

Galas & Gatherings

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SPORTS

their onanistic responses to victory. To live here is to be continually reminded how much of the baseball cake Cubs fans want to both have and eat—and worse, to see that many of these people appear to not even really enjoy cake! And use cake as an excuse to skip work and get drunk in the sun! And oh God what a cute little baby *bear* you've got there...

...Do you see?

These are friends and neighbors who hold doors, strangers at whom I smile while our dogs meet and play. People I would hope to respect and connect with, and certainly not feel morose delectation in their pain. Because make no mistake, I've reveled in all Cubs defeat, regardless of divisional standings. I want, it seems, for these people to suffer.

The similarities between us could well be part of the problem. As my historian friend describes it, "Chicago and St. Louis are two sides of the same coin: They sit at opposite ends of a more-or-less coherent cultural unit." Cubs and Cardinals fans reciprocally share a high degree of what neuroscientists call "high self-relevance of the comparison domain." In this case, there are essentially two ways my brain can respond to the Cubs. The first, which we've covered, is called *schadenfreude*, the sick habit of deriving joy from the pain of others. When I raise a toast to another Cubby loss, my ventral striatum is firing on all cylinders. But *schadenfreude*, a recent study finds, occurs most often as a kind of corrective process, a pleasurable sensation we produce to undo the emotion that corresponds to activity in the brain's dorsal anterior cingulate cortex. This negative emotion is envy.

Envy, oxygen to *schadenfreude*'s flame. Envy, the true cause of laughter and sick joy, jokes, derision, and my entire personal essence as a Cardinals fan in Chicago.

Exactly the kind of answer that'll stop a man from asking questions.

In January, only the outer halves of the sidewalks lining the Wrigley Field corner of Waveland and Sheffield avenues are covered in snow. The Bud Light bleachers, added before the 2006 season, jut out from the original wall in tasteful augmentation. The neighborhood trees, barren and spidery, whip about in the brutally cold wind.