

# FRAMING THE OLYMPIC GAMES: IMPACT OF AMERICAN TELEVISION COVERAGE ON ATTITUDES TOWARD INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND FOREIGN POLICY IN THE UNITED STATES

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*The official mission of the Olympic Games is to utilize sport for the promotion of peace and mutual understanding among the nations of the world. This laudable goal, aided by the ability of the Games to attract an unparalleled global audience, makes the Olympics one of the most powerful and influential public diplomacy tools of our time. Unfortunately, such a tool may be undercut by the tendency of the American media to portray the Games as a competitive and nationalistic spectacle. This research examines the role that domestic television coverage plays in framing the Olympic Games and the impact divergent frames may have on viewers. Results suggest that television coverage which frames the Olympic Games in nationalistic terms may actually serve to reinforce divisiveness and international rivalry, while coverage framed in more international terms may promote the Olympic mission.*

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The modern Olympic Games are perhaps the single most recognized media event capturing the attention of the global community on a recurring basis. In fact, the Games have

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claimed such a prominent place on the world's calendar that approximately one of every two people in the world watch the Olympics on television, and it is broadcast in more countries than any other event (Emerson & Perse, 1995; Tomlinson, 1996). In the United States, viewership is even higher. According to Nielsen (2006), over 81% of all U.S. households saw all or part of the 2006 Torino Olympics, making them the 8<sup>th</sup> most viewed event in U.S. television history. Given such pervasiveness, the symbolic themes which accompany the televised presentation of the Olympics have the potential to influence the opinions of a substantial segment of the world population.

But what are these themes? When Pierre de Coubertin re-established the ancient Greek tradition of the Olympic Games in 1896, his stated goal was for the Olympic Movement to "contribute to building a peaceful and better world by educating youth through sport practiced without discrimination of any kind... with a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play" (International Olympic Committee, 2007). The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has continued to officially endorse this mission and has also promoted the concept of the Olympic Truce, which encourages all participating countries to lay down their weapons during the Games in an effort to create a window for dialogue, reconciliation, and diplomatic conflict resolution. Such high-minded objectives were echoed at the Olympic Winter Games in November 2001 by IOC President Dr. Jacques Rogge when he stated, "The IOC wishes that this peaceful gathering of all Olympic athletes in Salt Lake City will inspire peace in the world" (International Olympic Committee, 2007).

However, this concept of the Olympics as a promoter of international dialogue and world peace has been hotly contested by several Olympic scholars, who note that de Coubertin's establishment of the Games was at least partly motivated by his desire to find a way for France to reassert its national power after losing the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. Indeed, demonstrations of nationalistic and political strength can still be found in the Olympic Movement today. As Toohey and Veal (2000) state:

The overtly political organizational structure and rituals of the Games themselves exacerbate the event's political construction. They draw upon and provide symbolic capital to various interest groups, despite the fact that the rhetoric and philosophy of the IOC suggest the opposite... When, during the Olympic medal ceremonies, national anthems are played and the flag of the victors' countries are raised, when team sports are organized on national lines and, during the Opening Ceremony athletes march into the stadium nation by nation, these practices are overtly creating nationalistic tensions, self-regard, and rivalries. (p. 97-99).

Thus, it could be argued that despite the IOC's stated desire to contribute to productive international dialogue and peaceful coexistence, the Olympics actually serve as more of a vehicle for displays of cultural and political dominance.

Putting this debate aside, international sporting events like the Olympics can indeed open up a conversational space for nations that are having trouble engaging one another in

a positive or constructive way, thus making sports a powerful tool for international diplomacy. While sports are “not a cure for animosities and conflicts that have existed for 50 years,” scholars have suggested that the “success of the likes of Michael Jordan, Mark McGwire, Jesse Owens, or Pelé can have positive effects beyond the playing field, onto the political chessboard” (Goldberg, 2000, p. 69). Tomlinson (1996), for example, notes that at the opening ceremony of the 1992 Olympics, nations from the former Soviet Union paraded independently from Russia and 107 athletes from Kuwait and Iraq marched only nine nations apart. Likewise, athletes from both North Korea and South Korea marched under one flag at the opening ceremony of the Sydney Olympics in 2000. This “harmonizing symbolism,” as Tomlinson calls it, has the potential to be a powerfully motivating force.

Unfortunately, the ideals of the Olympic Games have been repeatedly hijacked by various governments, organizations, and athletes in order to advance their own agendas—often at the expense of world peace and camaraderie. The use of the Games as a political tool largely began with Hitler’s reinforcement of Aryan superiority at the 1936 Berlin Olympics. This was followed by the performance of the black power salute by Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, the Israeli hostage crisis of the 1972 Munich Olympics, and the Cold War boycotting of both the 1980 and 1984 Olympics in Moscow and Los Angeles, respectively. The Games have also been used as an indicator of acceptance into the Western, capitalized world. The 1964 Tokyo Olympics and the 1988 Seoul Olympics were framed as Japan and Korea’s entry into the elite halls of international power, and this same tactic was also utilized by China’s Olympic Organizing Committee for the 2008 Summer Games. Ironically, the motives of those who coordinate and participate in the Olympic Games often run counter to the goals of the IOC.

The mission and purpose of the Olympics may be further distorted by the way the Games are covered by the American media. While media outlets from all countries are guilty of reporting on the Olympics (as well as other international events) from their own perspective, the American media have been routinely criticized for their overly nationalistic coverage (see Sabo, Jansen, Tate, Duncan & Leggett, 1996, for a review). As noted previously, the vast majority of Americans experience the Olympics through the medium of television. Consequently, the way that American television outlets choose to portray the Games—in particular, the frames that they adopt for their coverage—may impact how the American viewing audience perceives not only the Olympics, but also the participating countries.

The present research examines the potential impact of nationalistic and international media frames on potential Olympic viewers and, by extension, the ability of the Olympics to serve as an effective public diplomacy tool. More specifically, Study 1 analyzes the effect these divergent frames have on public perceptions of whether the Olympics achieve the objectives laid out by the IOC. Study 2 looks at the broader implications these nationalistic

and international frames may have on public perceptions of other nations, and on support for aggressive foreign policy positions such as preemptive attacks.

## THE FRAMING OF SPORTS AND INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

The concept of framing can be understood as the process of shaping the opinions and perspectives of others by including, excluding, or emphasizing certain aspects of an issue or event. Entman (1993) has defined framing as follows:

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described...[T]he frame determines whether most people notice and how they understand and remember a problem, as well as how they evaluate and choose to act upon it. (p. 52-54)

Framing can be distinguished from related constructs such as agenda-setting or priming in that it does more than make a particular issue salient or more cognitively accessible (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984; Miller & Krosnick, 1996). Framing also influences *how* individuals are likely to think about that issue by focusing attention on certain key elements. To "frame" an issue or event is to select one among a number of possible ways of looking at something. For example, the Olympics could be framed as more of a celebration than a competition or, alternately, as a competition among individuals each striving to achieve their personal best. Nationalistic elements inherent in the Olympics Games such as distinct costumes, flags, and anthems almost certainly prime the category of country among all viewers. But the U.S. broadcast media takes this one step further. By focusing disproportionate attention on the American athletes and events that American athletes might win, through the constant tallying of each country's medal count, and by allowing highly charged competitive rhetoric from network commentators, the Olympics are portrayed using a hypernationalistic "us versus them" frame (Sabo et al., 1996).

