanism are designed to promote a unified

identity and a team spirit that elevated the group above the individual. Liberalism in contrast

privileges rugged individualism over a unified collectivity as the force of national identity that

valorized "athletes [who] compete and struggle without assistance through hard work"

(Anderson, 2010, p. 68). This identity fosters patriotic pride steeped in notions of *individualism*

and self-reliance. Individuals embrace a national identity, but on their own terms, and without

surrendering their sense of independence or their need for the group. Commitments to liberalism

are also visible in these four components of nationalism, where a pride in rugged individualism

helps unite groups behind shared ideologies and exclude individuals who do not measure up to

this nationalist ideal. Liberal conceptions of politics and sports can also promote patriotism but

there is a much more independent spirit animating such ideologies.

U.S. nationalism often reifies ideological tensions between collective and individual

values. These four aspects of nationalism (i.e., emotional attachments, normative behaviors,

exclusion rhetorics, and media circulations), steeped in ideologies of republicanism and

liberalism, guide our rhetorical analysis of the 2014 World Cup ad for the U.S. vs. Ghana soccer

match. It is to these mediated and complex rhetorics of nationalism that we now turn.

Rhetorical analysis. The United States vs. Ghana soccer match during the 2014 World

Cup featured a promotional ad that depicted many of these nationalism ideologies. First, this ad

functioned to showcase U.S. exceptionalism and connected audiences with an amorphous sense

of U.S. pride. With images of U.S. players practicing and running, the voiceover exclaims, "This

is who *we* are." This ad suggests that U.S. character is defined by hard work and perseverance.

Yet, the ad also showcases the paradox of nationalism at work as individual players are featured

as working hard in the spirit of rugged individualism while trying to achieve the ultimate mission

of a team victory that can only be accomplished via collective action. Americans seemingly

represent the target audience, with expressions like, "*You* doubt *us*?" and "we" used throughout.

On one hand, the ad consequently unites U.S. audiences through a broad sense of patriotism and

exceptionalism. On the other, the ad also reifies the power of the rugged individual working hard

to build a sense of physical strength and power.

Second, the introduction suggests how audiences should react and behave by promoting

the militaristic and masculine imaginary. The ad showcases military service as a nationalist

assumption of U.S. identity that exists in tension with the force of rugged individualism. Images

of two uniformed military officers are interspersed throughout the training montage. The

voiceover announces, "Challenges are what we wake up for." One of the officers is a female who

walks with a serious expression on her face. The female officer reinforces the symbolism of

rugged individualism as a woman defying tradition by becoming a leader in a hyper-masculine institution. Kiefer Southerland providing the ad's voiceover furthers the force of rugged individualism. Southerland is best known for his starring role on the hyper-masculine TV show *24* that featured Southerland's "Jack Bauer" and U.S. military personnel torturing and killing terrorists for nine seasons. Southerland often defeated powerful enemies on his own through cunning foresight and physical prowess. Yet, Southerland also gives voice to a sense of the group spirit when ending the advertisement with the following remark: "Group of death? Makes sense . . . because we're in it." The audience is encouraged to link the soccer tradition in the United States with U.S. militarism, heroism, and patriotic masculinity. The ad's producers from Victory Pictures affirmed a commitment to such themes in internal e-mails when expressing: "Nice job getting Jack Bauer" (Suddath, 2014, n.p.). At the same time, the spirit of republicanism is furthered through images of U.S. soccer players running, diving, heading, and kicking the ball in unified and self-less ways. They also show solidary when marching into the stadium together, as if in military formation. The implication is clear: Team USA is ready to defend the nation from external threats. These images together feature the rugged individualism of liberalism with the collective group spirit of republicanism.

Third, the ad reinforces rhetorics of exclusion typical of U.S. nationalism discourses. Ghana is portrayed as a small, overly confident nation: "Ghana. A West African nation about the size of Oregon. Took us out of the last two World Cups . . . and really seemed to enjoy it." Such depictions indicate that Ghana is small and therefore weak compared to the strong and massive United States. The ad also implies that the Ghanaian players and fans are not serious opponents as they are shown dancing and celebrating instead of practicing like their U.S. counterparts. This introduction serves to otherize and minimize Ghana and its fans/citizens.

