

Pride found to be a cross-cultural phenomenon

By Janet Cromley
LOS ANGELES TIMES

TWO RESEARCHERS are probably walking a little taller these days, puffing out their chests, maybe tilting their heads back and smiling slightly. If they're looking a little smug, perhaps it's because their recent studies on the nature of pride have added some small but important pieces to a psychological puzzle.

Among their conclusions, published in a review in the June issue of *Current Directions in Psychological Science*: Pride appears to be a universal, human emotion, and it comes in two flavors: positive and arrogant.

In a summary of current scientific thinking on the nature of pride and a review of four of their own papers on the topic, Jessica Tracy, an assistant professor of psychology at the University of British Columbia and Richard Robins, a University of California, Davis, psychology professor, suggest that pride is a cross-cultural phenomenon — that even remote-living tribal cultures know it when they see it — and that humans recognize two distinct types of pride: justifiable pride and arrogant, or conceited, pride.

They also found that people who feel justifiable pride are likely to be more extraverted and conscientious, whereas those who feel conceited pride tend to be narcissistic and attribute their success to their innate abilities rather than their personal efforts.

To test their hypothesis that pride is a universal emotion, Tracy and Robins asked 40 members of a tribal group in Burkina Faso, West Africa, to review photos of Westerners and Africans ex-

pressing various emotions, including pride.

The subjects, 20 men and 20 women ages 20 to 75, had little or no exposure to Western culture (for example, they didn't recognize photos of President Bush, Tom Cruise or Michael Jordan) and were able to identify pride from among photos of anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, surprise and shame. Their recognition of pride was perhaps a hair higher than all other emotions except for happiness and surprise.

The study itself is under review for publication in a psychological journal. Other studies also suggest pride is universal, Tracy says. For example, researchers have found that pride is first exhibited by children around age 2½ to 3, and can be reliably recognized by children as young as 4.

Tracy and Robins' work also bolsters prevailing theories of distinct types of pride.

In a series of seven studies that canvassed more than 2,000 students at UC Davis, the scientists found the most concrete evidence to date that expressions of pride are generally perceived either positively, as a state related to an accomplishment (termed "authentic pride" by the researchers), or negatively, as one caused by arrogance or conceit (so-called "hubristic pride").

In one of the studies, 99 undergraduate students were shown 190 pairs of 20 pride-related words — such as "productive" and "determined" — and asked to rate how similar the words were to each other.

The investigators found that responses tended to cluster around two

broad categories: achievement and arrogance. This suggests there is a consensus that pride has a light and a dark side.

The scientists also found distinct personality characteristics associated with these two states.

In one study, 110 undergraduate psychology students completed five personality tests, including the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and the Narcissistic Personality Inventory, and then later rated the extent to which they identified with 77 pride-related words.

Tracy and Robins found that students who scored high in authentic pride also demonstrated high self-esteem, whereas those who scored high in hubristic or arrogant pride tended to be narcissistic and prone to feelings of shame as measured by the personality scales.

Charles Darwin put the study of pride on the psychological map in 1872, when he said, "Of all the complex emotions, pride, perhaps, is the most plainly expressed . . . a proud man exhibits his sense of superiority over others by holding his head and body erect."

But since then, the preponderance of research in the area of emotion has centered on primal emotions such as happiness, sadness and fear.

Nevertheless, pride is an important line of psychological inquiry, Tracy says, because of its widespread but little recognized social influence.

Pride is important, for example, because it fuels pursuits: A healthy dose of pride pushes us to achieve academic, job-related or personal goals. It exhorts us to solve medical mysteries, build better bridges and break sports records.

Ross Buck, professor of communica-

tion sciences and psychology at the University of Connecticut, believes pride has an important but under-recognized role in our social system, influencing many interactions in ways that we usually don't consider.

For example, a person who has a healthy dose of pride — justified or not — will dominate an interaction with a person who doesn't share that pride, he says. Simply put, when the proud or scornful person interacts with the relatively unsuccessful person, he or she feels pity or scorn for the unsuccessful person, he says. The unsuccessful person senses those feelings and in turn experiences envy or jealousy. The result is an unconscious dance of dominance and submission.

In this scenario, he adds, research suggests that it's healthier to be proud because the proud person has a positive physiological response to the interaction while the lowly underachiever is flooded with the stress hormone cortisol.

Pride probably has a survival component, Tracy says, but not in the same way that anger or fear does.

"Pride helps us survive by helping us maintain our status in a group. As social creatures, those relationships are essential."

There may also be such a thing as too much pride, says Michael Lewis, distinguished professor of pediatrics and psychiatry at Robert Wood Johnson Medical School in New Jersey.

"We're finding that children who are given constant rewards and flattery for their accomplishments may feel shame when they do fail," he says. "With this shame comes an avoidance of doing anything that could cause them to feel shame in the future. So some suggest that you can overdo praise."