To be sure, media frames serve many useful purposes. As McQuail (2003) rightly points out, media outlets are the principal means of public expression in modern society, and the frames they utilize help citizens to make sense of the overwhelming and often very complex amount of information available, thus enabling the public to better interpret and digest news and other data.

However, American television networks also depend on profits and are therefore primarily concerned about attracting the largest share of viewers possible. As a result, the framing of media content is often constructed according to the tastes of the audience, and news organizations frequently frame issues using the most provocative or entertaining format rather than the most realistic or informative format (Wicks, 2005). Consequently, the framing of media content is "constrained by the anticipated reaction of the audience — or,

to use a different language, by what the American political culture finds permissible” (Kinder, 2007, p. 156). As a result, media outlets often rely on the dominant societal frames, thus reinforcing the way media consumers currently interpret their reality (Callaghan & Schnell, 2005; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

Of particular relevance to this study is television’s framing of international and sporting events. As Gruneau (1989) states, the way that sports competitions are portrayed to audiences in the United States involves a multitude of decisions regarding which images, camera angles, sports statistics, styles of language, theme songs, and storylines will be employed. These choices are often based on what the program’s producers feel are in line with the “dominant ideological tendencies” of our society. Thus, the “processes of selection and representation involved in the production of sport for television have been viewed as manifestations of such (allegedly) ‘dominant values’ as hero worship, instrumental rationality, obedience to authority, possessive individualism, meritocracy, competitiveness, and patriarchal authority” (Gruneau, 1989, p. 135). Through these frames, some aspects of sporting events are highlighted while others are either de-emphasized or completely omitted.

The most common frame used in the televising of sports is an emphasis on competitive conflict. Despite sport being a form of competition where cooperation is often necessary in order to agree upon rules and the authority of the referee, extensive research by Bryant, Comisky, and Zillman (as cited in Bryant & Raney, 2000) has shown that sports commentators frequently use war-like metaphors and conflict-driven language to highlight the competitive aspect of sports. Prior research has also demonstrated that this aggressive language influences viewers’ perceptions of violence in sports (Sullivan as cited in Bryant & Raney, 2000). Indeed, Comisky concluded that such “‘findings are suggestive of the great potential of sports commentary to alter the viewer’s perception of the sports event’” (as cited in Bryant & Raney, 2000, p.170). Implicit in this competitive frame is the idea that the winner/loser binary is the singular most important element of sport.

Other experts have pointed to the framing of sports as a high drama or storytelling event, designed to increase the entertainment value of the sportscast regardless of outcome. By elevating the sporting event to the level of dramatic conflict and using the elements of drama (such as plot, symbolism, and social message) in its presentation, the broadcast is able to grab and hold the attention of viewers. This use of narrative in sports media demonstrates that there is a “point of convergence for two dominant ‘models’ of coverage—‘news actuality and dramatic entertainment.’ Televised sport brings these elements together in a unique manner” (Gruneau, 1989, p. 145).

Sporting events that take place between nations bring other frames with them as well. Levermore (2004) found the stereotyping of national populations to be commonplace in an analysis of World Cup 1998 media coverage. Germans, for example, were frequently referred to as “thorough, efficient, cold-hearted, and with no sense of humor” (p. 21). Similarly stereotypic references were made to describe Japanese, Iranian, Korean, British,

and Cameroonian players. Such tendencies were also found by Sabo et al. (1996) who documented many specific instances of nationalistic bias contained within 340 hours of American television coverage of seven different international athletic events:

Nationalism thrives on “we versus they” scenarios. In this regard, we found that commentators characterized athletes from Communist bloc, or formerly Communist bloc, countries in ways that suggested they are cheaters, machine-like, inhuman, and without feelings. In contrast, athletes from the United States and its allies were generally featured as warm, fair, and human... It was stated or implied that some nations bring a political agenda to international athletic events, but the hidden assumption being conveyed was that the United States has no such political agendas. Whereas doubts are raised about the state funding of athletes from other countries, problems linked to corporate sponsorship of athletes in the United States or Western democracies are unstated. Comments about drug use among Chinese or East German athletes ignored the fact that some U.S. athletes use drugs as well. Such stories about Soviet women gymnasts and East German women swimmers point up the contrast between the “good” (us) and the “bad” (them). (p. 18)

The authors summarized their results by calling national bias within sports telecasts the “fly in the ointment” for televised international sports (Sabo et al., 1996, p.19).

But referring to nationalistic media bias as merely a “fly in the ointment” suggests minor or inconsequential effects. Prior research on in-group/out-group bias suggests otherwise. For example, Tajfel’s (1978) work on the minimal conditions necessary for individuals to give preference to their in-group showed that even when people were randomly assigned to a group that never actually met, they rated members of their in-group more positively and, conversely, members of the out-group more negatively. One way to explain this phenomenon is through the lens of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Hogg & Abrams, 1988). This theory asserts that groups only exist in contrast to other groups. In other words, in order for an “us” to exist, a “them” must exist as well. This process is not inherently evil but is a natural result of an individual’s attempt to understand their world by undergoing a “process of categorization” and dividing the world into “comprehensible units” (Hogg & Abrams, 1990, p. 2). However, according to Social Identity Theory, when a category includes oneself, an individual’s “desire for positive self-evaluation provides a motivational basis for differentiation between social groups” in a way favorable to both one’s in-group and, as a result, oneself (Hogg & Abrams, 1990, p. 3).

Drawing on these concepts, Rivenburgh (2000) argues that when the nation is viewed as the salient in-group, as is often the case during international sporting events, people are much more likely to protect or maintain national identity in order to maintain positive self-perceptions. Not surprisingly, American television outlets either consciously or unconsciously promote a point of view which favors the U.S. when reporting on events that takes place in an international context. In fact, as Rivenburgh points out, this focus on national identity is no doubt “encouraged by the knowledge that the producers of media are

constructing news for a national audience with which they share national membership” (Rivenburgh, 2000, p. 306). Entman (1991) provides a classic example of Social Identity Theory’s relevance to the framing of international events in his analysis of the KAL and Iran Air incidents. Through a content analysis of media coverage, he demonstrates that while the 1983 Soviet shooting of KAL Flight 007 was framed by the American media as an act of aggression, the similar incident of a 1998 American shooting of Iran Air Flight 655 was framed as an “understandable accident.” Entman’s analysis aptly illustrates that the framing of both incidents served to protect U.S. national identity and therefore enabled Americans following the stories to maintain positive perceptions of their own in-group.