Fourth, this ad highlights how U.S. nationalism is constructed and reified through mediated symbols. These media discourses include various patriotic symbols visually reifying U.S. nationalism and identity. Patriotic images dominate the ad. The players have red, white, and blue uniforms, and they are often featured out of focus, blending together in a patriotic blur. Someone plays a red, white, and blue guitar and fans chant "U-S-A!" from the stands as an American Bald Eagle screeches in the background. A U.S. player with a serious expression carries an American flag into the stadium. The introduction concludes with a player planting that flag into the stadium's turf with an air of certainty and finality. This weaving together of patriotic images and iconic symbols reinforces the nationalist narrative of U.S. exceptionalism and inevitable triumph of the team and the individual. These rhetorics of unity reinforce a sense of republican political thought where the shared mission of the nation is an essential component of national identity. All of the assumptions empowering the discourses of nationalism, thus, are present in this ad. We next explore the impact of these messages on viewers by turning to experiments informed by theories of social identity.

Experimental Study and Hypotheses

Experimental context. The second goal of this study was to test whether propositions from the social identity perspective (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, 1985) predict the effects of exposure to the nationalistic themes revealed in the rhetorical analysis. Social identities are defined as the component of a person's self-concept that is based on their membership into various social groups (nation-states, racial groups, etc.) and the emotional attachment the person has to these social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The social identity perspective acknowledges that people have both individual identities (i.e., based on personal attributes) and multiple social identities (i.e., which vary based on group attributes), and that the communication context will

dictate which identity will be salient at any given time (Turner, 1985). Once a social identity is

activated, people no longer view themselves as unique individuals; instead they view themselves

in terms of these group attributes, with these group attributes guiding one's social perceptions

(Turner, 1985). A primary proposition of the social identity perspective is that when individuals

are viewing themselves in terms of their group memberships, they are motivated to view their

own groups (termed ingroups) favorably compared to other social groups they are not a part of

(termed outgroups) because favorable social group comparisons reflect positively on the person's

self-concept (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Research connecting the formation of ingroups and

outgroups to sporting contexts is not new (for a review see, Bryant & Cummins, 2010).

Specifically, this line of work finds that connection to specific teams (e.g., the home or regional

team) functions like a conventional social identity (e.g., racial groups). More notable to the

current context, international mediasport has been linked to national identity construction both

social scientifically (e.g., Billings, K. A. Brown, & N. A. Brown, 2013) and rhetorically (e.g.,

Butterworth, 2010).

The social identity perspective dovetails nicely with the U.S. nationalism approach used

above for several reasons. First, both the social identity perspective (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1986)

and the rhetorical approach (e.g., Bruner, 2002) emphasize that people are emotionally connected

to their social groups, in this case, one's nation. Second, both perspectives (e.g., Smith, 1999;

Tajfel & Turner, 1986) assume that identities are constructed in part through social comparisons

to other groups, which can lead to forms of "othering". Third, once these identities are

(re)constructed rhetorically, and activated cognitively, both perspectives acknowledge that

(national) identities serve as an important guide to social attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Beasley,

2004; Turner, 1985). And finally, both perspectives appreciate the important role of the media in

these processes (e.g., Atwell Seate & Mastro, 2015; Butterworth, 2010). Thus, though these

perspectives take a different tack, methodologically, they are complementary in their

understanding of identity construction and the implications of said (re)construction. Taken

together this suggests that the predictions grounded in the social identity perspective will provide

insights into the effects of exposure to the identity-based discourses illuminated in our rhetorical

analysis.

  Hypotheses. As stated previously, the social identity perspective has been applied to

understanding identity construction in sport contexts (e.g., Bryant & Cummins, 2010). Overall,

this work finds that sport is an important venue to understanding identity construction, and that

mediasport texts are rich with identity-based themes and images (e.g., Rada & Wulfemeyer,

2005), particularly those themes tied to national identity (e.g., Jiang, 2013). Sporting contexts

that are on the international stage, including the Olympics and the World Cup, are particularly

ripe for national identity (re)construction (Billings et al., 2015; Meân, 2010) as research suggests

that one's national ingroup is typically prominently featured in said coverage (Billings &

Angelini, 2007). Moreover, unlike more popular games in the U.S., such as basketball or

(American) football, international mediasport is more likely to activate a national identity, as

opposed to a regional or local social identity.

