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# American Attitudes in the Sporting Mega-Event Spectacle: Nationalism and Self-Identity in the 2014 FIFA World Cup

Robert Brady Belair  
*Clemson University*

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AMERICAN ATTITUDES IN THE SPORTING MEGA-EVENT SPECTACLE:  
NATIONALISM AND SELF-IDENTITY IN THE 2014 FIFA WORLD CUP

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Graduate School of  
Clemson University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
Communication, Technology and Society

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by  
Robert Brady Belair  
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Accepted by:  
Dr. Jimmy Sanderson, Committee Chair  
Dr. John Spinda  
Dr. Darren Linvill

## ABSTRACT

Previous research has shown that the televised consumption of sporting mega-events, like the Olympics and FIFA World Cup, has significant cultivation effects on viewers. Past studies have also focused on fans' identification to their home nation during these international sporting competitions in terms of self-categorization. To measure relationships between identification to the U.S. Men's National Team with FIFA World Cup viewing and nationalistic attitudes, a total of 119 American participants were surveyed in the one-month period following the 2014 World Cup Final. Participants responded to 29 items based on a seven-point Likert scale pertaining to five measures: patriotism, nationalism, smugness, internationalism, and identification. The number of U.S. matches viewed was significantly correlated with identification, but not with patriotism, nationalism, or smugness. A multivariate linear regression revealed that 6 variables (age, amount of exposure to U.S. matches, patriotism, nationalism, smugness, and internationalism) were significant predictors of identification. In addition, amount of exposure to U.S. matches and patriotism were significant predictors of identification when controlling for all other variables. Theoretical extrapolations of cultivation effects and self-categorization are offered, as well as the limitation and directions for future research.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil was widely considered the most successful mega-event in history in terms of television viewership, media consumption, and social media conversations (The 2014 FIFA World Cup, 2014). For example, the World Cup set records for all-time high television viewing records in Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium, and was responsible for the largest quantity of data ever streamed for an event as millions of fans watched online (The 2014 FIFA World Cup, 2014). The month-long event also was responsible for more than three billion interactions on Facebook and 672 million messages on Twitter (Billings, Burch, & Zimmerman, 2014; ESPN Staff, 2014;). Additionally, Facebook reported that 88 million people had more than 280 million social interactions globally, which broke the record for the highest level of Facebook conversation for any single sporting event that was previously held by the 2013 Super Bowl (McHenry, 2014). Furthermore, the World Cup final was a watershed moment for soccer in the United States, as it beat television-viewing figures for the 2014 National Basketball Association (NBA) Finals and 2013 Major League Baseball (MLB) World Series with an estimated 26.5 million viewers. (ESPN Staff, 2014).

An even more impressive statistic for soccer in the United States centers on the average viewing audience for each of the 64 World Cup matches, which constitutes a staggering growth of the game in the United States (Stubits, 2014). ESPN, ESPN2, and the American Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) comprised a trio of networks that broadcasted the World Cup in the United States. These networks combined to average 4.5

million viewers per match, which was 1.2 million more than the previous high during the 2010 World Cup (Vertelney, 2014). In fact, one columnist noted, “More than ever before fans flocked to the television to watch the beautiful game” (Stubits, 2014). Overall, the tournament was the most watched World Cup ever in the United States (Vernelney, 2014).

Scholars contend that sporting mega-events, like the World Cup, have an inflated status as a nation builder and social unifier; and abundant research exists on sporting mega-events (Billings, Brown, & Brown, 2013a; Billings et al., 2013b; Cornelissen, Bob, & Swart, 2011), but it is imperative that researchers continue to investigate the impacts of these events since they vary over time and as the geographic locales change. This collection of research covers a wide range of topics, but mainly focuses on a specific nation or set of nations and is generally about either the Olympics or the FIFA World Cup (Florek, Breibarth, & Conejo, 2008; Grix & Houlihan, 2013; Kaplanidou et al., 2013). With the World Cup specifically, there have been some studies that involve nationalism, fan identity, and media consumption (Grant, 2014; Rowe, McKay, & Miller, 1998; Sabo, Jansen, Tate, Duncan, & Leggett, 1996). However, little research has focused on Americans’ nationalistic attitudes about the World Cup. The lack of scholarship on American soccer fans may be because of the global perception that Americans do not care about soccer, or that research on American fans is more interesting in sports where the U.S. teams are dominant. Nevertheless, with the growing viewership of World Cup matches, exploring Americans’ nationalistic attitudes during the world’s largest sporting mega-event is warranted.



The purpose of this study is to examine the relationships between Americans' media consumption and nationalistic attitudes during the 2014 FIFA World Cup. Participants completed a survey one week after the FIFA World Cup final, which consisted of five sub-scales (nationalism, patriotism, internationalism, smugness, and identity) with twenty-nine total items that measured participants' nationalism on a seven-point Likert scale. This thesis contains the following sections. First, I provide a history of soccer in the United States to provide context for the American soccer scene. Next, I review literature concerning sporting mega-events, nationalism in sport, and fan identification. I discuss these topics through the lens of cultivation and self-categorization theories, which were used to interpret the results. Specifically, cultivation theory was used as a framework to understand the effects of World Cup viewership on Americans' nationalistic attitudes and self-categorization theory was used to explain the results in terms of the differences, or lack thereof, between Americans' level of attachment to the United States Men's National Team and the sport of soccer in general. Following the literature review, I present the research questions and hypotheses. Then, I explain the method and analysis techniques used to answer the research question and test the hypotheses. Finally, I discuss the results, explain the limitations of this study, and offer future directions for research.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **History of Soccer in the United States**

The history of soccer in the United States, although relatively brief compared with other countries, is interesting in its own right. Some Ivy League schools played soccer in the late nineteenth century for a brief time, but the rules were eventually changed to form what is known today as American football (Markovits & Hellerman, 2001). Perturbed by the foreign origins of the sport, many Americans were more interested in playing sports that aligned with their ideologies and nationalistic values. Immigrants made several attempts at establishing a professional soccer league in the early twentieth century, but failed to promote the sport because of internal disagreements and a lack of a clear vision (Markovits & Hellerman, 2001). For the next fifty years, soccer remained a sport outside the mainstream of American life even though the United States Men's National Team reached the semi-finals in the first FIFA World Cup in 1930 (Hopkins, 2010). In 1975, The North American Soccer League (NASL) was the first professional league to gain traction in the United States when its New York Cosmos franchise signed Brazilian superstar Pele (Hopkins, 2010). As many as 77,000 fans filled the Giants stadium to watch Pele's Cosmos take on other international superstars (who joined the league after Pele) during a playoff game in 1977 (Hopkins, 2010). However, lack of consistent television ratings and huge financial losses led to the downfall of the league and another period of absence of soccer in the American professional sport culture (Markovits & Hellerman, 2001).

Soccer's history in the United States can be explained by the theory of "American Exceptionalism," which originated in the 1830s from the work of Alexis de Tocqueville. Tocqueville traveled to the United States to find out why French efforts at establishing a democracy had failed after the French Revolution, while America had established itself as a democratic republic after the American Revolution (Mansfield & Wintrop, 2000). By positing that America was exceptional, Tocqueville was not suggesting that it was a better country than others, rather, that it was qualitatively different than other countries (Lipset, 1997). For example, America is an exceptional country in that it was perhaps the first colony to become an independent democracy. Unlike other countries that define themselves by a common history through certain ideologies, becoming an "American" is an ideological act that emphasizes a commitment to liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, populism, and laissez-faire tenets (Lipset, 1997).

Whereas England's source of national pride derived from being part of the center of the global empire, the United States attained much of its national identity from having spurned this empire (Collins, 2006). The United States government and formation of law is inherently exceptional because of the American Revolution and its rejection of colonialism and monarchial rule. The American Constitution and Bill of Rights emphasizes the rights of the individual over those of the state, which differs from European countries and other world powers who place a greater emphasis on obedience to political authority and state power (Lipset, 1997). Another example of American exceptionalism is its educational system: "[The United States] has led the world by far in proportion of people completing different levels of mass education from early in the

nineteenth century, first for elementary and high schools, later for colleges and graduate institutions” (Lipset, 1997, p. 21). This potentially stems from the fact that the United States spends more money on its educational system, while most affluent European countries spend their public funds on bettering the living conditions of working classes and poor communities (Lipset, 1997). These examples have been provided to illustrate a basic understanding of the American exceptionalism theory because it can be used to explain why the sports landscape in America is qualitatively different from other countries in the world. An explanation of America’s sports exceptionalism will be given later to demonstrate how and why soccer developed differently in America compared with the rest of the world.

