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Stand Up, Show Respect: Athlete Activism, Nationalistic Attitudes, and Emotional Response

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The number of athlete social protests has risen over the past several years, but no protest has touched a collective national nerve as kneeling for the national anthem has. Using the theoretical framework of social identity theory, this study examined how nationalistic attitudes affect participants' perceptions of athletes who engage in a form of activism. A 2 × 3 between-subjects factorial design was used for a manipulated newspaper article focusing on the issue of a college quarterback kneeling for the national anthem. Results found no significant effects with respect to implicit and explicit racial cues. Data did support the notion that individuals who displayed higher levels of nationalism would respond with more negative emotions to the athlete activism. On a theoretical level, this study lends support to the ideas of social identity theory and social identity threat management. Broader social and practical implications are also discussed.

Keywords: sports, social identity theory, social identity threat management, athlete activism, attitudes

As the 2016 NFL preseason began, few took notice of San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick quietly sitting on the bench during the national anthem until the third week of the preseason. Once asked why he was sitting by a reporter, Kaepernick stated,

> I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that opposes Black people and people of color. To me, this is bigger than football and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way. There are bodies in the street and people getting paid leave and getting away with murder. (Wyche, 2016, p. 1)

After the interview, Kaepernick switched from sitting to kneeling during the national anthem. His statement and action set off a string of athletes who began kneeling at all levels—from high school to professional sports and across different sports—and touched a nerve in the collective American public. Social protest and activism among Black athletes is not a new phenomenon. Edwards (2016) denotes four waves of African American sports activism that have occurred throughout the 20th century in the United States. Though he notes that athletes dialed down activism for a period between the third and fourth waves, in recent years, activism and social protesting by professional athletes, primarily African American athletes, seem to be

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experiencing a resurgence (Hurley, 2017). While different protests have been met with resistance and negative backlash, none seems to be as large and as polarizing to date as the action of kneeling during the national anthem.

Social identity theory examines how individuals sort themselves into groups of like-minded individuals, based on beliefs, attitudes, and characteristics (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). As individuals form themselves into these groups (the in-group), they come to classify and view individuals who do not share these same ideals as the out-group, and they turn to each other to reinforce both their group ideals and self-esteem. The theory posits that the in-group will respond to the out-group in a certain manner, specifically when the group identity is threatened.

The idea of nationalism can be viewed as one form of an in-group/out-group dynamic. When an act occurs that threatens an individual's feelings of nationalism, or a group's collective ideals of what nationalism is—for example, kneeling during the national anthem—it is expected that members of the in-group will respond in such a way that will mitigate this threat to their collective identity and reinforce their own self-esteem. To answer which form of social identity individuals will seek to protect (nationalism or racial group), the overarching question of the study will examine how nationalistic attitudes affect participants' perceptions of athletes who engage in a form of activism. Secondarily, the study will also examine how the race of the athlete protesting affects the attitudes of participants.

Theoretical Grounding—Social Identity

Krane and Barber (2003) propose a social identity perspective, using both social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), to explain the psychological and social processes individuals used to maintain positive social identities. Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory posits that individuals classify themselves into groups of people with similar characteristics, while placing other people with different characteristics into different groups. By grouping with people they believe share some kind of similarities, individuals ultimately enhance their own self-esteem (Sartore & Cunningham, 2009). Self-categorization theory posits an in-group and an out-group; people align themselves with group members they feel they share similarities with, in either behaviors, thoughts, or attitudes (Turner & Reynolds, 2001). Turner (1975) noted that self-esteem elevates further through the negative labeling of out-groups. Members of the in-group tend to assign themselves positive stereotypes, while labeling members of the out-group with negative stereotypes, resulting in potential prejudicial and discriminatory actions (Tsui & Gutek, 1999). Studies of the in-group versus the out-group find that there is more in-group favoritism than out-group derogation (Brewer, 1999).

Social Identity Threat

Social identity theory assumes that individuals seek to maintain positive perceptions of their groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). When positive perceptions are challenged, individuals experience a threat to their social identity, which shows as negative emotions or a reinforcement of behaviors that align with group norms (Walton & Cohen, 2007). The concept of identity threat is one that retains many definitions; in a synthesis of literature, Petriglieri (2011) conceptualized identity threat as "experiences appraised as indicating potential harm to the

value, meanings, or enactment of an identity" (p. 644). Simply, anything that challenges an individual's social identity can be considered a threat. Threats to social identity can come in two forms: something that threatens the shared values, norms, or practices of a group, and threats that seek to delegitimize characteristics that make a group unique (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999).

