

Group bragging betrays insecurity, study shows

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From partisans at a political rally to fans at a football game, groups that engage in pompous displays of collective pride may be trying to mask insecurity and a low social status, suggests new research led by University of California, Davis, psychologists.

The research will be presented Thursday at the annual meeting of the Society for Experimental Social Psychology in Sacramento. Hosted this year by the UC Davis Department of Psychology, the three-day meeting will bring together about 250 research psychologists from around the world. The meeting is open to the media.

"Our results suggest that hubristic, pompous displays of group pride might actually be a sign of group insecurity as opposed to a sign of strength," says Cynthia Pickett, associate professor of psychology at UC Davis and one of only a few research psychologists to have studied collective pride.

Pickett and her co-investigators found that groups that boast, gloat and denigrate outsiders tend to be of low social status or vulnerable to threats from other groups. In contrast, those that express pride by humbly focusing on members' efforts and hard work tend to have high social standing.

Pickett will talk about how the new findings can be used to better understand this summer's Democrat and Republican political conventions. She will also talk about what she learned from interviews

with UC Davis undergraduates following the university's first-ever football victory over Stanford in 2005.

Pickett's co-investigators included UC Davis psychology professor Richard Robins and University of British Columbia psychologist Jessica Tracy. Robins and Tracy, a former UC Davis doctoral student, were the first social scientists to observe that in individuals, the emotion of pride has a distinct nonverbal expression that is unlike body language used to express other positive emotions such as happiness and excitement. Those findings, first reported in a 2004 article in *Psychological Science*, were cited during the Beijing Olympics earlier this year by observers commenting on the body language of Michael Phelps and other triumphant athletes.

Source: University of California - Davis

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