

# Don't Grin When You Win: The Social Costs of Positive Emotion Expression in Performance Situations

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People who express positive emotion usually have better social outcomes than people who do not, and suppressing the expression of emotions can have interpersonal costs. Nevertheless, social convention suggests that there are situations in which people should suppress the expression of positive emotions, such as when trying to appear humble in victory. The present research tested whether there are interpersonal costs to expressing positive emotions when winning. In Experiment 1, inexpressive winners were evaluated more positively and rated as lower in hubristic—but not authentic—pride compared with expressive winners. Experiment 2 confirmed that inexpressive winners were perceived as using expressive suppression to downregulate their positive emotion expression. Experiment 3 replicated the findings of Experiment 1, and also found that people were more interested in forming a friendship with inexpressive winners than expressive winners. The effects were mediated by the perception that the inexpressive winner tried to protect the loser's feelings. This research is the first to identify social costs of expressing positive emotion, and highlights the importance of understanding the situational context when determining optimal emotion regulation strategies.

*Keywords:* emotion expression, emotion regulation, expressive suppression, outperformance, impression formation

John Wayne won his Academy Award in 1969, but his acceptance speech still makes regular appearances on “best of” lists (O’Hara, n.d.). Upon winning, Wayne communicated his happiness with little more than a smile and self-deprecating comment: “Tonight I don’t feel very clever, very witty . . . I feel very grateful, very humble.” In contrast, James Cameron’s 1997 acceptance speech is a mainstay of many “worst speeches” lists (Mitchell, 2012). Cameron responded to his win by high-fiving audience members in glee, before infamously concluding his speech with “I’m the king of the world!” The public reception of these two reactions underscores conventional wisdom that winners should avoid expressing excessive positive emotion in order to appear “humble in victory,” but this process has been little studied.

## The Benefits of Emotion Expression

The suggestion that winners should inhibit positive emotion expression runs counter to a large body of literature extolling the personal and social benefits of expressing positive emotion (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). Happier people are rated more positively across several dimensions, including likability, warmth, friendliness, and intelligence (for a review, see Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). These judgments can be made with even the most minimal information: People who express greater genuine positive affect in yearbook photos are rated as the most likable (Harker & Keltner, 2001). In addition to adding social value, expressing positive emotions when they are experienced comes with personal benefits. People who both feel and express positive emotions enjoy high well-being over the longer term, whereas people who feel but do not express positive emotions suffer from lower well-being, an effect that is mediated by social connectedness (Mauss et al., 2011). The authors suggested that this process occurs because disconnection between internal and expressed positive emotions may make individuals appear inauthentic, and thus unlikeable. High levels of positive emotion, and the expression of that positive emotion, are therefore powerful predictors of beneficial outcomes both personally and socially.

It is likely that winners experience a great deal of positive emotion. All available evidence suggests that the best social strategy would be to express that emotion. However, we hypothesize that outperformance may be one context in which inhibiting the expression of positive emotions is the most socially appropriate response. Cultural display rules hold that humility is required of a

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winner (Ekman, 1972), and thus to achieve the appearance of humility and ensuing reputational benefits, a winner may need to reduce the expression of positive affect. Therefore, we suggest that *not* expressing positive emotions could garner social benefits in outperformance situations.

### The Costs of Emotion Suppression

To reduce the outward expression of positive emotion, winners need to regulate their emotions. Expressive suppression is a common emotion regulation strategy that involves inhibiting the outward expression of emotion (Gross & Levenson, 1993). Suppression follows the onset of the emotion (Gross, 1998), making it ideal for outperformance situations in which winners are not aware of their success before it occurs. Although winners may still feel prideful, even conceited in success, they can employ suppression to shield themselves from negative evaluations.

