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Pride: The Emotional Origin of Success and Social Rank

Jessica L. Tracy

Aaron C. Weidman

University of British Columbia

Please address correspondence to:

Jessica L. Tracy  
Department of Psychology  
University of British Columbia  
2136 West Mall  
Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z4  
P: 604-822-2718  
F: 604-822-6923  
E: [jltracy@psych.ubc.ca](mailto:jltracy@psych.ubc.ca)

Pride has received a great of psychological research attention in recent years. Although prior to 1990 psychologists paid little attention to pride, it is now considered a major topic of empirical inquiry; an average of 45 articles with the keyword *pride* were published each year from 2010-2016, according to a *PsycInfo* search. This surge likely reflects a growing acceptance of pride as: (a) an evolved part of human nature, (b) distinct from other positive emotions, and (c) functional primarily in the social, interpersonal domain. In this review, we first discuss philosophical and psychological conceptualizations of pride, and how these conceptions are consistent with research findings on the psychological structure of pride. Next, we review research showing that pride, like other evolved emotions, is associated with a distinct, universally recognized nonverbal expression. Consistent with this evolutionary approach, we next review findings on the development and neuroscience of pride, as well as how pride is linked to mental health, and then discuss emerging work addressing the question of why pride evolved and what functions it serves. A comprehensive review of the psychological research literature on pride is beyond the scope of this chapter, so we instead focus on these primary lines of inquiry. For a broader review, we encourage interested readers to see Tracy, Weidman, Cheng, and Martens (2014), or Tracy (2016).

### **What is Pride?**

For over a millennium scholars have noted that pride is different from many other emotions, in that it has a dual-faceted nature. Its dark or “sinful” side has been cautioned against by religious scholars and philosophers ranging from Dante and Thomas Aquinas to Lao Tzu and the Dalai Lama; in fact, almost all early conceptualizations of pride emphasized its overweening or self-aggrandizing side, and the tendency of proud individuals to be arrogant, selfish, and unempathic (see Tracy, Shariff, & Cheng, 2010). One exception, however, was Aristotle, who

argued that pride is not necessarily a sin, but if accurately reflective of one's abilities could in fact be a virtue to be celebrated, far preferable to false modesty. Later philosophical accounts began to make a distinction between two forms of pride; Rousseau, for example, differentiated *amour propre* from *amour de soi*—with only the former referring to vanity (see Tracy, 2016).

Partly on the basis of these accounts, emotion researchers have postulated two distinct components of the emotion, which have been labeled “authentic” and “hubristic” pride (Lewis, 2000; Tracy & Robins, 2004a; Tangney et al., 1989). Several lines of empirical research support this view (Tracy & Robins, 2007a). When asked to think about words relevant to pride, individuals consistently generate two very different categories of concepts, which empirically form two separate clusters of semantic meaning. The first (authentic pride) includes words such as “accomplished” and “confident,” and suggests a pro-social, achievement-oriented conceptualization. The second cluster (hubristic pride) includes words such as “arrogant” and “conceited,” and represents the more self-aggrandizing, egotistical conceptualization. In addition, studies assessing individuals' subjective feelings during actual pride experiences have replicated this pattern; factor analyses of participants' pride ratings consistently reveal two relatively independent factors, which closely parallel the two semantic clusters. Subsequent analyses have demonstrated that the two factors are not artifacts of a tendency to group together good vs. bad, activated vs. deactivated, or trait vs. state words (Tracy & Robins, 2007a).

These results—both on pride's conceptual structure and its experiential structure—were first observed in U.S. samples but have been replicated in Mainland China and South Korea, using both indigenously derived pride-related words (in Chinese and Korean) and translated versions of English words (Shi, Chung, Cheng, Tracy, Robins, Chen, & Zheng, 2015). These cross-cultural findings suggest that the two-facet structure of pride is not unique to Western culture.

