

HOW DOES OLYMPIC AND BIOGRAPHICAL MEDIA COVERAGE
AFFECT FAN AND SOCIAL IDENTIFICATION

WITH MO FARAH?

by

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ABSTRACT

Mo Farah is a quadruple Olympic gold medalist who has won distance gold medals in track competition in the London and Rio De Janeiro Summer Olympic Games, in 2012 and 2016, respectively. Farah's national and ethnic identity are complex. Often, news coverage of him has mentioned his heritage. Using media clips, one of Farah winning a race at the Olympics and two clips from a documentary about Farah – one where Farah is at home with family Oregon, where he trains, and one where Farah is visiting his roots in Somalia, where he was born – this study asked survey participants which clip scored highest on several scales. Those scores included how well Farah represented his country, his likability, his relatability to the American college student audience, and how positively the participants felt about him. Findings show that participants reacted most positively toward Farah when he was described as Somali in the media, even though he left Somalia at age eight, was officially a British athlete in the Olympics, and now lives in the United States. Participants on the whole responded better to personable documentary coverage than news coverage, and they seemed to embrace Farah based on what they perceived his national identity to be.

Keywords: Social identity, national identity, ethnic identity, nuanced national identity, media coverage, sport and Olympic media, Mo Farah.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to all those who helped me and guided me through writing this research paper. Without the support of friends and family as I was researching and writing, this paper would not have been possible.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

SD Standard Deviation

M Mean: the sum of a set of measurements divided by the number of measurements in the set

N Valid Number of participants who took the survey and turned in a useable set of answers

= Equal to

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INTRODUCTION

On August 14, 2016, Mo Farah started his 10,000-meter race on the track at the Rio de Janeiro 2016 Olympic Games, with the whole world watching, including his adopted nation, Great Britain, under whose flag he was running. Halfway through the race, the world gasped as Farah tripped over fellow competitor and training partner, Galen Rupp. However, Farah got up and determinedly rejoined the leaders and won the race, attaining the gold medal, which would be his second Olympic gold in the 10,000 meters (Fordyce, 2012). Although Farah was running for Great Britain, he had immigrated to that country from Somalia, and he was living in the United States. His national identity, therefore, spanned continents.

Sports have a unique way of bringing people together, unifying regardless of culture and language (Butler & Lynn, 2016). The 2016 Rio Olympic Summer Games were a global highlight for many people, with their excitement, thrilling events, politics, and fun, but for Mo Farah in particular, this was the climax of a lifetime's hard work and training (Pearlman, Soutar, & Greenwood, 2016).

Previous research has looked at the ability of athletes to enable a feeling of nationalism and how events like the Olympics create a sense of nationalism, whether by design or not. In this study, the researcher will examine how positively people react toward Mo Farah after watching media clips emphasizing his different national identities as well as his athletic achievements, home life, and immigration using social identity theory (SIT) and the concept of nationalism. This research aims to examine which of the above factors might be the strongest predictors of individual perceptions about the athlete, as most of the public's interactions with athletes will come in a mediated fashion. Through a survey designed to

expose participants to different aspects of Farah's personal and professional life, this study will examine which type of coverage potentially influences perceptions.

Mo Farah's History and Background

Mo Farah is a phenomenon not just in Britain but in the global world of sports, largely due to his success in winning double Olympic gold medals in the 5,000- and 10,000-meter races, along with numerous other world, European, and Commonwealth Games titles (Butler & Lynn, 2016; Lawton, 2017). His accomplishments come from a deep desire to make his family, his country, and himself proud (Shearman, 2017). As a child, Mo Farah emigrated from Somalia, East Africa to the United Kingdom (U.K.). Later in life, to help him compete for Olympic medals, he moved with his young family to Portland, Oregon, so he could train with the best (Pearlman, Soutar, & Greenwood, 2016).

Farah grew up in Somalia, where he lived a much less comfortable and less certain life than he did once he emigrated to the U.K. Once he had moved to the U.K., he became a fairly successful student, met his future wife, Tania, and got heavily involved sports, where he was objectively successful at anything he tried (Pearlman, Soutar, & Greenwood, 2016). He particularly enjoyed soccer as a schoolboy, wanting to play for Arsenal Football Club (Pearlman, Soutar, & Greenwood, 2016). However, due to his speed, he was encouraged to take up running (Pearlman, Soutar, & Greenwood, 2016). Initially, not being so committed, he was told to leave the track scene and think about his commitment to the sport (Pearlman, Soutar, & Greenwood, 2016). He came back rejuvenated and more committed once he was noticed by important figures in U.K. athletics (Pearlman, Soutar, & Greenwood, 2016). Initially a good runner, but not pushing for world titles, Farah sought the help of training legend Alberto Salazar, who has a training facility in Beaverton near Portland, Oregon (Pearlman, Soutar, & Greenwood, 2016). There Farah changed his training regimen, became more committed to the sport, and got to a point where he was really challenging for medals

(Pearlman, Soutar, & Greenwood, 2016). The London 2012 Olympics arrived, and Farah was a gold medal hopeful, particularly for the 10,000-meters (Butler & Lynn, 2016; Fordyce, 2012). Farah won not only the 10,000-meters but also the 5,000-meters, surprising some but also sending his adopted nation, Great Britain, into delirium, as was obvious from the BBC commentary on both of the gold medal-winning races (Butler & Lynn, 2016; Fordyce, 2012).

Subsequent to this, Farah went about his training regime again, winning races globally (Pearlman, Soutar, & Greenwood, 2016). Then came the Rio Olympics in 2016, where Farah aimed to repeat his London 2012 achievements, which would put him in an exclusive group of runners who had won both the 5,000- and 10,000-meters at two Olympics (Butler & Lynn, 2016; Pearlman, Soutar, & Greenwood, 2016). Not even the great Ethiopian Kenenisa Bekele had managed this (Lowe, 2016). In Farah's first race, the 10,000-meters – his specialty – Farah tripped and fell early on in the race (Butler & Lynn, 2016; Lowe, 2016). The drama and tension were evident in the stadium (Butler & Lynn, 2016; Pearlman, Soutar, & Greenwood, 2016). However, Farah got up, recovered, and ended up winning the race (Butler & Lynn, 2016; BBC Sport, 2016, August 14). He then went on to win the 5,000-meters as well, firmly cementing his place in the list of all-time sporting greats, along with his friend and “sprint king,” Usain Bolt (BBC Sport, 2016, August 21).

It is often said that sports can be a common thread across communities, countries, cultures, and other geographic barriers (Topič & Coakley, 2010). The Olympics are one example of how one single sporting event can unite people from around the globe in excitement and anticipation of cheering on their favorite athletes, usually athletes from their own nation. The purpose of this study was to see how that sense of national identity applied to people's perception of Mo Farah, based on how various media clips emphasized his nationality and other key factors in his life. Research explored existing literature on athlete support and identification. The research also examined social identity theory, which pertains

to why and how people identify with particular athletes (Pradhan, 2016). Previous research in World Cup soccer fans showed that nationality and flag trumped all other differences, even faith, race, and other social identities (Billings, Devlin, & Brown, 2013). This study aimed to see if American viewers of media clips about Mo Farah identified most strongly with the fact that he lives in Oregon, rather than with his British gold medal or his Somali roots. By showing media clips of his 10,000-meter race from Rio 2016 and one of two documentary clips, one featuring his family roots in Somalia, and the other featuring Farah's family time at home in Portland, Oregon, the researcher hoped to test the concepts that nationality and social identification do affect how people view athletes (Butler & Lynn, 2016). The study also examined whether nationalism and social identity of the viewer had roles in creating impressions or inclinations towards or against Farrah.

