

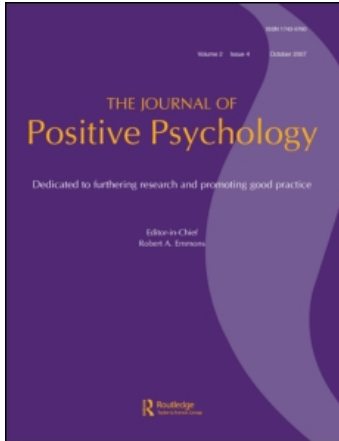
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Beyond brands: Happy adolescents see the good in people

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Beyond brands: Happy adolescents see the good in people

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How does happiness affect adolescents' stereotypes of other people? Using a collage methodology with 60 adolescents aged 12–18, we find that happier adolescents hold more positive stereotypes of others compared to those who are less happy. We also find that happier adolescents are less likely to form impressions of people based on surface level cues such as the products and brands that people own. Finally, our results show that happier adolescents have a more nuanced view of others, (e.g., *some* cool kids wear expensive brands, but *some* shop at thrift stores), compared to their less happy counterparts, who tend to oversimplify their view of others (e.g., *all* cool kids wear expensive brands, *all* doctors drive a BMW).

Keywords: adolescents; stereotypes; happiness; social roles; impression formation

Introduction

Happiness is becoming an increasingly popular topic of discussion. Arguably, happiness is the only aspect of our lives with real universal value. In fact, the field of positive psychology is revealing strong evidence that happiness brings us highly desirable life benefits, such as better health, longer life, successful relationships, success in work, and better mental health (see Seligman, 2002a for a review). A growing body of research is demonstrating that as we become happier, we essentially become better people. For example, as we become happier, we become more compassionate (Neff, Rude, & Kirkpatrick, 2007), more creative (Veenhoven, 1988), more energetic (Brebner, Donaldson, Kirby, & Ward, 1995), and more emotionally and physically healthy (Stack & Eshleman, 1998). We are also more likely to marry (Harker & Keltner, 2001), to engage in more social interactions (Berry & Hansen, 1996), and to have stronger social activities (Okun, Stock, Haring, & Witter, 1984).

Most of the research thus far has focused on adult populations. We know significantly less about if and how happiness might bring adolescents similar desirable social and psychological benefits. Given that adolescence is a time when social awareness is heightened and daily social pressures mount, the ideal starting place in understanding the benefits of adolescents' happiness would be to investigate if and how their levels of happiness play a role in how they navigate through their social worlds – more

specifically, how do adolescents view and stereotype others? Understanding how they form stereotypes is important because making sense of different social crowds and fitting into the 'right' ones are pivotal during adolescence.

We look to the adult social judgment literature to guide our work. We know from Forgas and Moylan (1987) that one of the most important factors that influences adults' social judgments is how they feel at the time of making judgments. However, to our knowledge, researchers have not investigated the relationship between adolescents' feelings (e.g., happy or sad) and adolescents' perceptions and stereotypes of others.

The purpose of this research is to examine how happiness influences adolescents' perceptions and stereotypes of others. Specifically, we ask the following three questions: Does happiness influence the degree to which adolescents hold positive stereotypes of others? Does happiness influence the degree to which adolescents use surface-level cues such as products and brands to form stereotypes? Does happiness influence the degree to which adolescents hold rigid stereotypes?

Conceptual overview

What is happiness?

Researchers have defined happiness as an overall sense that life is good (Myers, 1992) and that life contains many positive situations and emotions (Ahuvia, 2008).

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Lyubomirsky, King, and Diener (2005, p. 803) define happiness as 'a preponderance of positive emotions'. According to Seligman (2002a), these emotions can be categorized as follows: past (e.g., satisfaction, contentment), present (e.g., pleasure, gratification), and future (e.g., optimism, hope). Accordingly, we place such related constructs (e.g., satisfaction, well-being) under the umbrella of 'happiness'. Additionally, following previous studies (e.g., Nicolao, Irwin, & Goodman, 2009; Seligman, 2002a), we use happiness, subjective well-being and well-being interchangeably because of their high interrelation, and view them as the positive state of the self which results from positive emotions.

