Pride and Licensing Effects: When Being Good Gives Us Permission to Be a Little Bad
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Five experiments examine how authentic and hubristic pride affect indulgence. Although we manipulate pride in different ways and use different measures of indulgent choice, we find that authentic pride leads to more indulgence than hubristic pride. We also find that these effects are especially strong when cognitive resources are available.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The current research investigates how authentic and hubristic pride influence licensing effects in indulgence. Previous research examining the influence of pride on indulgence has generally found that pride could lead to both indulgence and self-control. The current research suggests that the reason for the discrepancy within the previous research is that pride is not a unitary construct. Rather, the two distinct types of pride—hubristic and authentic—have different consequences on indulgence. Consistent with prior literature, the results from the first two studies suggest that authentic pride leads to more licensing in indulgence than hubristic pride. We further demonstrate how cognitive resources moderate the effect of pride on indulgence. By manipulating pride in different ways and using different measures of indulgent choice, the results from the last three studies confirm that authentic pride leads to more indulgence than hubristic pride, especially when cognitive resources are available. However, when cognitive resources are limited, hubristic pride leads to more indulgence. We further demonstrate how resisting temptation mediates indulgence licensing. This research contributes to our basic understanding of the dynamics of pride on licensing effects.

Pride is a powerful self-conscious emotion, which involves both self-assessment and self-awareness (Cheng, Tracy, & Henrich, 2010; Tracy, Shariff, & Cheng, 2010). Marketers sometimes try to generate a sense of pride in consumers through their commercials. For example, P&G’s “Best Job Sochi 2014 Olympic Game” commercial shows a proud mother watching her child win in the Olympics. From a managerial perspective, if marketers want to tap into this powerful emotion, they should understand its complex effect on choice. Although pride is important in consumer decision-making for both theoretical and empirical reasons, researchers have just begun to investigate how it works to influence consumer decision processing and decision-making (Aaker & Williams, 1998; Fredrickson, 2001; Patrick, Chun, & Maclnnis, 2009; Wilcox, Kramer, & Sen, 2011). This paper builds on existing research by examining how different types of pride (authentic vs. hubristic pride) influence licensing effects.

Pride is too broad a concept to be considered as a singular and unified construct (Lewis 1993). Instead, pride is more appropriately viewed as having two distinct facets: authentic pride and hubristic pride (Tracy and Robins 2004). Specifically, authentic pride is associated with self-confidence and accomplishment. Hubristic pride is associated with arrogance and self-aggrandizement. McCerran, Aquino, and Tracy (2011) showed that authentic pride increases the preference for luxury brands in consumer behavior. Prior research has shown that the act of doing something good (e.g., eating a healthy diet, engaging in pro-social behaviors) can sometimes give individuals a reason for indulging (Khan & Dhar, 2006; Merritt, Effron, & Monin, 2010; Witt Hubert, Evers, & De Ridder, 2012). Based on prior research, we predict that authentic pride, associated with self-accomplishment, will lead to stronger licensing in indulgence than hubristic pride, especially when consumers have the cognitive resources that allows one to justify the indulgence after one feels pride about his/her earned accomplishment. However, this effect will be different for hubristic pride. Hubristic pride is more likely to lead to indulgence when the cognitive resources are low.

The objective of study 1 was to test our hypotheses that authentic pride leads to more indulgence than hubristic pride. Undergraduate students (N = 160) were randomly assigned to one of four conditions (authentic pride vs. hubristic pride vs. happy vs. control). Participants in were asked to write about a time when they had succeeded through hard work and effort (authentic), behaved in a self-important manner (hubristic), felt happy (happy), or did laundry (control). Indulgence was measured with the choice of a movie ticket vs. gas card. As predicted, authentic pride (41.86%) led to more indulgent choice (movie ticket) than hubristic pride (22.97%; Wald’s $x^2$ = 4.67; $p < .05$), happiness (12.90%; Wald’s $x^2$ = 7.94; $p < .01$) or the control (23.91%; Wald’s $x^2$ = 4.26; $p < .05$).