The empirical consensus is that suppression is generally dysfunctional. Suppression of negative emotions results in worse mood, lower well-being, maladaptive physiological functioning, and poorer memory for suppressed events (Denson, Grisham, & Moulds, 2011; Gross, 1998; Gross & Levenson, 1993; Richards & Gross, 2000). Few studies have examined positive emotion suppression, but existing research suggests that it, too, is associated with dysfunctional personal outcomes (Gross & Levenson, 1997; Nezlek & Kuppens, 2008). In addition, suppression comes with social costs. Suppression of negative emotions undermines interpersonal closeness and communication, and impairs relationship formation and satisfaction (Butler et al., 2003; Gross & John, 2003; Impett et al., 2012; Srivastava, Tamir, McGonigal, John, & Gross, 2009).

The extant literature therefore portrays expressive suppression as pathological and socially maladaptive. However, some research suggests that suppression can have beneficial consequences when it involves inhibiting the expression of negative emotions. For example, Le and Impett (in press) found that for interdependent people in romantic relationships, suppressing negative emotions when sacrificing for one's partner was associated with high personal well-being and relationship quality. Soto, Perez, Kim, Lee, and Minnick (2011) found that the negative consequences usually associated with expressive suppression do not emerge for Chinese participants, who are high in cultural interdependence, and the results of a study by Stipek (1998) suggest that Chinese participants believe that individual pride is better suppressed. Together, these findings suggest that expressive suppression can be a functional emotion regulation strategy when there a goal is to promote social harmony.

### The Current Research

Although research has begun to identify potential benefits to suppressing the expression of negative emotion, no research has yet explored whether downplaying the expression of *positive* emotion could have hidden social benefits. Given the relationship strain that often occurs when one person outperforms another (Exline & Lobel, 1999), and that cultural display rules prescribe humility on the part of winners (Ekman, 1972), outperformance may be one context in which *not* expressing positive emotion is the most appropriate response. Research shows that winners sponta-

neously inhibit emotion expression after a triumph more in the presence of supposed losers than when alone (Friedman & Miller-Herringer, 1991). What is not known is whether this spontaneous inhibition of positive emotion is an effective social strategy. In the present program of research, we tested whether expressing less positive emotion in outperformance situations conferred interpersonal benefits.

In three experiments, participants watched videos of real-life events in which one person triumphed over another. The videos focused on winners who were *inexpressive*, showing minimal positive emotion, or who were *expressive*, showing exaggerated positive emotion. In contrast to previous research, we expected to find beneficial, rather than harmful, social effects of perceived positive emotion suppression. In Experiments 1 and 3, we tested mechanisms of this effect. Friedman and Miller-Herringer (1991) found two common reasons winners give for downplaying their emotional reaction are (a) to avoid giving the impression of being prideful, and (b) to protect the loser's feelings. We hypothesized that these two processes would mediate the relationship between winner expressivity and social ratings.

### Experiment 1

Experiment 1 tested our core hypothesis that inexpressive winners would be evaluated more positively than expressive winners. We hypothesized that this effect would be mediated by perceptions of hubristic and authentic pride (Tracy & Robins, 2007). Authentic pride is associated with genuine feelings of self-worth. Conversely, hubristic pride is associated with feelings of arrogance (Tracy & Robins, 2007). Appearing authentically prideful can confer status and accolades, whereas appearing hubristic can come with interpersonal costs (Tracy & Prehn, 2012). As conventional wisdom holds that winners should be humble, we hypothesized that inexpressive winners would be seen as lower in hubristic pride, and therefore liked more than expressive winners. People do expect winners to be proud of their achievements, however. We therefore hypothesized that the two types of winners would not differ in degree of perceived authentic pride.

### Method

**Participants and design.** One hundred thirteen Australian university students (69% women,  $M_{\text{age}} = 21.11$ ,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 6.37$ ) participated in an online study for partial course credit. The experimenter employed a between-subjects design that manipulated the winner's expression of positive emotions<sup>1</sup>: inexpressive (coded as 1) versus expressive (coded as 2).