Research on happiness

Researchers across disciplines (e.g., social psychology, economics, marketing) have made much progress in advancing our knowledge on the topic of happiness. Although most of these studies are correlational in nature, Lyubomirsky et al. (2005, p. 803) have argued that the majority of researchers have 'frequently used wording implying that cause flows from the resource to happiness'. (i.e., happiness has mostly been examined as an outcome/consequence). Most of these studies have focused on adult samples, linking adult happiness to a number of background factors, as well as social, behavioral, and psychological factors. We briefly discuss some of these findings below to provide a thorough background on the types of studies that have been conducted on the topic of happiness.

First, researchers have linked happiness to background factors such as institutional structure, income, and age (Frey & Stutzer, 1999), as well as national GDP and unemployment (Di Tella, MacCulloch, & Oswald, 2003). Second, researchers have linked happiness to social factors such as quality of interpersonal relationships (e.g., Diener & Seligman, 2002), amount of time spent socializing (Ben-Zur, 2003; Diener & Seligman, 2002), success in finding a conjugal partner and having a satisfying marriage (Harker & Keltner, 2001), presence of children in a couple's relationship (Headey, 1988), and participation in social events (Argyle & Lu, 1990). In fact, there is ample evidence indicating that having healthy social relationships contributes to individuals' happiness (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Clark, Diener, Georgellis, & Lucas, 2008; Diener & Seligman, 2002).

Third, happiness has been found to be associated with behavioral factors, including gratitude (Emmons, 2004), and prosocial behaviors (e.g., altruism, donating, helping, volunteering). Researchers have found that gratitude is positively associated with happiness (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005), and prosocial behaviors are positively

associated with individuals' well-being (Dunn, Aknin, & Norton, 2008; Lyubomirsky, Tkach, & Sheldon, 2004; Thoits & Hewitt, 2001).

Finally, researchers have examined the link between adult happiness and psychological factors (e.g., self-esteem, anxiety, and personality traits). For example, findings suggest that people who have higher self-esteem (Diener & Diener, 1995; Furnham & Cheng, 2000; Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 2002) or are extraverted (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Lu & Shih, 1997), are significantly happier than their respective counterparts who have lower self-esteem or are introverted.

In sum, over the past several decades, the topic of happiness has received much attention from researchers. Although most of the academic work has focused on adult happiness, a small set of studies has examined happiness in a much more vulnerable population, adolescents. We turn to a discussion of these findings in the next section.

Research on adolescent happiness

Happiness as an outcome: What influences adolescents' happiness?

Researchers have primarily treated adolescent happiness as an outcome variable, examining, for example, what types of things or people make adolescents happy (Chaplin, 2009), how ethnic identity affects well-being (Martinez & Dukes, 1997), how gender is related to happiness (Mahon, A. Yarcheski, & T.J. Yarcheski, 2005), and how parents and peers contribute to adolescents' happiness (e.g., Ben-Zur, 2003; Demo & Acock, 1996; Manning & Lamb, 2003; Rigby, 2000). Other predictors of adolescent happiness include extraversion (Cheng & Furnham, 2002), higher self-esteem (Cheng & Furnham, 2002), and greater internal locus of control (Kelley & Stack, 2000).

Happiness as a predictor: How does happiness affect adolescents' lives?

We know relatively little about happiness as a predictor variable. The importance of more studies that contribute to our understanding of adolescents' happiness as a predictor (as opposed to an outcome) is reflected in Seligman's (2002b) suggestion that much of the prevention against problematic aspects of individual functioning (e.g., mental illnesses, undesirable behaviors) should focus on understanding how to foster certain virtues, such as happiness, in young people, i.e., treat happiness as an antecedent of, or stimulus for, a number of life benefits.

