

Research Report

Pride

Adaptive Social Emotion or Seventh Sin?

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ABSTRACT—*This experiment examined the ability of pride to serve as an adaptive emotion within the context of social interaction. After an in vivo induction of pride or a neutral state, participants engaged in a group problem-solving task. In contrast to a conventional view that pride is often associated with negative interpersonal outcomes, results confirmed that proud individuals not only took on a dominant role within the group problem-solving task, but also were perceived as the most likeable interaction partners. These findings suggest that pride, when representing an appropriate response to actual performance (as opposed to overgeneralized hubris), constitutes a functional social emotion with important implications for leadership and the building of social capital.*

Views of pride, unlike the majority of emotions, demonstrate a Janus-faced quality both through time and across cultures, from, for example, Dante's *Divine Comedy* to Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* (Lewis, 2000; Tracy & Robins, 2007a, 2007b). Unlike love, which is universally admired, or jealousy, which is universally reviled, pride has been alternately viewed as both virtue and vice, noble characteristic and deadly sin. The question of pride's place in the emotion arsenal thus becomes an intriguing one. Does it engender greater stature or, as suggested by Emily Brontë in *Wuthering Heights*, lead to the breeding of sad sorrows?

In considering this issue, many researchers have suggested that, although pride holds a somewhat negative connotation in American culture,¹ it may possess a dual nature and, given certain contingencies, can be beneficial (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2001; Tracy & Robins, 2007a; Williams & DeSteno, 2008). The pivotal factor appears to be whether pride stems from objective successes (i.e., *authentic*, or *beta*, pride) or from a

generalized overly positive assessment of self-worth (i.e., *hubristic*, or *alpha*, pride; Lewis, 2000; Tangney, 1999; Tracy & Robins, 2007a, 2007b). To date, however, empirical support for the beneficial effects of pride has been quite limited.

Working from a functionalist perspective, we endorse the view that emotions serve as efficient mechanisms that aid individuals in responding to adaptive challenges. For humans, many challenges involve successful navigation not only of the physical environment, but also of the social environment and, consequently, necessitate the existence of a class of socially oriented emotional responses. If pride does represent such an emotion, then pride derived from appraisals involving actual successes on definable tasks should lead to distinct behavioral and social outcomes that serve to benefit individuals vis-à-vis social interactions.

It is our contention that a primary function of pride is to motivate hedonically costly efforts aimed at acquiring skills that increase one's status and value to one's social group. In essence, we believe that pride, unlike generalized positive affect (cf. Wegener & Petty, 1994), should impel one to incur short-term costs (e.g., expenditure of high effort) for the purpose of reaping longer-term rewards (e.g., value by a social group). That is, pride should motivate individuals to acquire and demonstrate abilities, even in the face of initial difficulties, in order to increase their status and attractiveness with respect to interaction partners. As initial support for this view, we have demonstrated that pride engenders perseverance on socially valued tasks and have dissociated this influence from the related factors of self-efficacy, self-esteem, and generalized positive affect (Williams & DeSteno, 2008). Yet such findings do not speak directly to the social functions of pride. Simply put, the fact that pride may mediate increased perseverance on tasks does not necessarily imply that individuals exhibiting pride are viewed as potential leaders or experts and, more importantly, are perceived more positively by peers.

The goal of the present experiment was to put our theory about the socially adaptive value of pride to the test. Building off our previous work demonstrating that pride facilitates increased effort on valued tasks while working individually, the current

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¹Synonyms for *proud* are almost universally negative (e.g., *arrogant*, *haughty*).

experiment utilized a group problem-solving task designed to determine whether proud individuals would not only take on a dominant role within an interpersonal setting, but also be viewed positively by their partners. To accomplish this goal, we adapted the pride induction we developed previously (Williams & DeSteno, 2008) and had participants engage in a cooperative group task. Within the context of this interaction, we obtained two measures of dominance: one based on objective behavior and one based on subjective impressions. In addition, we obtained a measure of social value of group members, which we operationalized as interpersonal liking.

METHOD

Participants

Sixty-two individuals (48 female, 14 male; mean age = 19 years) participated in exchange for course credit. Participants completed the study in same-sex dyads; one member of each pair was randomly assigned to the pride condition, and the other to the neutral condition.