#### Materials and measures.

**Manipulation.** Twelve videos of winners were selected as stimuli. Videos were sourced from three domains: the Academy

<sup>1</sup> Pilot testing was conducted to determine the specific positive emotions expressed by the winners. A separate set of participants watched the full set of videos and rated winner emotional expression using 10 positive emotions from the Modified Differential Emotions Scale (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003). Participants rated expressive winners as expressing significantly more joy, gratitude, pride, interest, awe, amusement, love, and hope than inexpressive winners (emotions listed in descending order of intensity). There were no differences in ratings of the expression of contentment and compassion.

Awards, tennis matches, and game shows. For each domain, we selected two videos featuring *inexpressive* winners, who appeared to express less positive emotion after winning, and two videos featuring *expressive* winners, who appeared emotionally effusive after winning. Participants were randomly assigned to view either expressive or inexpressive winners. The videos were, on average, 29.7 s long, and were matched on winner gender, age, and race.<sup>2</sup> The materials were edited so that winners did not speak in the videos (e.g., to give acceptance speeches or interviews about their success); participants only saw winner's initial emotional reaction.

**Manipulation check.** Winner inexpressivity was assessed using three items ("How much do you think the winner was downplaying their emotional reaction to the award?"; "How strong/intense was the reaction of the person winning this award?" [reverse scored]; and "How much do you think the winner is trying not to express their positive emotions?";  $\alpha = .69$ ), with higher scores indicating greater emotional inexpression. Except when otherwise noted, all items in the study were measured on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). Because a happy mood has been shown to lead to more positive interpersonal ratings (Forgas & Bower, 1987), participants also rated how the video made them feel from 1 (*very negative*) to 7 (*very positive*).

Winner evaluations were assessed using six traits drawn from Anderson's (1968) list of personality-traits ("To what extent do you think the winner is each of the following: aggressive/selfish/intelligent/friendly/nice/likable";  $\alpha = .74$ ). Less likable traits were reverse scored, so higher values indicated more positive evaluations.

Winner pride was assessed using adjectives drawn from scales by Tracy and Robins (2007). The scales distinguish ratings of *hubristic pride* ("To what extent do you think the winner is each of the following: arrogant/conceited/egotistical";  $\alpha = .90$ ) from *authentic pride* ("To what extent do you think the winner is each of the following: accomplished/confident/productive/high in self-worth/successful";  $\alpha = .88$ ). This scale has traditionally been used more in ratings of the self, rather than providing ratings of others. When used in the context of rating others, it may be that the items used to measure authentic pride instead measure perceived competence, and the results for this scale should be interpreted accordingly.

## Results and Discussion

**Manipulation checks.** Inexpressive winners were rated as significantly more emotionally reserved ( $M = 3.88$ ,  $SD = 0.61$ ) than expressive winners ( $M = 2.61$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ),  $t(111) = 10.45$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .50$ .<sup>3</sup> There was no difference in participant mood after watching inexpressive and expressive winners,  $t(111) = .369$ ,  $p = .713$ ,  $\eta^2 = .001$ , suggesting that the effects were not driven by changes in personal mood.

**Interpersonal ratings.** Inexpressive winners were evaluated more positively ( $M = 5.35$ ,  $SD = 0.64$ ) than expressive winners ( $M = 4.88$ ,  $SD = 0.56$ ),  $t(111) = 4.09$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .13$ . There was no difference between inexpressive and expressive winners in ratings of authentic pride,  $t(111) = 0.83$ ,  $p = .411$ ,  $\eta^2 = .01$ . However, inexpressive winners were rated as significantly lower in hubristic pride ( $M = 2.47$ ,  $SD = 0.86$ ) than expressive winners ( $M = 3.15$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ),  $t(111) = -3.77$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .11$ . In

the following analysis, we tested whether ratings of hubristic pride mediated the effect of winner expressivity on winner evaluations.

**Mediational analysis.** When entered into a regression model after the manipulation, hubristic pride was associated with less positive evaluations ( $\beta = -.35$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and the effect of the manipulation on winner evaluations was reduced (see Figure 1). Bootstrapping analyses with 10,000 resamples revealed that the indirect effect of winner expressivity via hubristic pride was significant ( $IE = -.16$ ,  $SE = .06$ , 95% CI  $[-.292, -.067]$ ).