Although parents, educators, and other concerned constituents have emphasized the importance of developing children and adolescents into happy individuals,

academic researchers have been relatively slow in providing empirical evidence to provide insight into why happiness is so important in children and adolescents' lives. Given the centrality that social relations have in adolescents' lives (Cotterell, 1996) and the influence that stereotypes play in social interactions (Snyder, Tanke, & Berscheid, 1977), an ideal starting point to investigate how happiness affects adolescents' lives is to examine how adolescents' happiness impacts the way they view and stereotype others. Accordingly, in the following sections, we discuss the development of social role knowledge, stereotyping, and the potential influence of adolescents' happiness on their stereotyping.

Social role knowledge

Social role knowledge has been viewed as 'a cognitive structure containing the perceiver's knowledge, beliefs, and expectancies about some human social group' (Mackie, Hamilton, Susskind, & Rosselli, 1996, p. 42). It is a 'cluster of behaviors and characteristics prescribed for a particular category of people, such as doctors or mothers' (Fischer, Watson, Van Parys, & Tucker, 1983, p. 12). As young as 3-years old, children have an understanding of simple social roles, in which they understand a common role (e.g., teacher) that is defined by concrete behaviors or characteristics (e.g., a teacher uses the chalkboard, gives you tests, and helps you learn). By middle childhood (i.e., 6–8 years), children understand role intersection, the case when one person occupies two or more social roles simultaneously (e.g., a mom can be a teacher and a wife; Fischer & Watson, 1981). It is also at this age that children start to move closer to adults' understanding of roles, although much more development will occur with increasing age (Watson, 1981). By late childhood (i.e., 10–11 years), children move beyond concrete social categories and begin to understand social systems and networks. By early adolescence (i.e., 12 years), although the ability to abstract enables adolescents to combine multiple roles, they have a very rigid and literal adherence to a particular social role category (e.g., all boys are athletes) (Chaplin & Lowrey, 2010). As a result, they tend to oversimplify social roles and do not readily accept nuances in social roles (Watson, 1981).

In summary, researchers have found that children begin to understand social roles as early as 3–4 years. However, it is not until around middle childhood that children's development of role schemas and their understanding of social roles become more complex and sophisticated (Fischer & Watson, 1981; Watson, 1981). With increasing age, children's understanding of social roles becomes more closely aligned with that of adults' (Fischer et al., 1983).

A discussion of social role knowledge is not complete without a discussion of how children and adolescents develop stereotypes. Therefore, we discuss this topic in the next section.

Stereotyping prior to adulthood

Stereotypes are 'abstract knowledge structures linking a social group to a set of traits or behavioral characteristics' that 'guide the processing of information about the group' (Hamilton & Sherman, 1994, p. 3; Weber & Crocker, 1983). Accordingly, the social role knowledge discussed above can be viewed as a stereotype (Hamilton & Trolie, 1986).

Most of what we know about stereotyping prior to adulthood is limited to child development studies on gender stereotyping (Bigler, 1995; Reis & Wright, 1982) or ethnic stereotyping (Bigler & Liben, 1993; Black-Gutman & Hickson, 1996; Powlishta, Serbin, Doyle, & White, 1994). Developmental researchers have shown that children as young as 3 or 4 years of age acquire and use stereotypes (J.E. Daniel & J.L. Daniel, 1998; Gelman, Collman, & Maccoby, 1986; Hirschfeld, 1995; Markman, 1989) and that their awareness of broadly held stereotypes increases with age (McKown & Weinstein, 2003). In fact, Devine (1989) argued that children's attitudes toward other groups form as soon as they are able to differentiate between in-groups and out-groups and are able to identify the ones to which they do or do not belong (i.e., preschool age).

As their knowledge of stereotypes increases, children's rigidity in stereotyping (i.e., the degree to which they oversimplify their stereotypes and steadfastly believe their impressions to be true) also increases. When their knowledge of stereotypes peaks during late childhood/early adolescence (ages 10–13), their stereotypes are most rigid (Miller, Trautner, & Ruble, 2006). Once children reach their peak level of knowledge, their stereotypes begin to decline in rigidity thereafter (Miller et al., 2006). Another aspect of stereotyping is the degree to which the stereotype is concrete *vs.* abstract. By the end of second grade (i.e., ages 6–8), children begin to incorporate abstract representations into their stereotypes. These abstractions increase with age so that by the time they reach middle childhood–late adolescence, children's stereotypes begin to resemble those of adults' (Ruble & Martin, 1998).