Procedure

Upon arriving at the lab, participants were informed that they were one of three individuals completing the experiment. In reality, the third “participant” was a confederate blind to the hypotheses of the study. The gender of the confederate matched the gender of the participants.

At the start of the experiment, all three individuals were seated at individual personal computers and given an overview of the tasks they would complete. The experimenter also informed them that the primary purpose of the session was to obtain scores on and evaluations of related spatial tasks that were in the process of development. They would complete both individual and group tasks and subsequently be asked questions about their performance and the performance of others.

Participants then turned to their computers to complete the first task, which was presented as a measure of visuospatial ability. This task consisted of 15 mental rotation exercises. Participants had to decide whether two images of three-dimensional objects were identical (i.e., were the same object only oriented differently in space). They were told that the computer would calculate their scores based on both the accuracy of their responses and their response times as compared with the speeds of others. Consequently, participants were not able to estimate reliably how well they performed.

After all participants had finished this task, the experimenter announced that individual calibrations of visual acuity were necessary and, to maintain privacy, would be completed in the adjoining room individually. Once in the separate room, participants were seated in front of a computer and asked to perform a 10-s spatial eyesight test. The true purpose of this “calibration” was to allow for the manipulation of the primary inde-

pendent variable. At this point, participants assigned to the pride condition received the pride induction before returning to the main room; those in the control condition simply completed the screening before returning. Once all three individuals finished the calibration, they completed an “evaluation” of the mental rotation exercise. In addition to filler items asking about image quality and instruction clarity, this evaluation included the manipulation check for the pride induction.

The experimenter next provided instructions for the second task. Participants relocated their chairs around a table in the center of the room. The experimenter informed them that the task would require the group to work together on a three-dimensional puzzle and that the group would receive a score based on their progress toward the solution. The puzzle was presented as a cube, which the experimenter unwound into a single rod of smaller adjoining cubes. To solve the puzzle, participants would have to bend and rotate the individual adjoining pieces of the rod to re-form them back into the large cube. This task appeared quite similar to the mental rotation tasks that participants had completed individually; in that task, the presented three-dimensional objects all consisted of adjoining cubes bent and rotated in different ways. The experimenter also turned on a video camera located over the confederate’s shoulder and facing the participants, noting that its use was to get a transcript of the conversation. Each group was given 6 min to work on the task. Confederates were trained to interact consistently and to touch the puzzle for approximately 1 min total. At the end of the allotted time, participants returned to their computers and completed an “evaluation” of this task, which included subjective ratings of their partners. Participants were then dismissed.

Manipulations and Measures

Pride Manipulation

As noted, the pride manipulation occurred individually as part of the supposed calibration for visual acuity. Each participant was alone with the experimenter at the time of the manipulation. For participants in the pride condition, the experimenter casually pulled three sheets of paper out of a printer, shuffled through them, and said, “I just wanted to show you how you did on that first task. You got a score in the 94th percentile—great job! That’s one of the highest scores we’ve seen!” As she made these comments, she pointed to an official-looking score sheet that included a graphical image indicating the participant’s high score. Participants in the neutral condition were simply asked to return to the lab once they had completed the calibration check. To maintain consistency, confederates entered the control room with the experimenter, waited the appropriate amount of time, and then reentered the lab.

Manipulation Checks

Using 7-point scales (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *completely*), participants indicated how they were currently feeling in reference to

several descriptors. Pride was calculated as the mean response to the items: *proud, confident, satisfied, fulfilled, accomplished, successful, achieving, productive*, and *full of self-worth* ($\alpha = .93$; cf. Tracy & Robins, 2007b; Williams & DeSteno, 2008). To measure differences in perceived subjective ability, participants also were asked to estimate how well they believed they performed in comparison to others. Participants also rated how *positive, good, content*, and *happy* they felt; these items were combined to form an index of positive mood ($\alpha = .91$).