Like other highly industrialized nations, America’s sporting culture developed between 1870 and 1930 because of technological advances, the booming economy, consumer culture, and the exponential growth of mass media (Markovits & Hellerman, 2001). Markovits and Hellerman (2001) contended that a sport had to have a clear-cut presence during this time period to become a major American cultural icon by the end of the twentieth century. Due to the booming economy, baseball was the first sport to benefit from the influx of Americans who were willing to pay money to watch the sport. Believed to have formed out of cricket, “baseball owed a good deal of its successful proliferation among the American masses to its identity as American” (Markovits & Hellerman, 2001, p. 54). This nationalistic tendency continued with the formation of American football, which was featured at universities in the late nineteenth century. By adopting various rules from soccer and rugby, football (like baseball’s emergence out of

cricket) could more easily be measured in terms of performance, which was important to American audiences. A third major sport entered the American sports landscape in 1891 after, unlike baseball and football, being created as an outlet for youth to play indoors during the harsh conditions of New England winters. While basketball was not as widely popular as baseball and football in the early twentieth century, its presence at the local and collegiate level kept the sport relevant until the NBA emerged as a global power in the 1950s (Markovits & Hellerman, 2001).

With the emergence of these three sports in early American sport culture, soccer was crowded out and identified as a “non-American sport” with foreign origins. Indeed, “Soccer was perceived by both native-born Americans and immigrants as a non-American activity at a time in American history when nativism and nationalism emerged to create a distinctly American self-image” (Markovits & Hellerman, 2001, p. 52). Meanwhile, soccer was exploding on the international scene and the worldwide appeal made it necessary to form a world governing body (Orejan, 2011). The Federation of Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) was founded in 1904 and assumed responsibilities for overseeing all international competitions, including the FIFA World Cup. Soccer became the most popular sport in the world and still dominates the international sport culture today (Orejan, 2011). This stark contrast in American sport culture, compared with the sporting cultures in other industrialized countries, is another example of American exceptionalism. America’s sports exceptionalism can be linked to self-contained nationalism acting apart from the rest of the international arena (Markovits & Hellerman, 2001).

Near the end of the twentieth century, a major event occurred on United States soil that impacted America's perception, participation, and consumption of soccer. The FIFA World Cup was hosted in nine cities during the summer of 1994, changing the landscape of soccer in America. Hosting the World Cup in a country with a small soccer following made little sense from a sporting point of view, but significant commercial sense from another point of view, as this strategy represented another attempt to persuade the U.S. public to buy into the world's most popular sport (Whannel, 2009). The World Cup USA organization was charged with three main goals: (a) maximize profits for itself, the United States Soccer Federation (USSF), FIFA, television networks, and the nine World Cup host cities; (b) attain a respectable American television audience; and (c) use the World Cup to launch the MLS (Major League Soccer) organization, which was sought to showcase first-division soccer in the United States with mostly American players (Markovits & Hellerman, 2001, p. 201). With record attendance figures, good television ratings, and the substantial amount of coverage by the American press, the 1994 World Cup was a great success. Although American sentiment about soccer soon faded after the World Cup, the MLS organization was formed two years later and the American media heavily covered the 1998 FIFA World Cup in France. Simply put, these outcomes would not have occurred had the World Cup not been held in the United States in 1994 (Hopkins, 2010).

The argument that soccer is drastically growing in the United States by providing the 2014 FIFA World Cup television ratings is short sided. After all, the interest in soccer in America seems spikes every four years during the World Cup and subsequently

plummets during the mega-event's off years. However, statistics from the official U.S. Youth Soccer annual registration of players and the growth of professional leagues in the United States over the past couple of decades provide a well-rounded context for soccer's growth in America. There has been a consistent and substantial growth in the number of players who have registered in U.S. Youth Soccer Leagues over the past 30 years.

USYouthSoccer.org reported that the number of youth players in the United States nearly doubled from 1985 (1,210,408) to 1995 (2,388,719); they grew nearly twenty-five percent by 2005 (3,050,465) and swelled to 3,055,148 in 2014 (USYouthSoccer, 2015). Furthermore, the expansion of teams in Major League Soccer (MLS) from 14 in 2008 to 21 in 2015 has created larger soccer fan bases across the United States as more cities are represented in the MLS; resulting in a significant increase in viewers for the 2015 MLS opener (539,000) compared with the average number of viewers per game in 2014 (240,000 during ESPN/ESPN2 broadcasts and 142,000 on NBCSN; Dietsch, 2015). The relatively new implementation of the professional academy system that is similar to foreign leagues is promising for the future of American soccer. The United States Soccer Development Academy (USSDA) formed in 2007 and is now considered the top tier of youth soccer in America because it features youth academies and clubs from various professional organizations including MLS, the North American Soccer League (NASL), and the United Soccer Leagues (USL).

Americans' consumption of soccer is also higher than ever and the 2014 FIFA World Cup illustrates this point. *The Wall Street Journal* (2014) published an article stating that the U.S. vs. Portugal game was ESPN's most-viewed program ever outside of

the NFL and college football with a record 18.2 million people tuning in. Furthermore, the 2014 FIFA World Cup™ in numbers (2014) document revealed that the United States was the second highest nation (Brazil ranked first) in total tickets allocated for all matches and more than tripled the number for the next closest nation (Argentina). This evidence strongly suggests that soccer is gaining traction in the United States. However, the increased interest in soccer in the United States may be attributable to Americans' tendency to support their country (no matter what sport is being played) during international sporting mega-events, which have considerable significance on a global scale.

### **Sporting Mega-Events**

Since the late nineteenth century, the Olympic games and the FIFA World Cup have established enduring popularity and memorability in modern society (Roche, 2003). Although the notion of mega-events have been understood for a long time, it is their scale and strategic use in late modern society that makes them appealing for host nations, corporations, media, researchers, visitors, and others (Florek, Breitbarth & Conejo, 2008). Getz (in Fayos-Sola, 1998), defines mega-events as:

planned occurrences of limited duration which have an extraordinary impact on the host area in terms of one or more of the following tourist volumes; visitor expenditures; publicity leading to a heightened awareness and a more positive image; related infrastructural and organizational developments which substantially increase the destination's capacity and attractiveness (p. 242).

Based on this view of mega-events, and given their duration, scale, media presence,



tourism attractiveness, and impact on the host city, the FIFA World Cup and Olympics fit the bill (Maflas, Theodoraki, & Houlihan, 2004). Horne and Manzenreiter (2006) offered three main reasons for the growth of sporting mega-events: (a) modern technologies of mass communication; (b) the formation of the sport-media-business alliance; and (c) the wide promotional benefits they offer to host nations. Accordingly, most of the research on sporting mega-events focuses on media technologies, economic impacts, and tourism because they are largely responsible for the growth of mega-events (Lee & Taylor, 2005; McGillivray, 2014; Nadeau, O'Reilly, & Heslop, 2013).

McGillivray (2014) suggested that in modern society, sporting mega-events are captivating spectacles of consumer capitalism because of the transformational power of modern technology. New developments in mass communication technology, especially the development of satellite television, have created unprecedented global audiences for events like the Olympics and the World Cup (Horne, 2006). Whannel (2009) noted, "By extending the live network globally, television enabled the transmission of events from any part of the globe and their dissemination and consumption to much of the world" (p. 206). Subsequently, broadcasting networks have competed to buy the broadcasting rights to these events at an increasingly costly rate. For instance, in the United States alone, the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) paid \$1.2 billion to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 2012 for the rights to air the London Summer Olympics, compared to the \$300 million paid for the rights to the 1988 Seoul Summer Olympics (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006). In terms of the FIFA World Cup, a private sports company bought the world television rights in 1996 for \$1 billion and \$1.2 billion for the 2002 and 2006

FIFA World Cup (Real, 1998).

In addition to television, new media technologies, such as Internet broadcasting and social media have been implemented during recent mega-events (2012 Olympics & 2014 FIFA World Cup) (McGillivray, 2014). Transnational corporations develop and employ their most refined technologies to bring differentiated versions of mega-events to viewers scattered in every part of the globe (Real, 1998). For example, networks like ESPN have created websites specifically for live online viewing of sports on laptop computers, tablets and smartphones in order to serve consumers who may not be able to watch on television. Furthermore, the Internet and social media have quickly become significant sources of sports information and communal discussion (McGillivray, 2014). Consumers are able to access sport news on-demand, while also receiving background information that television and radio cannot produce (Rowe, 2004). In sum, modern mass communication technologies have transformed the way people consume and interact with sport. Since sporting mega-events draw such a large global audience, new technologies are used to promote these events, which often results in rapid dissemination to wide audiences.