Studies examining the personality correlates of pride have demonstrated that the two facets diverge in a number of ways. Authentic pride is positively related to the socially desirable and generally adaptive traits of Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, and Openness to Experience, whereas hubristic pride is negatively related to the two pro-social traits of Agreeableness and Conscientiousness (Tracy & Robins, 2007a). Authentic pride is also positively related to both explicit and implicit self-esteem, whereas hubristic pride is negatively related to self-esteem, yet positively to narcissism and shame-proneness (Tracy, Cheng, Robins, & Trzesniewski, 2009). The facets also differ in their links to a range of social behaviors and mental health outcomes; essentially, each pride facet seems to underlie a different way of engaging with the social world and approaching one's goals. Individuals high in dispositional authentic pride tend to be low in depression, trait anxiety, social phobia, aggression, hostility, and rejection sensitivity; and high life satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, dyadic adjustment, and social support. In contrast, individuals high in dispositional hubristic pride are more likely to experience anxiety, engage in aggression, hostility, and a range of other anti-social misbehaviors, and report lower dyadic adjustment and social support (Tracy et al., 2009). Furthermore, although both facets are positively related to an approach orientation, individuals high in authentic pride vigorously engage in their life goals and put failures in perspective, whereas individuals high in hubristic pride tend to set unrealistically high goals for fame and success, and interpret any positive event as indicative of their own greatness (Carver, Sinclair, & Johnson, 2010).

Consistent with these distinct approaches to interpreting one's achievements, several studies suggest that the two pride facets are elicited by distinct cognitive appraisals. Pride occurs when individuals appraise a positive event as relevant to their identity and their identity goals, and as internally caused (Lewis, 2000; Tracy & Robins, 2004a; Weiner, 1985). Yet authentic and

hubristic pride may be further distinguished by subsequent attributions; authentic pride seems to result from attributions to internal but unstable and controllable causes, such as effort, whereas hubristic pride is more likely to occur from attributions to internal but stable and uncontrollable causes, such as ability (Tracy & Robins, 2007a).

### **Nonverbal Expression**

One of the most prominent criteria used to determine whether an emotion is likely to be evolved is whether it has a distinct, cross-culturally recognized nonverbal expression. Numerous studies provide strong evidence for a reliably recognized, cross-cultural pride expression (see Tracy & Robins, 2004b, 2007b), which includes the body (i.e., expanded posture, head tilted slightly back, arms akimbo with hands on hips or raised above the head with hands in fists) as well as the face (i.e., small smile), and is recognized and distinguished from similar emotions by individuals across cultures, including those living in largely preliterate traditional small-scale societies (Tracy & Robins, 2008; Tracy, Shariff, Zhao, & Henrich, 2013). Pride-recognition rates in educated U.S. samples typically range around 80-90%, comparable to rates found for other evolved emotion expressions (e.g., anger, sadness).

Equally important, the recognizable pride expression is also spontaneously *displayed* in pride-eliciting situations, by successful children as young as 3-years-old (Lewis, Alessandri, & Sullivan, 1992; Stipek, Recchia, & McClintic, 1992), high school students who have performed well on a class exam (Weisfeld & Beresford, 1982), and victorious adult Olympic athletes from a wide range of cultures, as well as congenitally blind athletes across cultures who could not have learned to display pride through visual modeling (Tracy & Matsumoto, 2008). Together, these findings suggest that the pride expression is likely to be a universal and innate behavioral response to success; it is unlikely that the expression would be recognized so consistently and robustly by individuals who could not have learned it through cross-cultural transmission (i.e.,

films, television, magazines), or be reliably displayed in pride-eliciting situations by individuals who have never seen others display it, if it were not part of human nature.

An important outstanding question for pride expression research is whether each facet of pride is associated with a distinct nonverbal expression. Thus far, all recognizable variants of the pride expression that have been examined have been found to be identified as authentic and hubristic pride at relatively equal rates (Tracy & Robins, 2007b), suggesting that the same expression conveys both facets. However, other studies suggest that observers can distinguish displays of the two facets if contextual information is provided (e.g., an expresser's apparent arrogance, or attribution of success to effort vs. ability; Lange & Crusius, 2015; Tracy & Prehn, 2012), or if perceivers are shown videos of displayers instructed to enact a dynamic version of each pride facet (Lange & Crusius, 2015; Russell & Nelson, 2014).