Social Identity Theory and the White Racial Frame

The need to uphold group dominance often drives the misrepresentations of the members of the out-group in popular culture (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986; Turner, Brown, & Tajfel, 1979). Ramasubramanian (2010) concluded with respect to racial attitudes, "Media portrayals of Whiteness as normative and superior are as important as negative stereotypical portrayals of racial/ethnic out-groups as different and inferior" (p. 105). Further, media messages use implicit racial cues in story framing, laying a foundation for eliciting negative emotions from the in-group toward out-group members. In-group members have been found to reject messages from out-group sources rather than in-group sources, even when the argument presented is objectively right (Esposo, Hornsey, & Spoor, 2013). With respect to race-based confrontations, Whites confronted by Blacks about bias tend to feel discomfort, irritation, and antagonized; messages are met with less acceptance; messages are met more negatively; and more prejudicial attitudes are produced than when the same confrontations happen with another White person (Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Gulker, Mark, & Monteith, 2013; Powell, Branscombe, & Schmitt, 2005; White & Harkins, 1994).

Larger social structures that favor White identity have been argued to attribute to the ongoing issues with racism in sports (Schmittel & Sanderson, 2015). Butterworth (2007) noted that for the archetypal sports hero, racial identity was never mentioned, Whiteness taken for granted. This notion mirrors Feagin's (2013) idea of the White racial frame being the ideal type. Because social structures favor White identity, the dominant in-group in sports is White, with Black and other persons of color falling into the out-group. De B'beri and Hogarth (2009) explained that minority athletes in this system should be grateful for their opportunities and not question the system. Viewers of sport tend to adopt the perspectives of athletes if they are the same race as the athletes (Pan & Zeng, 2017), but athletes' speaking out on social issues, such as racism, largely challenges the existing power structures, leading to discomfort and disruption for fans and the response for athletes to "stick to sports" (Frederick, Sanderson, & Schlereth, 2017).

Athlete Activism

Shaw (2001) noted that political activism serves to communicate the need or demand for change to those in power and create new and popular support for causes. Expressions of activism among the Black population in the United States formed as a response to racism and continue to be rooted in social institutions, including sports (Agyemang, Singer, & DeLorme, 2010). Pelak (2005) stated that professional athletes can serve "agents of social change" (p. 59) because of their high public profile. Studies within sports media surrounding this wave diverge into two main branches: athletes engaging in activism, and fan response to athlete activism.

The engagement of athletes in activism has largely centered on current events in society. In 2012, Miami Heat star LeBron James tweeted a photograph of the team wearing hoodies in support of Trayvon

Martin (Demby, 2012). Teams across the NCAA, NBA, and NFL wore T-shirts during warm-ups stating, "I can't breathe," referencing Eric Garner who died after being put in a chokehold by police ("Athletes Wearing," 2014). Three WNBA teams wore T-shirts during warm-ups honoring the Black Lives Matter movement and the five police officers murdered in Dallas in 2016 (Gibbs, 2016). Five St. Louis Rams players entered the stadium in 2014 during introductions with their hands up in a "hands up, don't shoot" gesture, mirroring protestors in Ferguson, Missouri ("No Fines for Rams," 2014). Black football players at the University of Missouri joined in the 2015 protests over the school's handling of racial tensions, stating that they refused to play until the university president resigned (Tracy & Southall, 2015; Yan, Pegoraro, & Wantanabe, 2018). Colin Kaepernick took a knee during the national anthem during the 2016 NFL season to protest the oppression of Black people and people of color in the United States (Wyche, 2016); this protest was continued by other athletes, primarily Black and a limited number of White, and teams from high school to the professional levels throughout the 2016 season.