The second reason for the growth of sporting mega-events is the formation of the sport-media-business alliance, which transformed professional sport in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006). For example, The World Sponsorship Monitor Annual Review (2011) reported that of the 2,012 sponsorships reported worldwide in 2011, sport sponsorships accounted for 88% of the total. In the case of the 2012 Olympics, sponsorship accounted for 34% (\$1.46 billion) of total revenue (Nadeau,

O'Reilly, & Heslop, 2013). Mega-events are of utmost interest to companies with a global consumer base, as these corporations view sporting mega-events as valuable opportunities for advertisement and brand promotion because they “allow companies to tap into a broad and diverse audience, of which many members care passionately about the sponsored property” (Cornwell & Amis, 2005, p. 188). The FIFA World Cup and the Olympics are interesting and exciting to consumers, which presumably increase the likelihood of consumer participation in brand promotions (Cornwell & Amis, 2005). For instance, Nadeau, O'Reilly, and Heslop (2013) investigated mega-event and sponsorship evaluations and found empirical evidence supporting the notion that sponsorships are worth the investment for companies even for those in challenging locales.

Another reason for the growth of sporting mega-events stems from the wide promotional benefits they offer to host nations (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2006). Many researchers have studied mega-events in terms of their legacies in the past decade because of their prominence in the global arena and massive investments by the host cities and countries (Cornelissen, Bob, & Swart, 2011). Preuss (2007), defined by stating: “Irrespective of the time of production and space, legacy is all planned and unplanned, positive and negative, tangible and intangible structures created for and by a sport event that remain longer than the event itself” (p. 211).

Scholars also have pursued the measurement of mega-event legacies in varied ways to discover the attraction and long-term impacts that hosting a mega-event can have on nations and cities. Horne (2007) contends that the perceived social, cultural, environmental, political, and economic impacts provide the greatest attraction for hosting

mega-events, but research has suggested that there are significant gaps between forecast and actual outcomes (Cornelissen, Bob, & Swart, 2011; Crompton, 1995; Tyrrell & Johnston, 2001). Thus, some research has been conducted on the economical impacts of mega-events because it is “tangible and needed for political justification of investing scarce public resources in an event” (Preuss, 2007, p. 212). For instance, the economic impacts of World Cups in Germany in 2006, and France in 1998, were studied in terms of overnight stays at hotels, national income from tourism, and retail sales (Allmers & Maennig, 2009). The authors concluded that these World Cups did not have short-run positive impacts on tourism, employment, and income (Allmers & Maennig, 2009). The 2002 FIFA World Cup in South Korea was critically assessed in terms of net direct expenditure and economic impact by Lee and Taylor (2005) however, they concluded that a more developed approach to studying economical impacts of mega-events is required and that the sociological and cultural impacts were more interesting and important for South Korea. Kaplanidou et al. (2013) looked at the economy of South Africa before and after the 2010 World Cup and determined that “the economic impacts had a significant post-event decrease,” (p. 638) which echoes previous research that suggests disconfirmation of expectations regarding economic benefits from hosting mega-events (Lee & Taylor, 2005; Rogerson, 2009).

The findings from previous research suggest three things: (a) a standardized method for researching the economical impacts of mega-events is required since perceived economical benefits is most commonly cited by potential host nations, (b) potential host nations should use previous research in order to plan for the foreseen and

unforeseen impacts of mega-events, and (c) further research into the long-term legacy of sporting mega-events is required because of their social, cultural, environmental, political, and economic impacts on a local and global scale. This research suggests that mega-events are valuable due to the modern technologies of mass communication, the formation of the sport-media-business alliance, and the wide promotional benefits they offer to host nations. Besides the obvious benefits mentioned here, sporting mega-events also provide opportunities for nations to benefit in a subtler manner. More than ever before, sporting mega-events are used by nations to promote nationalism through the manipulation of content produced in national televised broadcasts and by sponsors who promote their brand by infusing their products/services with the events. Therefore, focusing on the cultivation of nationalism through televised broadcasts of sporting mega-events is an important area of sport media research.

### **Nationalism**

Anderson (1983) defined nationalism as the “imagined political community” (p. 6) in which groups of people enhance perceived commonalities between members of their own nation and minimize similarities with people from other nations (Billings et al., 2013b, p. 582). Nationalism has been studied through the lens of mega-events because nations hosting mega-events have shown that they can reinforce a sense of national community by linking domestic viewing rituals with the larger imagined community of the nation (Brookes, 2002). Media coverage of sporting events often involves high levels of emotional expression through the frequent use of language and visual images that give form to imaginary bonds of national unity (Blaine, Boyle, & O’Donnell, 1993;

Buffington, 2012; Rowe, McKay, & Miller, 1998). The use of visual images and nationalistic language has been studied during America's most popular sporting mega-event, the Super Bowl. Martin and Reeves (2001) argue against the idea that the Super Bowl is the premiere international televised sporting event. Rather, they contend that it is used as a way to control 'our' American sport and 'our' superiority in the world through "an emphasis on white men in English speaking countries and/or U.S. outposts, on U.S. military readiness, [and] rugged, masculine places like a rocky Maine coast" (p. 233). American nationalistic values have been extremely present in the most recent Super Bowls through commercials, halftime performances, and the constant reminder of national duty through the videos and images of American troops. "From the opening performance of the National Anthem to the maelstrom of commercials, we are conditioned to this sense of patriotic obedience" (Heydari, 2014). While researching nationalism during a mega-event like the Super Bowl may be fruitful, it does not appear to have as much global significance as the Olympics or the World Cup.

Mega-events research focusing on nationalism is frequently related to modern mass communication technologies and media consumption. For example, the 2006 World Cup in Germany, which drew a global TV audience of over 26 billion, "offered *the* most powerful platform to showcase German people and culture" (Grix & Houlihan, 2013, p. 580). Germany's successful hosting of the World Cup re-established national pride and also improved their international image that was destroyed by "anti-Semitism and the murderous tyranny over millions of Jews" (Sewpaul, 2009, p. 149). South Africa followed this approach to hosting the World Cup in 2010. Prior to the start of the World

Cup, South African President Zuma implored South Africans and other African nations alike to capitalize on the opportunity to host the World Cup in Africa:

We need to find resonance between the ability of sport to unite a people and to establish the roots for peace and development. This international event, to which all of us can rightly claim ownership, should be used to deepen our understanding of our shared cultures and ensure that dialogue and cooperation among Africans is promoted (Zuma, 2010).

During the 2010 World Cup, the broadcasted games were accompanied by the buzzing sound of vuvuzelas; “a sonic reminder of where the games were being played, focusing the world on South Africa” (Ryan, 2012, p. 12).

The increased global attention given to host nations from media coverage, tourism, and the mega-event spectacle encourages host nations to raise the profile of their national interests and their geopolitical aspirations (Grant, 2014). However, using sporting mega-events as a platform to build nationalism does not end with the host nations. For example, the Olympics are hosted in a particular nation or city, but that does not prevent members from different nations from showing pride in their country. People have shown nationalistic attitudes by dressing in their country’s colors, cheering for athletes and teams from their nation, and bonding with members of their national community that they could never expect to know other through face-to-face interaction (Anderson, 1991). Furthermore, there is a massive amount of television networks that broadcast the mega-event. Sabo et al. (1996) argue that coverage of a mega-event in one nation is likely to be distinctly different from that of another country (Scott, Hill, &

Zakus, 2012). Scott, Hill, and Zakus (2012) found that networks broadcasting home country content employ nationalistic themes depicting work ethos, patriotic appeals, and “Us/We versus Them” language within commentary when describing their home team. This scholarship suggests that researchers should investigate the link between media consumption of sporting mega-events and their effects on consumers’ nationalistic attitudes.

As the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup are the world’s most watched televised sporting events, they provide a platform for networks to promote national values, symbols, and ideologies. Therefore, cultivation theory is a useful framework for researchers who wish to capture the media’s effect on sporting mega-event consumers. The “nationalism index,” created by Michael Real (1989), defines the widely accepted relationship between sports media and nationalism. Specifically: (a) all nations promote nationalism to some degree, and (b) the degree of nationalism promotion varies widely. Thus, studies have tried to measure how sporting mega-events promote nationalism and the degree to which nationalistic attitudes are shown.