Dominance

Dominance was measured in three ways. The first measure was based on objective behavior. Given that solving the puzzle required active manipulation of its pieces, a coder viewed each video clip and recorded the total amount of time each participant manipulated the puzzle. The other two measures involved subjective assessments of dominance. For the first, we utilized participants' ratings of each other. As part of the second evaluation, each person completed ratings of his or her two interaction partners with respect to items measuring subjective dominance, leadership, contributions, ability, and relative time spent talking and listening during the puzzle completion (cf. Anderson, Srivastava, Beer, Spataro, & Chatman, 2006; Dovidio, Ellyson, Keating, Heltman, & Brown, 1988). These items were averaged to form an index of subjective dominance ($\alpha = .80$). Finally, we obtained a second measure of subjective dominance from two individuals who did not take part in the experiment and, therefore, would not be subject to any self-presentation concerns about rating others as more dominant than the self. These individuals were drawn from the same population as the primary participants and were unaware of both the purpose of the study and the experimental conditions of the participants. Each rater was asked to view each 6-min video clip and provide a rating (using a 7-point scale: 1 = *not at all dominant*, 7 = *extremely dominant*) for the dominance level of each individual in the respective dyads ($\alpha = .78$).

Liking

As part of the postpuzzle evaluation measure, participants also completed ratings of their two interaction partners with respect to their level of liking for each. Specifically, they were asked how much they liked the person, would want to work with the person again, and enjoyed the interaction with the person. These items were averaged to form an index of liking ($\alpha = .84$).

RESULTS

Given that participants were nested within dyads, all statistical analyses utilized techniques appropriate for nested data. All reported *t* values stem from paired *t* tests, and all reported regression coefficients stem from multilevel models in which participant-level data were nested within dyadic groupings.

As expected, the pride manipulation proved successful; participants in the pride condition reported feeling more pride ($M = 4.78$) than did those in the neutral condition ($M = 3.73$), $t(30) = 3.47$, $p = .002$, $p_{\text{rep}} = .98$, $d = 1.00$. Confirming predictions, proud participants also evidenced greater dominance within the context of the group problem-solving task. They spent more time manipulating the puzzle ($M = 192$ s) than did neutral participants ($M = 145$ s), $t(30) = 2.18$, $p = .04$, $p_{\text{rep}} = .92$, $d = 0.66$. They were also perceived as more dominant by their partners ($M = 4.61$) than were neutral participants ($M = 4.30$), $t(29) = 1.86$, $p = .07$, $p_{\text{rep}} = .86$, $d = 0.50$,² and, confirming this perception, were also judged to be more dominant by third-party observers ($M = 4.31$) than were neutral participants ($M = 3.48$), $t(30) = 2.56$, $p = .02$, $p_{\text{rep}} = .92$, $d = 0.66$. Of import, dominance was attributable specifically to pride; time spent manipulating the puzzle was directly predicted by pride intensity, $b = 16.31$, $t(60) = 2.06$, $p = .04$, $p_{\text{rep}} = .89$, but not by positive mood or self-efficacy (i.e., participants' subjective assessments of their level of relative performance on the task).³ Thus, although both judgments of self-efficacy and positive mood were elevated in the pride condition ($ts > 2.60$, $p_{\text{reps}} > .95$), these constructs cannot explain the predicted finding in dominance behavior.

Finally, our primary hypothesis regarding the social attractiveness of an individual exhibiting pride also received support. As shown in Figure 1, individuals experiencing pride were more liked by their partners ($M = 5.25$) than were individuals in the neutral condition ($M = 4.74$), $t(30) = 2.53$, $p = .02$, $p_{\text{rep}} = .98$, $d = 0.93$. To demonstrate that this effect stemmed from differential perceptions by participants in the neutral condition, we also compared liking for participants with liking for the confederate. As depicted in Figure 1, neutral participants demonstrated enhanced liking for the proud participant ($M = 5.25$) as compared to the confederate ($M = 4.89$), $t(30) = 2.71$, $p = .01$, $p_{\text{rep}} = .95$. However, proud participants did not evidence any differential liking between neutral participants ($M = 4.74$) and confederates ($M = 4.82$), $t < 1$, thereby confirming that differential liking reflects an enhanced attraction of neutral participants to partners experiencing pride.⁴ This finding also demonstrates that liking is not a simple function for effort expended on the task, as proud individuals did not show any differential liking for neutral participants and confederates, even though confederates exerted less effort than neutral participants.

²Data from one dyad were removed because of an aberrantly low dominance score.

³The *b* coefficients refer to slopes from two-level hierarchical linear models regressing time on the potential predictors while controlling for dyad membership.