### **Development**

Pride is first experienced later in the course of development than more basic emotions like fear and joy—around 3 years of age (Lewis et al., 1992; Stipek et al., 1992). Behavioral components of the pride expression and verbal indicators of pride tend to be displayed by children who have reached 2.5-3 years, but not by younger children, and not in shame-inducing (i.e., failure) situations or easy success conditions.

The capacity to understand pride emerges somewhat later than its (assumed) experience. The earliest-emerging understanding is the ability to recognize the pride expression, which first appears at age 4 (Tracy, Robins, & Lagattuta, 2005)—the same age at which children begin to show accurate recognition of most other expressions. Recognition of dynamic displays of both authentic and hubristic pride has been shown to emerge by age 6 (Nelson & Russell, 2015). In contrast, the ability to understand the situations and contexts in which pride is elicited develops considerably later. Seven-year olds have difficulty understanding that pride should be attributed

to individuals whose success is due to internal but not external factors; however, by age 9 or 10, children can make the appropriate attributional distinctions, and grant pride only to individuals who are the cause of their own success (see Tracy et al., 2014, for a review).

This developmental trajectory is consistent with the assumption that certain cognitive capacities are pre-requisites for the experience of pride (and all self-conscious emotions): self-awareness, stable self-representations, comparisons between one's own behavior and external standards, and internal attributions. By age 3, children demonstrate early-emerging components of self-awareness and begin to display pride behavioral responses to success (Lewis et al., 1992), but cannot yet identify pride in others (Tracy et al., 2005). The development of a full understanding of the situations and attributions that elicit pride and distinguish it from happiness seems to coincide with the achievement of a global sense of self and self-esteem.

Moving beyond early childhood, one study used a cross-sectional approach to delineate a portrait of normative shifts in authentic and hubristic pride across the lifespan (Orth et al., 2010). Authentic pride increased fairly continuously from adolescence to old age, in a trend that paralleled overall well-being. In contrast, hubristic pride peaked in adolescence and young adulthood, declined throughout adulthood until about age 65, and was stable in old age.

## **Neuroscience**

Several studies have begun to examine the brain structures and neurochemicals that may be involved in pride experiences. In one fMRI study on pride experiences, greater brain activation was found in the posterior superior temporal sulcus and left temporal lobe—two regions thought to be involved in theory of mind—when participants imagined themselves in pride-eliciting scenarios, compared to when they imagined themselves in neutral scenarios (Takahashi et al., 2008). Although theory of mind may be an important cognitive pre-requisite for pride (self-evaluations require the understanding that others can evaluate the self), these

researchers had expected to find greater medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC) activation, given that the mPFC promotes the ability to represent others' perspective, including their positive evaluations of the self. A more recent study found that participants manipulated to feel pride (or a neutral control) showed greater activation in the posterior medial cortex, a region involved in self-referential processing (Simon-Thomas et al., 2012); notably, these authors also found no differences between pride and neutral conditions in mPFC activation.

Additionally, recent work provided the first evidence that authentic and hubristic pride may be associated with distinct patterns of neural activation. Kong and colleagues (in press) examined the association between trait authentic and hubristic pride and fractional amplitude of low-frequency fluctuations, a measure of brain activity during resting state. Authentic pride positively predicted bilateral activation in the superior temporal gyrus, a region implicated in self-recognition and autobiographical memory. In contrast, hubristic pride positively predicted activation in the left orbitofrontal cortex—a region implicated in low well-being and affective disorders—and negatively predicted activation in the posterior cingulate cortex, a region implicated in goal-directed cognition and reward monitoring. Together, these findings suggest that authentic pride may involve brain activation involved in self-reflection and memories of self-relevant experiences, whereas hubristic pride involves activation associated with emotional deregulation and unrealistic goal setting. However, these findings need to be replicated, ideally in studies that compare activation during pride to other similar emotional states, to control for shared variance in positivity or reward.