The second vein of research surrounding athlete activism has focused on reactions to activism and has reached similar conclusions. Kaufman (2008) noted that athletes who engaged in activism were "treated like deviants" (p. 218) and garnered more negative attention than other activist figures. This sentiment continues to resonate today. While social media has been found to be a medium that allows for athletes to engage in activism and initiate conversations (Schmittel & Sanderson, 2015), fans may be uncomfortable with athletes questioning structures that favor Whiteness. Further, fans may use these same social media spaces to solidify group values and the dominant ideology of Whiteness, mitigate social identity threats, and reinforce the notion that athletes should not question their place (Frederick et al., 2017; Sanderson, Frederick, & Stocz, 2016). Social identity theory has been used in sports communication literature, examining fan behaviors and the "us" versus "them" thought processes and effects (see Dietz-Uhler & Murrell, 1999; Fink, Parker, Brett, & Higgins, 2009). Examinations of identity threats have begun to look at external forces that lead to social identity threats. Sanderson and colleagues (2016) found that fans used social media to condemn the actions of five NFL players who engaged in a social protest action, including racial commentary and renouncing their fandom. A similar examination of fan perceptions of athlete activism on Facebook found that comments reinforced the dominant ideology of Whiteness, chastising and condemning the protesting athletes for challenging the status quo (Frederick et al., 2017). Sanderson (2013) found social media to be a forum for fans to manage social identity threats through strategies of derogating the out-group and elevating the in-group. Social media has not been the only online space where such findings have occurred; Gill (2016) found the same themes in examinations of user comments in online news articles surrounding the St. Louis Rams "hands up, don't shoot" protest. At one time apolitical, Coombs and Cassilo (2017) examined LeBron James and his quiet support of the Black Lives Matter movement, finding his support and message as one of consideration rather than revolution. Athletes who speak out on social issues tend to find themselves learning the lesson that they are no longer welcome in the world of sport they once occupied (Kaufman, 2008).

Nationalism

The ideas set forth in the social identity perspective can be seen in the idea of nationalism; people will first support their nation (the in-group) rather than go out of their way to degrade another (the out-group). Nationalism has been defined as both an ideology and a behavior. Kellas (1991) explained that the behavior

of nationalism is part instinct, but it is also the result of learning and the environment. Kohn (2017) stated that nationalism "is a product of historical, social, and intellectual conditions; its rise in the different countries varies, therefore, according to the conditions prevailing then and there. . . [it] carries a different meaning with different peoples at different ages" (pp. 119–120). Kosterman and Feshbach (1989) outlined six factors of nationalism present in the perception of an individual's relationship with his or her nation: *patriotism, nationalism, internationalism, world government, civil liberties,* and *smugness.* Later examinations have conceptualized four of these factors to specifically apply to nationalism and sports.

Nationalism in Sports

Specific examinations of nationalism surrounding sporting events have been grounded in ideas of team identification, self-categorization theory, and social identity theory (e.g., Billings & Tambosi, 2004). Content analyses have revealed nationalistic biases to be present both in U.S.-based and non-U.S.-based broadcasts of international sporting events (e.g., Elling, Van Hilvoorde, Van Den Dool, 2014; Li, Stokowski, Dittmore, & Scott, 2016; Sabo, Jansen, Tate, Duncan, & Leggett, 1996; Scott, Hill, & Zakus, 2012; Vincent & Crossman, 2015), with all examinations finding "home" media favoring home nation athletes in commentary and coverage amounts.

Tying the military into sporting events is not a new phenomenon, particularly in football (Stossel, 2001). Butterworth and Moskal (2009) noted that after 9/11, excessive displays of patriotism in sport though military images and appearances have helped to continuously reaffirm national identity. Fisher (2014) similarly noted excessive displays of patriotism though the NFL's 9/11 commemorations. Dramatizations, such as Fox network using notable figures from the NFL to read the Declaration of Independence before Super Bowl XLII, assert the values of being an American (Butterworth, 2008). Such rituals and performances help foster the ideas of nationalism, and what patriotism should mean.

As mentioned, Kosterman and Feshbach (1989) demarcated six factors of nationalism; Billings, Brown, and Brown (2013) later conceptualized four of these factors to specifically apply to nationalism effects in sport: *patriotism*, the focus on pride in one's own country without comparison to other aspects; *nationalism,* the presumed superiority of one's own nation and the inferiority of all others; *internationalism*, a sense of global citizenship; and *smugness*, a more arrogant feeling of vast superiority over all other nations. These four factors (nationalism, patriotism, internationalism, and smugness) have been found to have significant relationships to media consumption of Olympic media consumption and consumption of the FIFA World Cup in U.S. media and viewers (Billings et al., 2013a), although these relationships were not always found to be positive (Billings, Brown, & Brown-Devlin, 2015b; Elling, Van Hilvoorde, & Van Den Dool, 2014). Examinations of nationalism in other countries have found U.S. spectators to be more likely to exhibit patriotism, nationalism, and smugness than their European counterparts (Billings et al., 2013; Brown, Billings, Schalhorn, Schramm, & Devlin, 2016). With respect to fan identification, highly identified fans showed higher levels of patriotism, nationalism, internationalism, and smugness (Devlin & Billings, 2016). Additional examinations have found that nationality and broadcast commentary have a direct effect on viewers' enjoyment of a broadcast sporting event (Smith, 2012).

