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## ATHLETIC IDENTITY LEVELS REDUCE IN COUNTRIES WHO FAIL TO BE AWARDED THE OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC SUMMER GAMES

OS NÍVEIS DE IDENTIDADE ATLÉTICA SE REDUZEM EM PAÍSES QUE NÃO SÃO ESCOLHIDOS COMO SEDE DOS JOGOS OLÍMPICOS E PARALÍMPICOS DE VERÃO

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### ATHLETIC IDENTITY LEVELS REDUCE IN COUNTRIES WHO FAIL TO BE AWARDED THE OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC SUMMER GAMES

#### ABSTRACT

The degree to which people identify with the sporting component of their self-concept is known as athletic identity, and this construct helps guide and organise the processing of self-related information following events of national importance. Athletic identity was assessed among countries with candidate cities bidding to host the 2012 and 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Candidate cities had significantly lower athletic identity levels across the population three months before and after the decision to host the event, except for the country with the elected host cities which had athletic identity levels that did not significantly change. These results indicate the importance of the effects of events of national importance on the degree to which individuals identify with the sporting component of their self-concept.

**Keywords:** Athletic identity. Olympic games. Paralympic games.

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#### INTRODUÇÃO

Self-concept is a dynamic and motivating set of attitudes which determine how individuals perceive themselves (MARKUS; NURIUS, 1986). Self-concept perceptions are multidimensional in nature in that they are formed through experience with, and interpretations of, different facets of one's environment (CIALDINI, 2000; LECKY, 1945). Individuals can simultaneously identify strongly with multiple facets of their self-concept, but one of these dimensions often becomes more salient than others in response to situational influences (HARDY; MORIARTY, 2006).

Athletic identity is the degree to which an individual identifies with the sporting component of their self-concept (BREWER; VAN RAALTE; LINDER, 1993), and research has revealed higher levels of athletic identity can

have both positive and negative effects. For example, researchers have suggested high athletic identity levels are associated with improved levels of participation in sport and physical activity, higher global self-esteem and enhanced sporting performances (TASIEMSKI; KENNEDY; GARDNER; BLAIKLEY, 2004). Previous researchers have also found evidence to suggest high athletic identity is associated with post-injury depression and difficulties associated with sports retirement among competitive athletes (WEBB; NASCO; RILEY; HEADRICK, 1998). Because of these and the associated implications of not being physically active (BATTY; LEE, 2004), this study examined whether athletic identity levels changed across the population as a result of an event of national importance.

#### Study 1

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## METHODS

In July 2005, the International Olympic Committee elected the host city for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games from five candidate cities – London (England), Madrid (Spain), Moscow (Russia), New York (United States) and Paris (France). Data were collected across the general population of the five countries with candidate cities bidding to host the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Before and after this date, athletic identity levels were assessed across the populations of these countries via invitation on-line sampling procedures.

A total of 1243 people participated in the study (England,  $n = 297$ ; France,  $n = 246$ ; United States,  $n = 320$ ; Spain,  $n = 219$ ; and Russia,  $n = 161$ ; males = 733, females = 510). All participants were invited to complete the *Athletic Identity Measurement Scale* (BREWER; VAN RAALTE; LINDER, 1993) three months before (Time 1; April) and after (Time 2; October) the announcement of the host city in July 2005. The *Athletic Identity Measurement Scale* comprises seven items scored on a 7-point Likert-type scale anchored by ‘Strongly Agree’ and ‘Strongly Disagree’ such that higher values indicate a stronger identity with the sporting role. It is summed to yield an overall score (range = 7-49), and has previously demonstrated strong internal consistency, construct validity and test-retest reliability (TASIEMSKI; KENNEDY; GARDNER; BLAIKLEY, 2004). Data were analyzed using analysis of variance procedures.

## RESULTS

If situational influences have no effect on different dimensions of self-concept, athletic identity levels should remain consistent across the population of all countries (from April to October). However, a significant pattern was found in terms of significantly lower changes in athletic identity levels among four out of the five countries with cities bidding to host the Games [France, Time 1=18.32 (SD=8.91), Time 2 = 15.33 (SD=9.59),  $p<0.01$ ; United States, Time 1 = 17.84 (SD=9.30), Time 2 = 14.53 (SD=8.73),  $p<0.01$ ; Spain, Time 1 = 18.02 (SD=10.39),

Time 2 = 15.15 (SD=9.80),  $p<0.01$ ; Russia, Time 1 = 14.98 (SD=10.86), Time 2 = 12.72 (SD=9.41),  $p<0.05$ ; and England, Time 1=18.27 (SD=9.44), Time 2=17.95 (SD=10.08),  $p=0.69$ ]. Athletic identity levels in the country with the elected host city – London, England – were found to be insignificant at Time 2 ( $p=0.69$ ) and this was consistent with regard to both age (18-29 years,  $n=91$ ,  $p=0.64$ ; 30-49 years,  $n=129$ ,  $p=0.41$ ; 50+ years,  $n=77$ ,  $p=0.43$ ) and gender (females,  $n=139$ ,  $p=0.51$ ; males,  $n=158$ ,  $p=0.60$ ).

