

Thrill of victory: Success among many feels better

June 19 2013



(Medical Xpress)—Success feels good, but it is better when people win in big groups—even if the chance of success is the same, a new University of Michigan report indicates.

Researchers found that people feel happier and more satisfied if their accomplishment is against competitors in larger groups than identical success among smaller groups.

"Success among larger [pools](#) is associated with more positive [emotional reactions](#) because people perceive the performance as more indicative of real [superiority](#)," said Ed O'Brien, the study's lead author and a U-M doctoral student in [social psychology](#).

In other words, the win against many competitors represents their "true" abilities, not an outcome that might be described as a "fluke" with fewer individuals seeking [victory](#), O'Brien said.

O'Brien and Linda Hagen, a doctoral student in marketing at U-M's Ross School of Business, conducted five studies to understand people's reaction to victories depending on the number of competitors in different scenarios, holding constant the chance of success.

In one experiment, participants read about a runner who placed in the top 10 percent of a [race](#) with few (20) or many (20,000) competitors, and estimated how happy he felt. They also rated how prestigious they thought the race was. The results indicated that participants thought the runner would be happier placing among the top 10 percent in a race with many [runners](#), as well as consider it a prestigious race compared with the smaller event.

Using the same race example, another experiment asked participants to rate what they thought the runner would infer about his true running abilities after the victory and winning future races. The participants thought the runner's victory against many people was significantly representative of his real running abilities and future success than the same win versus fewer people.

"These findings suggest people have an intuitive understanding of what's called the law of large numbers," Hagen said. "They realize that large competitive pools contain a wider, better range of talent. Winning in large competitions thus seems like a more definitive victory, even

though chance of success doesn't actually change—and that provides the emotional boost."

The findings appear in the current issue of *Emotion*.

More information: [psycnet.apa.org/index.cfm?fa=s ...
ID=1&page=1&dbTab=PA](https://psycnet.apa.org/index.cfm?fa=s...ID=1&page=1&dbTab=PA)

Provided by University of Michigan

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