The researcher expected that as participants saw the two clips, they would feel more personal identification with the documentary clips than the sports coverage, as the documentary was more personal (Pearlman, Soutar, & Greenwood, 2016). Prior research suggested that when participants saw the clips about Farah's roots in Somalia and his family time in Portland, they would be more likely to feel more emotional towards Farah because they were seeing something that was more personal than the BBC's race coverage (Butler & Lynn, 2016). Furthermore, due to the fact that Americans were taking this survey, the researcher predicted participants were likely to feel more similarity to Farah when they saw him having family time in Portland, Oregon. Logically, when they saw the Somalia clip, they were likely to feel less similar to him. Due to Farah's British nationality, participants might be less likely to be supportive of him compared to the Oregon clip, but still hold some support for him due to Britain's similarity in culture to America (Billings et al., 2016). Previous research suggested that people tend to be most supportive of athletes from their own country (Billings et al., 2016); the survey participants, who are almost wholly American,

might therefore feel less favorable toward Farah when they realized he is British with Somali roots.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section will explore research written on athlete identification and reactions of fans toward athletes, and also how the theory of social identification plays a role in the way fans can relate to a particular athlete, all of which has been studied through how fans see these athletes in the media. For instance, although Americans do not share the same flag with Farah, they culturally relate to him because of the common cultural bonds between the United States and the U.K. (Billings, Devlin, & Brown, 2016). Because this is media research, this study looks at the way in which athletes are presented in various media formats, particularly how coverage can slant athletes in a positive or negative light, and how fans will react to media coverage through previous prejudices and opinions, depending on their social and national identity.

Mediated Representations of Athletes

In many cases, athletes develop their brand, their public identity, and their fan base from the stories told about them in a mediated context. In some cases, athletes can create a positive, favorable brand and identity if their performance and public life as displayed in a mediated context is all favorable. However, media can also help athletes self-destruct, as has been seen in cases with golfer Tiger Woods or cyclist Lance Armstrong. Brown, Anderson and Dickhaus (2016), studying the impact of the image repair process on athlete endorsements, discussed how athletes need to maintain the trust of fans in order keep a positive image with them. This is almost more important than not behaving badly, for if the athlete is truthful to his or her fans about his or her behavior, then fans will continue to support him or her (Brown, Anderson, & Dickhaus, 2016). Because athletes are under a media microscope, it is more difficult to maintain a positive image which is respectable with

the audience; however, if the athletes are truthful with the audience, this will trump bad behavior for the most part (Brown et al., 2016). This is because “customers do not want to hear an athlete attempt to downplay their role and responsibility in a transgression,” which feeds into the desire of fans for athletes just to be honest (Brown et al., 2016, p. 40). It is also true that because of this media microscope, athletes are portrayed in a more human way, which puts them above the god-like status they used to be given (Brown et al., 2016). This increasing media microscope has included “the globalization of sports, increased news coverage of troubled athletes, and increased activism of sports fans,” all of which have meant a crisis of “public perception” where athletes have to work harder to keep a good image (Brown et al., 2016, p. 32). In terms of athlete endorsements, it is only with success that these athletes are able to endorse products, and with this success often comes a particular reputation which the brands are aware of when hiring athletes (Brown et al., 2016). Negative information known about the athlete is taken into account by the company before hiring him or her (Brown et al., 2016). In terms of this paper, it is important to bear in mind that media coverage and globalization of sport may have affected Farah’s portrayal by the media, particularly in the documentary used in this study, and therefore how participants might react to him.

Another scholar, Black (2016), looked at how Mo Farah’s national identity became accepted by the British public, or more particularly by the newspaper media, to be authentically British. According to Black (2016), Farah’s success transformed him from being in the “outsiders” group to the establishment “us” group. This was largely due to how Farah was perceived as a successful example of British integration, from a minority community, where he took advantage of the British system and had help from the British state in order to succeed and go on to represent his country on the biggest stage he could and win (Black, 2016). Black (2016) focused on the way Farah was portrayed, from when the

media was skeptical about his Somali roots and “refugee” status, to after the Olympics when he was embraced as one of “us.” However, it is incorrect to say Farah was an illegal refugee, because he came to the U.K. legally with his family at the age of eight (Black, 2016). Based on Black’s research, it would seem likely that the American participants in this study who see the documentary on Farah’s Somali roots might find him unfavorable.

Mediated Coverage of Sport and Gender

Carter, Casanova, and Maume’s (2015) article on gendering of Olympic athletes and how they are profiled according to their gender discussed how media outline the way in which the audience views particular athletes, in particular through media guides. The article explained that media guide producers are the ones who make the decisions of what reporters will see of an athlete (Carter et al., 2015). The researchers found that profiles of men tend to emphasize their achievements and athletic ability, whereas the profiles of women are about their personal life (Carter et al., 2015). It seems important to emphasize the personable nature of women and the masculine side of men, in particular showing women as being interested in feminine pursuits and men being interested masculine pursuits and not homosexual (Carter et al., 2015). This could apply to Mo Farah in the way he is depicted by the media but more in a cultural sense, where his national identities as portrayed in the media make the audience view him in a certain way.

Mudrick, Miller, and Atkin’s (2016) study on social media’s influence on fan reaction behaviors shows how important social media has been in affecting fans’ interaction with sports coverage and sports fandom. Social media has been phenomenally important in the way fans interact with sports fandom (Mudrick et al., 2016). In particular, it has meant fans in group identities have become stronger in both good and bad ways, as is demonstrated by the way in which fans will wish harm, whether jokingly or not, on their favorite team’s opponents (Mudrick et al., 2016). Put simply, Mudrick et al.’s study (2016) found social

media has increased the fanaticism of sports fandom, which could explain intensity of feelings toward Mo Farah among those who identify with him.

Broch's (2016) study on national identity in sports discusses how international sports competition gives people a greater sense of national identity. Broch (2016) states, "Diversity in national identities persists, in spite of intensified globalization. Sports are today one of the most powerful arenas in which national identity performances and communication occur" (p. 575). Broch (2016) finds this sense of national identity can happen through the successes of a sports star where a country or group of people buy into the narrative of a sports star to create a sense of national identity. For this study on Mo Farah, Broch's findings are pertinent because of the multicultural success story that was built around Farah at the London 2012 Games as an example that multiculturalism can work in Britain (Burdsey, 2016). From the clips participants are shown, they might buy into this sense of multicultural success Farah has achieved, seeing his roots in Somalia to his success at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games.

Stanton's (2014) article discussed Syria's participation in the Olympics and how the country's participation related to its national identity in the wider world. Stanton demonstrated the sheer importance of the Olympics in how it molds a country's identity and national morale. In particular, the Syrian government felt it could galvanize the nation to indicate progress and status in the world by being able to send representatives to the Olympics to compete for Syria (Stanton, 2014). The author indicated that being able to compete at the Olympics means a nation is considered a country, even if that place is not considered a country by the United Nations (Stanton, 2014). Despite the government's use of Syrian athletes to indicate the Assad regime's legitimacy, others turned to social media during Syria's participation in the Olympics as a platform to criticize the wider world for not condemning the Assad regime more rather than celebrating Syria's participation (Stanton, 2014). When athletes represent countries at the Olympics, it gives them legitimacy. In this

instance Mo Farah as an athlete simultaneously represents Somalia, Britain, the USA, so is giving legitimacy to them, particularly Somalia.

Factors Influencing Perceptions

Billings, Devlin, and Brown's (2016) study on fans "BIRGing" ("basking in reflected glory") of teams and "CORFing" ("cutting off reflected failure") for teams in the 2014 FIFA World Cup showed ways in which fans support their side or their players. Billings et al. (2016) observed that "'the flag often trumps many other considerations,' resulting in increased salience for home athletes" (p. 53). The researchers found that nationalism was as powerful in the World Cup as was the idea of peaceful unity the games supposedly brought (Billings et al., 2016). In short, a person's national identity was the most important factor in supporting any team or athlete (Billings et al., 2016). Interestingly, no matter how heavy the coverage of the World Cup events, there was no increase or decrease in nationalism towards or against the team, and the team losing did not lose fan support (Billings et al., 2016). These results indicated that fans will still support their team no matter how badly they do (Billings et al., 2016). In reference to this research study, participants might react more strongly to Mo Farah most because they share his nationality or because his nationality is the most significant factor to them.

A study by Thomas et al. (2016) examined sports identification by looking at how individual, social, and personal identities play into what group identities one may consciously or unconsciously subscribe to. The article described how motivated identity construction theory (MICT) and social identity theory (SIT) combine to define a team identity or a national identity (Thomas et al., 2016). The article noted six identity motives to explain MICT: self-esteem, distinctiveness, belonging, meaning, continuity, and efficacy (Thomas et al., 2016). Thomas et al. explained that identities can be situation-sensitive. A person may hold one identity while doing one thing but maintain another identity in another situation

(Thomas, et al., 2016). The research might explain fans' motivations for supporting Mo Farah.