  Billings and colleagues' (Billings, K. A. Brown, & N. A. Brown, 2013; Billings, N. A.

Brown et al., 2013; Billings, Brown, & Brown-Devlin, 2015) work in this arena is particularly

notable as their findings indicate that consuming Olympic media coverage is associated with

nationalized attitudes. Specifically, Billings, N. A. Brown, et al. (2013) found that heavy viewers

of the 2012 London Olympics were more likely to endorse higher levels of patriotism,

nationalism, and smugness than light viewers of the Olympic coverage in a sample including six

nations. Similarly, for U.S. respondents, higher levels of 2014 Sochi Olympic media consumption predicted higher levels of patriotism, nationalism, smugness, and internationalism (Billings et al., 2015). The implication here is that exposure to the types of nationalistic themes discussed in the extant literature, and revealed in our rhetorical analysis, activates one's identity in ways congruent with the social identity perspective. Hence, as predicted by theory, individuals should hold attitudes that are congruent with, and that enhance the activated social identity.

In our study we chose to examine the effects of sport media exposure on perceptions of nationalism related to republicanism/liberalism paradox. First, we examined beliefs rooted in a shared group identity found in both U.S. uncritical patriotism and support of militarism. We chose to examine these two constructs because previous work indicates that they are linked to the republican component of the U.S. ideology paradox (Crowson, 2009; Huddy & Khatib, 2007). Huddy and Khatib note that uncritical patriotism is "closely aligned with nationalism and ethnocentrism" and this ideology is associated with a "tendency to defer to authority figures and support them unconditionally" (p. 64). This tendency to support authority figures, termed authoritarianism, predicts support of military actions (Crowson, 2009). Second, we examined critical patriotism that corresponds to a belief in a rugged individualist strand of U.S. political thought (representing the liberalism component of said paradox). We chose this construct because it reflects a form of patriotism that goes against the grain of collectivist group norms (e.g., norms in the form of policy or institutional support). Moreover, the literature indicates that these constructs are important rhetorical dimensions of national identity (re)construction (Smith, 1999) particularly in sporting contexts (e.g., Butterworth, 2010), and previous survey research indicates that sports media consumption is associated with endorsing nationalized attitudes (e.g., Billings, N.A. Brown, et al. 2013).

The social identity literature and our rhetorical analysis illuminate two potential

mechanisms that explain why the identity-based themes discussed above are so important in our

text specifically and mediasport more broadly in influencing nationalized attitudes. First, these

themes provide citizens of the nation state a definition of who they are as a people, thereby

reducing their uncertainty about their social world. In other words, mediasport, particularly

sporting events on the international stage, help citizens understand where they stand compared to

other nations. Second, these identity cues allow for immense feelings of pride in one's social

group that reflect positively on the individual. These two motivations, uncertainty reduction and

self-enhancement, are "the two core individual-level motivations underlying social identity

processes" (Reid & Hogg, 2005, p. 804). In their study, Reid and Hogg (2005) found that both

motivations caused identity-related perceptions. In the current context this suggests that sports'

ability to influence attitudes rests upon the ability of mediasport to gratify the social identity

needs of uncertainty reduction and self-enhancement. Taken together this suggests:

H1: Both exposure to an intergroup game and exposure to an intergroup game along with

the introduction ad have a direct and positive effect on uncertainty reduction gratifications (a)

and self-enhancement gratifications (b), compared to exposure to a non-intergroup game.

H2: There is an indirect effect of exposure to the intergroup game and exposure to the

intergroup game alongside the introduction ad on perceptions of uncritical patriotism (a), critical

patriotism (b), and support of militarism (c) via uncertainty reduction gratifications and self-

enhancement gratifications.