A study by Billings et al. (2013b) measured the relationships between Olympic media viewing and nation-based attitudes. A total of 1,025 respondents from 6 nations answered survey questions pertaining to four different types of nationalism: patriotism, nationalism, internationalism, and smugness. The results showed that heavier consumers of Olympic media scored higher on the patriotism, nationalism, and smugness measures but not the internationalism measures. Billings et al. (2013b) concluded that media consumption influences these nationalistic attitudes to some degree, but future research



should continue examine the relationship. In a different study, Billings et al. (2013a) examined the effects on Americans' attitudes of nationalism based on their level of exposure to 2012 Olympic media. In this study, 342 participants responded at three different points in time (immediately prior to, immediately after, and one month after) to determine the relationship between Olympic media exposure and nationalistic attitudes. The results showed that heavy viewers of the Olympics displayed significantly higher levels of nationalism, patriotism, internationalism, and smugness than light viewers of Olympic media.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The use of theory is an important element of research that allows scholars to predict or explain how certain phenomena are related to one another by comprising an abstract set of ideas that helps understand or explain events observed in the world (Miller, 2005). Since sport and media have become increasingly interconnected, “theory allows the investigation of the relationship between sport and the media” (Yoo, Smith, & Kim, 2013, p. 9).

#### **Cultivation Theory**

World Cup television programming re-creates athletic events in a mediated reality, which raises significant issues related to socialization, and the formation of values and norms (Mercurio & Filak, 2010; Wenner, 1989; Yoo et al., 2013). These programs inherently contain messages that help viewers cultivate social or cultural values and ideology (Yoo et al., 2013). Thus, it is helpful to study televised sporting events through the lens of cultivation theory. The originator of cultivation theory, George Gerbner, developed the theory by studying institutions, messages, and publics or as he called them, ‘Cultural Indicators’ (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). Starting in the 1960’s, Gerber believed that television was the most influential medium that people used to construct realities. Morgan and Shanahan (2010) summarized the framework of Gerbner’s cultivation theory during its infancy:

Cultivation analysis explores the independent contribution of television viewing to audiences’ conceptions of social reality... survey methods are used to assess the

variety of opinions, images, and attitudes, across a variety of samples, types of measure, topical areas, and mediating variables. The goal is to ascertain if those who spend more time watching television, other things held constant, are more likely to perceive the real world in ways that reflect those particular messages and lessons (p. 339).

Cultivation theory changed throughout the following decades after receiving criticism from several scholars (Gunter, 1994; Hirsch, 1980) and was adapted to include results from studies that focused on different topics such as gender and age (Strouse & Buerkel-Rothfuss, 1987), community background factors (Wiemann, 1984), and genre devotion (Weimann, Brosius, & Wober, 1992). At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Shanahan and Morgan (1999) conducted a meta-analysis that consisted of two decades of cultivation research, which showed that television viewing makes a small but consistent contribution to viewers' beliefs and perspectives (as cited in Morgan & Shanahan, 2010).

The theory's modern underlying premise is that exposure to television's reconstructed realities can result in perceptions of reality very different from what they might be if viewers watched less television (Cohen & Weimann, 2000). In other words, the more a viewer watches, the more he/she will form expectations about reality based on the represented world, rather than the experienced one (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1994). Additionally, "Cultivation researchers argue that mediated stimuli can negotiate the terms of debate, depict boundaries of discourse and increase argument salience" (Gerber, Gross, Morgan, Signorelli, & Shanahan, 2002; in Billings, 2007, p. 331). Therefore, cultivation theory is a useful framework to examine the influence of

mediated sport content on people's attitudes and perceptions (Yoo et al., 2013). For example, Billings (2007) studied the broadcasts of four main sports (gymnastics, track and field, swimming, and diving) during the 2004 Olympics to determine if there were any gender biases, which could shape the real-world views of consumers of Olympic media. Cultivation theory would appear to align with the results of the Billings et al. (2013a) and Billings et al. (2013b) studies by supporting the notion that heavier consumers of the Olympic media displayed higher levels of nationalism, patriotism, and smugness because of a higher level of exposure to the media's reconstructed realities, which perpetuate nationalistic ideologies. However, Billings et al. (2013b) warned that people with higher feelings of nationalism might be naturally drawn to these expressions, such as the Olympics or the World Cup. In essence, heavy consumers of sporting mega-event media might have responded similarly during a time when there was no presence of a sporting mega-event because they simply love or are happy with their country. Furthermore, the cultivation of nationalism in the context of sporting mega-events may also vary according to the level of fan identification. During sporting mega-events like the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup, fans identify themselves with athletes and teams from their nation. Presumably, this process of self-categorization could effect fans' cultivation of nationalism.

### **Team Identification**

Along with nationalism, sport mega-events provide great opportunities to study team identification, or the degree to which a fan feels a psychological connection to a team or sport (Murrell & Dietz, 1992). In the context of international mega-events,

individuals often feel a connection with those who represent their nation (Denham, 2010). While fans may identify with a team because of shared nationality, other fans' identification is rooted in strong psychological attachment to a team (Dietz-Uhler & Lanter, 2008), thus, "As identification blossoms, fans increasingly correlate their self-esteem and social identity with athletes' and sports teams' performances" (Sanderson, 2013, p. 489). Dietz-Uhler and Lanter (2008) further contend that fan identification level is important because it can have serious consequences on affective, cognitive, and behavioral tendencies. In the context of the current study, attachment to the U.S. Men's National Team may be contingent on the degree of nationalism a fan possesses.

Research on the affective consequences of team identification has found that when sport fans identify strongly with a team, they tend to experience more extreme feelings than those who weakly identify with a team (Dietz-Uhler & Lanter, 2008). This seems rather intuitive, but the extreme feelings felt by fans who strongly identify with teams can result in positive and negative outcomes based on the team's performances. Keaton and Gearhart (2013) reviewed scholarship about affective consequences of sports fan identification and confirmed that fans with higher attachments to teams experienced more extreme positive and negative emotions that manifested, such as enjoyment or satisfaction (Raney, 2003), aggression or hostility (Gearhart & Keaton, 2011), and sadness or grief (Wann & Branscombe, 1992; Wann, Carlson, & Schrader, 1999; Wann, Royalty, & Rochelle, 2002). In regards to soccer, researchers examined the emotions felt by fans following a loss and found that strongly identified fans reported feeling angry,

but not sad, whereas weakly identified fans reported sadness but not anger (Crisp, Heuston, Farr, & Turner, 2007).

The strong reactions of highly identified fans can be attributed to identification with a team being a central component of their self-identity (Wann, Schrader, & Adamson, 1998). Tajfel (1972, 1982) and Tajfel & Turner (1979) posited that individuals seek to attach themselves to social groups that reflect positively on the way they view themselves (in Lock, Taylor, Funk, & Darcy, 2012, p. 283). Identifying with sports teams can provide fans with a myriad of social categories from which they derive social identity benefits (Cialdini & Richardson, 1980). For instance, Wolfson, Wakelin, and Lewis (2005) found that soccer fans believed that fans of their team were more supportive, enthusiastic, and listed more positive attributes for fellow fans than rival fans. Wann (2006) found that identification fosters prosocial outcomes such as “increasing interpersonal connections, enhancing social life satisfaction, and reducing loneliness and alienation” (as cited in Sanderson, 2013, p. 489). Not surprisingly, identification can also elicit ‘dysfunctional behaviors’, which include being verbally abusive to opposing fans and referees (Gibson, Willmig, & Holdnak, 2002), engaging in hostile and criminal acts toward opposing teams (Wann, Culver, Akanda, Daglar, De Divitiis, & Smith, 2005), and feeling the need to drink alcohol (Wakefield & Wann, 2006). Highly identified fans behave according to their team’s performance in order to protect or maintain a positive self-image. Thus, fans more overtly express their identification with winning teams and distance themselves from losing teams (Partridge, Wann, & Elison, 2010; Sanderson, 2013).