## AMERICAN TELEVISION AS FRAMER OF THE OLYMPIC GAMES

To date, American television networks that have broadcast the Olympic Games have chosen to adopt frames which bear a striking resemblance to the generic sports and international news frames described above. As a result, they portray an image of the Olympics which is very different than that which is outlined by the IOC’s official mission. In fact, Epsy (1979) argues that the Olympics are being distorted from their original intent into “an extravaganza that reflects and enhances the competitive and divisive interests in the world” (p. 162). Scholars such as Emerson and Perse (1995) have observed that “instead of promoting understanding among the earth’s peoples as de Coubertin had hoped...the broadcasts of the Games perpetuate present day stereotypes” (p. 80). Thus, the frame being employed by American television networks in their coverage of the Olympic Games emphasizes the in-group/out-group dynamic which is central to Social Identity Theory, perhaps raising international tensions and undermining the very purpose of the event. In reality, this is unsurprising. As previously noted, media outlets will often utilize the frames which are culturally resonant with their target audience.

This emphasis on competitive conflict and nationalism rather than internationalism and athletic skill in the Olympics has been further highlighted by the regular conflation of political power and victory in international sporting events. One of the best examples of “competitive importance attached to an inter-state sporting contest was...when ice hockey matches between the U.S. and Soviet Union were played in a volatile competitive context and where the winning team depicted its political system as the pre-eminent one” (Levermore, 2004, p. 19). By employing the dominant competitive frame for its Olympic coverage and imbuing international sporting events with political significance, the media served to portray the Olympics — and politics by extension — as a zero-sum game. Such promotion is not only contrary to the official mission of the IOC, but likely serves to reinforce existing international tensions.

In a detailed study of ABC’s television coverage of the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles, Meadow noted that the network gave its presentation such a nationalistic frame

that it appeared “overwhelmingly preoccupied” with American athletes and the sports that are normally popular in the United States. He found that U.S.-related coverage of the Olympics took up 44.7% of total coverage, while African athletes received only 2.8% and South Americans just 2% (as cited by Houlihan, 1994). Likewise, NBC’s coverage of the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta was criticized for largely ignoring the successes of foreign athletes: the exciting 1500 meter freestyle race that was won by Australian athlete Kieren Perkins was never even broadcast because no American athlete placed in the event. As a result, many international visitors who traveled to the Games felt slighted at what little attention was paid to their country’s athletes. The message that was sent to these foreign tourists was that “the Olympics are not about international competition, but about competition between America and the world” (Meadow as cited by Houlihan, 1994, p. 156) — a perspective that makes sense in the context of Social Identity Theory but which is completely antithetical to the official goals of the IOC.

Meadow is not alone in his conclusions. In fact, several scholars have documented this nationalistic bias in American television coverage of the Olympic Games. In a comparative analysis of the NBC, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), and TEN (Australia) telecasts of the 1988 opening ceremony in Seoul, Larson and Rivenburgh (1991) found that NBC devoted only 49 minutes, 57 seconds of its broadcast to cultural performances, compared with 81 minutes, 58 seconds for TEN and 85 minutes for the BBC. When the network missed the beginning of one South Korean dance because of a commercial break, it spent only 26 seconds on it before cutting to an athlete interview and then to another commercial break, thus preventing the American audience from “becoming engaged in the Korean cultural narrative that flowed through all the performances” (Larson and Rivenburgh, 1991). Moreover, NBC spent less time on the entry of the athletes than did the other networks: they mentioned only 86 of the 160 national teams entering the stadium (compared to 111 on TEN and 134 on the BBC), thereby ignoring 46.3% of the participating nations. The authors conclude that “television constructs the Olympic spectacle into multiple realities, and that it does so with profound implications for images of nation, culture, and the Olympic movement” (Larson and Rivenburgh, 1991). As a result of such skewed coverage, it is quite possible that Americans have a more biased perspective, not only with respect to the Olympics and the mission of the IOC, but of international community as a whole.

American television outlets do indeed have legitimate reasons for framing the Olympic Games in these nationalistic and competitive terms. Given that it is extremely hard to maintain viewer interest in any event that spans sixteen days, such frames are designed to provide the most entertainment value to the widest possible American audience — regardless of whether or not they conform to the values which the IOC wishes to project. When one considers the staggering amount of money which networks must now pay for broadcasting rights to the Games (NBC paid over \$600 million for rights to the 2006



Olympics), it becomes understandable that their primary concern is the ability to cover such costs.

In fact, one might argue that the very success of these nationalistic and competitive frames is the reason that the Olympics have become as big a spectacle as they are today. Prior to the 1960s, U.S. broadcasters did not believe that Americans would be particularly interested in watching a multi-sport event held in a remote location, especially one that featured unfamiliar events such as the pentathlon and the luge. Some contend that interest in the Games only came about as a result of television's portrayal of the event through the frame of international rivalry combined with the use of nationalistic competition as political theater. In this way, the American media and the IOC are engaged in a symbiotic, mutually beneficial relationship: the IOC needs the American media to continue legitimizing and promoting the Olympics, and the American media sees the Olympics as a jewel in the sports broadcasting crown.

But could the American media's nationalistic portrayal of the Olympic Games ultimately undercut the very purpose of the event? In Study 1, we examined whether — far from promoting world peace — adopting a competitive and nationalistically-centered frame for Olympic coverage actually serves to reinforce international rivalry and undercuts the intended objectives of the IOC. More specifically, Study 1 predicted that:

- H1: Individuals exposed to a nationalistic frame of the Olympic Games will be more likely to view the Olympics from a nationalistic perspective, and
- H2: will be less likely to perceive the Games as supportive of official IOC goals.

We further predicted that if American television outlets were to reshape their broadcasting of the Olympic Games so as to adopt a more universal, internationally-centered frame, the goals of the IOC may be better realized. Thus, we predicted that:

- H3: Individuals exposed to an international frame of the Olympic Games will be less likely to view the Olympics from a nationalistic perspective, and
- H4: will be more likely to perceive the Games as supportive of official IOC goals.

In Study 2, we considered the broader implications these nationalistic and international frames may have on the American public's perceptions of other nations and certain foreign policy decisions. Here we predicted that:

- H5: Individuals exposed to a nationalistic frame of the Olympic Games will be less likely to demonstrate willingness for international engagement and trust, and
- H6: will be more likely to support aggressive foreign policy actions.

By contrast, we hypothesized that viewing a more universal, internationally-centered frame would have the opposite effect. In other words:

- H7: Individuals exposed to an international frame of the Olympic Games will be more likely to demonstrate willingness for international engagement and trust, and  
H8: and will be less likely to support aggressive foreign policy actions.

In addition to these hypotheses, we chose to examine the effects of both the nationalistic frame and the international frame on viewer interest. As noted previously, current portrayals of the Olympics by American broadcasting companies are pursued because the networks believe that adopting a less nationalistic, more international frame would not generate as much interest and would significantly decrease viewership and revenue. Consequently, testing the effects of each frame on the willingness of the participants to watch and/or attend future Olympic Games was seen as an important part of measuring the commercial feasibility of adopting a more international Olympic frame. In both Study 1 and Study 2 we tested the following:

- RQ1: Is there a relationship between how the Olympics are framed and audience interest?