For decades, researchers across disciplines have studied the extent to which children recognize the social status accorded to a variety of goods as well as their beliefs about the traits of people based on their possessions (e.g., Belk, 1981; Belk, Bahn, & Mayer, 1982; Estvan, 1958). Consumer researchers have found that by middle childhood, children are capable of forming impressions of people based on the products

and brands they own (Achenreiner & John, 2003; Belk, Mayer, & Driscoll, 1984; Chaplin & John, 2005; Chaplin & Lowrey, 2010) and that this ability is well developed by late childhood (Belk et al., 1982). Social psychologists have also studied how children associate social status with a variety of goods. For example, Estvan (1958) found that children as young as 3 can recognize the status dimension in life-situation drawings. Similarly, in a study with 6–9 year olds, Jahoda (1959) found that children in the youngest age group were aware of the degree of social status associated with different consumption items. Estvan (1958) and Jahoda (1959) also found an increasing age trend in children's ability to engage in consumption stereotyping. Recently, Chaplin and Lowrey (2010) found that not only are 5-year-old children able to stereotype and associate certain products and brands with a particular social role, but they are also able to thoughtfully do so for a number of social roles.

In summary, researchers have found that even preschoolers have the ability to stereotype (Belk et al., 1984; Williams, Bennett, & Best, 1975) and that they become better at stereotyping as they grow older (Achenreiner & John, 2003; Belk et al., 1984; Chaplin & John, 2005; Chaplin & Lowrey, 2010). Further, sometime during middle childhood, children's stereotypes become stronger and more consistent, becoming more and more like those of adults (Maccoby, 1980).

What factors influence adolescents' stereotypes?

For decades, researchers have tried to isolate the factors that influence children's and adolescents' stereotypes. Researchers have offered various explanatory frameworks, including the influence of significant others, cultural–historical variables, and cognitive development (see Aboud & Amato, 2001 for a review). For example, Birnbaum, Nosanchuk, and Croll (1980) argued that parents may have a strong influence on their children's impressions of others. Specifically, Birnbaum et al. (1980) proposed that a possible explanation for the sex-related stereotypes that children hold (e.g., males are more linked to anger and females are more linked to fear) lies in the influence that the parents' own stereotypes have on their children's. Interestingly, the study of McAninch, Manolis, Milich, and Harris (1993) with participants in late childhood–early adolescence (ages 8–12) revealed that gender had a strong influence on impression formation. Participants tended to rate same-sex children more favorably (i.e., girls rated girls more favorably than they rated boys) and tended to think that same-sex children were more interesting.

Researchers have also studied the influence of the self on stereotypes. People's self-perceived trait centrality has been found to affect the information that

the perceiver focuses on when evaluating others. Riggs and Cantor (1984) found that participants for whom anxiety was high (low) in their self-concepts sought more (less) anxiety-related information about the targets they were evaluating. Shrauger and Patterson (1976) have also suggested that the dimensions and attributes that an individual uses in evaluating others are those that are highly relevant to the self-image rather than those that are of low relevance. For instance, the higher the relevance of ideas such as material possessions, athleticism, or fat–thin to the self-image, the higher the frequency with which those dimensions are used to judge others.

Although we know considerably less about how affective states might influence individuals' stereotypes, research does suggest that the changing emotional states that occur during adolescence (Ben-Zur, 2003) are linked to the way adolescents perceive other people (Holmbeck, Paikoff, & Brooks-Gunn, 1995). In our research, we are particularly interested in examining how a positive affective/emotional state, such as individuals' happiness, influences their perceptions of others. We discuss this issue in more detail in the next section.