We are also interested if these effects would be more pronounced for those exposed to the

game introduction. In other words, given that our rhetorical analysis found that the nationalistic

themes were highly prevalent in the game introduction, it stands to reason that exposure to a

game featuring the ingroup along with the introduction would exacerbate the findings compared to exposure to the intergroup game alone, or a non-intergroup game. Hence, we propose the following:

H3: Both the direct effect of experimental conditions on the two dimensions of social identity gratification (a) and the indirect effect of experimental conditions on the three outcomes (b) is stronger for those exposed to the game introduction ad compared to those exposed only to the intergroup game.

Figure 1 demonstrates the hypothesized model: The exposure to intergroup game and to the game along with the promotional ad affect the three nationalized attitudes indirectly through the two dimensions of social gratifications.

Method

Participants and Procedure

This study followed an experimental control group design. Study participants were undergraduate students, 18 years of age or older, enrolled in communication classes at a large northeastern university in the U.S. Students were asked to come to the lab in groups of up to eight approximately five months after the conclusion of the 2014 World Cup. They were randomly assigned to one of the three study conditions (see description below) and were seated in separate carrels. Participants received extra course credit for their participation.

Our original sample had 228 participants. However, for the hypothesized effects to be observed, participants had to be U.S. citizens. Therefore, during the data cleaning process, we removed participants if they: 1) did not report their citizenship ($n = 18$) or 2) were not U.S. citizens ($n = 16$). We also removed participants who missed the manipulation check items (see description below; $n = 12$). Hence, the final sample consisted of 182 students. Participants were,

on the average, 19.26 years old (SD = 1.75; range = 15). Most participants were White (57.14%;

14.28% Black, 13.73% Asian/Pacific Islander, 5.59% Hispanic/Latino, 1.09% Native American,

7.07% mixed race/ethnicity, 1.1% other). The sample had an even distribution of males (50.50%)

and females.

Experimental Conditions

The study consisted of two experimental conditions and one control condition. An

important principle is that the experimental and control conditions should be equivalent on as

many elements as possible, with the exception of the elements predicted to be responsible for the

effects observed (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). Therefore, participants in all experimental

conditions watched an approximately 2-minute condensed version of a 2014 World Cup soccer

game. This design allowed for comparable study completion times for all conditions and

eliminated any suspicion on part of the participants in the control condition that they are not

exposed to a treatment (Lindquist et al., 2007). In one of the experimental conditions,

participants watched the highlights from United States and Ghana match, prefaced by the 90-

second ad that was rhetorically analyzed above[2]. We chose to show the ad before the game

highlights because this is how it was presented on *ESPN* when the game was aired. In other

words, when the game originally aired on *ESPN*, the promotional ad was shown immediately

prior to the start of the game. In the other experimental condition, participants saw the same

match without the game introduction ad. Individuals in the control condition watched highlights

from a non-intergroup game between Switzerland and Ecuador. We chose this game because

both matches ended with the same score (2 to 1, for the U.S., and for Switzerland, respectively)

and were part of the first 2014 World Cup stage (i.e., Group G and Group E, respectively). The

game highlights featured each of the teams' goals, the team celebrations after the goals, and

important goal saves. The videos were taken from the FIFA website and the FIFA logo was visible to participants in the upper right corner of the screen.

Manipulation Checks

Participants were asked 1) what teams were playing in the game they just watched; 2) whether there was an introduction to the game they watched; and 3) which teams were featured in the introduction they watched (if their response to question 2 was affirmative). Participants who did not recognize the teams that played and/or failed to report having seen an introduction ad to the game were removed prior to the analyses ($n = 12$).

Measures

Each of the measures reported below had missing data (10% on average). Participants with missing data on any of the variables included in the analyses were compared across the other variables in the model and no significant differences emerged across the groups. Missing cases were replaced with the variables' mean after forming the overall measures. Analyses were performed both prior and after mean replacement and no changes in the study's results emerged. Hence, for our measures below and in our results, we report the variables and the effects with mean replacement.

Self-enhancement gratifications. We measured self-enhancement gratifications with fifteen items rated on a 9-point Likert scale (Joyce, 2014). Example items follow: "I enjoyed the game because it allowed me to feel good about groups I belong to"; and "I enjoyed the game because it allowed me to see people I identify with." Principal components analysis (PCA) revealed that the scale was bi-dimensional, with five items clearly loading on one component. We averaged those to form a measure of self-enhancement gratifications (Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$; $M = 5.39$; $SD = 2.24$).