Athlete activism is not a new phenomenon and is one that has elicited strong emotional reactions. President Donald Trump raised a new round of fury over athletes kneeling during the national anthem at a 2017 speech when he stated that NFL owners should fire players ("Get that son of a bitch off the field. He's fired!") who kneel during the anthem (Jenkins, 2017). The president has continued to use athlete activism as a talking point to fire up his base, noting an "us" versus "them" narrative; calling athletes who kneel "un-American" and athletes who protest "whiny"; questioning the intelligence level of Black athletes; and condemning athletes who have refused invitations to visit the White House (Boren, 2018). After LeBron James and Kevin Durant spoke critically about the president, Fox News host Laura Ingraham took the opportunity to note, "You're great players, but no one voted for you. Millions elected Trump to be their coach. So keep the political commentary to yourself, or as someone once said, shut up and dribble" (Chavez, 2018, p. 1).

Each form of activism, and each protest, comes with a separate goal; all protests cannot be lumped together and defined with one singular purpose. However, the overarching negative attitudes seem to center on the notions of viewing the protesting athlete as a threat to group identity. Based on the previously reviewed literature, the action of an athlete engaging in an activist protest, such as kneeling during the national anthem, is one that could cause a threat to the social identity of a group. The in-group that would be threatened is the group whose members identify with higher levels of pride for and emotion about their country. By taking a knee, the action of the athlete would be seen as a threat to the values the in-group holds. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: *Participants with higher levels of patriotism will display more negative than positive emotions after reading a news story about an athlete kneeling for the national anthem.*

H2: *Participants with higher levels of nationalism will display more negative than positive emotions after reading a news story about an athlete kneeling for the national anthem.*

H3: *Participants with higher levels of smugness will display more negative than positive emotions after reading a news story about an athlete kneeling for the national anthem.*

Similarly, literature has consistently shown that race has been another form of the in-group/out-group dynamic. Research has shown that when the views and biases of individuals are confronted or challenged by individuals of a different race, their response to the viewpoint is more negative and less accepting. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: *Participants will respond to the story featuring a player of a different race with more negative than positive emotions.*

Finally, as noted by Ramasubramanian (2010), the media often use implicit racial cues in story framing, leading to a negative perception on the part of the reader/viewer.

Therefore, the following research question is proposed:

RQ1: Will the different levels of story language (positive, negative, neutral) have a positive or negative effect on emotion?

Method

Design and Participants

The experiment used a 2 × 3 between-subjects factorial design. The two factors were race (White vs. Black) and language frames (neutral language vs. positive language vs. negative language). A total of 553 participants were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) in exchange for monetary compensation. A total of 63 turned in incomplete surveys and were excluded from the data analysis, leaving a usable sample of 490. Power analysis suggested a sample of 363; the achieved sample was well above that number.

The sample skewed slightly female, with 57% of the respondents reporting themselves as female, and predominantly White (77%), with 8% reporting as Black, 8% reporting as Hispanic, less than 1% each reporting as Asian, Pacific Islander, and Middle Eastern, and 5.5% reporting as other. Ages ranged from 18 to 77, with the highest concentration falling between 20 and 44. The sample was limited to respondents from the United States. When looking at education, the highest percentage of respondents had a bachelor's degree (40%).

Procedures

Amazon's MTurk is an online participant solicitation and data collection tool. Through the platform, anonymous workers are solicited to perform a wide variety of short "human intelligence tasks" for a predetermined amount of payment (Mason & Suri, 2012). A request to participate in an academic research study examining attitudes toward athletes who engaged in social protests was distributed electronically via Amazon's MTurk to a United States-based population of unknown size. Potential participants were assured of their anonymity and were offered 20 cents for taking part in the research. Participants were told they would answer one set of questions before reading a news article about an athlete who engaged in a social protest before an athletic event. Participants were told the story was true, but names and identifying information had been changed to protect the identity of the athlete. Participants were informed that they would answer a second set of questions after reading the article. Seventy-five percent of the participants took an average of 14 minutes to complete the full survey. The least amount of time spent was 8:14, and the greatest amount was 32:47.

Manipulations

The key variables of visual frames and news frames were manipulated by constructing a newspaper article, including a photograph of the athlete, focusing on the issue of a college quarterback kneeling for the national anthem before a spring college football game (see the Appendix located at https://www.dropbox.com/s/ayrb26k24z66re1/IJSC%20Appendix%20.docx?dl=0 for an example of a manipulation). The news story was built using two real articles: one on Colin Kaepernick and his motivations for kneeling during the

national anthem, and one on the Amherst College football players who kneeled before a 2016 game (Williams, 2016). The manipulation was built primarily using the Kaepernick story, with additional quotes being pulled from the second article. To manipulate the news frames, the language in the stimuli was altered in three ways. In the neutral language condition, the story was presented with just facts and a quote from the quarterback about his reasons for kneeling. In the positive language condition, quotes were included from the athlete mentioning the support he had received for his decision, as well as quotes from the coach, college president, and athletic director supporting the quarterback's actions. In the negative language condition, quotes were included from the athlete noting the backlash he had received for his actions, as well as a quote from a board of trustee member condemning the athlete's actions.