⁴To verify the presence of an interaction between emotion and target identity, we utilized a three-level hierarchical linear model analysis in which likeability ratings for individuals (i.e., partner vs. confederate) were nested within participants, which were nested within dyads. As expected, results confirmed that neutral individuals, as compared with proud individuals, evidenced greater differences in liking between the two targets, or, put differently, evidenced a steeper slope for the Level 1 variable indexing the effect of target identity on liking, $b = -0.51$, $t(120) = 3.39$, $p = .001$, $p_{\text{rep}} = .99$.

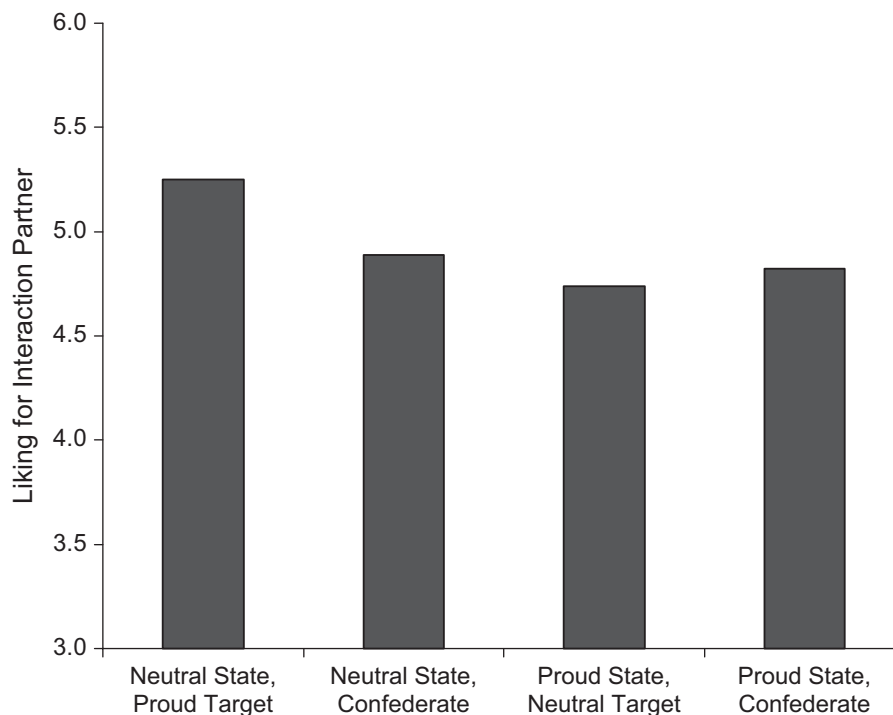


Fig. 1. Mean ratings of liking for interaction partners as a function of the participant's emotional state (neutral or proud) and the interaction partner's identity (proud target, neutral target, or confederate). Higher numbers indicate increased liking.

DISCUSSION

Taken together, we believe these findings are noteworthy. They are the first to show functional outcomes of pride within the context of actual social behavior, and thereby constitute an important cornerstone for a view of pride as an adaptive emotion. Although pride is certainly associated with the constructs of self-efficacy and self-esteem, the experience of the emotion itself appears to be a principle motivator of adaptive behavior and social perception (Williams & DeSteno, 2008). However, illumination of the mechanisms underlying increases in perceived attractiveness requires future investigation. Heightened attractiveness cannot stem solely from increased behavioral dominance, yet it is nonetheless likely that some interaction between behaviors and expressive signals associated with authentic pride serves to indicate social value (cf. Tracy & Robins, 2007a).⁵ Indeed, it may be just such a link between expression and context that serves as a mechanism to dissociate adaptive versus hubristic pride. Over time, the disconnect between pride expressions and behavioral evidence may hone individuals' accuracies with respect to the "signal value" of pride expressed by particular actors.

⁵In our study, liking for others was associated with their perceived dominance, $b = 0.44$, $t(60) = 3.01$, $p = .004$, $p_{rep} = .99$, but was not predicted by their level of general positive mood.

At present, though, it appears certain that pride does not always breed sad sorrows. Rather, when experienced under appropriate conditions, it may play an essential role in the development of leadership and social capital.

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