## STUDY I

### Method

Participants were recruited from undergraduate classes at a major university. All participants filled out a pre-viewing survey. This survey first assessed participants' pre-existing interests which could affect the efficacy of a particular frame (such as their interest in travel, sports, foreign policy, and international affairs) using a 10-point Likert scale. The pre-viewing survey then asked participants to respond to a series of 10 items adapted from Emerson and Perse's (1995) Olympic Viewing Motivation Scale, which was designed to assess the extent to which a variety of motives play a role in whether or not the respondent would watch the Olympics on television. These motives included the following: to learn about other countries and cultures; to root for my country's athletes; to feel like a citizen of the world; to admire the dedication and athletic skill of the participants, to feel the thrill of competition; to relax or unwind with family and friends; to learn more about different Olympic sports; to participate in an historic event; to be able to discuss the event with others in the future; and to experience a sense of pride for being a citizen of my country. The extent to which the respondent agreed or disagreed that their Olympic viewing would be motivated by each of the above was measured using a 10-point scale ranging from "Not at All" (1) to "Extremely" (10).

Participants were then randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions — a nationalistic frame condition, an international frame condition, or a control group. Those assigned to the nationalistic frame condition were shown a 4-minute video compilation of images from past Olympic Games that primarily featured U.S. athletes and the U.S. role in the Games, ceremonies in which U.S. athletes won gold medals with the American flag displayed prominently in the background, and demonstrations of nationalism on the part of both U.S. and foreign athletes (such as the waving of a flag). In the nationalistic condition at least two minutes or half of the video was exclusively dedicated to images of American athletes and activities. Those assigned to the international frame condition were shown a video compilation of images of equal length but featuring international opponents celebrating together and competition among athletes from all nations (not primarily U.S.), with a heavy emphasis on the skill of the athletes rather than their nationality (for example, gravity defying snowboarding, gymnastic events, ice skating, races). Both video compilations included the same opening and closing scenes and featured roughly the same number and range of Olympic events. All images were taken with permission from commercially available footage of the 2004 Summer Games and the 2002 Winter Games. The images in both conditions were accompanied by the song *Titans Spirit* by Trevor Rabin. Participants in the control condition were not shown any video. A manipulation check of the two videos was conducted on 20 undergraduates with 10 students viewing each video and then completing Emerson and Perse's (1995) Olympics-related Nationalism and Internationalism Scales (described in more detail below). The results of this manipulation check suggested that the videos did differentially evoke the two desired Olympic frames.

Participants were then asked to fill out a post-viewing survey, which asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they agreed with a series of statements designed by Emerson and Perse (1995) to measure Olympic-related nationalistic sentiments. Prior research has demonstrated that these two subscales effectively measure feelings of Olympic-related nationalism and internationalism among survey respondents. Items from Emerson and Perse's Olympic Nationalism Scale include the following: it makes little difference to me if the American entry wins in the Olympics; success at the Olympics brings prestige to the U.S.; the Olympics make me feel that the U.S. is the greatest nation in the world; the Olympics make me realize that we should strive for loyalty to our own country before we can afford to consider world brotherhood; I feel angry at U.S. athletes when they do not win; I feel angry at non-U.S. athletes when they beat U.S. athletes. Items from Emerson and Perse's Internationalism Scale (conceptually similar to our international frame) include the following: the Olympics make us more aware of our differences rather than our similarities; the Olympics provide a common ground for cooperation; watching the Olympics gives me a sense of belonging to the global society; watching the Olympics makes me feel that it is better to be a citizen of the world than of any particular country; watching the Olympics makes me feel that I am a member of the international community.

Next, the post-viewing survey measured the extent to which participants believed that the Olympic Games do or do not fulfill various aspects of the International Olympic Committee's stated goals. Using a 10-point scale, respondents indicated the extent to which they felt the Olympic Games achieve each of the six following IOC objectives: promote world peace; celebrate individual achievement; promote feelings of friendship and solidarity with the people of other nations; blend sport with culture and education; promote understanding and respect for the people of other countries; and encourage sports. Interspersed within these six IOC goals were two counterobjectives: promote national pride; and display the U.S.'s strength and power. The survey then assessed each respondent's interest in attending and watching future Olympic Games using a scale that ranged from "Not at All Interested" (1) to "Extremely Interested" (10).

Finally, respondents were asked a series of demographic questions including age, gender, ethnicity, nationality, year in college, and major. In addition, they were asked how many hours of television they watch per week (on average) and how much coverage of the 2002, 2004, and 2006 Olympic Games they had watched using a 5-point scale (Not at All, A Little, Some, Quite a Bit, A Lot). All respondents were subsequently debriefed about the experimental conditions and thanked for their participation.

## Results

One hundred and twenty-eight individuals completed both the pre-viewing and post-viewing surveys. To be eligible to be included in the subsequent analyses respondents had to be United States citizens. Eight participants who were not U.S. citizens, and therefore may not have responded to the nationalistic frame, were excluded from subsequent analyses. The remaining 120 respondents were equally represented in terms of gender in the three experimental conditions with 20 males and 20 females in each of the three experimental conditions — nationalistic frame, international frame, and control condition.

*Analyses.* All dependent variables were subjected to a one-way analysis of variance followed by paired contrasts between each of the three experimental conditions (nationalistic, international, and control) to determine precisely which conditions were significantly different from one another. All analyses used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software Version 15.

*Pre-existing interests and demographics.* There were no significant differences on any of the pre-existing interests or background variables between the three experimental groups. The only pre-existing interest found to predict participant interest in viewing and attending future Olympics was an interest in sports. All subsequent analyses were run both with and without interest in sports as a covariate. Since there were no statistically significant

differences between these two sets of analyses we report the more conservative analysis of the two — the analysis without a respondent's interest in sports as a covariate.

*Motives for viewing Olympic Games.* Ten items were adapted with some slight wording changes from Emerson and Perse's (1995) Olympic Viewing Motivation Scale to assess participants' preexisting motivations for watching the Olympic Games. There were no significant differences by experimental condition for any of the individual motivations or for the scale as a whole.

*Olympic nationalism versus internationalism.* Table 1 reports the mean scores by experimental condition of Emerson and Perse's (1995) Olympic Nationalism and Internationalism Scales. Scientific notation is used to identify which conditions are significantly different at  $p < .05$ . Entries in a row representing a particular dependent variable that do not share a letter subscript are significantly different from one another.

On average, participants in the nationalistic frame condition of the current study scored significantly higher on Emerson and Perse's Olympic Nationalism Scale ( $M = 5.54$ ) than those in both the control ( $M = 4.72$ ;  $F(1,78) = 17.41$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and the international frame condition ( $M = 4.26$ ;  $F(1,78) = 51.06$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $F(2,118) = 18.81$ ,  $p < .001$  in the overall one-way analysis of variance). Conversely, participants exposed to the international frame scored significantly higher on Emerson and Perse's Olympic Internationalism Scale ( $M = 5.63$ ) than their counterparts in both the nationalistic frame ( $M = 4.01$ ;  $F(1,78) = 53.9$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and control condition ( $M = 4.51$ ;  $F(1,78) = 71.01$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $F(2,118) = 31.33$ ,  $p < .001$  in the overall one-way analysis of variance). This suggests that the different compilations of Olympic images in the present study did indeed invoke the desired frames.