For the key variable of the visual frame, photographs were manipulated for race and showed either a White or a Black player. All photographs were tight head shots only, taken on the field. The tight shot allowed the viewer to recognize that the player was on a football field, but no identifying information for the field was visible. The head shot framed the player's head and top of his shoulders, so the viewer could see the shoulders and neck of the player's jersey, but again, no identifying information on the jersey could be seen.

Once the news stories were built, a pilot test was run using 45 undergraduate students to test the feasibility and credibility of the different versions of the story. All 45 participants rated them as either *highly believable* or *believable*, using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 was "highly unbelievable" and 5 was "highly believable."

Measurements

Nationalism (the perception of national superiority), patriotism (the degree of love for and pride in the United States), and smugness (a sense of righteousness about the United States) were measured using an adapted version of Kosterman and Feshbach's (1989) patriotism and nationalism questionnaire. Participants answered each item on a scale of 1 (*not*) to 7 (*lots*.) Patriotism was measured using a six-item scale (α = .93). Nationalism was measured using a six-item scale (α = .83). Smugness was measured using a four-item scale (α = .89). To classify levels, each variable was split into three levels—low, medium, and high—using the median score as the point at which the variable was split. Means for the three scale variables are found in Table 1.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of Patriotism, Nationalism, and Smugness Scales.

Scale	*M*	*SD*
Patriotism	32.75	7.83
Nationalism	22.28	7.32
Smugness	16.21	6.41

Emotions were rated by respondents on a scale from 1 (*none*) to 10 (*extreme*) using the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Ten emotions were classified as positive (interested, excited, strong, enthusiastic, proud, alert, inspired, determined, attentive, active; α = .91), and

10 were classified as negative (distressed, upset, guilty, scared, hostile, irritable, ashamed, nervous, jittery, and afraid; α = .90). Means for the PANAS scale emotions are found in Table 2.

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations: PANAS Scale (N = 490).

Emotion	*M*	*SD*	Emotion	*M*	*SD*
Interested	3.21	1.10	Irritated	1.72	1.06
Distressed	1.6	0.91	Alert	3	1.25
Excited	2.01	1.19	Ashamed	1.48	0.95
Upset	1.72	1.07	Inspired	2.47	1.33
Strong	2.69	1.33	Nervous	1.32	0.72
Guilty	1.22	0.65	Determined	2.75	1.32
Scared	1.26	0.72	Attentive	3.28	1.23
Hostile	1.41	0.87	Jittery	1.36	0.77
Enthusiastic	2.31	1.30	Active	2.39	1.23
Proud	2.7	1.39	Afraid	1.28	0.76

Results

The first three hypotheses tested emotions using PANAS (Watson et al., 1988). The first three hypotheses predicted that participants with higher levels of patriotism, nationalism, and smugness would display more negatively based than positive emotions after reading the article. Ordinal regression analysis found more significant effects on each of the three variables of negative emotions than of positive emotions, leading to an increase in the odds of feeling a more negative emotion after reading the article. Tables 3, 4, and 5 break down the full ordinal regression results for each variable.

When examining the respondent's level of patriotism, one positive emotion was displayed (active), and seven of the 10 negative emotions emerged (distressed, guilty, scared, hostile, irritated, nervous, and afraid) for respondents who displayed higher levels of patriotism. Therefore, H1 is supported.

Table 3. Ordinal Regression: Patriotism.

Emotion	*p*	Exp(B)	*df*	Wald chi-square	95% CI
Distressed	.047	.97	1	3.95	[.932, 1.00]
Guilty	.001	.92	1	10.95	[.881, .968]
Scared	< .001	.92	1	13.21	[.881, .963]
Hostile	< .001	.92	1	13.47	[.883, .963]
Irritated	.007	.95	1	7.30	[.918, .987]
Nervous	.003	.94	1	8.56	[.905, .980]
Active*	.014	.98	1	1.21	[.953, 1.01]
Afraid	< .001	.91	1	17.02	[.867, .951]

*Positive emotions.

H2 predicted that participants with higher levels of nationalism would display more negative than positive emotions. After reading the article, three positive emotions emerged (strong, inspired, and active), and five negative emotions were reported (upset, guilty, scared, hostile, and nervous). H2 is supported.