Other studies examining the physiological correlates of pride have identified an apparently distinct pattern of cardiac activity. Positive feedback on a lab task (assumed to induce pride) led to moderate increases in skin conductance and heart rate, as well as shifts in heart rate variability, indicative of the sympathetic nervous system preparing for controlled action (Fourie,



Rauch, Morgan, Ellis, Jordaan, & Thomas, 2011). However, another study that compared cardiac arousal levels following pride, anger, and shame inductions found lower arousal for pride compared to the negative emotions (Herrald & Tomaka, 2002). Together, these findings may suggest that pride promotes moderate, rather than large, physiological changes, which help prepare the body for action.

### **Mental Health**

Consistent with the findings reviewed above suggesting that authentic pride is linked to well-being, studies have demonstrated that pride can play an ameliorative role in the trajectory of certain mood disorders, such as Depression and Bipolar Disorder (BPD). Pride negatively predicts current manic symptoms and future depressive symptoms among individuals at-risk for BPD (Gruber & Johnson, 2009). In addition, pride may even be diagnostic of these disorders; highly depressive individuals show blunted reactivity when presented with pride-evoking film clips, despite normal reactivity to happiness-evoking clips (Gruber, Oveis, Keltner, & Johnson, 2011).

These same studies, however, also indicate that individuals who experience high levels of pride are at greater risk for developing BPD (Gruber & Johnson, 2009), and that pride predicts the development of BPD above and beyond other positive emotions (e.g., love, compassion). Given the aforementioned positive relation between hubristic pride and unrealistic life goals (Carver et al., 2010), and the finding from this work that those at risk for BPD engage in unrealistic goal setting (Gruber & Johnson, 2009), the form of pride that underlies BPD development is likely to be hubristic pride. In fact, manic symptoms are higher among individuals high in dispositional hubristic pride, but not in those dispositionally prone to authentic pride (Johnson & Carver, 2012). Making this same distinction, between the two facets,

at the state level in addition to the trait level is a critical direction for future clinical research in this area.

### **Evolutionary Function**

Pride meets at least one of the central criteria to be considered a “functional universal” (i.e., a psychological entity that evolved to serve a particular adaptive function; Norenzayan & Heine, 2005): its nonverbal expression is displayed by individuals across cultures in the same contexts and situations. Furthermore, the evidence that pride experiences and recognition emerge early in development, and may have distinct neural and physiological correlates, is also consistent with this account. Pride may therefore be best understood as an adaptation for coping with challenges presented by the situations in which it occurs—opportunities for social rank enhancement—and several theorists have indeed argued that pride evolved to help individuals transform culturally valued achievements into higher social status, an outcome with clear adaptive benefits (e.g., resource acquisition, mate retention, well-being). Supporting this contention, a recent survey of 1,348 individuals in 16 countries found that the same events which cause people to feel pride also elicit positive interpersonal perceptions, suggesting that pride informs individuals as to which behaviors help them accrue status and respect from others (Szyncer et al., 2017). Similarly, in a recent series of longitudinal studies in an academic context, students who had performed poorly on a class exam experienced consequent low levels of authentic pride, signaling that their poor performance was an undesirable outcome. Authentic pride feelings in turn led these same students to engage in better studying habits for a subsequent class exam, which in turn predicted better *performance* for these same students on the subsequent exam (Weidman, Tracy, & Elliot, 2016). Together, these findings suggest that authentic pride may be best conceptualized as a barometer alerting individuals to the socially sanctioned value of their behaviors—the extent to which these behaviors are likely to promote

achievement and confer status—and that through this informational mechanism authentic pride may guide individuals toward engagement in a more optimal set of status-enhancing behaviors.

