

****Media and the role of racialized football celebrities****

Article. Ala'alrababa'h, Marble, Mousa & Siegel (2021). Can Exposure to Celebrities Reduce Prejudice? The Effect of Mohamed Salah On Islamophobic Behaviors and Attitudes. American Political Science Review, 115, 1111-1128

Link: [PSR_2100042_1111..1128](https://doi.org/10.1017/XPS.2020.42)

Aim. Prejudice and discrimination remain significant problems, and researchers are constantly exploring and looking for ways to improve the relationship between different groups. This research explored whether positive exposure to a prominent Muslim figure – the soccer player Mohamed Salah – can reduce prejudice towards Muslims in England. The core idea is that getting to know someone, even through media, can change our attitudes.

Methods. Researchers used a variety of methods to investigate this. They analyzed police records of hate crimes, tracked over 15 million tweets from British soccer fans, and conducted surveys with Liverpool fans. They compared trends in Liverpool, where Salah played, to other areas of the UK.

Key findings. The findings show how hate crimes in the Liverpool area decreased by around 16% after Salah joined the team, compared to other areas. Negative comments about Muslims in tweets from Liverpool fans were also significantly reduced. Surveys showed that simply reminding people about Salah's Muslim faith made them more likely to view Islam positively. This suggests that seeing a successful and well-liked Muslim figure can positively influence attitudes.

This research matters because it suggests a practical way to combat prejudice: positive representation in the media. If seeing a successful role model can improve attitudes, it highlights the importance of diverse and inclusive media portrayals. It also suggests that celebrities can play a role in promoting tolerance and understanding.

Limitations. While the study found a link between Salah's popularity and reduced prejudice, it's difficult to definitively prove that he 'caused' the change. Other factors could have contributed, and the positive effect might not apply to all celebrities or in all situations. The study also focused specifically on Liverpool, and the results may not be generalizable to other areas or groups. Furthermore, the data on hate crimes only reflects reported incidents, and the analysis of tweets only captures a specific type of online expression. Despite these limitations, the research provides food for thought on the potential for positive exposure to reduce prejudice.