Table 4. Ordinal Regression: Nationalism.

Emotion	*p*	Exp(B)	*df*	Wald chi-square	95% CI
Upset	.008	.96	1	6.96	[.918, .987]
Strong*	.004	.95	1	1.06	[.924, .985]
Guilty	.014	.94	1	6.02	[.892, .987]
Scared	.008	.94	1	7.09	[.893, .983]
Hostile	< .001	.91	1	16.46	[.873, .954]
Inspired*	.014	.96	1	6.03	[.931, .992]
Nervous	.036	.96	1	4.40	[.914, .997]
Active*	.004	.97	1	2.90	[.998, 1.08]

*Positive emotions.

H3 predicted that higher levels of smugness would lead to more negative than positive emotions. This hypothesis was supported; six negative emotions were reported (distressed, upset, hostile, irritated, ashamed, and afraid), as opposed to two positive emotions (alert and inspired).

Table 5. Ordinal Regression: Smugness.

Emotion	*p*	Exp (B)	*df*	Wald chi-square	95% CI
Distressed	.005	1.07	1	7.76	[1.02, 1.12]
Upset	< .001	1.09	1	14.03	[1.04, 1.14]
Hostile	.001	1.10	1	11.09	[1.04, 1.17]
Irritated	< .001	1.13	1	26.42	[1.08, 1.19]
Alert*	.004	1.01	1	8.34	[1.01, 1.10]
Ashamed	.001	1.09	1	10.30	[1.03, 1.15]
Inspired*	< .001	.94	1	21.53	[.870, .945]
Afraid	.042	1.07	1	4.14	[1.00, 1.14]

*Positive emotions.

H4 predicted that participants would respond to the story featuring a player of a different race with more negative than positive emotions. Multiple linear regressions were calculated to predict emotions based on the race of the participants and the race of the player in the story. The dependent variables were the emotions from the PANAS scale, and the independent variables were participant race, player race, and the interaction between participant race and player race. Tables 6–8 outline the significant differences.

Table 6. Summary of Simple Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Participant Emotions: Participant Race (N = 486).

Variable	R^2	*F*	*B*	*SE B*
Excited	.09	8.93**	−.61	.18
Strong	.03	3.16**	−.66	.20
Guilty	.03	2.85*	.01	.10
Enthusiastic	.08	8.85**	−.87	.19
Proud	.07	7.56**	−.79	.21
Inspired	.07	7.72**	−.82	.20
Determined	.04	3.50**	−.67	.20
Attentive	.03	3.01*	−.32	.19
Active	.03	3.25**	−.55	.19
Alert	.06	5.81**	.04	.19

$*p < .05$. $**p < .01$.

Table 7. Summary of Simple Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Participant Emotions: Player Race (N = 486).

Variable	R^2	*F*	*B*	*SE B*	β
Excited	.09	8.93**	−.11	.22	−.05
Strong	.03	3.16**	−.16	.25	1.06
Guilty	.03	2.85*	−.08	.12	−.06
Enthusiastic	.08	8.85**	−.09	.24	−.03
Proud	.07	7.56**	.08	.26	.03
Inspired	.07	7.72**	−.03	.25	−.01
Determined	.04	3.50**	−.16	.25	−.06
Attentive	.03	3.01*	−.03	.23	−.01
Active	.03	3.25**	.02	.23	.01
Alert	.06	5.81**	.15	.23	.06

$*p < .05$. $**p < .01$.

Table 8. Summary of Simple Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Participant Emotions: Participant × Player Interaction (N = 486).

Variable	R^2	*F*	*B*	*SE B*	β
Excited	.09	8.93**	.13	.25	.05
Strong	.03	3.16**	.21	.28	.08
Guilty	.03	2.85*	.04	.14	.03
Enthusiastic	.08	8.85**	.20	.27	.08
Proud	.07	7.56**	−.15	.29	−.05
Inspired	.07	7.72**	.13	.30	.05
Determined	.04	3.50**	19	.28	.07
Attentive	.03	3.01*	.17	.26	.07
Active	.03	3.25**	.04	.26	.02
Alert	.06	5.81**	−.12	.26	−.05

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Looking at Tables 6–8, the positive emotions of excited, strong, enthusiastic, proud, inspired, determined, attentive, and active were all statistically significant. One negative emotion—guilt—emerged as statistically significant, with White participants displaying significantly more guilt. Non-White participants experienced significantly less of these emotions when reading about the White player versus when reading about the Black player. White participants experienced significantly less of these emotions when reading about the Black player versus reading about the White player. When examining how participants viewed players of the same race, White participants experienced significantly less of these emotions when reading about Black players, but they also showed less positive emotions when reading the story with the White player than non-White participants showed when reading about the Black player. There is partial support for this hypothesis.