Sumino's (2017) article on national identity and public attitudes towards multiculturalism in Canada showed how national identity plays a part in the way people view integration and multiculturalism. Sumino (2017) found that if a person has a more ethnic sense of national identity, based on racial and physical identification with others, that person will be more threatened by multiculturalism and others, but if someone has a more civic sense of national identity, which is community and values related, that person will be less threatened by multiculturalism. In this paper's study on Mo Farah, white, non-African participants who have a greater sense of ethnic identity will perhaps be less likely to perceive a similarity with Farah, whereas Americans who have a greater sense of civic national identity will perhaps be more likely to embrace Farah for his American residency.

Kwon, Lee, and Kim's (2015) study discussed how important a fan's social identification with an event, and the teams within the event, is for their enjoyment and interaction with it. Kwon et al. (2015) made the point, "Fans' perceptions of their national teams and the global sporting event coexist and are associated with each other, so that fan behaviors of celebrating their collective national team identity cannot be isolated from how those fans value the global sporting event" (p. 182). This is important within this study because of the identification many students may or may not have with Mo Farah's "team" (whether Britain, Somalia, or the United States). If study participants have a more negative identification with one of those groups, particularly Somalia, their assessment of Farah could be affected.

Platow, Hunter, Branscombe, and Grace (2014) looked at how fairness was expressed through the ethnocentrism of various countries toward outcomes of the Olympic Games. The study particularly focused on how different countries viewed the medals gained by their

country in different ways, to benefit their national image. For instance, looking at total medal count, the United States was clearly superior to New Zealand, but when looking at medals per person within the population, New Zealand was better presented (Platow et al., 2014). The irony the authors found was that despite the Olympics supposedly being all about fairness, peace, and unity, many countries saw it as a platform to show their sports superiority (Platow et al., 2014). In addition, the study discovered that fans whose countries were not so successful at the Olympics saw the competition and its rules as less fair (Platow et al., 2014). In terms of this study, perhaps Americans involved in the survey would see fairness in the games and in Farah's achievements differently depending on whether they perceive of Farah as British or Somali, or as an American resident (Platow et al., 2014).

Theodorakis et al.'s (2017) studied how Qatar's teams and athlete identifications were affected by peers and different groups but found peer effects mainly happened via online and digital communication as the way most people discuss their fandom. Another conclusion from results was that identification or support for a team or athlete can be based on the athlete's physical characteristics (Theodorakis et al., 2017), which could play a pivotal role in how participants in this study view Mo Farah due to his racial characteristics.

Fandom, Nationality, and Athlete Perceptions

Billings, Brown, and Brown's (2013) research on Olympic media nationalism found that nationalism, patriotism, internationalism, and smugness were greater for fans who watched more coverage of the 2012 London Olympics, but over time, only the smugness level of fans increased. The researchers suggested this was because the tone of the coverage of the Olympics was so powerful that it affected the viewers' opinion of the athletes and the U.S. team (Billings et al., 2013). The success of the U.S. Olympic team aided this increasing nationalism, patriotism, smugness, and internationalism for people watching more of the coverage (Billings et al., 2013). However, the researchers concluded that the nationality of

the fan was the factor which determined whom they supported more than all else, despite an increased sense of internationalism shown by fans who watched more coverage (Billings et al., 2013). Tellingly, the authors stated, “It is clear that Americans will watch athletes of wildly different backgrounds as long as that coverage is wrapped red, white, and blue” (Billings et al., 2013, p. 593). This means that American students who participate in this study may react better to Mo Farah if they consider him to be American, no matter his background. Self-evidently, this will be hard because he is British.

Larkin and Fink (2016) studied how fantasy sports affect the fandom of traditional sports, and how second-screen use of social media allows fans to have multiple identities. The researchers said fantasy sports and social media have changed users’ priorities towards traditional support of actual teams. The study found many fantasy sports and social media users supported their traditional team more and watched more content because of the increased choice and flexibility of new media (Larkin & Fink, 2016). The important findings were that fans’ identities were not affected by using fantasy sports, and study participants still supported the same teams they used to before fantasy sports, but in some cases, identities could be changed. For instance, when watching one event, a fan might support one team, but watching another, she or he might support another team depending on which teams were playing or whom the fan was interacting with (Larkin & Fink, 2016). Here, salience of identities was important, as depending on what event, a different identity could form in a fan’s thinking (Larkin & Fink, 2016). For instance, when interacting with a fantasy sports league, a fan might be loyal to the created team, but in a real game with a real-life sports team, the fan might not support that team (Larkin & Fink, 2016). Studies on these sorts of interactions and identities are important for this study, because the clips on Mo Farah describe him with different identities that might appeal in different ways to the same viewer.

Pradhan (2016) studied the effects of system justification and sports fan identity (or social identity theory) on sports stars in the midst of doping controversies. Pradhan demonstrated that as long as sports stars were open and forward with fans, fan support and identity did not waiver when the sports stars went through a doping scandal, even if they were guilty. Fans also rationalized drug usage of athletes they supported, as they saw it would benefit their athlete and help the athlete win (Pradhan, 2016). In relation to Mo Farah, who has faced drug allegations because of affiliation with his coach Alberto Salazar, this should mean he would not lose fans. In general, Farah's success means he maintains fans (Pradhan, 2016).

Iorweth and Hardman's (2015) article was a rebuttal to a case for the cessation of international sports competition put forth by Gleaves and Llewellyn, who said international sporting competition oversimplifies international diplomacy and political crises. Iorweth and Hardman (2015), however, found international sporting competitions create important unity between nations, at the same time expressing national patriotism. This is pertinent to the research study on Mo Farah, because Farah has both international and national identities, whether Somali, British, or American.

Sports Narratives

Heere et al. (2013) researched the power of sport to unite a nation with particular reference to the FIFA World Cup 2010 in South Africa. The study addressed how much a sporting event can affect the mood of a nation and whether the team's success is important. Heere et al. (2013) found social capital and national identity increased throughout the mega sporting event, and it did somewhat boost the country's pride and national identity. However, what was most important in increasing this national identity and pride was the success of the home team (Heere et al., 2013). Even then, Heere et al. (2013) found that such a feeling of national identity was only a short-term trend lasting a year at most. The relevance to this

research is that in the U.K., Farah created staunch national identity and support, but for some American students in the study, he may well not have the same effect, despite his immense success.

Yan and Watanabe's (2014) article focused on the Liancourt Rocks controversy in the London 2012 Olympic Games. The Liancourt Rocks are islands between South Korea and Japan, whose sovereignty has for centuries been under contention between the two nations. During the London Olympics, a South Korean player raised the issue with a banner displaying the logo, "Dodko is our land" (Yan & Watanabe, 2014, p. 495). This article looked at the reactions of Japanese and South Korean media to this protest and how the media reactions displayed certain behaviors of victimhood (South Korea) or disengagement (Japan). Yan and Watanabe's article is relevant to this research because coverage of a political dispute played into the Olympic venue to create a sense of national identity. Such could also be the case in this study where the racial or cultural narratives of Mo Farah may bother those who participate in the survey.

Topič and Coakley's (2010) study looked at the relationship between sport and national identity in post-socialist Slovenia. The study presented the way in which sport and the narrative of sporting games and events have been used to garner a greater sense of national identity, particularly civic national identity rather than ethnic national identity, in Slovenia, as a way to unite an ethnically diverse country. Topič and Coakley (2010) demonstrated the importance of sport as a device to increase national identity. This is related to Mo Farah because of the cultural unity which the success of Mo Farah has conjured up for many in Britain because of his multiculturalism success story. For participants in this survey, the journey Farah has made from his roots in Somalia to being an Olympic gold medalist for the British Olympic Team to living in the United States could create or affect a sense of civic nationalism.

Baker (2015) researched the opening ceremony at the London 2012 Olympics, looking at the political and cultural angles the ceremony took, and how it reflected a particular image of British history and society. Many considered it multicultural and a liberal look at Britain, leaving behind the conservative and colonial history many associate with Britain (Baker, 2015). Baker (2015) suggested that in doing so, the opening ceremony simply ignored Britain's colonial past and the effect it had on the modern world. Much was also made of the diversity and mosaic narrative of modern Britain and how so many immigrant populations have made it what it is today (Baker, 2015). This perfectly linked to the story of Mo Farah, who was mentioned in Baker's (2015) study, due to his diverse background. This sense of diversity stressed in the opening ceremony made Farah's achievements seem all the more important. However, how does this affect American college students' perspectives on him, and will his immigrant background change the way they will view him in this study's survey?