As expected, inexpressive winners were evaluated more positively and as less hubristic than expressive winners. The effect of emotional expression on winner evaluations was partially mediated through perceived hubristic pride. Both types of winners were rated as equally authentically proud, suggesting that observers still believed that inexpressive winners took pride in their achievements. However, the items measuring authentic pride may have assessed perceived competence of the winner more so than evaluations of the winner's prideful feelings. Due to this theoretical ambiguity of the meaning of the authentic pride ratings, we did not include this measure in future studies, but instead focused on hubristic pride, which showed significant differences between expressive and inexpressive winners.

The findings provide evidence that downplaying one's emotional reaction can have reputational benefits in outperformance situations. Our results should be interpreted in light of the fact that people typically prefer individuals who express positive emotion (Harker & Keltner, 2001) and tend to dislike individuals who suppress positive emotion (Butler et al., 2003; Srivastava et al., 2009). We have shown it is possible to reverse this typical effect simply by changing the social context to a performance domain. This finding adds to research showing that contextual factors moderate the appropriateness of particular emotion regulation strategies (Westphal, Seivert, & Bonanno, 2010).

## Experiment 2

One emotion regulation strategy that the winners could be using to inhibit positive emotional expression is expressive suppression. Expressive suppression is a common regulation strategy and follows the onset of the emotion (Gross, 1998). This makes it a likely and appropriate strategy for performance situations in which winners cannot be sure of their success before it occurs. Suppression is effective in downregulating emotional behavior (Webb, Miles,

<sup>2</sup> A second pilot study was conducted to ensure that winner emotional expression was not confounded with preexisting beliefs about the winner, or personal characteristics of the winner independent of their emotional expression. Participants were shown a neutral video still image alongside the name of each of the 12 winners. The participants in this study had never seen the video stimuli, and thus were able to provide ratings of the winners independent of their expressive behavior in the videos. We found no significant differences between conditions on liking or desire for friendship. Participants rated the expressive winners as being significantly more attractive than the inexpressive winners, an effect that runs counter to arguments that attractiveness might drive the effects. Participants also reported being significantly more familiar with inexpressive than expressive winners, but baseline familiarity was very low. This effect was driven entirely by the tennis domain, and all findings still hold without tennis included.

<sup>3</sup> The differences hold for awards, tennis matches, and game shows in all experiments suggesting that all three domains can be included in analyses.



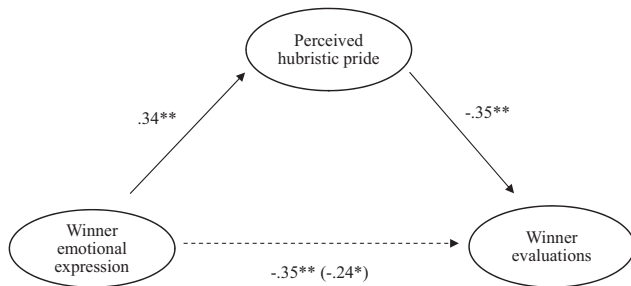


Figure 1. The mediating effect of hubristic pride on the relationship between winner emotional expression and winner evaluations (Experiment 1). Numbers are standardized beta coefficients. Standardized coefficient in bracket indicates weight after inclusion of mediators. \*  $p < .01$ . \*\*  $p < .001$ .

& Sheeran, 2012) but generally leads to poorer personal (e.g., Gross & Levenson, 1997) and social (e.g., Butler et al., 2003) outcomes. Performance situations, however, may be one situation in which engaging in expressive suppression is an effective social strategy. Suppression could be implemented quickly and effectively, shielding winners from the negative social consequences of positive emotional expression observed in Experiment 1.