There are several additional mechanisms through which pride functions to help individuals attain increased social rank. First, numerous studies suggest that the pride nonverbal expression signals an individual's deservedness of increased rank to others. Indirect support for this claim comes from a study showing that individuals manipulated to experience pride – and therefore presumably displaying pride expressions –were subsequently judged by others as “dominant” (Williams & DeSteno, 2009). More most direct evidence for the suggestion that pride displays *communicate* high status comes from studies showing that individuals across cultures automatically perceive these displays as conveying high status, and that pride is more strongly implicitly associated with high status than a wide range of other emotions (Shariff & Tracy, 2009; Tracy et al., 2014). In fact, the high-status signal sent by pride displays is powerful enough to override contradictory status cues in the environment (Shariff, Tracy, & Markusoff, 2012). Other studies have shown that perceivers who effectively recognize these displays in others also benefit; individuals incentivized to acquire new knowledge were found to copy the information provided by pride displayers, more so than information provided by individuals showing other expressions, including happiness (Martens & Tracy, 2013). Pride displays thus appear to signal not only a social rank increase but also expertise, and to bias observers' social learning choices as a result.

Turning to the adaptive function of the pride experience, one question that arises is why humans might have evolved to experience pride in two distinct facets—and, in particular, why we would feel a seemingly dysfunctional hubristic pride? An answer comes from evidence that humans evolved to attain social rank using two highly divergent strategies, *dominance* and *prestige* (Cheng, Tracy, Foulsham, Kingstone, & Henrich, 2013; Henrich & Gil-White, 2001).

Dominance is a form of rank attained through force, threat, and intimidation, and it contrasts with prestige, which is a social rank attained through the display of knowledge, skills, and earned respect. Dominant individuals wield power by controlling others' costs and benefits, such as access to resources, mates, and well-being. Dominant leaders incite fear in subordinates by withholding resources, and subordinates submit by complying with demands or providing deference. Prestige, in contrast, likely arose in evolutionary history with the human ability to obtain cultural knowledge from others, making it adaptive to selectively attend and defer to the most knowledgeable or skilled group members. Prestigious individuals therefore acquire power by virtue of their competence and expertise, and by permitting followers to copy them. Both dominance and prestige have been found effective in promoting influence over others, suggesting that both are likely to be adaptive strategies.

Linking this account to pride, the two facets of the emotion may have separately evolved as the affective mechanisms that, respectively, underpin the dominance and prestige systems (see Cheng, Tracy, & Henrich, 2010; Tracy et al., 2010). Specifically, hubristic pride may facilitate the attainment of dominance by motivating individuals to behave in an aggressive and intimidating manner, and providing them with a sense of grandiosity and entitlement that allows them to take power rather than earn it, and to feel little empathy for those who get in their way. In contrast, authentic pride may facilitate the attainment of prestige by motivating and reinforcing achievements and other indicators of competence, and providing individuals with feelings of genuine self-confidence that allow them to demonstrate social attractiveness and generosity (see Tracy, 2016). The accumulated evidence suggesting that authentic pride is associated with agreeableness, conscientiousness, empathy, and hard work focused on attaining achievements; whereas hubristic pride is associated with arrogance, low empathy, and a desire to work hard only for extrinsic goals or in response to feelings of anger (Ashton-James & Tracy,

2013; Damian & Robins, 2012, 2013; Tracy et al., 2009; Tracy & Robins, 2007a; Weidman et al., 2016) are consistent with this account. Furthermore, several studies have more directly demonstrated that individuals prone to authentic pride judge themselves and are judged by their peers as highly prestigious, whereas those prone to hubristic pride judge themselves and are judged by peers as dominant (Cheng et al., 2010).

## **Conclusion**

A relatively large body of research on pride has emerged in the past decade; these studies suggest that pride is a fundamental emotion in the biological and evolutionary sense, and in the social psychological sense. It plays a major role in interpersonal and, in all likelihood, intergroup functioning, and also importantly shapes each individual's self-concept and self-esteem. Perhaps most important, pride is the single most important emotion underpinning the attainment and maintenance of social rank; pride experiences motivate status striving in a variety of ways, and the pride expression communicates rank-relevant information to others. We hope that the research reviewed in this chapter provides a foundation for future work addressing a range of remaining questions about pride and its antecedents, consequences, and impact on the social world.

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