Burdsey (2016) discussed how Mo Farah's triumphs at the London 2012 Olympic Games were covered by media and how his triumphs were used to indicate British immigration was successful. Burdsey (2016) said the British state hid failures to help British immigrants succeed in society by saying Mo Farah's success showed that anyone who has come into Britain as an immigrant can achieve anything. Burdsey (2016) said that before Farah's success, right-wing papers were far too skeptical of him, and once he had done well, they were celebrating his success as if to imply they were never against him. Burdsey (2016) further posited that the fact that Farah was of East African descent and so skinny and had little muscular bulk, unlike the traditional muscular and imposing view of black Africans, that the British establishment and prominently white population would find him less intimidating, enabling them to accept him as British. In addition, the author concluded that celebrations of Farah's success were accepted by the British right-wing press because it was a sporting

achievement and not something which encroached upon more significant parts of society (Burdsey, 2016). In terms of this study, Farah's color and Somali roots may influence how participants view him. Burdsey (2016) exposed and explained possible biases towards black athletes or black people in the public spotlight and how they might be celebrated in majority white cultures.

Closs Stephens' (2012) article strongly linked the government building a national fervor around the London 2012 Olympics to an attempt to distract the public from the austerity the British government had been implementing. Closs Stephens (2012) concluded that the national fervor meant the public would embrace national unity and be more accepting of the government's austerity agenda. The author believed this nationalism was already there underneath the surface of public consciousness, and it could be conjured to the fore of people's thinking (Closs Stephens, 2012). She believed this was an "affective atmosphere," which almost blinded a country's population to the actual motives of a government (p. 181). In reference to this study on Mo Farah, Closs Stephens (2012) raises the importance of how Farah's story could have contributed to a sense of national fervor because of his integration success story. The participants in this survey, although not British, could see Farah's success for a Western country as an integration success story, distracting from current political disagreements over immigration and multiculturalism.

THEORY

Social Identity Theory

This study will help give the researcher a better idea of how people see Mo Farah depending on how parts of his personal and professional life are portrayed in the media. Social identity theory will enable the researcher to better understand how Farah's different identities make people biased for or against Farah. The theory will enable the researcher to make conclusions based on different identities and views about who is more likely to view Farah more positively or negatively after watching video clips of him (Banks et al., 2016).

Banks et al. (2016) researched how employees are attracted to apply for certain companies and how their identities can help in understanding this attraction. The researchers concluded that, although someone can have multiple identities at any one point, having an identity which has a connection to the company is the most important identity, ensuring a potential candidate's interest in the company (Banks et al., 2016). As Banks et al. (2016) explained, someone's group social identity is most critical, as it is that which gives someone the confidence and prestige to apply and work for the company. In the case of this study, group social identity might give some indication of whether viewers will find Mo Farah appealing or not.

Mazur and Li (2016) studied social identity on social networking web sites of Chinese and U.S. users. The researchers set out differences between Chinese and Americans in social media behavior and style in the way they socially identify themselves. The most important conclusion the researchers found was U.S. users were more likely than Chinese users to be positive in their interaction and postings (Mazur & Li, 2016). This was also somewhat due to the likelihood of the U.S. individualistic society to be more expressive in confidence and self-

expression, while the Chinese view “extreme personal expression [as] distasteful” (Mazur & Li, 2016, p. 112). Collectivistic cultures such as China consider such expression and emphasize modesty as a better form of expression (Mazur & Li, 2016). As the American students are participating in the Mo Farah survey, they might feel the national identity they associate with Farah will dictate how he should express himself.

Abrams and Grant (2012), in their article on social identity in connection with Scottish nationalism, discussed how a strong group identification with a minority group or group in general would cause tremendous group loyalty, maybe in the support of a political cause or another cause related to the group. In this instance, the authors looked at the way in which it was more likely for the Scottish people to support the Scottish National Party than another Scottish political party, in their desire for independence from the U.K. (Abrams & Grant, 2012). In relation to the current research study on Mo Farah, a strong social or national identity could influence reaction to the clips of Farah, depending on what factors the clips emphasize.

Research Questions

Based on the literature reviewed and the underlying premise of social identity theory, the following research questions were advanced:

RQ1: In which clip would participants see Mo Farah as the best representative of his country?

RQ2: In which of the three clips will Farah’s relatability to the viewer be seen as the highest?

RQ3: In which of the three clips will Farah’s likeability be seen as the highest?

RQ4: In which of the clips will the general reaction to Farah be the highest or the most positive?

METHODOLOGY

The study used a survey created using Qualtrics software to examine how people viewed Mo Farah based on various media clips of him. The survey was distributed through the College of Communication and Information Sciences (C&IS) participant pool at The University of Alabama. All participants were students at the university and were voluntary participants.

Students were first asked demographic questions, followed by questions designed to show whether they knew of Farah before the survey. Next, they were asked to rate whether they were fans of the Olympics and if so, how strong a fan. Next, all participants were shown a clip from the BBC which showed Farah winning the 10,000-meter race at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics, where he ran as a British citizen (Butler & Lynn, 2016). Participants were then asked questions to ascertain how they viewed him as a representative of his country; how likable he was; how relatable he was; and generally, how positively they thought about him. In each case, students were asked to rank those factors on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being the lowest and 10 being the highest score. After the positivity question, participants were asked to explain why they marked the answer that they did.

Next, the survey was designed to sort the students at random into one of two groups. One group was assigned to see a clip from a documentary about Farah, entitled *No Easy Mile*, in which he was shown with his wife and children in Portland, Oregon, where he trains (Pearlman, Soutar, & Greenwood, 2016). The second group was assigned to see a clip, also from the documentary *No Easy Mile*, which showed Farah visiting Somalia, the nation he was born in, but had left as a child to move to Britain (Pearlman, Soutar, & Greenwood, 2016). In the clip, he visited old friends and family (Pearlman, Soutar, & Greenwood, 2016). After

each clip, the participants were asked to rank Farah for how well he represented his country; his likeability; his relatability; and the general reaction to Farah. The same scale as above was used, with 0 being the lowest and 10 being the highest mark on the scale. After the positivity questions, participants were asked why they gave him the rank they did.

A copy of the survey is attached in Appendix A.

DATA AND ANALYSIS

A total of 88 participants completed the survey. Of those, 59 (67.0%) were female and 28 (31.8% were male), with 1 person (1.1%) selecting “prefer not to say.” As to the participants’ race and ethnicity, the majority of participants, 74 (84.1%) responded that they were “White/Caucasian.” There were 5 (5.7%) “Black/African American” participants, 4 (4.5%) “Asian/Asian American” participants, 8 (9.1%) “Hispanic/Latino” participants, 1 (1.1%) “Native American” participant, and 1 (1.1%) “other” participant, with 1 person (1.1%) checking “prefer not to say.” Some participants selected more than one race as an identifier.

In order to determine who might be familiar with the subject shown in the video clips, participants were asked what Mo Farah’s profession was. The most common response was “Runner,” with 35 (39.8%) respondents identifying him in that way. In terms of his country of origin, the most common answer was “Somalia,” with 16 (18.2%) respondents knowing that ahead of time. Although it was originally planned to remove participants who knew who Farah was prior to the study, the decision was made to keep them in the population. This was because some participants admitted after taking the survey that while taking the survey, they had searched for Farah on Google to learn who he was. It seemed clear that not all participants who marked answers about his career and background actually knew those factors ahead of time. Thus, everyone who answered was kept in the study.

Next, participants were asked how strong a fan they were of the Olympics. Eighty-five participants, or 96.6% of the total research study participants, responded to this question. When asked to rank their fandom of the Olympic Games on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being

the lowest and 10 being the highest fandom, the participants responded with an average score of 5.35, indicating a fairly even balance between high and low fandom.

Everyone saw the BBC clip of Farah winning the 10,000-meter race in the Rio de Janeiro Olympics. In this case, Farah was clearly connected with the nation of Great Britain, the nation under whose flag he was running. Participants were then asked questions to ascertain how they viewed him as a representative of his country. They were asked to use a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being the lowest and 10 being the highest ranking of Farah as a representative of Britain. The average score for Farah as a representative of Britain, on the 0 to 10 scale, was 7.49 (SD = 2.07). Overall, then, he was assessed as fairly good as a representative of Britain, perhaps not a surprise, as he won a gold medal for his country.