The video stimuli do not allow us to gain direct insight into the strategies used by winners to regulate their emotions. We thus do not know whether winners are consciously downregulating positive emotion. We can, however, determine whether participants think that winners are engaging in suppression as an emotion regulation strategy. In Experiment 2, we assessed whether participants interpreted the actions of the inexpressive winners as attempts at expressive suppression. We hypothesized that inexpressive winners would be rated as using expressive suppression strategies significantly more than expressive winners. We also hypothesized that inexpressive winners would be rated as showing more nonverbal signs of expressive suppression than expressive winners. Participants were randomly assigned to watch the videos with and without audio to demonstrate that the effects were not confounded by audio content.

## Method

**Participants and design.** Participants were 80 community members in the United States recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk (see Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; 51.25% women,  $M_{\text{age}} = 37.66$ ,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 13.41$ ). The experiment employed a 2 (winner demeanor: expressive vs. inexpressive)  $\times$  2 (audio condition: audio vs. no audio) mixed design, with winner demeanor as a within-subjects variable and audio condition as a between-subjects variable.

**Materials and measures.** The videos were identical to Experiment 1, but in this study all participants viewed both inexpressive and expressive videos in a random order. Participants were also randomly assigned to view the videos with or without audio.

Expressive suppression was assessed using a scale adapted from the expressive suppression scale developed by Gross and John (2003). Participants were asked to rate how much they agreed with the following statements: “The winner is keeping their emotions to themselves,” “The winner is being careful not to express their

positive emotions,” and “The winner is controlling their emotions by not expressing them” (assessed on a 7-point scale; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*;  $\alpha = .97$ ).

For nonverbal signs of emotion expression, participants were also asked to rate, on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*), how much they thought that the winner was smiling, how much they noticed the winner moving their face, and how neutral they found the winner’s facial expressions. These items were chosen to assess the nonverbal signs of positive emotion expression and suppression. Smiling was assessed because it is a common nonverbal signal communicating positive emotion (Kraut & Johnston, 1979), and facial movement was assessed because it is often used as a nonverbal cue to code for emotional expression (e.g., Gross, 1998; Gross & Levenson, 1993). We asked about the neutrality of facial expression in an attempt to assess a nonverbal cue to emotion suppression (rather than emotion expression). Expressive suppression is defined as an attempt to hide the outward expression of emotional cues, and so should result in more neutral facial expressions.

## Results and Discussion

Participants rated inexpressive winners as using suppression strategies significantly more ( $M = 4.78$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ) than expressive winners ( $M = 2.03$ ,  $SD = 0.81$ ),  $t(79) = 20.29$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .86$ . Participants also rated inexpressive winners as demonstrating fewer nonverbal cues of positive emotion expression. Inexpressive winners were perceived to smile less ( $M = 3.89$ ,  $SD = 0.81$ ) than expressive winners ( $M = 5.47$ ,  $SD = 0.77$ ),  $t(79) = 15.03$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .74$ . Inexpressive winners were also perceived to move their faces less ( $M = 3.53$ ,  $SD = 0.86$ ) than expressive winners ( $M = 5.80$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ),  $t(79) = 18.87$ ,  $\eta^2 = .83$ . Finally, inexpressive winners were perceived to have significantly more neutral facial expressions ( $M = 4.45$ ,  $SD = 0.82$ ) than expressive winners ( $M = 2.28$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ),  $t(79) = 13.66$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .70$ .

We ran a series of mixed ANOVAs to determine whether winner emotional expression interacted with audio condition to predict ratings of expressive suppression and nonverbal cues. The interaction between winner expression and audio condition was nonsignificant for all dependent variables,  $F_s(1, 78) < .45$ ,  $p_s > .506$ . This suggests that participants are making their judgments about suppression primarily based on nonverbal cues.

These results confirmed the hypothesis that inexpressive winners are perceived as engaging in expressive suppression significantly more than expressive winners. These findings demonstrate that participants believe that inexpressive winners are downregulating their positive emotions using expressive suppression. This has interesting implications, given the large body of research showing that expressive suppression typically has negative social consequences. The results also increase confidence in the experimental materials, showing that inexpressive winners are indeed rated as showing significantly fewer expressive nonverbal cues than expressive winners.

