

# All bets are off: Office pools lead to unhappiness

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Office pools for the NCAA basketball tournament or Oscar contests are fun, right? Not according to the *Journal of Consumer Research*. A recent study suggests that betting on the outcome actually reduces people's enjoyment of the events. Authors Naomi Mandel and Stephen M. Nowlis (Arizona State University) explore this phenomenon, and why these contests are so common.

"Nobody likes to be wrong. Once a person has committed to a predicted outcome, he's set himself up for the possibility of looking like a fool. In other words, the fear of losing [known as] 'anticipated regret' may actually feel worse than losing itself." Peoples' worry about losing the bet tends to spoil the event for them.

The study was inspired by the researchers' experience of participating in an office pool related to the CBS television show " Survivor." They noticed officemates' increased stress after locking in predictions about the show. They designed a series of experiments where they asked participants to predict or not predict the outcome of game shows and marble games.

How does the unhappiness associated with betting coexist with the growing popularity of office pools and tournament prediction contests? The researchers found that participants expected that betting on events would enhance their viewing experience, though the actual effects were the opposite.

"In a wide range of studies, people have been shown to be poor predictors of their own enjoyment and happiness," write the authors. "Our results imply that a consumer playing roulette might actually enjoy that gamble more if the 'house' rather than the consumer chooses the number to be played."

Source: University of Chicago

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