Next, after watching the BBC race-winning clip, participants were asked how likable Farah was. Again, they were seeing him as an athlete running for Britain who had just won a gold medal in the Olympics. Overall, the participants assessed Farah with an average score of 7.89 (SD = 2.09), higher than his “representative of his country” score. Overall, he was seen as quite likable.

Next, everyone was asked how relatable Farah was after watching the BBC clip, where he was shown as a British Olympian. Presumably the participants were more likely to be American, and few, if any, had experience as an Olympic athlete, so it stood to reason they would not relate to him very strongly as a British Olympian. Of the 88 participants who watched the BBC clip, one person skipped the question on how relatable Farah was, and the calculations reflect that skip. Participants ranked Farah’s relatability after the BBC Olympics coverage at 5.75 (SD = 2.44), clearly indicating much less relatability than likability and “representative” status. Overall, his relatability score after the BBC coverage of the race was just barely past halfway in the scale, indicating relatively low relatability.

Next, participants were supposed to be sorted at random into watching one of two clips from the documentary *No Easy Mile* (Pearlman, Soutar, & Greenwood, 2016). Some participants were expected to see a clip of Farah at home with his family in Portland, Oregon, thus identifying him as a resident of the United States. The other group was expected to see a clip showing Farah visiting his native country of Somalia, where he met old friends and relatives. This clip reinforced his Somali identity, although he was no longer a citizen of that country. Of the 88 participants surveyed, 51 people, or 57.9%, were assigned to watch the clip designated as “Family in Portland,” and 56 people, or 63.6 %, were assigned to watch the clip designated as “Roots in Somalia.” As the percentages indicate, in error some participants were mistakenly shown both of the clips from the documentary. The data reflect the clips that all participants saw, even if they saw all three clips.

As with the BBC clip, participants were asked, after seeing each clip, to answer a series of questions showing their feelings toward Farah based on a 0 to 10 scale, with 0 being the lowest and 10 being the highest ranking.

A total of 51 people saw the Family in Portland clip, which emphasized Farah’s residency in America. When asked how good a representative of his country he was, participants at that point could have considered him American or British, or if they had accidentally seen all three clips, Somali. The viewers of this clip gave him a mean score of 7.1 (SD = 2.42) as a representative of his country, assessing Farah pretty high as a national representative, despite the fact that he was now identified with more than one country.

Next, the participants who saw the Portland clip were asked how likable Farah was. By now, these participants had seen him as a loving family man with a wife and small children in America. No longer was he just an Olympian making an impressive win. When asked about his likability, this group ranked him at a mean score of 8.08 (SD = 2.18). Overall, he was highly likable as a family man in America.

Next, the participants who saw the Portland clip were asked about Farah's relatability. This factor should have been fairly high, as the participants were American students who, given their age, were probably tied to their families fairly strongly. Thus, they should have related well to Farah as a family man living in America. Overall, the average relatability score for Farah in this clip was 7 (SD = 2.24), a fairly high relatability score and much higher than his relatability score for his Olympics clip. It was no surprise that Farah was more relatable to American students when they saw him at home in America than when winning a gold medal in the Olympics, something few, if any, of the participants could ever aspire to.

Finally, participants who saw the Portland clip were asked for their general impressions of Mo Farah, with 0 being a poor impression and 10 being the best possible impression. Overall, their average response was 7.98 (SD = 2.29), a higher positive impression than in the Olympics clip, and overall a high positivity score.

In another portion of the study, some participants saw a clip of Farah returning to his native country of Somalia to visit relatives and old family friends. This clip clearly linked Farah with the nation of Somalia. Since very few, if any, of the participants had any connection with Somalia, it would seem likely that few would find Farah relatable in this setting. Likewise, the participants in the survey by an overwhelming majority marked themselves as "White/Caucasian," indicating that Farah, a black man from Africa, would be opposite to them in race, thus emphasizing differences. The relatability scores could therefore potentially be low.

As stated above, in error, some participants saw both the Roots in Somalia clip and the Family in Portland clip. The answers of all who saw the Somalia clip have been included here. Also, of the 56 participants who watched the Somalia clip, one person answered the "representative of his country" question but skipped the likability, relatability, and positivity questions. All calculations reflect those skipped questions.

First, the Somalia clip watchers were asked how good a representative Farah was of his country. They already knew he raced in the Olympics as a British citizen, but the clip made clear he was a native of Somalia. Thus, participants would be marking him as a national representative as they saw fit, whether as Somali or British. Also, some people had accidentally seen him in the American clip as well and had that possible national identity to consider. Overall, those who watched the Somali clip gave him a mean score of 7.49 (SD = 2.07) as to being a representative of his country, using the same 0 to 10 scale. The score was higher than for the Portland clip, but identical to the BBC race coverage clip.

Next, participants who saw the Somali clip were asked how likable Farah was on the 0 to 10 scale. Overall they gave him an average likability score of 8.75 (SD = 1.64), the highest of all the likability scores. Farah was seen as highly likable in all three clips, but he was rated most likable in his African setting.

Participants who saw the Somali clip next were asked how relatable Farah was, using the 0 to 10 scale. In this case, it was expected that his relatability score would fall, as Somalia is very far away and only vaguely part of the American students' conscious world. It even has some bad associations with Somali pirates in the Indian Ocean (Gardner, 2017). Overall, those who watched this clip gave Farah a mean relatability score of 6.31 (SD = 1.66), a score higher than his Olympics relatability score but lower than his Portland relatability score. Thus, his relatability indeed was highest in the American clip, which is not surprising, given an American set of students taking the survey. They indeed had difficulty in relating to an Olympic athlete as strongly as they related to Farah as a "regular" person. The Somali identity did result in a lower score than the American relatability score, again not surprising.

Finally, those who watched the Somali clip were asked for their general overall impressions of Farah, using the 0 to 10 scale. His overall positivity score for this group was 8.69 (SD = 1.66), the highest score of any in the study. Clearly the Somali group identity for

Farah, even though he left there as a child and is no longer a citizen – and, as the participants knew, had won in the Olympics for Great Britain – resonated most strongly with the American audience.

Research question 1 asked in which clip participants would perceive Mo Farah as being the best representative of his country. The mean for the Family in Portland clip was 7.1 (SD = 2.42), which was fairly high and well over the middle score, but lower than the other two clips. The mean for the Roots in Somalia clip was 7.49 (SD = 2.02), which tied for the highest mean along with the BBC race clip for representation of his country. The mean for the BBC race clip was also 7.49 (SD = 2.07), tying the Somalia clip as a high mean for representation of his country. In this data, the mean showed participants reacting most positively to Farah as a representative of his country, jointly, when viewing the Roots in Somalia clip and the BBC race clip. The high score for the BBC race clip made sense. When an athlete wins a gold medal at the Olympics, the athlete is surely at the pinnacle of representing his country, so it's no surprise the BBC race clip scored high. The more interesting finding was the Somalia clip, where it appeared that Farah's skin color made the largely white audience associate him with Africa as strongly as his association with Britain.

Certainly, an athlete winning a medal in the Olympics is highly tied in the public mind to representing his or her country. After viewing the Roots in Somalia clip, one participant said, "After learning of his immigrant story, I feel that he represents his country of Britain very well but his original countries not as well because he does not represent them while competing." Another participant said, "Obviously, he is a talented athlete, and he deserves my utmost respect for being a master in his craft, especially because he became the first British track athlete to win 3 Olympic gold medals. I only deducted the points that I did from my opinion on how well he represents his country because he is originally from Somalia, and he moved to Great Britain some time afterwards." This was interesting, because

although the participant felt that Farah represented Britain well in the clip, the participant saw Farah somewhat negatively for not representing the country he was born in during the Olympics. But another participant was more forgiving of Farah’s multiple national identities. The participant commented, “The video is a great way to showcase how much Farah was willing to give up in order to improve. But he has never forgotten his roots. Roots are important to almost everyone, no tree can grow unless its roots are deep and strong.” Another participant commented, “I like him but it’s different that he’s African American from a generally white country.” The stereotype of national ethnicities was suggested here. This participant seemed to indicate that Farah was less of a positive representative of his adopted country, Great Britain, because of his race. Another liked Farah’s story but admitted, “He is a brilliant runner although I don't know much about him personally. Also, being American I do not know how well he represents the U.K. or Somalia.”