*International Olympic Committees objectives.* Participants were asked to use a 10-point scale ranging from Not at all (1) to Extremely well (10) to assess the extent to which they felt the Olympic Games met six objectives either explicitly or implicitly stated in the mission statement of the IOC (see Table 2). A series of one-way analyses of variance revealed that there were significant differences by condition for four of the six IOC objectives: promoting world peace ( $F(2,117) = 46.41$ ), promoting feelings of friendship and solidarity with the people of other nations ( $F(2,117) = 24.82$ ,  $p < .001$ ), blend sport with culture and education ( $F(2,117) = 15.66$ ,  $p < .001$ ), promote understanding and respect for the people of other countries ( $F(2,117) = 25.09$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Encouraging sports and promoting individual achievement were not statistically significant in the one-way analysis of variance. Both of the two counterobjectives — promoting national pride and display the U.S.'s strength and power — were also significant by condition ( $F(2, 117) = 4.10$ ,  $p < .01$  and  $F(2,117) = 13.79$ ,  $p < .001$ , respectively).

TABLE 1  
FEELINGS OF OLYMPIC NATIONALISM AND  
INTERNATIONALISM AS A FUNCTION OF FRAME

These items were adapted from Emerson & Perse's (1995) Nationalism and Internationalism Scales.

The letter subscripts indicate scientific notation. Means that are statistically significant from one another do not share the same letter subscript. An asterisk indicates that the item was reverse coded.

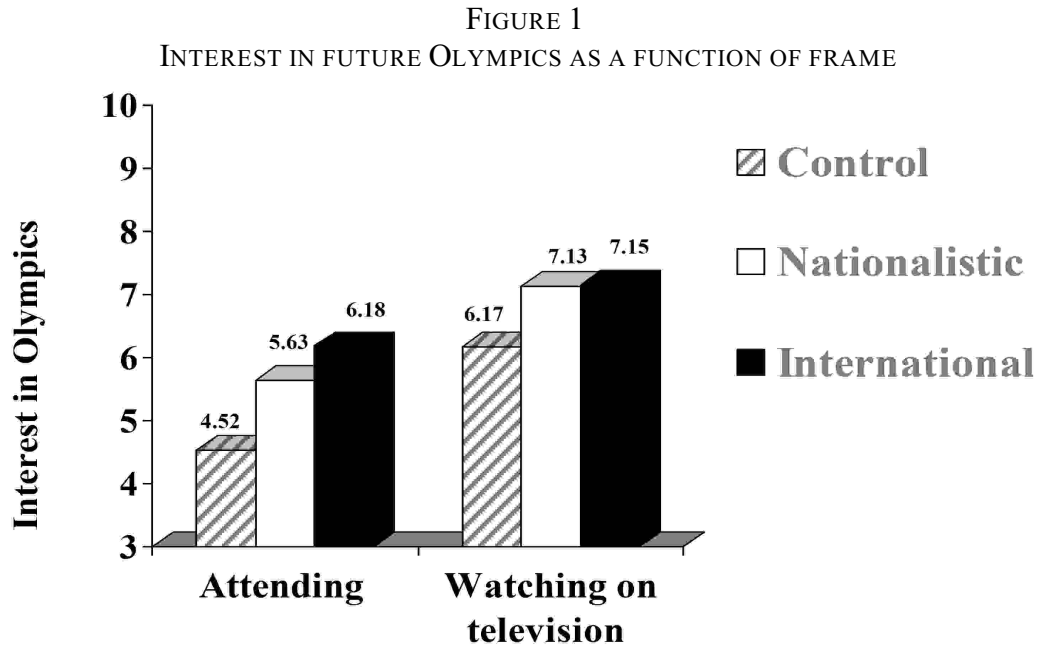
<b><u>Olympic Nationalism</u></b>	<b><u>Control</u></b>	<b><u>Nationalistic</u></b>	<b><u>International</u></b>
It makes little difference to me if the American entry wins in the Olympics.*	4.35b	3.60a	5.00c
Success at the Olympics brings prestige to the U.S.	6.93a	7.10b	6.63a
The Olympics make me feel that the U.S. the greatest nation in the world.	3.08a	4.62b	2.95a
The Olympics make me realize that we should strive for loyalty to our own country before we can afford to consider world brotherhood.	4.78b	5.08c	3.68a
I feel angry at U.S. athletes when they do not win.	3.75a	4.60b	3.42a
I feel angry at non-U.S. athletes when they beat U.S. athletes.	4.13a	5.45b	3.88a
<u>Average score on Nationalism scale</u>	<u>4.72b</u>	<u>5.54c</u>	<u>4.26a</u>
<b><u>Olympic Internationalism</u></b>			
The Olympics make us more aware of our differences rather than our similarities.*	5.40b	5.95c	4.87a
The Olympics provide a common ground for cooperation.	3.93a	3.70a	5.48b
Watching the Olympics gives me a sense of belonging to the global society.	4.60a	4.20a	6.00b
Watching the Olympics makes me feel that it is better to be a citizen of the world than of any particular country.	5.03b	3.88a	6.05c
Watching the Olympics makes me feel that I am a member of the international community.	4.38a	4.23a	5.55b
<u>Average score on Olympic internationalism scale</u>	<u>4.51b</u>	<u>4.01a</u>	<u>5.63c</u>

TABLE 2  
EXTENT TO WHICH OLYMPICS SERVE  
VARIOUS OBJECTIVES AS A FUNCTION OF FRAME

On a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree) to what extent do you think the Olympic Games...

<b><u>IOC Objectives</u></b>	<b><u>Control</u></b>	<b><u>Nationalistic</u></b>	<b><u>International</u></b>
Promote world peace?	4.45a	4.23a	6.48b
Promote feelings of friendship and solidarity with the people of other nations?	4.78a	4.40a	6.45b
Blend sport with culture and education?	5.05a	4.65a	6.35b
Celebrate individual achievement?	7.10a	7.52b	7.25ab
Promote understanding and respect for the people of other countries?	4.68a	4.38a	6.35b
Encourage sports?	8.25a	8.33a	8.35a
<u>Average IOC objectives score</u>	<u>5.72a</u>	<u>5.57a</u>	<u>6.87b</u>
<b><u>IOC Counterobjectives</u></b>			
Display the U.S.'s strength and power?	6.40a	6.90b	5.65a
Promote national pride?	6.60a	7.38b	6.75a
<u>Average IOC counterobjectives score</u>	<u>6.50a</u>	<u>7.14b</u>	<u>6.20a</u>

Planned contrasts between each of the three framing conditions revealed that participants in the nationalistic condition did not differ from the control condition on 5 of the 6 items, differing only on the extent to which they felt the Olympics celebrate individual achievement (7.10 and 7.25, respectively  $F(1, 78) = 4.58, p < .04$ ). In contrast, participants in the international framing condition scored significantly higher than those in the control condition on 4 of the 6 items including promoting world peace ( $F(1,78) = 48.5, p < .001$ ), promoting feelings of friendship and solidarity with the people of other nations ( $F(1,78) = 25.77, p < .001$ ), blending sport with culture and education ( $F(1,78) = 14.57, p < .001$ ) and promoting understanding and respect for the people of other countries ( $F(1,78) = 27.04, p < .001$ ). Those in the international condition did not differ from those in the control condition on ratings of whether the Olympics encourage sports or celebrate individual achievement.