Affect and judgment of others

Most of what we know about the effect that individuals' affective state (i.e., happiness and other feelings and emotions) has on forming judgments of others comes from research conducted with adult populations. Hence, we draw upon these findings as a basis for our conceptualization with adolescents.

Research with adults has shown that the affective state of the self (e.g., level of happiness) influences the way individuals form judgments (e.g., Bower, 1981; Forgas, 1995; Niedenthal, Halberstadt, & Innes-Ker, 1999; Schwartz, Bless, & Bohner, 1991). For example, people are inclined to perceive others as more aggressive when they feel fearful (Feshbach & Singer, 1957) and to find others more attractive when they feel good (Gouaux, 1971).

Of particular interest to our study is the work of researchers who have found a relationship between mood (e.g., happy vs. sad) and individuals' judgments of others. For example, Forgas and Bower (1987) found that happy individuals formed more positive impressions of others than did sad individuals. Studies have also shown that when people are happy, they tend to perceive that good events happen more frequently (Buchwald, 1977). Relatedly, individuals interpret others' behaviors more positively when they are in a good mood (Veenhoven, 1988). In fact, Forgas and Bower (1987, p. 53) noted that, 'the way the perceiver feels at the time is one of the most important influences on social judgments'. Bower and Cohen (1982, p. 307) echoed this sentiment, arguing that 'social behavior is

almost a black canvas onto which perceivers project a picture according to their moods’.

Abele and Petzold (1994) provided additional evidence for the influence of mood on individuals’ impression formation. They found that when participants were experimentally induced to be in a good mood, they perceived other people as being more likeable than when they were induced to be in a bad mood. These findings are supportive of the mood congruency effect which predicts that a positive (*vs.* negative) emotional state is likely to lead to more (*vs.* less) positive judgments. More recently, Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) discussed the various factors that are related to positive affect – positive construals of others was among the list, underscoring the relationship between mood and judgment of others.

Research hypotheses

Happiness and stereotype valence

In light of literature reviewed, the following question emerges: If happier adults view others more positively, can we expect the same to occur with adolescents? We believe that it is likely that happier adolescents will also view others in a more positive light since children’s stereotypes begin to resemble those of adults by the time they reach middle childhood–late adolescence (Ruble & Martin, 1998). It is noteworthy that the adult literature does not differentiate between favorable *vs.* less favorable social roles (i.e., happier adults will view both favorable and less favorable social roles more positively than their less happy counterparts). Therefore, we anticipate that when asked to evaluate a favorable social role *vs.* a less favorable social role, adolescents with higher levels of happiness will judge both positively. That is, due to the strong effect of happiness on their stereotyping, happy adolescents will hold positive stereotypes toward both types of social roles. By the same logic, we expect those with lower levels of happiness to perceive others in a less favorable manner, regardless of whether the particular social role is favorable (e.g., cool kid) or less favorable (e.g., quiet kid without a lot of friends). Formally stated:

- H1: Happier adolescents will have more positive stereotypes of social roles compared to adolescents who are less happy. Specifically:
- H1A: Happier adolescents will hold a more positive stereotype of a favorable social role (e.g., cool kid) compared to adolescents who are less happy.
- H1B: Happier adolescents will hold a more positive stereotype of a less favorable social role (e.g., quiet kid who does not have a lot of friends) compared to adolescents who are less happy.

Happiness and material possessions in stereotypes

We know that the dimensions and attributes that an individual uses in evaluating others are those that are of high relevance to the self-image (Shrauger & Patterson, 1976). We also know that material possessions can be highly self-relevant, as individuals use brands and products to create, communicate, and maintain their self-image (Aaker, 1999; Chaplin & John, 2005; Fournier, 1998; Sirgy, 1982). In fact, given that teenagers today have around 145 conversations about brands per week (adults invoke brand names about half as often; Heim, 2007) and are considered to be the most brand-conscious generation (Schor, 2004), it would not be surprising to see adolescents relying on brands and products to form their stereotypes, at least to a certain degree. We argue that individuals who place more importance on brands and products are more likely to use brands and products in their evaluations of others. Additionally, given that materialistic individuals (i.e., those who place a great value on material possessions such as brands and products) tend to be less happy (see Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002 for a review), we would expect material possessions (e.g., brands and products) to be less self-relevant for happier adolescents. As a result, happier adolescents should focus less on what people have when forming impressions. Formally stated:

- H2: Happier adolescents will use fewer material possessions to describe a social role compared to adolescents who are less happy. Specifically:
- H2A: Happier adolescents will use fewer products to describe a social role compared to adolescents who are less happy.
- H2B: Happier adolescents will use fewer brands to describe a social role compared to adolescents who are less happy.

Happiness and stereotype nuances

We know that adolescents have a rigid and literal adherence to a particular social role category (e.g., *all* professors are busy, wear glasses, and own a Smartphone). As a result, adolescents tend to oversimplify social roles and do not readily accept nuances in social roles (e.g., only *some* professors wear glasses) (Watson, 1981). However, it is possible that certain adolescents will be more (less) likely to have rigid stereotypes, and thereby be more (less) likely to oversimplify their descriptions of social roles. Given the research findings showing that as we (i.e., adults) become happier, we are more likely to enjoy larger social rewards such as having more friends, enjoying stronger social support, and enjoying richer social interactions (e.g., Berry & Hansen, 1996; Harker & Keltner, 2001; Marks & Fleming, 1999; Okun et al., 1984), it is possible that the level of happiness in

adolescents influences how rigid their stereotypes are. We argue that because happier adolescents are likely to have more friends and to enjoy stronger and richer social interactions (Csikszentmihalyi & Hunter, 2003), they will hold more nuanced stereotypes. More specifically, because happier adolescents will have a larger social network, not only will they have the opportunity to interact with more individuals, but also meet more people from diverse backgrounds, which will allow them to develop a more nuanced view of others (e.g., *some* adults are strict but *some* are lenient), as opposed to having rigid, oversimplified views of others (e.g., *all* adults are strict). Their interactions with more people allow them to appreciate the nuances of any given social role, making them more likely to appreciate variations within the same social role, rather than having oversimplified (i.e., all or nothing) stereotypes. Therefore, we forward the following hypothesis:

H3: Happier adolescents will hold more nuanced stereotypes (see more variation within the same social role) compared to adolescents who are less happy.

Study

The purpose of this study was to formally test our hypotheses with a sample of adolescents. To do so, we asked participants to describe two different social roles by building collages. We know from Chaplin and Lowrey (2010) that children as young as 5 are capable of forming impressions of a range of social roles including, but not limited to, doctors, teachers, and celebrities. We also know that projective techniques such as collages have been used with success in studying children's understanding of symbolism across a wide age range (Chaplin & John, 2005, 2007; Chaplin & Lowrey, 2010). Unlike unstructured, open-ended interviews, it is also a task that does not rely on retrieval and verbalization skills, which may make it easier for those who find expressing imageries that exist in memory to be difficult (younger children) or for those who may not be particularly motivated to engage in a discussion of imageries in their memory (adolescents). Therefore, the collage methodology is appropriate for testing our predictions.

Method

Sample

Sixty participants from the middle to upper-middle class were recruited from schools and after school programs in the midwestern, northeastern, and southwestern United States: thirty 7th/8th graders (12–13 years) and 30 10th/11th graders (16–17 years). The sample

consisted of 43 Caucasians, 8 African Americans, 3 Hispanics, 4 Asians, and 2 'Other'. Boys and girls were equally represented.

Procedure

Participants were recruited from schools and after school programs to participate in a study explained to be 'about things different people like'. Consent forms were distributed to participating schools in a medium-sized midwestern town, two large cities in the Northeast, and one small city in the southwest, inviting 7th/8th and 10th/11th graders to participate. Prior to participating in the study, each participant returned a signed consent form from his/her parent or guardian and a separate participant assent form. At the end of the study, participants received a prize bag with school supplies and were entered in a lottery for a grand prize of \$50 at the end of the study.