The numbers, however, seemed to show that Farah’s Olympic win did link him with representing his country. Also, racial identity perhaps played a role. Farah was seen as a success story out of Somalia, a country the largely white participant pool seemed to identify him as part of, though he hasn’t lived there since the age of eight. It’s possible that the largely white audience categorized him most clearly as a black man from Africa and thus praiseworthy as a breakthrough athlete. It should be noted that all reactions were well over the halfway point in the “good representative” category.

The rankings of the “representative of his country” are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Representation of his country

| | BBC Race Clip | Family in Portland Clip | Roots in Somalia Clip |
|----------------|---------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| <u>M</u> | 7.49 | 7.1 | 7.49 |
| Std. Deviation | 2.07 | 2.42 | 2.02 |
| N Valid | 88 | 51 | 56 |

Research question 2 asked in which clip participants would perceive Mo Farah as being the most likable. The mean value was more positive for both of the documentary clips (the Oregon and Somalia clips) than the BBC race clip. The clip of Farah winning the Olympic race came in at a mean of 7.89 ($SD = 2.09$), which was higher than the midpoint of possible scores but lower than the mean scores for the two documentary clips. The mean of the Family in Portland clip was 8.08 ($SD = 2.18$), higher than the BBC race clip mean score but, as it turned out, lower than the Roots in Somalia clip's mean score. The mean for the Roots in Somalia clip was 8.75 ($SD = 1.64$), which was the highest mean score out of all the clips. In terms of likability, participants said that Mo Farah was most likable in the Roots in Somalia clip. That is, he came across as most likable when he was in his native country, even though he had left that country as a child. Perhaps to the largely white American audience in this study, he seemed to fit in in a most agreeable way in Africa.

However, participants did find him likeable after seeing the BBC and Portland clips. One participant commented after the BBC race clip, "Considering his background, Mo Farah seems like one of those success stories where if one works hard, one can accomplish anything. He seems humble and it's hard not to like him," while another said, "He did not give up after his fall or when he was behind on the final lap, he was humble in his interview following his win." These comments suggested his likability had something to do with his humility and fighting spirit. Indeed, another comment a participant made after watching the BBC race clip also mentioned Farah's humble manner. The participant said, "I don't know him. I don't know much about marathons and such, but he is humble and has nice mannerisms, which makes him likeable." This comment indicated that although the viewer knew nothing of Farah's sport, the BBC clip made him likable. Another of the participants

said he liked Farah because he was a hard worker who had come from adversity to be Olympic champion.

However, overall the findings on likability ran contrary to prior expectations and literature that anticipated that footage relating to the participant’s country of origin would appeal more to participants (Billings et al., 2016), which would have made the Portland clip the favorite. One participant said, “Likable guy, confused as to why he was competing for Britain if he is from East Africa.” That remark was telling. Despite the BBC clip that clearly identified Farah as racing for Britain, the student still felt Farah was Somali. Perhaps his physical appearance, his dark skin making him look African, caused confusion. The comment along with the numbers seemed to indicate that the majority white students taking the survey categorized Farah most quickly into his African identity, rather than the clearly indicated identity as a British runner. Quite likely the finding indicated that there is still a strong tendency to categorize people by their race and looks. It is noteworthy that he was overall quite high on the likability scale in general, but the viewers of the Somalia clip found him most likable. The results of the likability scales are show in Table 2.

Table 2
Likability

| | BBC Race Clip | Family in Portland Clip | Roots in Somalia Clip |
|----------------|---------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| <u>M</u> | 7.89 | 8.08 | 8.75 |
| Std. Deviation | 2.09 | 2.18 | 1.64 |
| N Valid | 88 | 51 | 55 |

Research question number 3 asked in which clip Farah would be found most relatable. When asked about relatability after the BBC race clip, the participants gave Farah a mean score of 5.75 (SD = 2.44), or just barely past the middle in the favorability range; for the Portland clip, participants produced a mean score of 7 (SD = 2.24), which was higher than the

middle and higher than the BBC race clip; and for the Somalia clip, participants marked a mean score of 6.31 (SD = 2.67), lower than the Portland clip but higher than the BBC race clip. This data said that participants reacted most favorably to Mo Farah in terms of relatability when watching the Family in Portland clip. This was not a surprise, given the fact that the participants in the survey were American college students at a time in life when family support is very important to most of them as they depend on parents paying for their education. Mo Farah as a family man in Oregon, in the United States, seemed very relatable to them, as no doubt he most closely matched their own experience in his Oregon situation. The least relatable was the BBC race clip of Farah winning a gold medal, again not a surprise, as few if any of the participants could hope to aspire to an Olympic medal.

After viewing the Family in Portland clip, one participant said, “Seeing Mo with his family and seeing his house makes him more relate-able. Watching his run, he is objectified as someone who runs, that's all you know about him. However, watching this video [in Portland] it's easier to see him as another human being.” The numbers and comment suggested that when presented with content or themes more familiar to them, many viewers reacted more positively. As one study said, flag or country trumps all other factors (Billings et al., 2016). However, in the case of the participant quoted immediately above, relatability also pertained to the impersonal nature of the BBC race clip compared to the Family in Portland clip. Other participants also could not relate as well to the BBC race clip. As one said after watching it, “I can't 100% relate, as I'm no runner!”

Another participant commented, “He seems like a genuinely nice athlete and it appears that he worked incredibly hard.” This comment also showed Farah's relatable qualities, as genuineness can be a quality that people relate to well. Another participant commented, “Even though he's a world-class athlete, he's just a Dad.” This participant, and perhaps others, related to Farah on the basic and human family levels of being a Dad. For

other participants it was more than just being a Dad, but also being his kids' role model. One said, "Through his interactions with his kids, I can tell they are an inspiration to him, and he would sacrifice a lot for them."

Interestingly, one participant mentioned relating to Farah as an immigrant. After watching the Roots in Somalia clip, that participant commented, "I still feel positively towards Mo Farah, especially since I can relate being raised in a different country." After watching the Roots in Somalia clip, another participant said, "I really think Farah's story is interesting because he is such a story of success. I cannot relate to his struggles as an immigrant child, but I can see how his story of success after immigrating can be an inspiration to immigrants all over the world." This showed that a person didn't have to be an immigrant to relate to the immigrant part of the story.

The comparisons on relatability are shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Relatability

| | BBC Race Clip | Family in Portland Clip | Roots in Somalia Clip |
|----------------|---------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| <u>M</u> | 5.75 | 7 | 6.31 |
| Std. Deviation | 2.44 | 2.24 | 1.66 |
| N Valid | 87 | 51 | 55 |

Finally, research question 4 asked in which clip Mo Farah would be perceived as being the most positive. The mean score for how positively participants felt toward Farah after watching the BBC race clip was 7.7 (SD = 2.22), the lowest mean for a positivity reaction to Farah after the clips, but still a pretty high ranking. After watching the Family in Portland clip, the mean reaction to Farah was 7.98 (SD = 2.29), higher than the BBC race clip mean but lower than the Roots in Somalia clip's mean. After watching the Roots in Somalia clip, Farah's overall score was 8.69 (SD = 1.66), which was the most positive reaction

towards Farah. Clearly, participants reacted most positively to Mo Farah when they viewed him in his Somali identity. The American students, mostly white, found Farah high in all rankings of positivity, but they had the strongest positive feelings about him when he was identified with Somalia – an African country he left as a child and where he was no longer a citizen.

After watching the Roots in Somalia clip, one participant said, “I think we get to see a little bit more of the human side of him instead of just seeing what the media presents regarding his Olympic career.” As well as providing one explanation for the positive reaction this clip received, this comment also suggested that the documentary clips – the Roots in Somalia clip and the Family in Portland clip – presented more personable content than the BBC’s event coverage. Some comments mentioned the Portland angle, with participants saying Farah was a “passionate family man” and that he had “such a cute family.” The positive comments on his status as a foreigner in Portland were interesting in light of political divisions over immigration in the United States at present. The numbers indicated that the documentary overcame any misgivings participants may have had about foreigners in the country.

