

**Line of Inquiry:** In what ways are ordinary achievements given value and merit in Nike's *Find Your Greatness* campaign?

For the professional athlete, participating in the Olympics is an opportunity to showcase an undeniably laudable level of physical prowess. On the other hand, the amateur athlete with relatively lackluster skill becomes invisible when points and rankings are given focus in mass media. When its rival Adidas was chosen as an official sponsor of the 2012 London Summer Olympics, the multinational sportswear corporation Nike launched *Find Your Greatness* (Sweeney), an ambush marketing campaign that championed those whom they considered overlooked achievers. The campaign's use of various cinematographic and rhetorical techniques give significance to the perseverance required by self-improvement and to encourage the appreciation of seemingly ordinary achievements.

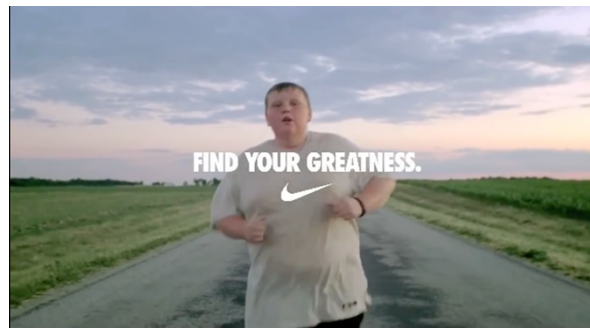


Fig. 1. The subject at the end of "The Jogger," Nike: Find Your Greatness (1:00)

The campaign's pre-production choices heavily influence the strength of its overall message. The conscious selection of subjects is obvious in one of its central advertisements, entitled "The Jogger." In the ad, an initially indistinct figure runs on a straight road towards the camera and is eventually recognized as an obese teenage boy

(fig. 1). Obese individuals are typically seen as the antithesis of physical fitness. The association of obesity and idleness enables the presentation of the boy's choice as powerful and demanding, an act of conquering a perceived flaw. The use of subjects with disabilities in the baseball and cycling ads reveal a similar acknowledgment of individual athletes' specific circumstances and obstacles. Not usually associated with achievement unless they exhibit incredible skill, child and teenage subjects also contribute to this idea as their small accomplishments are seen through a lens of inexperience. In one ad, for example, a boy under ten years old jumps from a high diving board. His age justifies his fear of an unfamiliar activity and supports the subjective nature of adversity and challenge. Essentially, the campaign's choice of subjects opens opportunities to magnify ordinary athletes' personal challenges and thus the value of their accomplishments.

Meanwhile, the choice of the location in which each ad is situated allowed Nike to cleverly allude to the Olympics and imply that achievement is accessible to all individuals, regardless of who they are or where they live. Each location has "London" in its name, and some ads let the audience know this. The long film that compiles clips from different places begins by showcasing the names of several locations, such as Jamaica's Little London (fig. 2) and Ohio's London Field (fig. 3). The connection to the Olympics' official venue already reflects Nike's goal to equalize professional and amateur athletes' achievements.



Fig. 2. Showcasing Little London, Jamaica (5:33) Fig. 3. Showcasing London Field in Ohio (5:39)

With the campaign featuring ordinary athletes, the campaign’s ethos depends on the subjects’ relatability. Unlike the professional athletes of Adidas’s *Take the Stage* campaign, the subjects of *Find Your Greatness* do not have the authority linked to being visibly accomplished in sport. Perhaps this is why *Find Your Greatness* heavily relies on pathos to persuade the audience that its subjects possess qualities embodied by professional athletes. Through filmic techniques, the campaign portrays ordinary athletes as individuals who completely immerse themselves in their chosen activity and persist in their endeavors.

Many ads, including “The Jogger,” use prolonged shots to allow the audience an undisturbed observation of the subjects’ physical activity, evoking appreciation for their effortful action. Ads with multiple shots usually cut on action for an illusion of continuity, maintaining the same effect when different shots or angles are used. Certain shots and angles are used to clearly display subjects’ pained or focused facial expressions and body language. We see this in the water polo ad, where a long shot from below a pool shows a player’s arms and legs thrashing in water (fig. 4). Later, a medium close-up shot shows her fiercely closed eyes and mouth underwater as she tries to break free of another

player's grip (fig. 5). Expressed through her facial expression and body language, her struggle frames her sport as a brutal test of strength.