Planned comparisons were also conducted on the two IOC inconsistent objectives of displaying the U.S.'s strength and power and promoting national pride. On both of these IOC-inconsistent items, participants in the nationalistic frame condition gave significantly higher ratings ( $M = 6.90$ ) than those in both the control condition ( $M = 6.40$ ;  $F(1,78) = 9.28$ ,  $p < .003$ ) and the international condition ( $M = 6.71$ ;  $F(1,78) = 50.90$ ). There was no significant difference on these items between the control and the international frame condition.

*Interest in attending and watching future Olympic Games.* As indicated by Figure 1, there was a significant influence of frame with participants in the nationalistic ( $M = 5.62$ ;  $F(1,78) = 7.45$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and international ( $M = 6.18$ ;  $F(1,78) = 17.57$ ,  $p < .04$ ) frame conditions reporting greater interest than those in the control condition ( $M = 4.53$ ) in attending future Olympic Games ( $F(2,118) = 9.15$ ,  $p < .001$  overall). There was also a significant increase in intention to watch future Olympic Games on television with those in both the nationalistic ( $M = 7.13$ ;  $F(1,78) = 9.278$ ,  $p < .003$ ) and international ( $M = 7.15$ ;  $F(1,78) = 8.29$ ;  $p < .001$ ) frames reporting a significantly higher interest in viewing future Olympic Games than those in the control condition ( $M = 6.18$ ;  $F(2,118) = 4.80$ ,  $p < .01$  overall).



## STUDY 2

### Method

Participants were once again recruited from the same undergraduate class at the same major university one semester later. Participants were informed that they would be filling out two unrelated surveys — one assessing their interest in the Olympic Games and a second assessing their opinions on international affairs ostensibly for a graduate student's dissertation.

*Olympic pre-viewing survey.* The Olympic pre-viewing survey and procedure were identical to that employed in Study 1. Respondents first filled out a survey that assessed participants' pre-existing interests which could affect the efficacy of a particular frame (such as their interest in travel, sports, foreign policy, and international affairs) using a 10-point Likert scale. The survey then asked participants to respond to a series of 10 items adapted from Emerson and Perse's (1995) Olympic Viewing Motivation Scale, which was designed to assess the extent to which a variety of motives play a role in whether or not the respondent would watch the Olympics on television. Participants were then randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions — a nationalistic frame, an international frame, or a control group which was not exposed to an experimental frame — using the same stimulus materials as described in Study 1.

*Olympic post-viewing survey.* Next, participants were asked to fill out an Olympic post-viewing survey that once again asked them how interested they were in both attending and watching future Olympics on a 10-point scale ranging from "Not at All Interested" (1) to "Extremely Interested" (10). Unlike Study 1, participants in Study 2 did not complete Emerson and Perse's Olympic Nationalism Scale (1995) or the items designed to measure the extent to which participants believed that the Olympic Games do or do not fulfill various aspects of the International Olympic Committee's goals. Instead, participants in Study 2 were asked to what extent the Olympic Games made them feel proud and excited using a 10-point Likert scales ranging from "Not at All" (1) to "Extremely" (10). Respondents were then asked the same series of demographic questions as in Study 1 including age, gender, ethnicity, nationality, year in college, and major. In addition, they were asked how many hours of television they watch per week (on average) and how much coverage of the 2002, 2004, and 2006 Olympic Games they had watched using a 5-point scale (Not at All, A Little, Some, Quite a Bit, A Lot).

*Public opinion survey.* The second, ostensibly unrelated, survey was administered by an unfamiliar graduate student immediately after the Olympic survey allegedly as part of his

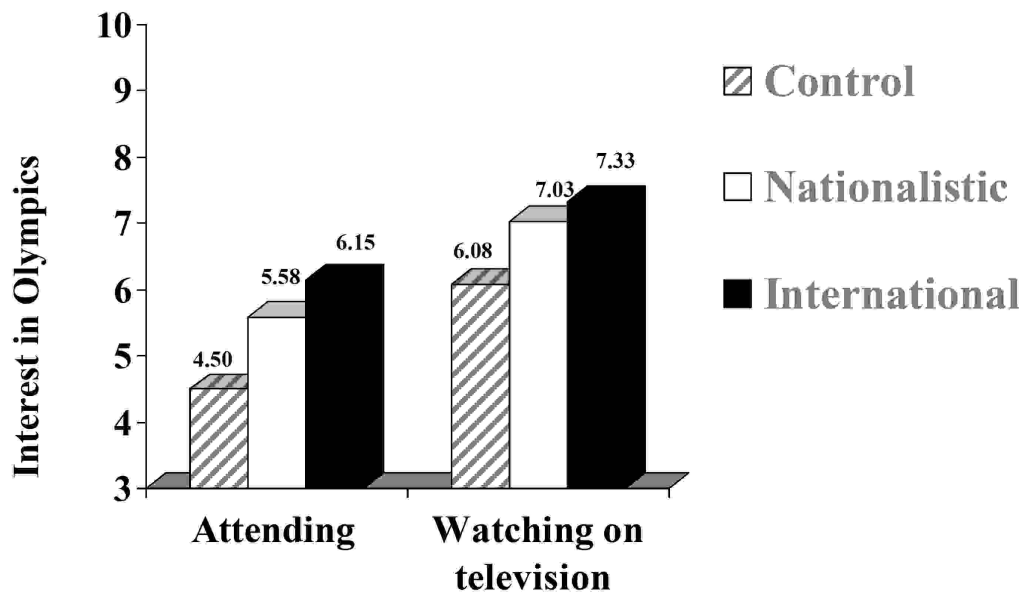
dissertation research. In this survey, participants first completed a modified version of Brewer, Gross, Aday, and Willnat's (2004) measure of international trust. Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed with each of the following statements on a 10-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (10): the United States can trust other nations; the United States can't be too careful in dealing with other nations; most of the time other nations try to be helpful to the United States; and other nations are just looking out for themselves. Respondents were then asked how much they agreed with a series of items also adapted from Brewer et al. designed to measure internationalism and isolationism which included the following statements: the United States should not concern itself with problems in other parts of the world; the United States should try to solve problems in other parts of the world; the United States should give humanitarian aid like food and medicine to foreign countries even if they don't stand for the same things we do; the United States should use military force to solve international problems; the United States should give financial assistance to countries in economic crisis; and the United States should devote a significant portion of its budget to defense.

Next, respondents were asked to indicate how friendly each of 25 nations are toward the United States on a 10-point scale ranging from "Extremely Unfriendly" (1) to "Extremely Friendly" (10). These items were also adapted from Brewer et al (2004). Finally, respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements designed to measure support for a number of aggressive foreign policy positions including: the military-led intervention against the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan; the decision to label Iraq, North Korea, and Iran as an "Axis of Evil"; the decision to place tariffs on steel imports; the decision to try Al Qaeda prisoners before military tribunals (as opposed to U.S. civilian courts); the decision to increase foreign aid to poor countries; and recent efforts to bring democracy to the Middle East. Respondents were also asked the extent to which they agreed that in the future the United States should: adopt tougher immigration policies; take pre-emptive military action; send troops abroad to spread democracy; and restrict the sale of foreign products within its own borders. After completing this survey, respondents were debriefed about the experimental conditions and thanked for their participation.