After seeing the BBC race clip, another participant commented, “I feel positively about him at around a 10 because I recognized him practicing his faith with hand motions before the race and after. His faith is different than mine, but both still fall under the Abrahamic tradition and it was nice to see someone praising God before and afterwards. Those actions brought positive feelings.” Positivity for this participant was based on faith that was expressed in the public arena. In addition to this, the same participant commented, “I also noted him approaching his wife and children after his win and sharing this moment with them and he acknowledged how his sport takes time away from them. He seems to be a man of good character with a solid family supporting him and I think his children will benefit from

seeing his efforts and determination.” Farah’s family man and role model image made this participant and others rate him more positively.

The final favorability rankings are shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Positivity

| | BBC Race Clip | Family in Portland Clip | Roots in Somalia Clip |
|----------------|---------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| <u>M</u> | 7.7 | 7.98 | 8.69 |
| Std. Deviation | 2.22 | 2.29 | 1.66 |
| N Valid | 88 | 51 | 55 |

This data on the whole showed that the clip the participants reacted most positively toward was the Roots in Somalia clip. The Roots in Somalia clip ranked or tied for highest mean in every instance except the relatability question, although it still edged out the BBC race victory clip in the question of relatability. Overall, participants reacted more positively to the documentary clips – either the Family in Portland clip or the Roots in Somalia clip.

According to Banks et al. (2015), these results would suggest that the group identity that participants perceived Farah as having in these media clips was most positive when he was in his native home, Somalia. Burdsey (2016) said that the British press and establishment found it difficult to recognize Farah as British rather than Somali, and the results of this study suggested that the participants in this study had the same inclination, too, rating Farah more positively when he was in the country they perceived he was from rather than the country he identified with and which has been his legal home since the age of eight. It seems the dark-skinned athlete from Britain was more clearly and easily categorized by the largely white participants as being African. In short, his identity as African seemed to be the strongest to this particular audience.

DISCUSSION

Participants felt that for three out of the four post-clip reaction questions – on representation of country, likability, and general positivity – Farah was at his best in the Roots in Somalia clip. Also, the mean data generally showed that participants reacted more positively to Farah when watching the clips on him in the documentary *No Easy Mile*, except on the question about representation of country, where the typical sports news coverage of his Olympics win showed him at the pinnacle of his athletic career and where the mean reaction on Farah's representation of his country was identical to the reaction to the Somali clip. The means also stated that the participants found Farah most relatable after watching the Family in Portland clip. Previous literature noted that when a person's country is represented, that person is more likely to react positively (Billings et. al., 2013; Topič & Coakley, 2010; Abrams & Grant, 2012), and in the Family in Portland clip, most participants' country (the United States) was represented.

One of the goals of the study was to look at the findings in light of social identity theory (SIT), as well as nationalism. SIT would suggest that participants would identify Mo Farah most positively based on the social groups either Farah or the participants are a part of. The findings on relatability certainly mirrored SIT. Participants rated Farah most highly when the media clip identified him as living in America with a wife and small children. As such, Farah belongs to the same social groups as most of the participants – a person living in America and depending on family. However, the concept of nationalism would suggest that the American college student participants would find Farah most likable in the Portland clip showing him in America. However, he was most likable and overall perceived as most positive in Somalia. It seemed the Americans taking the survey preferred to think of Farah as

Somali rather than American (their own social group) or British (much more clearly related to America culturally than Somalia). In other words, Americans didn't grab hold of nationalistic pride nor follow the sense that someone from Somalia was "the other," as might be suggested in SIT. Instead the participants liked the presentation of Farah as Somali, even though he is no longer a citizen of that country. Perhaps, however, as SIT might predict, a black man from Africa is so much an "other" in the minds of mostly white American students that they can most easily embrace him in a presentation emphasizing his "other" roots.

It must be noted that this study demonstrated a general positive reaction to Mo Farah after all clips, as the means for each post-clip question were at least higher than midway through the possible responses, and some were very high. In short, whether the media clips portrayed Farah as a British Olympian, an American family man, or a Somali immigrant, the participants in general found him to be favorable. The various group identities of Mo Farah as identified in the media all seemed to lead to fairly positive results. There was no big outcry against a Somali immigrant or a gold-winning Brit.

It was interesting that the Somalia clip, which highlighted Farah's diverse background, seemed to cause viewers to understand Farah as Somali, not British. The clip showed him as an outsider from a British perspective and from the American participants' perspective, but there was a positive reaction to the clip. This may be due to many participants believing Farah to be Somali, or it could be the participants simply found the Somali angle to be the easiest to understand for a black man from Africa.

This study showed that participants found different stimuli likable and relatable. Farah was seen as more likable in the Roots in Somalia clip but was seen as more relatable in the Family in Portland clip, possibly because as participants were American and they perceived Farah being in their country as more relatable. However, they found Farah more likable in Somalia, possibly because they perceived Farah as being Somali or more closely identified

him as Somali as opposed to being British or American, and so perceived he had come to Olympic stardom through adversity.

The study also indicated how audiences relate to different types of mediated stories. As previous literature has said and as shown in the data, the way in which media portray someone is very important to the way in which the audience will view that person. The BBC clip and the documentary clips on Farah were examples of pro-Farah literature, highlighting his athletic and multicultural success story (Butler & Lynn, 2016; Pearlman, Soutar, & Greenwood, 2016). These stories were and are a convenient narrative for his management team, for the world of athletics, and for his adopted country, Great Britain (Burdsey, 2016; Stephens, 2012). The British media and government used the stories to great effect during the Olympic Games in 2012 to highlight a multicultural success story to impress the British public (Black, 2016; Baker, 2015; Burdsey, 2016).

Yet it's interesting that overall, the traditional sports coverage of an athlete winning a much-celebrated gold medal at the Olympics resulted overall in the least positive reactions. Despite the high achievement and despite (or maybe because of) the traditional nature of such coverage, the BBC clip resulted in mean scores less than the documentary clips. The more personal documentary clips scored well with the audience. Perhaps the audience has seen traditional coverage frequently and is jaded to it. Perhaps the more narrative stories of Farah's career had more appeal for their dissimilarity to traditional sports coverage.

The responses showed another theme as well. One participant said after seeing the BBC race clip, "I have a huge respect for Mo Farah because, as a runner, I appreciate his dedication and perseverance in the sport that I love." Another participant gave a fairly typical comment, saying, "I have a greater respect for him as I now know of his journey as an immigrant, not to mention his incredible dedication and accomplishments in running." These

comments indicated how the narrative of Farah as an underdog in society appealed to the participants.

It's worth remembering that all three clips were positive about Farah. It is possible to suggest, then, that the coverage presented to the participants was going to get a positive reaction, and therefore was possibly biased. Any negative biases toward non-Americans, immigrants, Africans, or an athlete who won gold over Americans would be brought to the table by the participants, and such biases just weren't there. It seemed that on average, participants didn't react negatively to any of the three different national identities of Farah, nor did they hold against him his immigrant status. In fact, they liked it.

CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The data from this study largely answered the research questions about which clip participants would think showed Farah as the best representation of his country, as the most likable, as the most relatable, and as the most positive overall. Three of the research questions – those on likability, relatability, and general positivity – were answered conclusively as there was a clear highest mean, two of the three settling on Farah’s identity as Somali as key. For the question on which clip showed Farah as the best representation of his country, two clips had exactly the same mean – the Somalia clip and the BBC coverage of his big win in the Olympics. Thus again, Farah’s Somali identity seemed to be paramount. Since 16 of the 88 (18.2%) participants in the study believed that Farah was Somali before this survey, it’s possible that those participants considered Farah as Somali and hence as the best representation of his country when in Somalia. The others who marked this answer, however, perhaps related his clear African heritage and his hardship story to be more meaningful in Somalia and hence representing Somalia. These results could be explained by the suggestion that participants’ perception of national identity was the most important factor in how participants identified Farah, which literature would suggest they did based on ethnic national identity rather than on his acquired cultural national identity (Billings et al., 2016; Sumino, 2017).

In terms of relatability, when the American participants saw Farah with his family in Oregon, they felt most able to relate to him in that clip than when they saw him in Somalia or winning a race for Great Britain in the Olympics. In terms of likability and general positivity, when participants saw Farah rediscovering his roots in Somalia, they found him more likable and thought of Farah more positively than in any other of the three clips. Once more, the

Somali connection, whether due to his physical “otherness” from the mostly white participants or due to his engaging underdog story or even due to confusion over his country of origin, won out.