In a study that investigated fans' tendencies to "bask in reflected glory" (BIRG), Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman, and Sloan (1976) discovered two interesting findings: college students chose to visually display their academic affiliation by wearing apparel more after their football team's successes rather than failures; and that those students used the pronoun *we* in order to associate themselves with a more positive source. On the other hand, Snyder, Lassegard, and Ford (1986, p. 383) defined cutting off reflected failure (CORF) as the "severing of associations with others who have failed, in the interest of avoiding a negative evaluation by others (and oneself)" (as cited in Spinda, 2011, p. 393). Research has discovered that highly identified fans participate in BIRGing behaviors (Madrigal, 1995; Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2005; Spinda, 2011; Wann & Brandscombe, 1990) and temporary CORFing behaviors, including derogating the out-group fans after defeat (Bernache-Assollant, Lacassagne, & Braddock, 2007), more than weakly identified fans. Behaviors stemming from fan identification can be explained through the lens of self-categorization theory, which is a derivative of social identity theory and serves as a useful lens to investigate nationalistic attitudes and World Cup consumption.

### **Self-Categorization Theory**

Social identity theory has been used as a framework to guide analyses of fan identification, group attitudes and behavior (Denham, 2010). Developed by Tajfel (1981), social identity theory is defined as "that part of the individuals' self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group together with the value and emotional significance of that membership" (p. 255). While social identity

theory has been used to study fan identification in previous research (see Wann, 1994; Wann, 2006; Wann & Pierce, 2005; Watkins, 2014), Denham (2010) suggested that the self-categorization theory “strengthens the social identity model, offering insight on in-group variation in addition to in-group/out-group distinctions” (p. 458).

Self-categorization theory accentuates the perceived similarity and differences of a person to the relevant in-group and out-group respectively, through a process of depersonalization, which represents individuals as embodiments of relevant in-group prototypes rather than as individuals (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Indeed, “Self-categorization theory states that people view themselves as both individuals and as part of a group, and group memberships are important in the development of self-identity” (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987; in Yoo et al., 2013). As research has shown, people that categorize themselves as highly identified fans of certain teams can gain tangible psychological benefits from their association with a group (Wann, 2006). For example, Gibson et al. (2002) found that participating in social activities often leads to a sense of belongingness with others and a connection to society. Thus, self-categorization theory will be useful in this study as a framework to understand how Americans’ identify with the USA Men’s National Team, America in general, as well as how biased broadcasts can affect behavior and attitudes. More specifically, self-categorization theory will be utilized to identify the differences between highly identified fans of the U.S. Men’s National Team and weakly identified fans with respect to their nationalistic attitudes during the 2014 FIFA World Cup.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### HYPOTHESES/RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As Billings et al. (2013b) observed, scholars have attempted to measure the impact of media consumption on nationalistic attitudes in a multitude of societies (Billings et al., 2013a; Cohen, 2008; Cohen & Wiemann, 2000). The most proficient model, in terms of measuring sport viewers' nationalistic attitudes during mega-events, was developed by Kostermann and Feshbach (1989) and included six factor-analyzed categories (Billings et al., 2013b). Contemporary research has modified the Kostermann and Feshbach (1989) model by reducing the number of nationalistic factor-analyzed categories from six to four in order to specifically measure the impact of international mega-event viewing (Billings et al. 2013a; Billings et al., 2013b). The four measures of nationalism proposed in this model are: (a) patriotism; (b) nationalism; (c) smugness; and (d) internationalism. Since this research is also interested in examining the effects of nationalistic attitudes on level of team identification, a fifth category, called identification, is included in the model.

The first category is *patriotism*, which involves “focusing more on pride in one’s own country without comparison to other countries” (Billings et al., 2013b, p. 915). In line with the findings of previous research and the tenets of cultivation theory, Hypothesis 1 will test patriotism as it relates to World Cup television consumption:

H1: The amount of exposure to televised U.S. matches during the 2014 FIFA World Cup will be positively associated with patriotism.

The second factor, *nationalism*, is “viewed as comparative patriotism in which

distinctions are made between the presumed superiority of one's own nation and the inferiority of all other nations" (Billings et al., 2013b, p. 915). The third factor is *smugness*, or "incorporating a blend of patriotism and nationalism, but in a manner more brazenly arrogant about a home country's presumed superiority over all other nations" (Billings et al., 2013a, p. 583; Billings et al., 2013b, p. 915). Since these two factors are most similar, Hypothesis 2 includes nationalism and smugness and their projected relationship with consumption of 2014 FIFA World Cup television programming:

H2: The amount of exposure to televised U.S. matches during the 2014 FIFA World Cup will be positively associated with nationalism and smugness.

The fourth category is *internationalism*, "broadly defined as a sense of global citizenship," (Billings et al., 2013b, p. 915) where people support the idea that "a rising tide raises all boats" (Billings et al., 2013a, p. 583). As mentioned earlier, this study includes a fifth factor: *identification*, which has been defined as the degree to which a fan feels a psychological connection with a team, sport, player, or coach (Murrell & Dietz, 1992). Testing American fans' level of identification during the World Cup has been understudied in previous research. However, cultivation theory would suggest that higher consumption of televised World Cup matches would increase levels of team identification. Hypothesis 3 directly tests this correlation:

H3: The amount of exposure to televised U.S. matches during the 2014 FIFA World Cup will be positively associated with identification.

Presumably, a fan's level of identification also could be predicted by each of the four categories of nationalism. Since factors such as age and amount of consumption have

shown to affect nationalistic attitudes, the most accurate test would take all of these factors into account. Thus, the following research question is posed:

RQ1: To what degree does age, amount of exposure to televised U.S. matches, patriotism, nationalism, smugness, and internationalism, predict identification with the U.S. Men's National Team?

## CHAPTER FIVE

### METHOD

#### Data Collection

Data were collected via an online questionnaire through SurveyMonkey.com for one month following the World Cup final (7/16/14-8/14/14). An attractive feature of web-based survey research is that it is less costly and less time-consuming than other approaches (Hopmann, 2012). The crux of the survey included twenty-nine items from the five categories detailed above (see Table 1). The twenty-nine items were based on a seven-point Likert scale in agree/disagree format. Multiple-item Likert scales are helpful in capturing people's attitudes about constructs that are not directly measurable by one item (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). Snowball sampling is often used in web-based surveys because it is cost and time efficient, and provides an effective way to gather research subjects through the referral method. Using snowball sampling, tweets were sent from the researcher's Twitter account asking for participation in the study and requested Twitter followers to re-tweet the request for participation. The same strategy was initiated using Facebook as well. The researcher contacted associates and asked them to disseminate a link to the survey via Twitter. The researcher also asked available participants to refer people who they thought would be likely to participate in the study. This resulted in 119 completed questionnaires for data analysis.

## Measures

The questionnaire started with a detailed consent form, which provided an overview and purpose for the study. Upon consenting to participate in the study, participants were directed to respond to five demographic items: (a) age; (b) location; (c) favorite team; (d) overall World Cup matches watched; and (e) number of matches watched of one's favorite team. Next, participants responded to twenty-nine items regarding five different measures: patriotism, nationalism, smugness, internationalism, and identification.

**Patriotism.** Patriotism was measured using the *Patriotism Scale* (Billings et al., 2013a; Billings et al. 2013b), which uses six semantic differential items that determine the level of pride in one's own country without comparison to other aspects. Example items include: "I love my country" and "It is important to serve my country." In this study, the six items were summed and averaged to create the patriotism score ( $M = 5.93$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ,  $\alpha = 0.87$ ).

**Nationalism.** Nationalism was measured using the *Nationalism Scale* (Billings et al., 2013a; Billings et al. 2013b), which uses five semantic differential items that determine the level of presumed superiority of one's own nation and the inferiority of all other nations. Example items include: "It is important to honor our national history and heritage" and "My country should be more forceful in influencing other countries when it believes it is right." In this study, the five items were summed and averaged to create the nationalism score ( $M = 4.32$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ,  $\alpha = 0.78$ ).

**Smugness.** Smugness was measured using the *Smugness Scale* (Billings et al., 2013a; Billings et al. 2013b), which uses six semantic differential items that determine the level of a blend of patriotism and nationalism, but in a manner more brazenly arrogant about a home country's presumed superiority over all other nations. Example items include: "I would never settle in another country" and "My country is the best country in the world." In this study, the six items were summed and averaged to create the smugness score ( $M = 3.82$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ,  $\alpha = 0.87$ ).

**Internationalism.** Internationalism was measured using the *Internationalism Scale* (Billings et al., 2013a; Billings et al. 2013b), which uses six semantic differential items that determine the level of one's sense of global citizenship. Example items include: "If necessary, we ought to be willing to lower our standard of living to cooperate with other countries in getting an equal standard for every person in the world" and "I wish all nations had equal resources to compete in an event such as the FIFA World Cup." In this study, the six items were summed and averaged to create the internationalism score ( $M = 4.14$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ,  $\alpha = 0.70$ ).

