

Positive memories, attachments can stifle hatred of rivals

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University of Michigan vs Ohio State University on November 30, 2013. Credit: MGoBlog

This is Rivalry Week—and nothing gets football fans nationwide more riled up than trying to beat their long-time foes for bragging rights.

Whether it's Alabama vs. Auburn, USC vs. UCLA or the University of Michigan vs. the "team down south" (Ohio State University), fans typically perceive their rivals as "outsiders" who are threatening to "our group," new research shows.

But when people recall positive memories about a close connection and attachment with someone, such as a friend or spouse, the negative emotions and aggressive behaviors about the rivals lessens, according to a study by Muniba Saleem, U-M assistant professor of communication studies and faculty associate at the Institute for Social Research—and an OSU alum.

The research involved several studies that tested the effects of attachment on negative emotions and aggressive behaviors toward members of a different group. This outgroup isn't limited to sports or collegiate ties. In fact, group identity can be based on religion, ethnicity, gender or politics.

One study involved 278 U-M students who could give a difficult task to their OSU counterparts. U-M students were asked to visualize a person "who accepts and loves you and helps you in times of need." Other participants were asked about a person "who lives in your neighborhood, but you do not know well."

Participants then could assign 11 puzzles ranging in difficulty to OSU students, who could hypothetically win a \$25 gift card if they completed the assigned puzzles within 10 minutes. U-M students who thought about one of their close relationships were less likely to assign difficult puzzles to the OSU student, the study showed.

The findings also indicated that U-M males, compared to their female counterparts, had higher negative emotions toward OSU sports fans. Saleem said freshmen and sophomores in the study were likely to feel

highly attached and identified with their universities, which meant a perceived greater threat from rival schools.

Saleem noted that thinking of a secure attachment reduced both negative emotions and beliefs, but only [negative emotions](#) predicted a lower desire to harm the outgroup. The study tested short-term priming effects and researchers noted that future studies are needed to test for long-term consequences.

The study, which appears in the journal *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, included researchers Sara Prot, Ben Lam and Craig Anderson, all from Iowa State University; Mina Cikara of Harvard University; and Margareta Jelic of the University of Zagreb in Croatia.

And, If there's any doubt about the intensity of the U-M and OSU rivalry: Go Blue!

More information: M. Saleem et al. Cutting Gordian Knots: Reducing Prejudice Through Attachment Security, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* (2015). [DOI: 10.1177/0146167215601829](https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167215601829)

Provided by University of Michigan

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