

Pride

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Pride is a “self-conscious” emotion that fuels many of our most meaningful achievements, both quotidian and life-changing. Like all self-conscious emotions, pride is experienced when individuals direct their attention inward and make a self-evaluation. As a positive emotion, pride occurs when these self-evaluations result in positive views of the self; that is, when individuals realize that their current self-representations fit with their goals for their identity—the kind of person they want to be. Thus, students experience pride after receiving a good grade, children after succeeding at a new task, and adolescents after finding a mate. Adults feel pride in response to a promotion at work, their child’s first steps, or their partner’s love. Indeed, pride seems to fuel several fundamental human pursuits: the desire to achieve, to attain power and status, to meet an attractive and intelligent romantic partner, to feel good about one’s self and one’s social group, and to raise successful and well-behaved children.

A COMPLEX EMOTION THAT IS “PLAINLY EXPRESSED”

One of the major findings in the social sciences is that a small set of “basic” emotions (anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, and surprise) have distinct, universally recognized, nonverbal expressions (Ekman, 1992). Although the more complex self-conscious emotions (e.g., pride, shame, guilt) have historically been omitted from this elite set, Darwin himself suggested that, “of all the . . . complex emotions, pride, perhaps, is the most plainly expressed...A proud man exhibits his superiority over others by holding his head and body erect. He... makes himself appear as large as possible; so that metaphorically he is said to be swollen or puffed up with pride” (1872, p. 263). Consistent with Darwin’s claim, recent studies suggest that pride is, in fact, associated with a universal nonverbal expression (see Tracy & Robins, 2007, for a review). The prototypical pride expression includes a small smile, expanded posture, head tilted slightly back, and arms akimbo with hands on hips or raised above the head with

clenched fists (see Figure 1). This expression is reliably recognized and distinguished from similar emotions (e.g., happiness) by adults from several cultures and children as young as 4 years-old. In fact, individuals from a highly isolated, preliterate society in Burkina Faso, West Africa, have been shown to reliably recognize the pride expression. Given that these individuals are unlikely to have learned about pride through exposure to Western media, their recognition suggests that the expression may be a human universal.

Other studies suggest that the recognizable pride expression is also spontaneously displayed when individuals experience pride. Children show it after successful task completion (e.g., Stipek et al., 1992), and athletes from a wide range of cultures show it after victory in the Olympic Games (see Tracy & Robins, 2007). Furthermore, blind athletes—including congenitally blind individuals who could not have learned the expression from seeing others show it—display pride in these same situations, suggesting that the pride expression may be a biologically innate behavioral response to success.

Together, these findings are consistent with the view that the pride expression is an evolved adaptation for securing and promoting social status and group inclusion. That is, individuals who show pride after success inform others that they merit increased status and group acceptance. In fact, studies have found that the pride expression implicitly signals high status, and that pride is the only emotion that conveys this message (Shariff & Tracy, 2008). Thus, the reason for the pride expression's ubiquity across cultures, its high level of recognizability, and its apparent innateness in the behavioral repertoire, may be that it has come to serve an essential function in human social groups: proud individuals are automatically perceived as deserving high status—and may be granted status on this basis.

A TALE OF TWO PRIDES

Much as the pride nonverbal expression may be an evolved adaptation, the subjective emotional experience associated with pride also may fit within a Darwinian framework. Specifically, pride feelings may inform proud individuals of their increased level of status and acceptance (e.g., “I feel proud; I must have accomplished something that will make others like and respect me”). Such knowledge may, in turn, allow individuals to take advantage of the status boost their success has bought them. In addition, pride feelings function to reinforce and motivate the socially valued behaviors which elicited the emotion. We strive to achieve, to be a “good person,” or to treat others well because doing so makes us proud of ourselves. Although we know cognitively that we should help others in need, it often takes the psychological force of an emotion like pride to make us act in altruistic ways. Individuals who perform such socially valued acts are, in turn, rewarded with social status and acceptance (Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006).