Social uncertainty reduction gratifications. We measured social uncertainty reduction gratifications with six items rated on 9-point Likert scale (Joyce, 2014). Example items include: "I enjoyed the game because it allowed me to see how other people like me interact with other groups"; and "I enjoyed the game because it allowed me to see how other types of people behave." We averaged the items to form an overall measure of social uncertainty reduction gratifications (Cronbach's α = .90; M = 3.73; SD = 1.84).

Uncritical patriotism. We measured uncritical patriotism with thirteen items rated on a 9-point Likert scale, adapted from Huddy and Khatib (2007). Example items include: "The world would be better if more people from other countries were like Americans"; and "I support my country's leaders even if I disagree with their actions." According to PCA, one item cross-loaded to two different principal components and two items loaded to different components; the three items were dropped from the final scale. The remaining ten items were averaged into an overall index of uncritical patriotism (Cronbach's α = .92; M = 4.12; SD = 1.63).

Critical patriotism. We used four items to measure critical patriotism (Huddy & Khatib, 2007). Each item was rated on a 9-point Likert scale and the measure included "People should work hard to move this country in a positive direction"; and "If I criticize the United States, I do so out of love of country." The items formed an internally consistent measure (Cronbach's α = .82; M = 7.18; SD = 1.26). This measure was slightly negatively skewed and was transformed.

Support of militarism. Support of militarism was measured with two items adapted from Huddy and Khatib (2007): "Supporting U.S. troops is one of the most important things an American can do" and "I would give up my seat for a U.S. serviceperson." The items were rated on a 9-point Likert scale. The items were averaged to form an overall measure (M = 6.52; SD = 1.96, r = .61, p < .001). This measure was also slightly negatively skewed and was transformed.

Results

To test our hypotheses, we used Hayes' PROCESS macro, model 4 (Hayes, 2013). Specifically, the current analyses used 5000 bootstrapped samples for the 95% confidence intervals. Experimental condition was dummy coded such that the control condition served as the reference category. [1] The two mediators (i.e., self-enhancement and social uncertainty reduction gratifications) were entered into the model simultaneously.

Social identity gratifications. H1 predicted a direct effect of experimental condition on the two dimensions of social identity gratifications and H3 (a) predicted that this effect should be stronger for those exposed to the game introduction ad. Exposure to the introduction ad and the intergroup game condition significantly predicted both, self-enhancement gratifications, $b = 1.98$, CI 95% [1.24, 2.71] and social uncertainty reduction gratifications, $b = 0.67$, CI 95% [0.03, 1.32]. Exposure to only the intergroup game predicted self-enhancement gratifications, $b = 1.54$, CI 95% [0.76, 2.32], but not social uncertainty reduction gratifications, $b = 0 .51$, CI 95% [-0.16, 1.19]. Generally speaking, H1 is supported. H3 (a) was not supported given that the confidence intervals overlapped for both self-enhancement gratification and social uncertainty reduction.

Uncritical patriotism. H2 (a) and H3 (b) predicted an indirect effect of experimental conditions via the two dimensions of social identity gratifications on uncritical patriotism, with stronger indirect effects on uncritical patriotism for those exposed to the game introduction ad. Results revealed that the model significantly predicted the outcome, $F (4, 177) = 11.05$, $R^2 = .20$, $p < .001$. Exposure to the ad alongside the game significantly predicted uncritical patriotism indirectly through self-enhancement gratifications, $b = 0.45$, CI 95% [0.18, 0.84] and social uncertainty reduction gratifications, $b = 0.12$, CI 95% [0.003, 0.36]. Exposure to the game only condition indirectly predicted uncritical patriotism through self-enhancement gratifications, $b =$

0.35, CI 95% [0.13, 0.69], but not via social uncertainty reduction gratifications, $b = 0.09$, CI

95% [-0.01, 0.32]. Hence, H2 (a) was mostly supported. H3 (b) was not supported given the

confidence levels overlapped for the indirect effects via both gratifications.