## Experiment 3

Experiment 3 aimed to replicate the findings of Experiment 1, and added an additional indicator of the social costs of expressing

positive emotions in the form of desire for friendship with the winner. We aimed to demonstrate that the social costs of positive emotion expression generalize beyond impression formation to desire for interpersonal closeness. Research shows that expressive suppression reduces desire for friendship with the suppressor (Butler et al., 2003), and Experiment 2 demonstrated that participants believed that inexpressive winners are using expressive suppression. In addition, the expression of positive emotions serves to signal that the expresser is friendly, affiliative, and willing to engage in social interaction (Frijda & Mesquita, 1994; Keltner & Haidt, 1999). Demonstrating that emotional inexpression *increases* desire for friendship in this study would further emphasize the unique social benefits of expressive suppression in outperformance contexts.

Friedman and Miller-Herringer (1991) found that a major reason for inhibiting positive emotional expression in outperformance situations was the desire to avoid hurting the loser's feelings. We therefore hypothesized that inexpressive winners would be perceived as protecting losers more than expressive winners, and that this perceived protection motive would help explain positive interpersonal ratings. We added this variable as a potential mediator in addition to hubristic pride, hypothesizing that they would be significant unique mediators of the social benefits of emotion inexpression.

## Method

**Participants and design.** Participants were 101 community members in the United States recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk (52.5% women,  $M_{\text{age}} = 36.52$ ,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.25$ ). The experiment employed a between-subjects design that manipulated winner demeanor (inexpressive vs. expressive).

**Materials and measures.** The experimental materials were identical to Experiments 1 and 2, except that to simplify and shorten the experiment, participants in each condition were asked to watch three videos instead of six. We selected the video with the highest and lowest emotional inexpression score for each domain in Experiment 1, for a total of three inexpressive and three expressive videos. The manipulation check for winner's emotional expressivity was assessed in same way as Experiment 1 ( $\alpha = .89$ ). All items in the study were scored on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*).

Perceived protection motive was assessed using a single item: "How much do you think the winner was trying to protect the loser's feelings?"

Hubristic pride was assessed using the full scale developed by Tracy and Robins (2007; "To what extent do you think the winner is each of the following: snobbish/pompous/stuck-up/conceited/egotistical/arrogant/smug";  $\alpha = .98$ ).

Winner evaluations were assessed using 11 traits drawn from Anderson's (1968) list of personality-traits ("To what extent do you think the winner is each of the following: aggressive/selfish/intelligent/friendly/nice/likable/understanding/loyal/dependable/unkind/thoughtless";  $\alpha = .93$ ). Less likable traits were reverse scored, so higher values indicated more positive ratings.

Desire for friendship was measured using three items adapted from the affiliation scale by Butler and colleagues (2003; "To what extent is the winner the type of person you could become close friends with?"; "To what extent would you be interested in talking

to the winner?"; and "How well do you think you would get along with the winner?";  $\alpha = .93$ ).

## Results and Discussion

As in Experiment 1, inexpressive winners were rated as significantly more emotionally reserved ( $M = 4.14$ ,  $SD = 1.83$ ) than expressive winners ( $M = 1.83$ ,  $SD = 0.83$ ),  $t(99) = 12.50$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .61$ . Inexpressive winners were again rated as lower in hubristic pride ( $M = 2.02$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ) than expressive winners ( $M = 3.07$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ),  $t(99) = -5.00$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .20$ . Inexpressive winners were also perceived as protecting the loser's feelings more ( $M = 3.97$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ) than expressive winners ( $M = 1.89$ ,  $SD = 0.96$ ),  $t(99) = 8.87$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .44$ .