In study 2, we replicate the findings of study 1 using a different manipulation of pride and different measures of indulgence. Undergraduate students (N = 78) were randomly assigned to one of three conditions (authentic pride vs. hubristic pride vs. control), where they wrote about a time when they felt accomplished (authentic pride), snobbish (hubristic pride) or the geography of their state (control). A one-way ANOVA that participants in the authentic pride condition ($M = 7.91$) were willing to pay for more for a luxury watch than those in hubristic pride condition ($M = 6.84$; $t = 2.50, p < .01$) and control condition ($M = 6.83$; $t = 2.59, p < .01$). The results of study 2 support our prediction that feelings of authentic pride can lead to more indulgence than hubristic pride.

The aim of study 3 was to replicate our earlier findings that authentic pride leads to more indulgence than hubristic pride. Participants (N = 140) were randomly assigned to one of three conditions (authentic pride vs. hubristic pride vs. control), where they wrote a brief story about themselves using the following four words: successful, confident, fulfilled and productive (authentic pride), or snobbish, conceited, arrogant and smug (hubristic pride) or a typical day of life (control). A one-way ANOVA showed a significant main effect of emotion on indulgence ($F(1,96) = 3.75, p < .05$), such that participants in the authentic pride condition ($M = 5.96$) were willing to pay for more for a luxury product than those in hubristic pride condition ($M = 5.56$; $t = 2.16, p < .05$) and those in the control condition ($M = 5.48$; $t = 2.51, p < .01$).

The aim of study 4 was to examine whether authentic pride always leads to more indulgence than hubristic pride. The overall design of the study was a 3 (emotion: authentic pride vs. hubristic pride vs. control) * 2 (cognitive resource: high vs. low) between-subjects design (N = 108). The manipulation of pride was the same as in study 1. After writing stories, participants were asked to remember a “password,” in order to manipulate cognitive resources. The analysis revealed a significant interaction between emotion and cognitive resources ($F(1,98) = 3.39, p < .01$), such that when cognitive resources were available, participants in the authentic pride condition ($M = 17.20, SD = 6.12$) assigned higher prices to the products than did those in hubristic pride condition ($M = 13.30, SD = 5.98, t = 2.01, p < .05$). However, when cognitive resources were limited, participants in the hubristic pride ($M = 17.16, SD = 5.57$) condition assigned significantly higher prices to logo products than did those in authentic pride condition ($M = 11.67, SD = 4.66, t = 2.32, p = .02$).

Finally, the overall design of the study 5 was a 2 (emotion: authentic pride vs. hubristic pride) * 2 (cognitive resource: high vs.
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low) between-subjects design (N = 134). The procedure was identical to study 4, except that we measured indulgence by asking participants to make a choice between a $10 movie theater ticket and gasoline card. Logistic regression showed a significant two-way interaction of emotion and cognitive load on indulgent choice (Wald’s $x^2 = 6.73; p < .01$). The results of study 5 again showed that feeling authentic pride leads to indulgence, especially when cognitive resources are available, but that when cognitive resources are limited feeling hubristic pride leads to more indulgence than authentic pride.

This research provides the evidence that two-faced nature of pride influence indulgence in different ways. Further, we show that authentic pride leads to more indulgence than hubristic pride especially when cognitive resources are available. Prior research has shown that authentic pride leads to more indulgence than hubristic pride or happiness (McFerran, Aquino, & Tracy, 2014; Wilcox, et al., 2011). The past research, however, only examines this effect when consumers have ample cognitive resources (e.g., not being distracted when making a decision). In fact, consumers usually make decisions with limited cognitive resources (e.g., while being distracted). Therefore, by taking cognitive resources into account, this research advances the theory on pride and indulgence by demonstrating that authentic pride leads to more licensing in indulgence than hubristic pride, but only when cognitive resources are available; yet, when cognitive resources are limited, hubristic pride leads to more of a licensing effect in indulgence. Further analysis shows that perceived resistance to temptation mediates this effect. Thus, this research provides a unique theoretical contribution to pride on indulgence by advancing our understanding of emotion and decision-making.

REFERENCES