Critical patriotism. H2 (b) and H3 (b) predicted an indirect effect of experimental

condition in predicting critical patriotism via social identity gratifications, with stronger indirect

effects on the outcome for those exposed to game ad. The model significantly predicted the

outcome $F (4, 177) = 4.63$, $R^2 = .09$, $p < .01$. Exposure to the ad alongside the game condition

significantly predicted critical patriotism indirectly through self-enhancement gratifications, $b =$

0.13, CI 95% [0.06, 0.22], but not social uncertainty reduction gratifications, $b = -0.02$, CI 95%

[-0.07, 0.001]. Exposure to only the intergroup game condition indirectly predicted critical

patriotism through self-enhancement gratifications, $b = 0.10$, CI 95% [0.04, 0.18], but not social

uncertainty reduction gratifications, $b = -0.02$, CI 95% [-0.06, 0.002]. H2 (b) was mostly

supported. H3 (b) was not supported given the confidence levels overlapped for the indirect

effects via self-enhancement and the non-significant indirect effects via social uncertainty

reduction.

Support of militarism. H2 (c) and H3 (b) predicted an indirect effect of experimental

condition in predicting support of militarism via social identity gratifications, with stronger

indirect effects on the outcome for those exposed to game ad. The model significantly predicted

the outcome $F (4, 177) = 4.34$, $R^2 = .09$, $p < .01$. Exposure to the ad alongside the game

condition significantly predicted militarism support indirectly through self-enhancement

gratifications, $b = 0.13$, CI 95% [0.04, 0.25], but not social uncertainty reduction gratifications, b

$= -0.01$, CI 95% [-0.06, 0.03]. Exposure to the game only condition indirectly predicted

militarism support through self-enhancement gratifications, $b = 0.10$, CI 95% [0.03, 0.20], but

not via social uncertainty reduction gratifications, $b = -0.005$, CI 95% [-0.06, 0.02]. These findings mirror the findings of critical patriotism, such that H2 (c) was partially supported and H3 (b) was not supported given the confidence levels overlapped for the indirect effects via self-enhancement and the non-significant indirect effects via social uncertainty reduction.

Discussion

Both rhetorical and social scientific sports communication research find group-based identities are constantly negotiated and recreated in sport contexts (e.g., Billings & Angelini, 2007; Meân, 2010). Building upon this rich body of research, we merged insights from the U.S. nationalism literature with the social identity perspective, to show how in combining these two approaches we can provide a more holistic picture regarding the implications of mediasport texts. In doing so, we make several unique contributions to this area of study. First, our study shows the need for continued collaboration between rhetorical and experimental research. Second, we provided causal evidence for the influence of mediasport on attitudes associated with an individual's national identity. In particular, our results reveal the split in national identity between republicanism and liberalism. And, third, we showed that mediasport's ability to gratify social identity-based needs is a driving factor underlying these effects. We discuss each one of these contributions in more detail below.

One of the biggest contributions of this study is showing the utility of a mixed-method, experimental and rhetorical, approach in examining the connection between identity and sport. The literature on media and sports shows that both groups of scholars appreciate the others' perspective (e.g., Billings et al., 2015; Butterworth, 2010). Yet, we are not aware of any other study that has used both methods in conjunction with one another. We believe that combining these two approaches is advantageous because rhetorical work provides rich insights into the

effects of experimental work. For instance, our study found that experimental condition predicted both critical patriotism and uncritical patriotism, which on the surface seems contradictory. However, given that the rhetorical analysis was able to link these attitudes to the republicanism/liberalism paradox, we are able to advance both theoretical perspectives. We hope other scholars see the utility of this mixed-method approach and continue its use in future research.