**Interpersonal ratings.** Inexpressive winners were again rated more positively ( $M = 5.29$ ,  $SD = 0.70$ ) than expressive winners ( $M = 4.60$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ),  $t(99) = 4.76$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .19$ . Participants were also more interested in being friends with inexpressive winners ( $M = 4.52$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ) than expressive winners ( $M = 3.90$ ,  $SD = 0.95$ ),  $t(99) = 3.26$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $\eta^2 = .10$ . In the following analyses, we tested whether loser protection and hubristic pride were unique mediators of the relationship between winner expressivity and interpersonal ratings.

**Mediational analyses.** When entered into a regression model after the manipulation and alongside hubristic pride, perceived loser protection was associated with more positive evaluations ( $\beta = .23$ ,  $p = .007$ ) and a greater desire to be friends with the winner ( $\beta = .33$ ,  $p = .002$ ). Hubristic pride was associated with less positive evaluations ( $\beta = -.68$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and lower desire to be friends with the winner ( $\beta = -.52$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The effect of the manipulation on the dependent variables was no longer significant when the mediators were added to the model ( $\beta_s < .14$ ,  $p_s > .184$ ). Bootstrapping analyses with 10,000 resamples revealed that the indirect effect of winner inexpression via perceived protection of the loser was significant on winner evaluations (IE =  $-.25$ ,  $SE = .10$ , 95% CI [ $-.461$ ,  $-.062$ ]; see Figure 2), and desire for friendship (IE =  $-.44$ ,  $SE = .19$ , 95% CI [ $-.85$ ,  $-.11$ ]; see Figure 3). The indirect effect of winner inexpression via hubristic pride

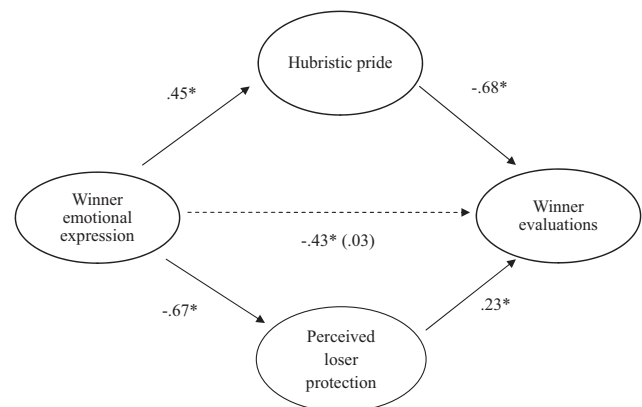


Figure 2. The mediating effect of hubristic pride and perceived loser protection on the relationship between winner emotional expression and winner evaluations (Experiment 3). Numbers are standardized beta coefficients. Standardized coefficient in bracket indicates weight after inclusion of mediators. \*  $p < .001$ .

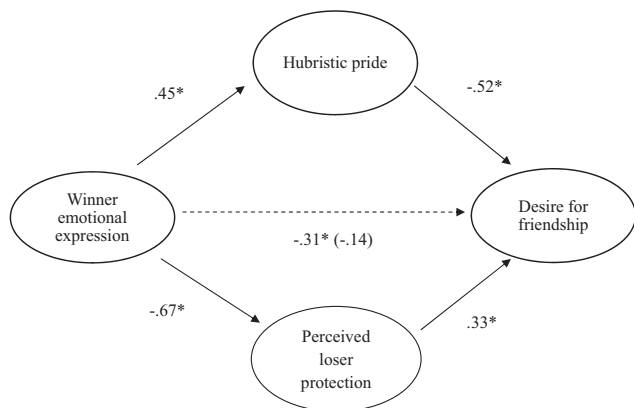


Figure 3. The mediating effect of hubristic pride and perceived loser protection on the relationship between winner emotional expression and desire for friendship (Experiment 3). Numbers are standardized beta coefficients. Standardized coefficient in bracket indicates weight after inclusion of mediators. \*  $p < .001$ .

was also significant on winner evaluations ( $IE = -.49$ ,  $SE = .12$ , 95% CI  $[-.759, -.279]$ ) and desire for friendship ( $IE = -.47$ ,  $SE = .13$ , 95% CI  $[-.779, -.255]$ ).

