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Does Pride Belong in the Pantheon?

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In 1872, Darwin speculated that every emotion is associated with a distinct, universally recognized expression, and added, "Of all the…complex emotions, pride, perhaps, is the most plainly expressed" (p. 263). Despite this claim, pride has yet to be accepted into the pantheon of six or seven "basic" emotions believed to have distinct, universally recognized, nonverbal expressions (Ekman, 1992). In fact, researchers have speculated that all positive emotions (including pride) might share a single expression (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2001). Our recent research challenges this assumption and suggests that Darwin might have been right—pride does have a distinct, recognizable expression (Tracy & Robins, in press-a).

In this article, we first summarize and discuss our research on pride, and then turn to the broader question of how to best conceptualize this emotion.

Evidence for a Nonverbal Expression of Pride

Over the past several years, we have conducted a series of studies testing whether pride has a distinct nonverbal expression. As a starting point, we reviewed the development literature on children's nonverbal reactions to success, and identified several possible features of the pride expression. We then asked individuals to pose this expression and set out to determine whether others would recognize it as pride. Following the standard procedures developed initially by Ekman, Sorenson, and Friesen (1969) and refined over the past few decades (e.g., Frank & Stennett, 2001; Russell, 1994), we found that participants can recognize pride and distinguish it from other emotions including anger, contempt, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, and surprise (Tracy & Robins, in press-a).

These initial studies provided a general picture of the pride expression, but we wanted to refine our understanding of the signal's components. To that end, we next manipulated several

specific facial and bodily features of the expression, including smile (large, vs. small, vs. none), head tilt (20 degrees, vs.10 degrees, vs. 0 degrees back), posture (expanded vs. relaxed), and arm position (raised above the head, vs. relaxed at sides, vs. hands on hips). We found that the best-recognized pride expression includes a small smile, head titled slightly (10 degrees) back, expanded posture, and arms either raised above the head or with the hands placed on the hips. These findings provide the basis for coding pride from nonverbal behavior.

Thus, like the current set of basic emotion expressions, the pride expression is an efficient signal that can be conveyed from a single snapshot image. However, in contrast to the other basic emotions, pride cannot be recognized from the face alone—without the appropriate posture and arm position, recognition rates were not above chance. Importantly, though, pride also cannot not be recognized from bodily components alone (i.e., when the face shows a neutral expression).

Having established the existence of a recognizable pride expression, we next wanted to address the question of whether this expression is universal. It is possible, after all, that the signal we found is a socialized gesture, developed to convey a culturally specific message (much like the thumbs-up sign). In a preliminary study addressing this issue (Tracy & Robins, in press-b), we found that individuals born, raised, and living in Italy could recognize the pride expression at rates comparable to those from the U.S. (see Figure 1). However, given that most Italians have been exposed to American media, the conclusions one can draw from this finding are somewhat limited. Thus, we are currently testing whether individuals in a remote village in Burkina Faso, Africa, can recognize pride; these individuals are non-literate, speak only a native African language, and have little or no contact with Western culture and media.

If it turns out that pride has a universally recognizable expression, then it is likely that this expression evolved to serve a distinct communicative function. Given that pride occurs in

response to an individual's success, the pride expression may be nature's built-in advertisement mechanism: those who feel pride show it, conveying their success to others and thereby promoting their own social status. Indeed, we might even surmise that the expression evolved from dominance signals in non-human primates; de Waal (1989) has noted that dominant chimpanzees appear large and walk with a "cocky," expansive gait, which may resemble the expanded posture in the pride expression.

We also suspect that pride has adaptive functions separate from those related to its expression. Specifically, pleasurable pride feelings may reinforce the socially valued behaviors that generated the emotion (e.g., achievement, care-giving, altruism). This fits with Leary, Tambor, Terdal, and Downs's (1995) argument that self-esteem evolved as a social barometer, informing individuals of the extent to which they are accepted. Pride may be the affective mechanism through which individuals acquire higher self-esteem following a socially valued success. Thus, the interpersonal and intrapsychic signals associated with pride may serve complementary adaptive functions—alerting the social group that the individual merits increased acceptance and status, and alerting the individual that he or she is not in danger of group rejection.