**Identification.** Identification was measured using the *Points of Attachment Index* (Trail, Robinson, Dick, & Gillentine, 2003; Galen, Trail, Kwon, & Anderson, 2009), which originally included two dimensions (organizational identification and sport identification) with six different areas of identification: team, coach, university, player, level of sport, and sport (Galen et al., 2009). Trail et al. (2003) originally conceived three items for each area of identification, but subsequent studies have manipulated the PAI to suit different sports and specific topics (see Robinson, Trail, & Kwon, 2004; Gencer,

Kiremitci, & Boyacioglu, 2011; and Gencer, 2015). Since identification in this study is understood as, “the degree to which a fan feels a psychological connection with a team, sport, player, or coach” (Murrell & Dietz, 1992), two of the areas of identification were ignored (university and level of sport). After analyzing the items used in previous studies, six items were selected and rephrased to fit the current study. In order to measure one’s level of identification with team, coach, player, and sport, the following items were included in the identification scale: (1) I consider myself to be a “real” fan of my country’s World Cup team; (2) Being a fan of my country’s World Cup team is very important to me; (3) Professional soccer (football) is my favorite sport; (4) I consider myself a fan of certain players more than I am a fan of my country’s World Cup team; (5) I consider myself a bigger fan of my country’s World Cup team more than a particular club team; (6) I am a supporter of my country’s World Cup team manager. In this study, the six items were summed and averaged to create the identification score ( $M = 4.82$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ,  $\alpha = 0.71$ ).

### **Data Analysis**

Before conducting a detailed analysis, a reliability test was performed using SPSS on each of the five scales in order to check for internal consistency of the items involved. Internal consistency can be thought of as the relationship between each item to every other item, as well as the relationship between each item to the collection of items or total score. Cronbach’s Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) is used to report the reliability of an item or scale. Additionally, “A reliability coefficient demonstrates whether the test designer was correct in expecting a certain collection of items to yield interpretable statements about

individual differences” (Cronbach, 1951, p. 297). It is generally accepted that the total Cronbach’s Alpha score for a scale should reside between 0.7 and 0.9 to ensure that the items are consistent (above 0.7) without being too similar (below 0.9). Table 1 reports the reliabilities for all five scales as well as the means and standard deviations for each item.

Table 1

*Nationalism and Identification Scale: Means and Standard Deviations*

Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<b>Patriotism Scale (<math>\alpha = 0.87</math>)</b>		
I love my country.	6.25	1.16
I am proud to be from my county.	6.36	1.13
In a sense, I am emotionally attached to my country and emotionally affected by its actions.	5.75	1.42
Although at times I may not agree with the government, my commitment to my country always remains strong.	5.94	1.26
It is important to serve my country.	5.21	1.64
When I see my country do well in events like the FIFA World Cup, I feel great.	6.40	1.01
<b>Nationalism Scale (<math>\alpha = 0.78</math>)</b>		
It is important to honor our national history and heritage.	6.14	1.28
My country should try to influence other nations’ values.	3.48	1.77
It is important that my country wins in international sporting competitions like the FIFA World Cup.	4.83	1.71
My country should be more forceful in influencing other countries when it believes it is right.	2.91	1.71
It is important to serve my country.	4.27	1.84
<b>Smugness Scale (<math>\alpha = 0.87</math>)</b>		
I would never settle in another country.	2.98	2.01
My country’s flag is the best in the world.	4.18	2.20
I think people from my country are the finest people in the world.	3.67	1.76
My country is the best country in the world.	5.18	1.83
My country best represents the “World Cup Ideal.”	3.42	1.60
My country best represents all that is right in the FIFA World Cup.	3.52	1.64
<b>Internationalism Scale (<math>\alpha = 0.70</math>)</b>		



If necessary, we ought to be willing to lower our standard of living to cooperate with other countries in getting an equal standard for every person in the world.	2.63	1.64
*The alleviation of poverty in other countries is their problem, not ours.	4.74	1.50
My country should be more willing to share its wealth with other suffering nations, even if it doesn't necessarily coincide with our political interests.	3.66	1.51
I would be willing to decrease my standard of living by 10% to increase that of a person's in poorer countries of the world.	3.87	1.75
I enjoy the FIFA World Cup more when I see many different countries winning matches.	5.09	1.78
I wish all nations had equal resources to compete in an event such as the FIFA World Cup.	5.04	1.79
<b>Identification Scale (<math>\alpha = 0.71</math>)</b>		
I consider myself to be a "real" fan of my country's World Cup team.	4.98	1.93
Being a fan of my country's World Cup team is very important to me.	4.75	1.93
Professional soccer (football) is my favorite sport.	4.19	2.34
I consider myself a fan of certain players more than I am a fan of my country's World Cup team.	3.09	1.89
I consider myself a bigger fan of my country's World Cup team more than a particular club team.	5.06	2.12
I am a supporter of my country's World Cup team manager.	5.11	1.79

\*Item was reverse coded

The twenty-nine scale items were used to calculate mean values for each of the five scales. The three hypotheses were analyzed in SPSS using bivariate Pearson correlation tests. Correlation tests measure the strength and direction of association that exist between two variables. A Pearson correlation attempts to draw a line of best fit through the data point of two variables, and the correlation coefficient,  $r$ , indicates how far away the data points are to the line of best fit. The purpose of this analysis is to test whether the relationship between the two variables is linear (e.g., as one variable increases, the other also increases). Since elements of nationalism and identification

would most likely be more prevalent in the television programming of U.S. matches, the mean values of the different nationalism scales were tested for their correlation with the amount of U.S. matches watched. The United States played in 4 total games during the FIFA World Cup. Out of the 119 participants (68% males; 32% females), 2.5% watched 1 U.S. match, 14.3% watched 2 U.S. matches, 16% watched 3 U.S. matches, and 67.2% watched 4 U.S. matches.

Research question 1 was tested in SPSS using a hierarchical regression analysis. Hierarchical regressions are used to evaluate the relationship between a set of independent variables and the dependent variable, controlling for the impact of a different set of independent variables on the dependent variable. It is used when testing to see how much of a dependent variable is influenced by independent variables. In this study, 6 independent variables were analyzed with 1 dependent variable. Specifically, age and amount of U.S. games watched were entered in Model 1. Age was categorized by three groups: 79% were between 18-35 years old, 8.4% were between 36-50 years old, and 11.8% were 50+ years old. Model 2 added these independent variables with the patriotism, nationalism, smugness, and internationalism scale scores in order to analyze their predictive power on identification (dependent variable).

## CHAPTER SIX

### RESULTS

Hypothesis 1 stated that the more U.S. matches participants viewed during the FIFA World Cup, the higher they would score on measures of patriotism. The Pearson correlation analysis revealed no significant correlation between the number of U.S. matches viewed ( $M = 3.48$ ) and the patriotism scores ( $M = 5.93$ ,  $r = .125$ ,  $p = .175$ ). Thus, H1 was not supported.

Hypothesis 2 stated that the more U.S. matches participants viewed during the FIFA World Cup, the higher they would score on measures of nationalism and smugness. The Pearson correlation analysis revealed no significant correlation between the number of U.S. matches viewed ( $M = 3.48$ ) and the nationalism scores ( $M = 4.32$ ,  $r = .106$ ,  $p = .258$ ) or smugness ( $M = 3.81$ ,  $r = .022$ ,  $p = .813$ ). Thus, H2 was not supported.

Hypothesis 3 stated that the more U.S. matches participants viewed during the FIFA World Cup, the higher they would score on measures of identification with the U.S. Men's National team. The Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between the number of U.S. matches viewed ( $M = 3.48$ ) and the identification scores ( $M = 4.84$ ,  $r = .543$ ,  $p = .000$ ). In other words, the mean values of identification consistently increased amongst participants who watched 1, 2, 3, or 4 U.S. matches. Thus, H3 was supported.