## Results

One hundred and twenty-four individuals completed both surveys. Data from four individuals who were not U.S. citizens, and thus may not have reacted to the framing manipulation, were excluded from subsequent analyses. The remaining 120 respondents were equally represented in terms of gender in the three experimental conditions with 20 males and 20 females in each condition.

FIGURE 2  
INTEREST IN FUTURE OLYMPICS AS A FUNCTION OF FRAME



*Pre-existing interests and demographics.* A series of one-way analyses of variance using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software Version 15 revealed that there were no significant differences on any of the pre-existing interests or demographics either between experimental conditions in Study 2 or between Study 1 and Study 2.

*Motives for viewing Olympic Games.* Similarly, there was no significant difference between the three experimental conditions on the 10 items adapted from Emerson and Perse's (1995) Olympic Viewing Motivation Scale assessing participants' preexisting motivations for watching the Olympic Games either between experimental conditions in Study 2 or between Study 1 and Study 2.

*Interest in attending and watching future Olympic Games.* As indicated in Figure 2, there was once again a significant effect of frame with participants in the nationalistic ( $M = 5.58$ ;  $F(1, 79) = 8.51$ ,  $p < .005$ ) and international ( $M = 6.15$ ;  $F(1, 79) = 21.77$ ,  $p < .001$ ) frames reporting significantly greater interest than those in the control condition ( $M = 4.50$ ) in attending future Olympic Games ( $F(2, 118) = 10.63$ ,  $p < .001$  overall analysis of variance). There was also a significant increase in intent to watch future Olympic Games on television with those in both the nationalistic ( $M = 7.03$ ;  $F(1, 79) = 8.20$ ,  $p < .005$ ) and international ( $M = 7.33$ ;  $F(1, 79) = 15.47$ ;  $p < .001$ ) frames reporting a significantly higher interest in

viewing future Olympic Games than those in the control condition ( $M = 6.08$ ;  $F(2,118) = 7.65$ ;  $p < .001$  overall).

*Emotions Olympics elicit.* Respondents were asked to gauge the extent to which the Olympics evoked the emotions of pride and excitement on a 10-point Likert scale ranging from Not at all (1) to Extremely (10). Interestingly, there were no significant differences by experimental condition in the extent to which respondents reported feeling excitement or pride, which suggests that these emotions were not driving differences on other dependent variables.

*International trust.* As shown in Table 3, participants in the nationalistic frame condition produced levels of international trust ( $M = 4.11$ ) that were significantly and consistently lower than those in the control condition ( $M = 5.49$ ;  $F(1,79) = 59.30$ ,  $p < .001$ ) which in turn were significantly lower than those in the international condition ( $M = 6.44$ ;  $F(1,79) = 33.95$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $F(2,118) = 88.99$ ,  $p < .001$  overall).

*Internationalism versus isolationism.* Table 3 also reveals that participants in the nationalistic frame condition reported the highest levels of isolationism ( $M = 6.16$ ), significantly higher than participants in the control condition ( $M = 5.56$ ;  $F(1,79) = 19.66$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Those who were exposed to the international frame had significantly lower levels of isolationism ( $M = 4.64$ ) than those in both the nationalistic ( $F(1,79) = 127.33$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and control conditions ( $F(1,79) = 19.66$ ;  $F(2,118) = 67.74$  overall).

*Ratings of friendliness toward the United States.* The average friendliness score of the 25 countries toward the United States revealed a consistent pattern with respondents in the international frame condition giving the highest friendliness ratings ( $M = 5.54$ ) followed by those in the control condition ( $M = 4.60$ ;  $F(1,79) = 20.68$ ,  $p < .001$ ) which in turn was significantly higher than the average rating of participants in the nationalistic frame condition ( $M = 3.97$ ;  $F(1,79) = 13.59$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $F(2,118) = 36.19$ ,  $p < .001$  overall).

*U.S. policy decisions.* As shown in Table 4, participants in the nationalistic frame condition ( $M = 5.49$ ) were more likely than those in the control condition ( $M = 4.75$ ;  $F(1,79) = 19.50$ ,  $p < .001$ ) to support aggressive foreign policies. Those in the control condition were, in turn, more likely to endorse aggressive foreign policies than those in the international frame condition ( $M = 4.46$ ;  $F(1,79) = 7.32$ ,  $p < .008$ ;  $F(2,118) = 25.86$ ,  $p < .001$  overall).

TABLE 3  
MEASURES OF INTERNATIONAL TRUST AND  
ISOLATIONISM AS A FUNCTION OF FRAME

<b><u>International Trust</u></b>	<b><u>Control</u></b>	<b><u>Nationalistic</u></b>	<b><u>International</u></b>
The United States can trust other nations.	5.03b	3.88a	6.05c
The United States can't be too careful in dealing with other nations.*	4.40b	6.20c	3.70a
Most of the time other nations try to be helpful to the United States.	4.60a	4.10a	5.98b
Other nations are just looking out for themselves.*	3.28b	4.95c	2.58a
<u>Average on international trust scale</u>	<u>5.49b</u>	<u>4.11a</u>	<u>6.46c</u>
<b><u>Isolationism</u></b>			
The United States should not concern itself with problems in other parts of the world.	6.90b	7.13b	5.78a
The United States should try to solve problems in other parts of the world.*	4.40b	3.40a	4.75b
The United States should give humanitarian aid like food and medicine to foreign countries even if they don't stand for the same things we do.*	5.05b	3.88a	6.05c
The United States should use military force to solve international problems.	5.43b	6.10c	4.88a
The United States should give financial assistance to countries in economic crisis.*	4.35a	4.25a	5.58b
The United States should devote a significant portion of its budget to defense.	4.85b	5.27b	3.58a
<u>Average on isolationism scale</u>	<u>5.56b</u>	<u>6.16c</u>	<u>4.64a</u>

Note: These items were adapted from both Brewer et al's (2004) International Trust and Internationalism/Isolationism Scales and Brewer & Steenbergen's (2002) Cooperative Internationalism and Militant Internationalism Scales. The letter subscripts indicate scientific notation. Means that are statistically significant from one another do not share the same letter subscript. An asterisk \* implies the item was reverse coded.

