

Goals affect feelings of pride and shame

December 2 2013

When the St. Louis Cardinals lost the World Series, just how much shame did the players feel? According to researchers at Penn State and Australia's Central Queensland University, a person's goals at the outset of a competence-based task, such as a sporting event, can influence how much shame or pride he or she feels upon completion of the task.

"Our research suggests that when your goal is to outperform others, your feelings of pride will be amplified when you succeed," said Amanda Rebar, postdoctoral researcher, Central Queensland University, "but when your goal is to avoid being outperformed by others, your feelings of [shame](#) will be amplified when you fail."

The research team—which included David Conroy, professor of kinesiology, Penn State—recruited 58 undergraduate students to complete 24 rounds of the video game Tetris. The participants were instructed to earn as many points as possible. Before each round, one of four different criteria for earning a point was presented onscreen, the goal of which was to elicit different [achievement goals](#) among the participants. Immediately following each round, the researchers provided the participants with bogus feedback and the participants rated their shame and pride.

"Our results suggest that a person's motivation and purpose regarding a task—whether that task is a [video game](#), a race or an academic exam—impacts the amount of pride or shame he or she will experience in response to success or failure," Conroy said. "And the amount of [pride](#) or shame a person feels can influence whether he or she will persist in

the task or drop out."

The results appeared in the November 2013 issue of the journal *Sport, Exercise and Performance Psychology*.

According to the researchers, it isn't necessarily a bad thing for people to focus on their performances relative to others.

"Pride is known to invoke a boost of confidence, persistence, and problem-solving ability, which can help people perform at their best," Rebar said.

But shame, on the other hand, can cause problems.

"If a baseball player is the first to strike out in a game, his shame may cause him to become distracted or to worry too much about his precise movements, both of which can hurt his performance," she said.

"Our advice is for people to focus on what they can achieve rather than on what they can lose," Conroy said. "It may be particularly helpful if coaches and teachers understand these results so they can help influence their athletes' and students' achievement goals so as to minimize feelings that can hurt performance."

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

Citation: Goals affect feelings of pride and shame (2013, December 2) retrieved 27 February 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-12-goals-affect-pride-shame.html>

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