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

[ Elise K. Kalokerinos et al., 2014 Emotion ]

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When You Win

Good speech
Tonight I don’t feel very clever, very witty ... I feel very grateful, very humble.

Bad speech
I’m the king of the world!
Background

Good speech

Tonight I don’t feel very clever, very witty ... I feel very grateful, very humble.

Bad speech

I’m the king of the world!

Winners should avoid expressing excessive positive emotion
The benefit of not expressing positive emotion
The benefits of Emotion Expression

- **Feel and express** positive emotion
  - $\rightarrow$ **higher** social connectedness

- **Feel, but not express** positive emotion
  - $\rightarrow$ **lower** social connectedness

Disconnection between internal and expressed positive emotions make individuals appear inauthentic.
Outperformance Situations

- Cultural display rules ... what emotion is appropriate to express
  - Humility is required of a winner
  - Winner need to reduce the expression of positive emotion

Author’s suggest

Not expressing positive emotions could garner social benefits in outperformance situations
The Costs of Emotion Suppression

Expressive suppression: emotion regulation strategy

- Suppression is generally dysfunctional
  - Suppression of positive/negative emotions
    → worse mood, lower well-being, ...

- Suppression comes with social costs
  - Suppression of negative emotions
    → undermines interpersonal closeness, communication
    → impairs relationship formation and satisfaction
Benefit of Suppression

- In romantic relationships
  - When sacrificing for one’s partner, suppressing negative emotions → high personal well-being

- For Chinese participants
  - Expressive suppression is good strategy for social harmony
The Current Research

- Identify potential benefits to suppressing the expression of negative emotion

  about positive emotion?

- Winners spontaneously inhibit emotion expression more in the presence of losers than when alone

  Whether inhibition of positive emotion is effective social strategy?
Experiment

- Participants watched videos of real-life events “outperformance situation”

1. Inexpressive winners were evaluated more positively

2. Inexpressive winners were perceived as using expressive suppression of their positive emotion

3. People were more interested with inexpressive winner
Experiment

- Participants watched videos of real-life events “outperformance situation”

1. Inexpressive winners were evaluated more positively
2. People were more interested with inexpressive winner

a) to avoid giving the impression of being prideful
b) to protect the loser’s feelings

mediate the relationship between winner and social ratings
Inexpressive winners were evaluated more positively than expressive winners.

- Inexpressive winners would be seen as lower in *hubristic pride*.
- Two types would not differ in degree of perceived *authentic pride*. 
Experiment 1: Method

- 12 videos of winners (the Academy Awards, tennis matches, game shows)
- Each domain, selected two inexpressive, two expressive
- Only picture, no voice, random

Winner inexpressivity

- How the winner was downplaying their emotional reaction?
- How strong/intense was the reaction of the person?
- How the winner is trying not to express their positive emotions?
- How the video made you feel negative/positive?
- To what extent do you think the winner is
  - aggressive/selfish/intelligent/friendly/nice/likable → Winner evaluations
  - arrogant/conceited/egotistical → hubristic pride
  - accomplished/confident/productive/successful/high in self-worth → authentic pride
Experiment 1: Results

- emotional inexpression
  
inexpressive > expressive

- participant’s mood
  
inexpressive = expressive

- evaluated more positively
  
inexpressive > expressive

- authentic pride
  
inexpressive = expressive

- hubristic pride 高慢
  
inexpressive < expressive

Downplaying one’s emotional reaction have benefits in outperformance situations
Inexpressive winners would be rated as showing more nonverbal signs of expressive suppression than expressive winners.

The inexpressive winners

\[\text{attempts at expressive suppression}\]
Experiment 2 : Method

- 12 videos of winners (the Academy Awards, tennis matches, game shows)
- Each domain, selected two inexpressive, two expressive
- Voice on/off, random (but have to watch both types)

**with voice**
- The winner is keeping their emotions to themselves
- The winner is being careful not to express their positive emotions
- The winner is controlling their emotions by not expressing them

**Expressive suppression**

**no voice**
- How much they thought that the winner was smiling
- How much they noticed the winner moving their face
- How neutral they found the winner’s facial expression

**Nonverbal signs of positive emotion expression/suppression**
Experiment 2: Results

- using suppression strategies
  - inexpressive > expressive

- smile
  - inexpressive < expressive

- move face
  - inexpressive < expressive

- neutral facial expression
  - inexpressive > expressive

※ Voice on/off is not affect expressive suppression
→ Judgment about suppression based on nonverbal cues

We believe that inexpressive winners are downregulating positive emotions using expressive suppression
Experiment 3 : Hypothesis

- Emotional inexpression increases desire for friendship in this study

- Expressive suppression reduces desire for friendship
  \[ \rightarrow \text{by } ②, \text{ inexpressive } = \text{ expressive suppression} \]

- Inexpressive winners would be perceived as protecting losers more than expressive winners

- This perceived protection motive would help explain positive interpersonal ratings
Experiment 3 : Method

- Same domain as experiment 1
- Use highest and lowest emotional inexpression score
- Additional indicator of the social costs of expressing positive emotions in the form of desire for friendship with winner

- The winner was trying to protect the loser’s feelings? → protection motive
- To what extent do you think the winner is
  - snobbish/pompous/stuck-up/conceited/egotistical/arrogant/smug → hubristic pride
  - aggressive/selfish/intelligent/friendly/nice/likable/understanding/loyal/dependable/unkind/thoughtless → Winner evaluations

- The winner the type of person you could become close friends with?
- Would you be interested in talking to the winner
- How well do you think you would get along with the winner

desire for friendship
Experiment 3: Results

- protecting the loser’s feelings
  - ineffectual > expressive

- more interested in being friends
  - ineffectual > expressive

- emotional ineffectual expression
  - ineffectual > expressive

- hubristic pride
  - ineffectual < expressive

- evaluated more positively
  - ineffectual > expressive
Experiment 3: Results

- Protecting the loser’s feelings
  inexpressive > expressive

- More interested in being friends
  inexpressive > expressive

- Emotional inexpression
  inexpressive > expressive

- Hubristic pride
  inexpressive < expressive

- Evaluated more positively
  inexpressive > expressive
Experiment 3: Results

- Protecting the loser’s feelings
  - Inexpressive > Expressive

- More interested in being friends
  - Inexpressive > Expressive

- Emotional inexpression
  - Inexpressive > Expressive

- Hubristic pride
  - Inexpressive < Expressive

- Evaluated more positively
  - Inexpressive > Expressive
Conclusions

Reduce the expression of positive emotions

To maintain positive reputations & relationships,

better not to grin when you win