Second, this study provides evidence that exposure to identity-based rhetoric causes individuals to align their attitudes in message congruent ways. Specifically, we found that exposure to mediasport texts that promulgates the identity of a nation-state, with or without the promotional ad, indirectly influenced nationalized attitudes through gratifying social identity needs, particularly those related to self-enhancement. Put differently, exposure to the games themselves and the nationalistic themes illuminated in the rhetorical analysis caused individuals to report higher levels of nationalized attitudes compared to the control condition by connecting the individual with their national identity. This is important because the preponderance of the previous work connecting international mediasport consumption to nationalized attitudes used a cross-sectional approach (cf. Billings, K.A. Brown, et al., 2013), limiting our ability to make causal inferences. Our study was able to provide evidence for the direction of this causal relationship using an experimental approach. Moreover, this study provides a more nuanced understanding of the means through which mediasport influences audience perceptions. It is also important to note that some of the nationalized attitudes, such as support of militarism, might not always work in countries other than the United States. Future research that follows a similar approach can thus adapt the specific nationalized attitudes to the country being studied, examining how they are affected by identity-based rhetoric.

Third, our work finds that the two underlying mechanisms for these indirect effects were linked to the media's ability to provide self-enhancement and to a much lesser extent reduce social uncertainty. Our results revealed that exposure to both the game and to the game alongside the promotional ad influenced all three nationalized attitudes indirectly via self-enhancement gratifications. However, the media's ability to reduce social uncertainty was only meaningful with regards to uncritical patriotism. These findings complement our rhetorical analysis indicating that these rhetorical tropes serve to connect audiences with an amorphous sense of American pride. Aligning with the social identity perspective (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, 1985), this suggests people's need for positive distinctiveness via their group memberships is one important reason that they hold attitudes that are congruent with group norms found in mediasport. These findings extend the social identity literature by integrating these two important mechanisms into a more comprehensive understanding of the role of media in intergroup processes. That is not to say that media scholars have not recognized the importance of media in self-enhancement and social uncertainty reduction; however, the preponderance of this work has examined these factors in the context of media selection and avoidance (e.g., Knobloch-Westerwick & Hastall, 2010). Our work connects these motivations to understanding intergroup attitudes more broadly. Not only does this extend the social identity literature, but it provides empirical evidence of the republicanism/liberalism paradox that circulates in U.S. political thought.

This study also offers insight into rhetorical understandings of nationalism. The results suggest, in part, that viewers unite behind common identities when watching international mediasport and promotional ads about them. Shared emotional and uncritical patriotic responses are enhanced through exposure to discourses of U.S. exceptionalism that reflect a republican

tenor of U.S. political thought. Yet, resistance to such collectivist thinking is also visible in our

results, as indicated by increased endorsement of critical patriotism due to ad exposure. These

results show that even when participating in a sporting event that unified and gripped the nation,

some participants still revealed an individualist streak most pronounced in theories of liberalism

and a firm allegiance to rugged individualism. Even in moments of heightened expressions of

unity, the urge to resist such collectivist actions remains a powerful force in political life and

sports culture. These results offered empirical evidence of tensions at work in U.S. political

thought between republicanism and liberalism.

        Such tensions showcase soccer's unique place in U.S. national identity. Since soccer is

more popular in Europe, U.S. audiences often view the sport as "foreign" and "soft" compared to

more popular American sports like (American) football (Hernandez, 2014). Such characteristics

run contrary to the rugged individualism and masculinity of liberalism strands in U.S.

nationalism. This understanding of U.S. identity explains soccer's comparative unpopularity

among American audiences. These ads thus attempt to address these inherent biases in two ways.

First, they showcase a collective sense of U.S. nationalism rooted in notions of republicanism. If

audiences are drawn to uncritical patriotism and collective unity over critical patriotism and

rugged individualism, soccer can thrive. Second, the ads showcase masculinity, toughness, and a

warrior-spirit of American soccer players; there is nothing "soft" about the ads' portrayal of U.S.

soccer players gearing up for battle in the "group of death." Thus, the ads highlight efforts to

market soccer to American audiences that speak to multiple, conflicting aspects of U.S.

nationalism, and the high ratings of the World Cup might suggest these strategies are succeeding.

        Although we found that social uncertainty reduction was only a mediator between

exposure to the game alongside the game introduction and uncritical patriotism, going against

our initial predictions, in retrospect this really is not all that surprising. Our initial prediction was

based in part on previous research linking Olympic coverage exposure and nationalized attitudes

(e.g., Billings, K. A. Brown, et al., 2013), which built upon previous research indicating that

identity-based themes are prevalent in this type of coverage (e.g., Billings & Angelini, 2007).