Research Question 1 asked the degree to which age, amount of exposure to U.S. matches, patriotism, nationalism, smugness, and internationalism would predict identification. As previously mentioned, the independent variables were entered in two

different models and are tested by a hierarchical regression with two steps. Model 1 (age and amount of exposure to U.S. matches) proved to be a significant predictor of identification ( $R = .58$ ,  $R^2 = 0.33$ ,  $F(2, 116) = 28.71$ ,  $p = .00$ ). According to the  $R^2$  value (effect size), 33% of the variation in identification values can be explained by age and amount of exposure to U.S. matches. Model 2 (patriotism, nationalism, smugness, and internationalism added to Model 1) also proved to be a significant predictor of identification ( $R = .70$ ,  $R^2 = 0.48$ ,  $F(4, 112) = 17.54$ ,  $p = .00$ ). The regression analysis shows that the six variables in Model 2 account for 46% of the variation in identification values.

Table 2

*Hierarchical Regression Analyses for Exposure, Patriotism, Nationalism, Smugness, and Internationalism Predicting Team Identification.*

Predictor	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$
Step 1	.32**	
Age		-.09
Exposure		.51**
Step 2	.46**	
Patriotism		.21*
Nationalism		.18
Smugness		.11
Internationalism		.10

Note. All beta values reported from final step.  $R = .58$ ,  $R^2 = .33$ ,  $F(2, 116) = 28.71$ ,  $p < .001$  for Step 1 (Age, Team ID/Exposure),  $R = .70$ ,  $R^2 = .48$ ,  $F(4, 112) = 17.54$ ,  $p < .001$  for Step 2 (all variables).

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .001$

While all of the independent variables combine to form a predictive model of identification, some of the variables may be more significant predictors of identification than others. The Coefficients Table presented below shows the  $\beta$  values (correlation

between the variables), the  $t$  values (level of accuracy), and the significance levels ( $p$  value). Out of the six independent variables, only amount of exposure to U.S. matches ( $\beta = .59, t = 7.43, p = .00$ ) and patriotism ( $\beta = .21, t = 2.22, p < .03$ ) are significant predictors of identification, while nationalism is the only other variable approaching significance ( $\beta = .18, t = 1.90, p = .06$ ).

Table 3

*Hierarchical Regression Coefficients*

Model	$\beta$	$t$	$p$
Step 1			
Age	.59	7.43	.49
Exposure	.06	.69	.00**
Step 2			
Patriotism	.21	2.22	.03*
Nationalism	.18	1.90	.06
Smugness	.10	1.15	.26
Internationalism	.11	1.39	.17

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **DISCUSSION**

This study offers findings about mega-event and sport media research as it pertains to the United States and the 2014 FIFA World Cup. While other studies have focused on the United States during sporting mega-events, they have been geared towards: a comparison of nationalistic attitudes among fans from different nations during the Olympics (Billings et al., 2013b), the examination of nationalism in televised broadcasts during the Olympics (Billings et al., 2013a), or the analysis of social media comments related to identification during the FIFA World Cup (Billings et al., 2014). Given the recent growth of soccer in the United States, the results of this study are important because they illustrate how media affects a developing fandom. Thus, this study provided unique insights about the nationalistic attitudes of American fans during the FIFA World Cup and about American soccer fandom in general.

From a theoretical perspective, self-categorization and cultivation theory provide explanations for media effects during the FIFA World Cup since broadcasts of sporting mega-events contain nationalistic themes that are used to garner support for national interests by providing content in which audiences and people can connect (Scott, Hill, & Zakus, 2012). Nationalistic themes are often embedded in networks' pre-programmed scripted dialogue of mega-events in order to connect with audiences by promoting a viewer's home nation (Scott et al., 2012). Billings and Tambosi (2004) performed a content analysis on the U.S. broadcast commentary during a match between the United States and Brazil; finding that the U.S. team received significantly more commentary

than the Brazilian team and that there were differences in the adjectives used to describe each team. Such broadcasts “have the power to culturally influence the perceptions of millions of viewers,” (Billings & Tambosi, 2004, p. 163) because viewers may make different inferences about each team according to their in-group status. This study supports these findings. According to self-categorization theory, the in-group/out-group distinctions and national biases present in the broadcasts of U.S. matches may have influenced participants’ survey responses to each of the five categories that were measured. As a result, self-categorization becomes a form of nationalism that may be “setting the terms of the debate,” (Billings, MacArthur, Lichen, & Wu, 2009, p. 382) from a cultivation perspective. Since broadcast commentary is biased towards the U.S. national team, the repetitive use of nationalistic themes could distort the viewers’ feelings of nationalism and shape perceptions of their nation.

Regarding the hypotheses, the results showed mixed results. First, H1 and H2 were not supported, which indicated that amount of exposure to U.S. matches was not positively associated to attitudes of patriotism, nationalism, and smugness at a statistically significant level. Cultivation can help explain the lack of support in the findings for H1 and H2 by revisiting the argument concerning America’s ‘exceptional’ sporting landscape. Since Americans have supported the Big 3 ‘American’ sports (Baseball, Football, and Basketball) for so long, they predominately draw their feelings of nationalism from those sports because they represent American values. For example, Fischer (2014) showed how the NFL’s commemoration ceremony on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9/11 presented a sports-media-military convergence, which perpetuated America’s

culture of militarism through the use of nationalistic themes and ideals.

While Americans have shown to cultivate nationalistic values during international sporting events like the Olympics (Billings et al., 2013b), the FIFA World Cup is different because it is a showcase of a sport that is still considered foreign in the United States. Also, many Americans are concerned with “being the best.” This holds true in the Big 3 American sports and the Olympics, as the United States consistently produces some of the best athletes and teams in the world. Major League Baseball (MLB), the National Football League (NFL), and the National Basketball Association (NBA) are considered to be the best leagues in the world for each particular sport. Similarly, the United States has been the most successful Olympic nation in the world (since 1896) in terms of total medals won.

Soccer, on the other hand, is a sport where the United States has not shown its international prowess. American fans do not have the same expectations for international success in the FIFA World Cup as they do in the Olympics. Although watching the U.S. Men’s National Team has become more popular in America, weakly identified fans may feel obligated to support their nation; perhaps because the outcome is expected to be negative. Thus, soccer may not be a vehicle that is effective at promoting nationalistic attitudes for weakly identified Americans because these individuals will likely not be as affected by the national broadcasts of U.S. matches. As research has shown, American broadcasting coverage and tone of narratives during the FIFA World Cup provide “unembellished expressions of soccer’s marginal place in the U.S. culture” (Buffington, 2012, p. 46). This type of broadcasting is problematic for the growth of soccer in the



United States because it can affect Americans' perception the sport; especially those who are weakly identified.

Second, regarding H3, the notion that the amount of exposure to U.S. matches would be positively associated with identification is supported. For each increment of U.S. matches watched (1,2,3,4), the level of identification with the U.S. national team increased. With regards to self-categorization theory, highly identified fans (those who watched either 3 or 4 U.S. matches) perceived themselves as part of a group (that supported the U.S. national team during the 2014 FIFA World Cup), while weakly identified fans (those who watched either 1 or 2 U.S. matches) behaved more individualistically. Presumably, highly identified fans consumed more U.S. matches because being a fan of the U.S. Men's National Team is an important part of their self-identity. Highly identified fans are motivated to watch U.S. matches because they care about the outcome and want to stay informed about the U.S. Men's National Team.

A highly identified fan benefits from staying up to date with the U.S. Men's National Team because they will be able to participate in dialogue with others and seem as knowledgeable. On the other hand, weakly identified fans did not consume as many U.S. matches because being a fan of the U.S. national team is not an important part of their self-identity. Weakly identified fans do not follow the U.S. Men's National Team as frequently because they may not care, or they lack the knowledge required to be able to engage with others in discussions about the team. It is reasonable to assume that these trends will occur in future FIFA World Cups. Thus, the U.S. Men's National Team marketing strategies should focus their efforts on weakly identified fans, since highly

identified fans will not require further motivation to watch U.S. matches.

This research suggested that the U.S. Men's National Team marketing efforts should include: educating both the population of people who did not watch U.S. matches and those who weakly identify with the U.S. Men's National Team about the sport of soccer in general, the history and traditions of the U.S. Men's National Team, and the players and coaches of the U.S. Men's National Team. An educational marketing strategy could increase weakly identified fans' knowledge about the U.S. Men's National Team, which may make them more active in following the team and more willing to participate in discussions about the team with others. Since the World Cup is a quadrennial event, Americans tend to only care about soccer every four years when the World Cup makes the sport relevant. Therefore, the U.S. Men's National Team could garner more support if soccer stayed visible throughout the years when the World Cup does not occur.