Each participant completed the study individually with the experimenter in a private room. Participants were asked to complete a single-item global happiness question (happiness task) as well as two collages (social role stereotyping task; we discuss these tasks in detail below). The order in which participants completed the two tasks was randomized to control for order effects (none were obtained). The order in which participants completed the two collages for the social role stereotyping task was also randomized to control for order effects (none were obtained). The collage task was described and then demonstrated by the interviewer to ensure understanding of the task instructions. After participants completed the first collage and a photograph of the collage was taken, they were informed that the first part of the study was over and all materials for that part of the study would be stored for later data analysis. Participants then completed a distraction task that required them to find and circle hidden pictures. The purpose of this task was to decrease the possibility of participants simply transferring their ideas from one collage to the next due to task similarity. After completing the distraction task, participants were asked to move to a different part of the room, where the experimenter revealed another set of stimuli and asked them to build a second collage. Participants were presented with a fresh set of stimuli in a different part of the room as a second way to minimize possible biases from task similarity.

Participants were interviewed during the task to gain a better understanding of why certain labels were chosen over others. A photograph of the collage was taken for later data analysis. After completing both tasks, participants were debriefed and asked to not talk about the study with their peers until everyone had completed the study. The entire procedure took approximately 20 min to complete.

Materials

Happiness task (survey)

To measure adolescent global happiness (i.e., overall happiness), a single-item question was used: ‘Taking all things together, would you say you are: not at all happy, somewhat happy, happy, or extremely happy with your life?’

Social role stereotyping task (collage)

Adolescents’ stereotypes of different social roles (favorable and less favorable) were measured using a collage methodology. Following Chaplin and Lowrey’s (2010) methodology, participants were asked to complete two collages for two different social roles, a ‘cool kid’ (favorable) and a ‘quiet kid who does not have a lot of friends’ (less favorable). It has been shown that children and adolescents are familiar with these social roles at a level where they could make multiple symbolic associations with each role (Chaplin & Lowrey, 2010). It has also been shown that children and adolescents view a ‘cool kid’ favorably and a ‘quiet kid who does not have a lot of friends’ less favorably (Chaplin & Lowrey, 2010). To assess their stereotypes, we asked participants to build a collage to complete the following statement: ‘When I think of a cool kid (quiet kid without a lot of friends) I think this person would...’ Participants were asked to construct their collages by choosing among a set of labels/pictures and placing them on their collage boards, and were instructed to describe a cool (quiet) kid in any way they wished, using some, all, or none of the categories provided (see next section for more details).

Collage stimuli

Chaplin and Lowrey (2010) found that children’s descriptions for a variety of social roles came from five categories (i.e., products, brands, personal characteristics, demographics/psychographics, and food items), which are symbolically intertwined to contribute to a rich view of a variety of social roles. Therefore, we modeled our stimuli selection after Chaplin and Lowrey’s (2010) studies and developed 20 laminated labels/pictures that represented each of the five categories (100 labels in total). The labels were placed on blank Post-it™ boards for participants to use. Pilot tests indicated the labels would resonate with participants of different ages and genders. Additionally, we followed the guidelines of Chaplin and John (2005) and John (2008) to ensure that results were not biased by participants’ familiarity with the stimuli. The final set of items used in the study excluded those not familiar to most children in each age group. Importantly, participants were instructed that they were not required to use any of the prepared labels and that they were welcome to develop their own descriptions.

Accordingly, participants were provided with blank cards and markers in the event that our set of stimuli was missing descriptions they wanted to use.