Yet, the pride experience is not a purely positive one. Ancient Greek and biblical thought condemned excessive pride or “hubris”, and Dante referred to it as the deadliest of the Seven Deadly Sins. In contrast, Western cultures tend to view pride as a virtue to be sought and rewarded. Reflecting these divergent perspectives, pride has been linked to both adaptive and maladaptive outcomes. Although pride in one’s success promotes continued achievement-oriented behaviors, narcissistic pride may contribute to aggression, hostility, and interpersonal problems. In fact, several lines of research suggest that there are two conceptually and empirically distinct facets of pride: “authentic” and “hubristic” (Tracy & Robins, 2007).

Specifically, studies show that when asked to think about words relevant to pride, individuals consistently generate two very different categories of concepts. The first category (authentic pride) includes words such as “accomplished” and “confident,” whereas the second category (hubristic pride) includes words such as “arrogant” and “conceited.” Similarly, analyses

of the feelings experienced in response to success demonstrate two relatively independent dimensions, which closely parallel the two semantic categories. Other studies suggest that these two dimensions of authentic and hubristic pride have highly divergent effects on personality, with authentic pride positively related to adaptive traits like extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and genuine self-esteem; whereas hubristic pride is more predictive of self-aggrandizing narcissism, aggression, and shame-proneness. Finally, the dimensions also seem to have distinct cognitive antecedents. Attributing successes to internal, unstable (i.e., malleable), and controllable causes (e.g., one's own effort) tends to promote authentic pride, whereas attributing the same events to internal but stable (i.e., permanent) and uncontrollable causes (e.g., one's ability) is more likely to promote hubristic pride. Importantly, the two dimensions of pride are not distinguished by the kinds of events that elicit them; each occurs after successes in various domains (e.g., academics, romantic relationships). Rather, it is the way in which those successes are appraised—for example, whether they are attributed to stable versus unstable causes—that plays a role in determining which facet of pride is likely to occur.

One question this research raises is whether the two prides are, in fact, distinct emotions. In contrast to their divergent cognitive antecedents and personality correlates, they are both reliably associated with the *same* nonverbal expression, suggesting that, at least from a behavioral perspective, there is only one pride. However, this raises a perplexing question: if pride evolved to promote social status, why does it have a dark (i.e., hubristic) side?

One possibility is that the two dimensions evolved to solve unique adaptive problems regarding the acquisition of status. Recent studies suggest that authentic pride underlies the attainment of *prestige*, a form of high status that is granted on the basis of others' respect and desire to learn from the high-status individual. In contrast, hubristic pride seems to underlie the

attainment of *dominance*, a form of high status granted on the basis of intimidation, and others' fear of the high-status individual (Tracy, Cheng, & Shariff, 2008). Both forms of high status provide adaptive benefits, though dominance may have done so for a considerably longer time period in our evolutionary history (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001). In contemporary society, personality differences and situational contingencies likely determine whether a status-seeking individual makes the appraisals that lead to authentic pride and prestige, or those that lead to hubristic pride and dominance.

CONCLUSION

Over a century ago, Darwin (1872) included pride within his evolutionary model of emotions and emotion expressions. Empirical findings now support Darwin's view, and demonstrate the significance of pride to research in social, personality, clinical, comparative, cultural, developmental, and biological psychology. Specifically, pride appears to be a core social emotion, central to the human need for status and acceptance.

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Suggested Readings

Tracy, J. L., & Robins, R. W. (2008). The nonverbal expression of pride: Evidence for cross-cultural recognition. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 94*, 516-530.

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Key Words

Pride, self-conscious emotion, nonverbal expression, adaptation, social-status

Figure Caption

Figure 1

Prototypical pride expressions. Expression A is slightly better recognized than Expression B, but both are reliably identified as pride. Reprinted from Tracy, J. L., & Robins, R. W. (2004). Show your pride: Evidence for a discrete emotion expression. *Psychological Science, 15*, 194-197.

Figure 1



Expression A



Expression B