The research question asked what effect the story language (positive, negative, neutral) would have on the participants' emotional response after reading the story. Ordinal regression revealed no significant findings.

Discussion

In October 2017, Munshi (2017) stated, "The political athlete is back, energised *[sic]* by the resurgent national furor over race and the direct power of social media" (p. 1). Athletes who have chosen to take a knee during the national anthem in the United States have stated that their protest is against racial inequality; the criticism leveled against their actions is that they are choosing to disrespect the flag, the country, or the military. This study sought to examine how nationalistic attitudes may affect how people view an athlete engaging in a form of protest, and if nationalism would be more of a driving factor in attitudes than the race of the athlete engaged in protest.

The most notable finding of this study occurs from the manipulation of athlete race. Previous literature on athlete activism examined specific race-related contexts, affirming the notions of a White in-group and the idea that minority athletes should know their place as the out-group and not question it. The fourth hypothesis in this examination looked directly at the manipulation of the athlete's race in the article. When looking at the

two groups, each experienced less positive emotions when reading the story containing a player of a different race. It is here that conclusions about in-group and out-group may begin to be formed. Less positive emotions were shown for the player of a different race from the participants, suggesting that an in-group and out-group bias for race is present. What is most notable about the findings, however, is that White participants showed less solidarity with stories about the White player than non-White participants showed when reading a story about the Black player. The finding surrounding White participants could be attributed to the tenets of expectancy violation theory; individuals develop expectations about the communication behavior of others, and when those expectations are violated, positive or negative judgments are assigned to the individual engaging in the violation of behavior (Burgoon & Hale, 1988). Recent instances of athlete activism have been primarily performed by Black athletes surrounding issues that directly affect the Black community (police brutality, racial injustice). For the White participants, there may be another out-group forming based on the player's actions. Because social structures favor White identity, the dominant in-group in sport is White. A White athlete speaking out on social issues, such as racism, may lead to both a violation of the expectations of how a White player is "supposed" to act with respect to activism, and a perception of the existing power structures being challenged. By showing fewer positive emotions, this finding mirrors the disruption and discomfort of fans found by Frederick and colleagues (2017). The findings also show that when comparing the reactions of participants reading the story featuring the player of their corresponding race, White participants elicited more negative emotions that non-White participants. This finding suggests that future research should examine if the message or action of the activist act is the main driver of negative emotions.

Previous research has found that the type and amount of media content observed have an effect in bolstering attitudes of patriotism, nationalism, and smugness (e.g., Billings et al., 2013; Billings et al., 2015b). Media consumers may enter into the viewing already set in an in-group "us" versus an out-group "them" mentality, leading to the higher attitude levels (Billings et al., 2015b). Within this examination, respondents who entered into the media story with already high levels of the three attitude measures of patriotism, nationalism, and smugness were predicted to show more negative emotions after reading an article about an athlete engaged in a protest in which he kneeled during the national anthem. All three hypotheses were supported, with more negative emotions emerging. It is also of note that different negative emotions emerged across all three hypotheses. Because each attitude has a discrete and separate definition, it may not be a random finding that different emotional reactions were elicited from each.

In terms of social identity theory literature, the notion of the in-group versus the out-group holds. Here, the primary in-group has been defined as those individuals who self-define as the patriots, the people who take pride in the country and hold a certain smugness about it, with a potential second in-group formed by White highly nationalistic individuals. The larger number of negative emotions reported suggests a form of derogation to the out-group member. One finding of specific note is that for all three attitudes, respondents reported feeling "hostile" after reading the article. Hostile was the only negative emotion to appear across all three attitudes, though several others appeared in two (e.g., irritated, scared, afraid, nervous). The latter four may reveal more about how members of this in-group felt that their identity was being threatened, while the emotion of hostile trends more toward members feeling as though their beliefs and attitudes are under attack. As noted previously in the literature, when members of the in-group feel as though they are under attack, they

become less likely to listen and more likely to feel antagonized. The resulting actions toward the out-group members may be prejudicial and discriminatory (Tsui & Gutek, 1999).

It is also of note that within the respondents' displaying high levels of nationalism, the greatest amount of positive emotion was reported after reading the article. Though the number of positive emotions reported was low, respondents who reported high levels of nationalism were more likely to report feelings of strength, feelings of inspiration, and feeling active. Further testing revealed no significant differences among genders, races, or levels of education as influencing factors.