TABLE 4  
SUPPORT FOR AGGRESSIVE FOREIGN POLICY AS A FUNCTION OF FRAME

<b><u>Aggressive Foreign Policy</u></b>	<b><u>Control</u></b>	<b><u>Nationalistic</u></b>	<b><u>International</u></b>
I support the military-led effort against the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan.	8.23a	8.33a	8.00a
I support Bush's decision to label Iraq, Iran, and North Korea an "Axis of Evil."	3.33b	4.80c	2.45a
I support the 2002 decision to place tariffs on steel imports to the United States.	6.93ab	7.10b	6.63a
I support the decision to try Al Qaeda prisoners before military tribunals rather than in the U.S. civilian courts.	4.13a	5.45b	3.88a
I support Bush's decisions to increase U.S. foreign aid to poor countries.*	4.43b	3.60a	4.78b
I support the U.S.'s recent efforts to bring democracy to the Middle East.	4.13a	5.45b	3.88a
In the future, the United States should have tougher immigration policies.	5.40a	5.95b	4.98a
In the future, the United States should take military action if it has reason to believe that a country is producing weapons of mass destruction.	3.08a	4.63b	2.95a
In the future, the United States should continue to send troops abroad to assist in spreading democracy.	3.08a	4.63b	2.95a
In the future, the United States should restrict the sale of foreign products within its borders in order to protect American jobs.	5.40a	5.95b	4.98a
<b><u>Average on aggressive foreign policy scale</u></b>	<b><u>4.75a</u></b>	<b><u>5.49b</u></b>	<b><u>4.46a</u></b>

Note: The letter subscripts indicate scientific notation. Means that are statistically significant from one another do not share the same letter subscript. The letter R indicates the scale runs in the reverse direction.

## DISCUSSION

The goals of this research were fourfold: first, to test the effects of nationalistic and international framing on the American viewing audience's perceptions of the Olympic Games; second, to test the effects of these frames on viewers' perceptions of whether the official objectives of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) are being achieved; third, to test the effects of both frames on viewer receptivity toward international engagement and trust; and fourth, to test the effects of both frames on viewer support for aggressive U.S. foreign policy. In addition, we explored the validity of the concern that adopting a more international frame for the Olympic Games would necessarily decrease American interest in attending and watching future Games.

As shown in Table 1, when individuals were exposed to a nationalistic frame of the Olympic Games, they were more likely to endorse nationalistic items from Emerson and Perse's (1995) Olympic-related Nationalism Scale such as "the Olympics make me feel that the U.S. is the greatest nation in the world" and "the Olympics make me realize that we should strive for loyalty to our own country before we can afford to consider world brotherhood." They were also more likely to reject internationally cooperative statements such as "the Olympics provide a common ground for cooperation" and "watching the Olympics makes me feel that it is better to be a citizen of the world than of any particular country." Individuals exposed to the international Olympic frame showed the exact opposite pattern of results. These results support Hypotheses 1 and 3 and suggest that the framing of the Olympics can have a major influence on how the Games themselves are viewed.

How the Games were framed also had a significant impact on whether or not individuals felt the Olympics were fulfilling IOC objectives. As shown in Table 2, those individuals who were exposed to the international frame generally perceived the Olympics to be much more supportive of the goals of the IOC than those exposed to the nationalistic frame or the control condition. Conversely, those individuals who watched the nationalistic frame generally perceived the Olympics to be much more antithetical to the goals of the IOC than those from the international frame or the control condition. Thus, Hypotheses 2 and 4 were also supported. This suggests that the heavily nationalistic framing of the Olympic Games by American television networks may serve to undermine the mission of the IOC and the very purpose of the Games. On a more optimistic note, our findings also suggest that if these networks were to adopt a more international frame, the mission of the Games may be better served.

Study 2 examined the broader implications these nationalistic and international Olympic frames may have on public perceptions of other nations or aggressive foreign policy. As shown in Tables 3 and 4, individuals who were exposed to a nationalistic frame of the Olympic Games were less likely to demonstrate receptivity toward concepts of international trust and engagement, and were more likely to support aggressive foreign policy decisions

like preemptive military action as predicted in Hypotheses 5 and 6, respectively. In contrast, individuals who were exposed to an international frame of the Olympic Games were more likely to demonstrate receptivity toward concepts of international trust and engagement, and were less likely to support aggressive foreign policy actions as predicted in Hypotheses 7 and 8.

The ramifications of these results are wide-ranging and point to an unintended, but potentially dangerous, consequence of framing the Olympics in a nationalistic manner. By employing an extremely nationalistic frame, American television networks may be encouraging negative attitudes toward other nations. As our findings show, these negative sentiments include a willingness to support international isolation and/or aggressive international action. Not only is such support in direct opposition to the mission of the IOC, but public opinion could influence U.S. foreign policy decisions in ways that increase international tension and promote rivalry among nations.

This overall pattern of results is consistent with the tenets of Social Identity Theory, which argue that when national identity is the most salient categorization, individuals will be motivated to promote positive views of their national in-group and negative views of the out-group. As a result, nationalistically framed Olympic broadcasts may encourage viewers to be less engaged and open to cooperation with other countries. By extension, Social Identity Theory also suggests that adopting a more international frame — or at least making national identity less salient in Olympic coverage — might generate more positive attitudes and actions among American audiences.

Interestingly, our findings also demonstrate that the adoption of a more international frame for Olympic broadcasts would not necessarily decrease viewership. Instead, exposure to Olympic coverage in both the nationalistic and international frame conditions increased the interest of the participants with respect to both attending and viewing future Olympic Games (see Figures 1 and 2). Contrary to what media outlets have argued, nationalistically-framed coverage might not draw any more viewers than a broadcast which focuses on cooperation, athletic skill, and athletes from a variety of countries.

### Limitations and Future Research

Like most studies, this one suffers from a number of limitations. Perhaps the greatest limitation is the use of relatively brief clips to evoke the desired frames. Obviously, having individuals watch actual coverage of the Olympics would have greater ecological validity. Similarly, a more compelling case could be made if we could measure actual behavior in terms of subsequent Olympic viewing rather than behavioral intent. We also acknowledge that we used only a very narrow segment of the U.S. population (undergraduates at a major university who are younger and better educated than the majority of Olympic viewers).



Moreover, the sample size per condition did not allow for in-depth analysis of within group differences (i.e. in terms of gender, race, etc).

There are also a number of other experimental conditions that would have been of interest. For instance, examining the impact of American media commentary on viewer perceptions of the Olympics would obviously have been very worthwhile. Also, research which compared the framing of U.S. Olympic coverage to the frames adopted by media outlets in other countries — and then correlated levels of support for IOC goals and international engagement in each country — would have proved extremely valuable. Finally, our study effectively limited discussion to the possibility of only two frames: nationalistic and international. This focus was not meant to suggest that alternative or “mixed” frames do not exist or are irrelevant to Olympic broadcasts. Thus, an exploration of a wider array of possible Olympic media frames would be most welcome. Lastly, we do not mean to suggest that television coverage of the Olympics is the only or even the primary influence on viewers’ attitudes toward other nations. Citizen attitudes, advertising demands, international business concerns, and government priorities all come together to influence the ways in which media outlets choose to cover certain topics. The relative size of the media’s role in shaping public opinion about the Olympics, as well as identifying other key factors in this process, are topics for future research.

## Conclusions

This research exposes a contradiction between how the modern Olympics Games are currently being presented to the American public and the official mission of the IOC. Our results reveal important and potentially alarming consequences of the use of highly nationalistic framing with respect to the Olympic Games, and perhaps international events more generally. These findings make a strong argument for the need to reframe or at least soften American television coverage of the Olympic Games. Ultimately, this research provides insight into how sports diplomacy, competition, national rivalry, internationalism, Social Identity Theory, and the concept of framing fit together in the media’s portrayal of the Olympic spectacle, and how we might be able to steer a more productive course in future coverage of international events.

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