Earlier in this study there was an assumption that participants would react to Farah positively because of a nuanced national identity placing him in America now, despite not being a citizen; however, the most common positive reaction was towards seeing Farah as a Somali, which surprised the researcher. Earlier literature (Billings et al., 2016) did not predict that American viewers would find the Somali relationship to be the most likable and positive. Possibly the exotic foreign location was simply more interesting than well-known Portland. Or perhaps participants felt Farah fit best in his native Africa rather than in America, based on his “otherness” in appearance and personal history.

Mazur & Li’s (2016) study indicated that people find the “other” difficult to interact with, so that other countries such as Somalia could cause someone to be less likable to an American. As Farah is a westerner but also a Somali, it may have meant that Americans would not have responded to him so favorably, but the study answers proved otherwise except for the relatability question.

Survey results were revealing when participants answered the question about how well Farah represented his country. The highest average answers were for the Roots in Somalia clip equal to the Olympic BBC clip where Farah won a gold medal for Great Britain in the Rio 2016 Olympic Games. The results show that the survey participants thought of Farah as either Somali or British but did not identify him as American. This, however, was not a negative for participants.

The “underdog” factor possibly appealed to the participants in study. Vandello, Golschmeid, and Richards (2007) explained that the reaction to an underdog becomes more positive when that underdog is likable and relatable.

Despite the general positive perception of Farah by participants in this study during the Somalia clip, American national identity seemed to be the most important factor in relatability, the only time when the Portland clip won out. Other studies suggest this was because something familiar, Oregon, was better known compared to the unknown, Africa (Sumino, 2017; Black 2016).

Banks et al.'s 2015 study showed the most important identity to identify was someone's group identity. Therefore, the data suggested that white Americans identified a black man who left Somalia as a boy most strongly with his African heritage, perhaps based on his looks. They liked him, but they saw him most clearly as being in the African identity, despite his other national identities.

Meanwhile, there were also more positive reactions to the documentary clips – either the clip where Farah visited his roots in Somalia, or the clip where Farah spent time with his family – as compared to the BBC news clip, which did not rank as highly on the positivity scale. It seemed the more personal narrative the documentary wove of Farah was more important than his historic win. This followed the multicultural success story narrative that the British media and government used to impress the British public with during the London 2012 Olympics Games (Black, 2016; Baker, 2015; Burdsey, 2016). This same narrative appears to have impressed the U.S. college student survey participants used in this research study. Also, it's the way sports journalism is going, with such backstories often told, and in this study it was clear that the backstory did sway feelings. Without the backstories, all any observer would know was that Mo Farah won a medal for Britain. Now survey participants know he's Somali by birth and find him most likable and most positive in that role, while also appreciating the fact that he is a family man in America. Therefore, more broadly when looking at athletes or teams, one of the most important elements in predicting how fans will think of them is their backstory, even a very personal backstory.

In the future it would be beneficial to test people of other age groups and other nationalities and ethnicities, and more particularly British people, to see if their reaction to these clips on Mo Farah would differ from responses by American college students who are mostly white. It would be beneficial to find more clips about other athletes to see if more personal clips would always garner more positive reactions from survey participants than more impersonal news clips. It would also be ideal to test clips about an athlete on participants from the country that the athlete represents.

This study emphasized the positive “underdog” story of Farah, which in itself is a limitation to the study; the optimistic nature of the source material shaped the perceptions of the respondents so that they would react positively to the post-clip questions. Because the nature of the clips caused a positive result, in the future, as previously hinted, it would be preferable to use a variety of clips that show the subject in a more nuanced light, perhaps a positive light in one clip and a negative light in another.

The design of a survey as much as the stimuli used could produce different results than these clips did. When referring to Scottish nationalists’ support of the Scottish National Party during the Scottish Referendum in 2014, Abrams and Grant’s (2012) study explained that support for someone in a person’s “in-group” would persist irrelevant of how successful or positive that person appeared. This concept could be studied with more nuanced clips in the future.

The study itself was also limited because it only used descriptive statistics, which meant there could not be more nuanced findings added to the analysis and conclusions. More in-depth statistics could lead to a better understanding of participants’ reactions to the clips. Therefore, it would be important in the future to use descriptive statistics and other more complex measures that could make more definite and complete conclusions about participants’ reactions and biases. Further research might also delve into how different

ethnicities responded to these clips, which could have provided more complete conclusions about possible racial bias in the way Farah is perceived as an ethnically African-British man, now living in America. However, there were not enough participants from non-white racial groups in this study to make such tests and analysis useful.

Lastly, due to the more positive responses in all of the post-clip questions to the Roots in Somalia clip, more research and analysis into that clip would be beneficial for future research. Except for the relatability question, when Americans chose the American clip as most relatable, in general the Somalia clip generated the highest positive results. It would be interesting to delve more deeply into why American students gravitated toward “the other” in so many factors.

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APPENDIX A

Mo Farah Profile Survey

My name is Oliver Simpson, a journalism Masters student at the University of Alabama. I am asking you to participate in this survey, and the data from this survey will be used for my thesis project in sports media. It is important for you to know that there are no right or wrong answers with any of these questions, and your responses will be anonymous. I will not be able to link any of your responses to you personally, so please be honest as you answer the questions.

This project has been reviewed and approved by my university's Institutional Review Board. Thank you for your time and help with this research.

Please indicated your biological sex:

- Male
- Female
- Prefer Not To Say

Please tell us how old you are:

Please tell me how you identify in terms of your racial or ethnic group.

- White/Caucasian
- Black/African American
- Asian/Asian American
- Hispanic/Latino
- Native American
- Other
- Prefer not to say

In which sport does Mo Farah compete?

What country is Mo Farah from?

How big of a fan are you of the Olympic Games? Rank how much these apply to you from 0-10, 0 never, and 10 always.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Please watch this clip of Mo Farah's Gold Medal winning run at Rio 2016

BBC Coverage of Men's 10,000m race at Rio 2016 (Link)

Rank from 0-10, with 10 being the highest

How good of a representative of his country, is Farah?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How easy is Farah to relate to?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How likable is Farah?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Please indicate how you feel about Mo Farah in terms of how positive or negative you feel about him. Rank it from 0-10, with 10 being the most favorable.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

If possible, please explain your answer:

Please choose one of the following two numbers. (check box next to each number)

84 [if participant selected this number s/he was taken to the Family in Portland, Oregon clip]

43 [if participant selected this number, s/he was taken to the Roots in Somalia clip]

Family Time in Portland clip (Link)

Rank from 0-10, with 10 being the highest

How good of a representative of his country, is Farah?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How easy is Farah to relate to?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How likable is Farah?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Please indicate how you feel about Mo Farah in terms of how positive or negative you feel about him. Rank it from 0-10, with 10 being the most favorable.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

If possible please explain your answer:

Roots in Somalia clip (Link)

Rank from 0-10, with 10 being the highest.

How good of a representative of his country, is Farah?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How easy is Farah to relate to?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How likable is Farah?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Please indicate how you feel about Mo Farah in terms of how positive or negative you feel about him. Rank it from 0-10, with 10 being the most favorable.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

If possible please explain your answer:

What are your perceptions of Mo Farah after watching the clips?

Thank you so much for completing this survey! By completing this survey, you have helped in researching the factor that social identity plays in the way people react towards athletes, in this case study Mo Farah. Your responses will lead this research project to a conclusion about how much these theories and phenomena affect people's reactions to athletes.

APPENDIX B

IRB approval

Message: IRB has approved the protocol with the following details.

Protocol ID: 17-09-518

Principal Investigator: Simpson, Oliver

Department: Journalism

Protocol Title: How does Olympic and Biographical Media Coverage Affect fan and social identification with Mo Farah?

Review Type: FULLBOARD

Approval Date: February 20, 2018

February 22, 2018

Oliver Simpson
Journalism
CCIS
Box 870172

Re: IRB#: 18-OR-077 "How Does Olympic and Biographical Media Coverage Affect Fan and Social Identification with Mo Farah?"

Dear Oliver Simpson:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. You have also been granted the requested waiver of written documentation of informed consent. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies

Your application will expire on February 19, 2019. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of the IRB Request for Study Closure Form.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved stamped consent form to provide to your participants.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,



Stuart Usdan, PhD
Chair, Non-Medical IRB