The results confirm that downplaying one's emotional reaction to a win confers reputational and relationship benefits in the form of liking and desire for friendship. We again found that these effects were driven partially by low perceptions of hubristic pride. The effects were additionally mediated by beliefs that inexpressive winners protected the loser's feelings. These processes confirm the intuition of winners in research by Friedman and Miller-Herringer (1991), in which winners reported inhibiting positive emotional expression to avoid appearing hubristic and to protect the losers' feelings. We now demonstrate that these instincts pay off. Winners are seen as humble and considerate when they express less positive emotion, and these perceptions bestow social rewards in the form of likability and desire for friendship.

### General Discussion

Three experiments demonstrated that *not* expressing positive emotions is a successful social strategy in outperformance situations. In Experiment 1, inexpressive winners were evaluated more positively than expressive winners. In Experiment 3, participants were more interested in forming a friendship with inexpressive than expressive winners. These effects were mediated by the perception that winners were not hubristic and that they protected the loser's feelings. It is by giving these impressions that winners come to reap the social benefits of emotional inexpression. Experiment 2 demonstrated that participants believed that the inexpressive winners were using expressive suppression strategies significantly more than expressive winners. This provides preliminary evidence that performance situations may be one context in which expressive suppression may have social benefits, despite its reputation in the literature as a dysfunctional emotion regulation strategy.

Previous research has almost uniformly found personal and social costs to emotional suppression. However, our findings demonstrate that contextually appropriate inhibition of positive emo-

tions can have important benefits for impression formation and management—a possibility that has received comparatively little attention in the literature. Researchers have extolled the virtues of expressing positive emotion (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005) and warned of potential drawbacks to suppressing positive emotions (Gross, 2002). However, it is still the case that emotion must be *appropriately* expressed (or not) depending on the context (Westphal, Seivert, & Bonanno, 2010). We now show that outperformance is one context in which it is appropriate, and successful, to avoid expressing positive emotions.

We have referred globally to “positive emotion” throughout, but of course there are many different positive emotions, and some may be more appropriate to express in outperformance situations than others. Pilot testing suggested that inexpressive winners downplayed a range of positive emotions, including joy, gratitude, and pride; hence our discussion of global positive emotion. It is the case, however, that pride was a specific driver of the effects in Experiments 1 and 3, which suggests that the expression of this emotion may be particularly important in informing people's reactions to winners. Future research might consider comparing expressions of pride with expressions of other emotions to determine whether the effects we have described are unique to this discrete emotion or are a function of the expression of positive emotion more generally. It may be that contextual factors have a powerful ability to reshape how people view the expression of many different positive emotions.

As with all research, there are some limitations to the present work. First, because it is difficult to find an appropriate control condition, it remains unclear whether emotional inexpression is driving up or emotional expression driving down ratings of winners. Additionally, because we sourced freely available experimental stimuli, there is no way of knowing the winners' true emotional state (i.e., whether they were using expressive suppression or an alternative strategy to regulate their emotional state, or if they simply felt less emotion to begin with). Experiment 2 confirmed that participants at least *perceived* that winners were using emotion suppression. This indicates that suppression, or the perception of suppression, may have social benefits in performance contexts. Future research that manipulates suppression with explicit instructions is needed to better understand the role of this emotion regulation strategy in outperformance contexts. Such research could also determine whether, despite the social benefits, there are personal costs to emotional inexpressivity following a win. Expressive suppression and low positive emotion expression are both associated with a variety of negative personal outcomes, and it is possible these personal costs still emerge in performance contexts. This would indicate that the social gains made by downplaying emotional reactions to wins might require personal sacrifices.

### Conclusions

The current findings suggest that there are contexts in which it is useful and necessary to reduce the expression of positive emotions. There may still be personal costs to suppressing positive emotions in outperformance contexts, but these costs may be outweighed by the social benefits gained by appearing humble in victory. Convention holds that winners are grinners. We suggest



that for winners who hope to maintain positive reputations and relationships it is actually better *not* to grin when they win.

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