How Should We Conceptualize Pride?

The fact that individuals agree that a particular nonverbal expression is related to pride does not mean that these individuals agree about what pride is. Different individuals, and indeed different researchers, are likely to conceptualize pride in distinct ways. Drawing on ideas from appraisal theories of emotion, we have argued that pride is elicited when individuals (a) direct attentional focus toward the self; (b) appraise an event as relevant to and congruent with their identity goals; and (c) attribute the cause of the event to internal factors (Tracy & Robins, 2003-

a). Following the suggestion that pride may not be a single, unified construct (Ekman, 2003; Lewis, 2000), we have further hypothesized that two variants of pride might be elicited by two kinds of internal attributions. Global pride in the self ("I'm proud of who I am"), labeled "hubris" by Lewis (2000), may result from attributions to internal, global, stable causes ("I won because I'm always great at everything"). In contrast, achievement-oriented pride ("I'm proud of what I did") may result from attributions to internal, specific, unstable causes ("I won because I practiced before the game"). Supporting this distinction, we found that individuals instructed to attribute a hypothetical success to their ability (global, stable cause) were more likely to report feelings of superiority (i.e., hubristic pride) than were those who attributed the same success to their effort (specific, unstable cause; Tracy & Robins, 2003-b).

Also consistent with this idea is evidence that the same emotion (pride) can lead to highly divergent interpersonal outcomes. On the one hand, narcissistic hubris may contribute to aggression, hostility, relationship problems, and a host of other self-destructive behaviors (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). On the other hand, pride in one's achievements may promote positive task-oriented behaviors and contribute to pro-social investments and the development of a genuine and deep-rooted sense of self-esteem.

From a psychodynamic perspective, narcissistic pride is viewed as the outcome of a regulatory process through which low self-esteem is transformed into false, exaggerated pride and arrogance (Kernberg, 1975; Kohut, 1977). More specifically, hubristic pride may be the direct result of one form of shame regulation (Tracy & Robins, in press-c). In this view, the narcissist inhibits feelings of shame by externalizing blame and developing a dissociated, globally positive and idealized explicit self who can do no wrong. Successes are attributed to this positive self through global, stable attributions, with no distinction made between a good thing

done and the good self doing it. Thus, hubris may be a unique variant of pride, caused by a self-regulatory attributional process orchestrated to avoid shame.

However, a second way to reconcile the divergent outcomes of pride, without postulating the existence of two variants of the emotion, is to distinguish between state and trait pride. It is conceivable that, as a state, pride is a positive, achievement-oriented, pro-social response; but as a trait-like disposition it produces conceit, arrogance, and other negative outcomes. Consistent with this distinction, we recently analyzed the semantic similarity among words generated from an open-ended study assessing recognition of the pride expression, and found two distinct clusters of words related to pride. Words in the first set included "triumphant" and "achieving" (state words related to achievement-oriented pride), and words in the second set included "haughty," "egotistic," and "arrogant" (trait words related to hubristic pride). Furthermore, these same clusters emerged when we analyzed the semantic similarity among words generated by a request to complete the sentence: “Pride is:_____”. Further research is needed to clarify whether there really are two distinct forms of pride, or whether pride might be interpersonally adaptive if experienced as an on-line state, but interpersonally damaging if experienced chronically as a stable trait.

Conclusion

Research to date suggests that pride has a recognizable expression and important social and intrapsychic consequences. Although it seems to meet a central criterion for basic emotions, further research must address its universality, test whether it serves adaptive functions, and explore its multifaceted nature. We hope that our findings point to the potential importance of pride, provide a new methodology for studying it (through behavioral coding of its expression), and hint at its place in the pantheon.

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Figure 1. Emotion-recognition rates in Italy (N = 28) and the U.S. (N = 75), averaged across several targets and photos.