Marketing plans should include promoting professional, collegiate, and youth soccer in the United States, as well as keeping the public informed on the U.S. Men's National Team's progress during the World Cup qualification stages. This type of strategy should start from the youth levels of soccer and work its way up. For example, marketers could attend youth soccer tournaments and showcases and conduct surveys in order to understand how people engage with the different levels of soccer, educate people about soccer through flyers and brochures, and provide them with information about how they can follow the U.S. Men's National Team (Twitter, Facebook, Team Websites, etc.). Strategies should also include promoting professional soccer leagues to sponsors and making the sport more visible to the public. The \$70 million deal that ESPN and Fox

Sports inked with the MLS and the U.S. Men's National Team in 2015 (Tannenwald, 2014) is an encouraging sign for the growth of soccer in the United States.

Regarding the research question (RQ1), the multivariate linear regression revealed several interesting findings regarding American soccer fans. Collectively, the six independent variables (age, amount of exposure to U.S. matches, patriotism, nationalism, smugness, and internationalism) were significant predictors of identification. This finding matches results found in previous research (see Billings et al., 2013b). Perhaps the most interesting finding of the linear regression analysis is that the amount of exposure to U.S. matches and patriotism are both significant predictors of identification when controlling for all other independent variables. An explanation for the reason that the amount of exposure to U.S. matches predicts identification is perhaps quite apparent. That is, some fans categorized themselves as weakly identified fans because they only watched one or two U.S. matches, while other fans categorized themselves as highly identified fans because they watched three or four U.S. matches. This research suggests that level of identification with a sports team can be estimated by the amount of exposure to that team's matches.

An explanation grounded in cultivation and self-categorization theory is required for the finding that patriotism is a predictor of identification with the U.S. Men's National Team. Recalling the definition of patriotism (focusing more on pride in one's own country without comparison to other countries), television is a medium that promotes patriotic attitudes in America especially through sports. By using war metaphors and imagery during sporting events, the media attempts to "coerce citizens into displays of

patriotism and national unity when it may not exist” (Jenkins, 2013, p. 259). In turn, Americans’ long-term exposure to televised patriotic messages can cultivate distorted realities of their nation. By instilling positive images of troops and the military during sporting events, some Americans will “support the troops” without questioning the ethicality of the United States militaristic ventures. Such media portrayals are problematic because the cultivation of warped views over long periods of time have molded the image of a ‘good’ American citizen; one who takes pride in the United States by holding American ideals, participating in American society, and supporting everything that represents the United States. Thus, patriotic Americans’ highly identify with the U.S. Men’s National Team during the FIFA World Cup because it is their ‘duty’ to support the team that represents his or her country during international competition. This research suggests that the U.S. Men’s National team marketing strategies should include patriotic messages in order to gain more support. A marketing strategy that includes patriotic appeals could eventually cultivate Americans’ perception of identification with the U.S. Men’s National Team as an American obligation.

Additionally, self-categorization theory offers further explanations for the finding that patriotism predicts identification with the U.S. Men’s National Team. First of all, participants that conveyed high levels of patriotism want to feel good about their country because it is a part of their self-identity. During international sporting competitions, in-group and out-group perceptions are defined by national boundaries. The dramatic stage of the FIFA World Cup increases the likelihood of fans to display strong identification with their in-group. Since it is important for these fans to take pride in their country,

attaching themselves to the U.S. Men's National Team could provide them with tangible psychological benefits (see Wann, 2006). On the other hand, less patriotic Americans do not feel the need to identify with the U.S. Men's National Team because taking pride in their nation is not a major part of their self-identity.

Second, patriotic fans choose to highly identify themselves with the U.S. Men's National Team because they can participate in activities and discussions with people that have similar identities. Engaging in dialogue surrounding U.S. matches could bolster fans' affiliation with a group that adheres to their identity, which has been linked to psychological well-being (Wann, 2006). Third, new forms of media have drastically increased the ways people can connect with each other and engage in dialogue. As Phua's (2010) research on mediated sports spectatorship discovered, using new forms of media as a communicative activity "allows sports fans to bond with other like-minded fans" (p. 199) and creates positive social identities by reinforcing their fan experience. Thus, this research suggests that the consumption of televised viewing of sporting mega-events, coupled with the communicative use of new media, may have effects on individuals' feelings of patriotism and identification.

### **Limitations**

While this study has produced important findings about Americans' nationalistic attitudes during the FIFA World Cup and their level of identification with the U.S. Men's National Team, it does not lack significant implications. First of all, the original goal for this research was to get at least 100 participants from the United States, England, and Australia in order to compare nationalistic attitudes among people from three different

World Cup participating countries. These three countries were originally selected because they were the most industrialized countries in the World Cup where English was the dominant language (Ghana and Nigeria were left out). The researchers reached out to peers and colleagues from England and Australia to request their help in gathering participants for the questionnaire from their respective countries. However, they were not able to generate enough participants from England and Australia, which explain this study's shift in focus from a comparative analysis of nationalistic attitudes amongst three countries to an examination of nationalistic attitudes in the United States. This may have been due to the data collection technique used or an inconvenience in the time frame of the data collection (students were on summer break).

Furthermore, a technique different from snowball sampling could produce a more representative group of American participants. Out of the 119 people that participated in this study, there were major differences in gender (68% males; 32% females), age (79% were between 18-35 years old, 8.4% were between 36-50 years old, and 11.8% were 50+ years old), and amount of U.S. matches consumed (2.5% watched 1 U.S. match, 14.3% watched 2 U.S. matches, 16% watched 3 U.S. matches, and 67.2% watched 4 U.S. matches). The results of this study may have been affected by the inequalities of participants in terms of gender, age, and amount of consumption. This limitation could have been overcome by either gathering more participants that are similar to the less represented categories of people, or by using a different method (such as interviews) that would ensure a directly representative population of American World Cup viewers.

## **Directions for Future Research**

In order to fully understand American soccer fans during the FIFA World Cup, future research should include a content analysis (in conjunction with this study's survey) of nationalistic themes and gender/racial biases within the broadcasts of U.S. matches in order to discover if/how their nationalistic attitudes are cultivated from the televised consumption of U.S. matches. Such a content analysis would be able to pinpoint the types of nationalistic themes and gender/racial biases that have significant/nonsignificant cultivation effects on Americans' nationalistic attitudes during the FIFA World Cup. This type of research would help with marketing strategies; as findings may reveal which type of embedded nationalistic themes are more likely to be cultivated through the consumption of U.S. Men's National Team matches.

Another line of research that would be interesting to explore concerns the differences between first and second generation Americans. The United States society has been called the "Melting Pot" because of the large presence of citizens with different races and nationalities. Since a large number of soccer fans in America do not only identify themselves as "Caucasian" or "American," first and second generation Americans may vary in terms of their feelings of nationalism and identification with the U.S. Men's National Team. For example, while a German-American may identify with the U.S. Men's National Team, he or she might identify more strongly with a world-class German player than any of the American players. Another relevant example would be an American whose favorite PGA Tour golfer is someone of European descent (Rory McIlroy), but still identifies with Team USA during the Ryder Cup. Findings may

produce unique insights on the similarities and differences of fans who identify with teams and players on multiple levels.

Future research should also consider first and second-order cultivation effects (see Hestroni & Tukachinsky, 2006), since individuals differ in terms of their perceptions of reality. An individual cultivation analysis would show the differences between people who have close approximations of the social reality and people whose approximations are reflective of television's portrayal of reality. This type of analysis could incorporate people of different ages in order to see the differences between their perceived realities and consequently, the different cultivation effects that may be procured. Such research could also incorporate fans that follow soccer year round compared with those who are only interested in soccer every four years when the World Cup occurs. Presumably, those who follow soccer year round would have a different perception of reality and about soccer because they have consumed media related to soccer over longer periods of time than World Cup fans.

Finally, research should continue to study Americans' nationalistic attitudes and their level of identification with the U.S. Men's National Team during each FIFA World Cup in order to track fan development, the growth of soccer in the United States, and to further the understanding of cultivation effects and the self-categorization processes that occur during one of the world's biggest sporting mega-events. Regarding this study's research question, future studies should consider examining if amount of exposure to U.S. Men's National Team matches is the main predictor of nationalistic attitudes and identification, or if the opposite is actually the case. It may be worthwhile to conduct a



study that analyzes which variables are predictors of exposure to U.S. Men's National team matches during the FIFA World Cup. In conclusion, future research should be conducted similarly to the present study, but may find stronger arguments with the suggestions I have provided.

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