## Study 2

## METHODS

Study 2 replicated the procedures in Study 1 and collected data from participants from the four candidate cities bidding to host the 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games [announcement of the host city in October 2009, with data collected in July 2009 (Time 1) and January 2010 (Time 2)], including Rio de Janeiro (Brazil,  $n=112$ ), Madrid (Spain,  $n=151$ ), Chicago (United States,  $n=188$ ) and Tokyo (Japan,  $n=124$ ) as well as one control city (Dublin, Ireland,  $n=144$ ). Data were also collected in January 2011 (Time 3).

## RESULTS

Consistent with the results in Study 1, athletic identity levels were found to be significantly lower at Time 2 in all cities except for Rio de Janeiro and Dublin [Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Time 1=19.25 (SD=10.10), Time 2=18.60 (SD=9.50),  $p=0.62$ ; Madrid, Spain, Time 1=18.42 (SD=7.11), Time 2 = 15.43 (SD=8.2),  $p<0.01$ ; Chicago, United States, Time 1 = 18.03 (SD=8.51), Time 2 = 15.82 (SD=9.10),  $p<0.02$ ; Tokyo, Japan, Time 1 = 17.65 (SD=8.60), Time 2=15.63 (SD=7.21),  $p<0.05$ ; and Dublin, Ireland, Time 1 = 14.72 (SD=6.43), Time 2 = 14.88 (SD=5.98),  $p=0.83$ ]. Follow-up analyses (Time 3) revealed similar results [Madrid,  $n=139$ ,  $M=15.4$ ,  $SD=8.8$ ,  $p=0.97$ ; Chicago,  $n=175$ ,  $M=15.36$ ,  $SD=8.97$ ,  $p=0.63$ ; Tokyo,  $n=98$ ,  $M=15.41$ ,  $SD=7.49$ ,  $p=0.83$ ; Dublin  $n=120$ ,  $M=14.74$ ,  $SD=6.23$ ,

$p=0.85$ ; Rio de Janeiro,  $n=103$ ,  $M=17.70$ ,  $SD=8.57$ ):  $p=0.47$ :  $p$ -value range for age and gender: 0.42-0.80].

## DISCUSSION

The degree to which individuals identify with the sporting component of their self-concept is known as athletic identity, and this construct helps guide and organize the processing of self-related information following events of national importance. Here it is shown that countries with candidate cities bidding to host the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Summer Games had significantly different athletic identity levels across the population before and after the decision to host the Olympics, except for the countries with the elected host cities, which had athletic identity levels that did not change. These results indicate that different dimensions of self-concept, and in this case, athletic identity, can be influenced by situational events such as bidding to host the Olympic and Paralympic Summer Games. Given the potential positive effects of athletic identity on involvement in sport and exercise, this psychological construct should be taken into account by future researchers and government policy makers.

Only a very small percentage of the population within a country will reach the

standard of competing at the Olympics and Paralympics. However, such individuals might be at-risk of identity foreclosure, which involves making premature commitments to an ideological, interpersonal or occupational role without engaging in exploratory behaviour in other roles (MARCIA; WATERMAN; MATTESON; ARCHER; ORLOFSKY, 1993). Athletic identity and identity foreclosure are positively correlated with each other and when strongly manifested, are considered maladaptive in the process of retiring from sport (LAVALLEE, 2005).

## CONCLUSION

One limitation is that data were collected in Study 1 across each potential host country, rather than each host city, and this will limit the generalizability of the findings. This limitation was addressed in Study 2, and it is interesting to note the consistent results for Madrid, Spain across both studies. Also, there was also no check concerning how informed participants were to the staging of the Olympics and Paralympics before (e.g., were they aware of the bid for the Olympics and Paralympics?) and after (were they aware of the outcome for their city?) the decision.

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### RESUMO

O grau com que as pessoas se identificam com o componente esportivo de seu auto-conceito é conhecido como identidade atlética, e esse construto ajuda a guiar e organizar os processamento de informação relacionadas ao *self* em sequência a um evento de importância nacional. Identidade atlética foi avaliada entre países que apresentaram cidades como candidatas a sediar os jogos Olímpicos e Paralímpicos de 2012 e 2016. Cidade candidatas apresentaram níveis significativamente menores entre a população três meses antes e após a decisão de sediar o evento, exceto nos países cujas cidades foram eletas sede, que tiveram níveis de identidade atlética sem variação significativa. Esses resultados indicam a importância do efeito de eventos de relevância nacional no grau com que os indivíduos se identificam com o componente esportivo do auto-conceito.

**Palavras-chave:** Identidade atlética. Jogos Olímpicos. Jogos Paralímpicos.

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