However, our game-only coverage consisted of condensed game versions from the FIFA website

and did not provide the identity-based themes found in the rhetorical analysis of the introduction,

or games that also feature game commentary. As revealed in our rhetorical analysis, however,

the ad provided the types of identity-based cues typically found in naturally occurring game

coverage, and hence, had the ability to reduce social uncertainty and help to predict uncritical

patriotism, but not critical patriotism or support of militarism. Our rhetorical analysis showed

that U.S. nationalism tapped into the construct of U.S. exceptionalism, which often denigrates

the outgroup. It consequently stands to reason that social uncertainty reduction would be an

important factor in this process and less so for critical patriotism and support of militarism.

Though speculative, our results suggest that games found in the current media landscape do have

the ability to influence attitudes in part by gratifying the need to reduce social uncertainty,

particularly when highlighting U.S. exceptionalism. Future research should explicitly test this

conjecture.

Study Limitations

Our study is not without its limitations. First, as mentioned above our games were

condensed game versions from the FIFA website that did not feature the game commentary. We

did this for the sake of internal validity. We had to ensure that our two games were comparable,

so we could conclude our findings were based on our theoretical constructs and not extraneous

variables (e.g., different announcers). However, future research should examine the role of

commentary during the game. Second, our variables had missing data and we used mean imputations to correct this issue. Scholars have noted that this is one way, among others, to handle missing data, but this method can reduce the variability of a construct. However, to bolster the confidence in our findings we ran our models with and without the mean replacements to ensure that there were not significant differences between the two iterations (which there were not). Third, we used undergraduate students as our sample, which may have limited the external validity of our results. Future research should test our model using more diverse samples to increase the generalizability of the findings.

Conclusions

Utilizing insights from the social identity and U.S. nationalism literatures, the current study rhetorically and experimentally examined the influence of nationalistic rhetoric on audience members' nationalized attitudes. Findings indicate that exposure to nationalistic rhetoric featured in international mediasport texts increases social attitudes toward uncritical patriotism, critical patriotism, and support of militarism indirectly through social identity gratifications, underscoring the paradox of U.S. identity construction.

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Footnotes

[1] Based on our identity-driven framework, we had working hypotheses for both national identity importance and soccer fandom, but neither construct significantly predicted neither the mediators nor the three outcome variables and were subsequently removed from the analyses.

[2] The promotional ad can be found on YouTube

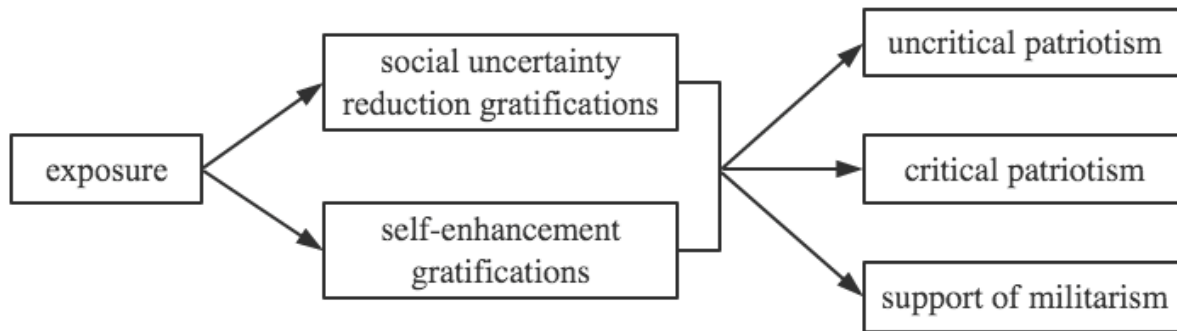http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IwpnLQ12fG4.

Figure 1. The conceptual model of the indirect effect of exposure (exposure to the intergroup game, exposure to the intergroup game alongside the introduction ad, and no exposure to intergroup game) on perceptions of uncritical patriotism, critical patriotism, and support of militarism via social uncertainty reduction gratifications and self-enhancement gratifications.