The negative emotions displayed reflect Kaufman's (2008) notion that athletes ultimately garner negative attention for speaking out on social causes. Within the narrative of this specific protest, if you are a member of the in-group that highly identifies with the ideals of patriotism, nationalism, and a smugness about how great your country is, when a challenge is put forth to the norms of how the country is to be honored (standing for the national anthem), that person is viewed as a threat to the ideals of the in-group; race of the protester may be taking a back seat to nationalistic pride, given that the negative emotions were produced for both races on a fairly consistent basis. Social identity theory assumes that individuals will seek to maintain positive perceptions of their group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). As seen in previous studies (e.g., Frederick et al., 2017; Sanderson, 2013; Sanderson et al., 2016), there have been examples in a sport context where in-group individuals engaged in behaviors to manage a viewed threat to their social identity.

Through mainstream media (current at the time of this writing), the narrative re-forming of the intent behind the protest and the re-framing of the focus of what it means to be a "real American" allow for this highly identified in-group to protect and defend its group's identity, even when the identity is being challenged by members of the same race. Is it racism, nationalism, or both that drives people to respond in a negative manner? Within this examination, nationalism may be the main driver, with respondents providing this defense through their reporting of a primary response of negative emotions after reading the article about the athlete's protest, regardless of the race of the athlete. These findings can offer practical implications with respect to media practitioners. When confronted with covering athlete protests, sports editors and sports media managers may realize that choosing to cover protests may drive away readers and viewers who identify as highly nationalistic and exhibit highly patriotic and smug behaviors. By re-framing the intent of the protest to more closely align with the views of the reader/viewership (as can be garnered through article comments and social media responses), editors and writers can narrate the story in a way that doesn't threaten the identity of their core audience, making it less likely that they will lose their audience to another source. It should also be acknowledged that cultural scholarship would invite researchers to ask if it is possible to decouple race and nationalism.

Previous literature on athlete activism examined specific race-related contexts, concluding with the notions of a White in-group and that minority athletes should know their place as the out-group and not question it. The fourth hypothesis in this examination looked directly at the manipulation of the athlete's race in the article. The race of the athlete had no effect on emotions, positive or negative, suggesting that race doesn't seem to be the driver in emotions, at least in this scenario. Secondarily, the implicit cue of bias examined—story language—had no effect on emotions.

On a larger societal scale, within the 2017 NFL season, all athletes who took a knee during the anthem were booed by fans, regardless of race. In this particular experiment, the driving factor in emotions seems to be the person's level of commitment to his or her country. Focusing these results around social identity theory, individuals who highly identify with their country do not want to see their country disrespected. Prior research notes that individuals' levels of patriotism, nationalism, and smugness will increase when their country does well. Prior research also notes that when a person's social identity is threatened, individuals will band together in ways to strengthen their social identity. When these prior findings are merged with the findings of the present study, a conclusion emerges of highly identified patriots using displays of negative emotions to mitigate a threat to in-group ideals and norms. Future research should investigate whether these attitudes would predict similar responses to other forms of protest.

This investigation faced several limitations that can be explored further in future research. First, the questionnaire did not ask respondents to identify as sports fans in any way. It is possible the fandom could be an influential factor in attitude, and one that could be analyzed in future analyses. Among those lines, this experiment used a fictional athlete in the story. Social identity theory, in-group/out-group considerations, and levels of fandom may play a factor when individuals are faced with an actual athlete, perhaps one from "their" team, or an athlete they consider themselves a fan of, who engages in a form of protest they do not agree with. Would attitudes change if the athlete is "their" athlete versus an athlete from "that other" team? Does the setting play a role, and would attitudes change based on the level of the athlete doing the protesting (high school, college, professional, national team)? The emotions listed in the survey were not defined in any way, leaving the meanings up to the individual interpretations of the participants. Finally, acknowledgment of self-report bias issues—as well as the potential that participants were already aware of the issue that has been discussed on a national level, both in sports media and mainstream media, leading to previously developed attitudes and opinions—must also be taken into account when considering the results.

Conclusions

This study was an examination of how nationalistic attitudes affected the emotions of respondents after they read about athletes who engaged in a form of activism. The data did find that more negative emotions were recorded for participants who had higher levels of nationalism, patriotism, and smugness, but explicit and implicit cues about race showed no effect on emotions. The findings reinforce ideas of social identity theory and management of threats to social identity, but raise new questions for exploration surrounding the impact of demographic factors on implicit and explicit racial cues embedded in media content focused on athlete activism.

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