Fig. 4. Below pool long shot, water polo ad (3:19) Fig. 5. Medium close-up shot of player (3:23)

We may also see pathos in the evocative language used by the campaign's two longer ads. In "The Jogger," the narrator says the following near the beginning of the ad: "Somehow we've come to believe that greatness is a gift. Reserved for the chosen few. For prodigies. For superstars." (0:16-0:26) The words "prodigies" and "superstars" connote a level of accomplishment that may be especially unimaginable for this ad's subject. The opposition to the idea of greatness's exclusivity among an elite group is more relieving as feelings of inadequacy are first prompted by the narrator's word choice.

Throughout the campaign, however, the main source of pathos is the consistent use of the word "greatness" or "great" in each ad. With outstanding individuals in not only sports but in many field being referred to as the "greats," these words are deeply associated with groundbreaking successes. The water polo ad embraces the weight of the word "greatness" with the narrator asking if it is "worth fighting for." (3:23-3:24) Accompanied by the visual, the dramatic phrasing encourages feelings of admiration for the female water polo player, who is characterized as a tenacious athlete. Although most ads treat the concept of greatness in a similarly serious manner, ads featuring leisure

activities invoke the enjoyment brought about by achievement. Addressing both its grueling and euphoric aspects allows the campaign to mirror the hardship and glory associated with professional athletes. Ordinary athletes and their accomplishments are thus presented as similarly commendable.

The campaign mainly uses voiceover narration to redefine or expand mainstream ideas regarding achievement. The voiceover usually introduces a view on greatness that may especially prevail during the Olympics then provides an alternative to this view. This was touched upon in the earlier discussion of voiceover narration in “The Jogger.” This order of presentation establishes the alternative as a critical response to the mainstream view and encourages the audience to accept the alternative. This structure suggests that the campaign embraces a challenging tone, but several ads are less insistent than others. The rest of the ads’ attempts to redefine greatness through the voiceover are more combative, while attempts to widen the scope of greatness adopt an air of suggestion rather than assertion.

Interestingly, a particular strategy was used for both purposes. We have the subversion of expectations in the ads which feature marathon running and strength training. In the marathon ad, the narrator asks questions related to a runner’s performance. Although each question presents specific options, implying that these are answers, the narrator follows them with only “Yes.” (3:12) The *non sequitur* opposes the act of limiting what achievement may mean, as implied by the close-ended questions. It registers as an empathetic affirmation of all options, all unique manifestations of greatness.



Fig. 6. Close-up shot of strength trainer and cast-iron weights (4:47)

The strength training ad, where a man lifts cast iron weights (fig. 6), adopts a more mocking tone in its rejection of public recognition as an indicator of achievement. The narrator reads, “Some measure greatness in precious metals, like iron.” (4:52-4:56) The audience would likely associate the phrase “precious metals” with gold and silver, expensive materials that are used for Olympic medals. Giving an inexpensive metal, which signifies the subject’s personal measure of improvement, as an example of a precious metal instead forces the audience to confront the superficiality of assessing achievements with external reward.

Most of the ads are still much more straightforward than those previously discussed. A few utilize anaphora and parallelism to equalize the endeavors of professional and amateur athletes, even when an ad’s subjects engage in leisure activities. This is consistent with the marathon ad’s acceptance of different forms of achievement. The baseball and boxing ads use the passive voice to present a mainstream view of greatness then use the active voice with the alternative view. They defiantly communicate a message of self-dependence related to that in the strength training ad. All these contribute to the campaign’s emphasis on the importance of subjective goals and de-emphasis of more rigid standards upheld by sports authorities.

The campaign ennobles self-satisfaction and agency, permitting the celebration of accomplishments that are realistic for ordinary athletes.

Starting with its *Just Do It* campaign, Nike as a brand has endorsed the idea that professional athletes are worthy of emulation by the ordinary person. The *Find Your Greatness* campaign, however, was a form of retaliation against Adidas, which unsurprisingly pushed the same narrative during the 2012 Summer Olympics (Adidas “Take The Stage” 0:00-1:00). Nike saw that abandoning its usual inspirational approach during an international sports event, a platform for cultural images of achievement, would distinguish its ambush marketing campaign and attract consumer interest. Nike’s *Find Your Greatness* campaign utilizes a range of visual and textual strategies to exhibit amateur athletes’ diligence and exercise of agency in journeys toward achievement. The campaign as a whole relies on the validation resulting from the positive representation of ordinary achievements and ultimately on its target consumer associating feelings of empowerment with Nike as a brand.

***[WORD COUNT: 1435]***

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