Measures

To assess how positively adolescents viewed each social role (hypotheses 1A and 1B), we had two measures. First, we counted the total number of valenced descriptions placed on the collages, positive (e.g., smart, nice, helpful) and negative (e.g., boring, rude, not fun). Second, two raters who were completely blind to the purpose of the study were asked to rate the degree to which each collage represented a positive view of a person (1 = not positive at all, 5 = very positive). To test hypotheses 2A and 2B, we calculated the number of brands and the number of products used to describe each social role. To test hypothesis 3, we calculated the total number of elements from each board. Fewer descriptions would indicate an oversimplified and less nuanced view (only being able to, or only willing to view a particular social role a certain way), while more descriptions would indicate having a more nuanced view, being open to different ways of describing a person. Finally, we used our interview data to gain additional insight into how happiness might influence the degree to which adolescents hold more/less nuanced stereotypes of others.

Results

The cool and quiet kid collages were analysed separately. Below, we report our quantitative findings for each type of social role. We also report qualitative findings from the interviews conducted while participants were constructing their collages. Recall, we had two raters, who were blind to the study aims and hypotheses, rate how positive each participant described each social role. The inter-rater reliability was acceptable (cool kid collage: $r = 0.66$, $p < 0.01$; quiet kid collage: $r = 0.64$, $p < 0.01$).

Quantitative results for ‘cool kid’ collage

Our results were supportive of hypothesis 1A. To test hypothesis 1A, we counted the number of positive descriptions (e.g., smart, funny, helpful) and negative descriptions (e.g., lazy, selfish, rude) placed on each collage. Planned contrasts between happier *vs.* less happy adolescents confirmed the existence of stereotyping differences. Specifically, happier adolescents used more positive descriptions ($M = 8.66$ *vs.* $M = 4.03$, $F(1, 58) = 8.43$, $p < 0.01$, $d = 2.17$) but fewer negative descriptions ($M = 1.65$ *vs.* $M = 2.82$, $F(1, 58) = 3.09$, $p < 0.01$, $d = 0.88$) on their ‘cool kid’ collages than their less happy counterparts. Collages of happier adolescents were also viewed by our raters as being more

Table 1. Means (M) and standard deviations (SD) for dependent variables.

		M	SD
Happiness		4.35	0.73
<i>Cool kid (favorable) collage</i>			
Raters' valence	Happier	4.03	0.79
	Less happy	3.48	0.98
Number of products	Happier	4.76	2.2
	Less happy	6.52	3.07
Number of brands	Happier	4.52	1.79
	Less happy	5.84	2.16
Total items	Happier	27.45	4.91
	Less happy	24.26	5.48
<i>Quiet kid (less favorable) collage</i>			
Raters' valence	Happier	3.72	0.83
	Less happy	3.08	1.11
Number of products	Happier	4.62	1.90
	Less happy	6.01	2.32
Number of brands	Happier	4.18	1.92
	Less happy	6.03	2.27
Total items	Happier	25.43	4.64
	Less happy	22.42	5.11

positive than those of less happy adolescents ($M=4.07$ vs. $M=3.48$, $F(1, 58)=2.54$, $p<0.01$, $d=0.65$; Table 1).

Our results were also supportive of hypotheses 2A and 2B. We found that happier adolescents were less likely to form their stereotypes based on what people have. Specifically, planned contrasts revealed that happier adolescents relied on fewer products ($M=4.76$ vs. $M=6.52$, $F(1, 58)=2.54$, $p<0.01$, $d=0.67$) and fewer brands ($M=4.52$ vs. $M=5.84$, $F(1, 58)=2.57$, $p<0.01$, $d=0.67$) to describe a 'cool kid' than their less happy counterparts.

To test hypothesis 3, we looked at the total number of descriptions used to build a collage for a 'cool kid.' We found that the cool kid collages constructed by happier adolescents had more total elements than those of less happy adolescents ($M=27.45$ vs. $M=24.26$, $F(1, 58)=2.37$, $p=0.01$, $d=0.61$). This finding suggests that happier adolescents hold a more nuanced view of a 'cool kid' and therefore, appreciate more ways to describe a social role, as opposed to oversimplifying their descriptions and limiting themselves to a small set of descriptions. Using fewer descriptions might be suitable to characterize the most common traits of 'cool kids' but certainly would not take into account nuances of individuals. Therefore, hypothesis 3 is supported.

Qualitative results for 'cool kid' collage

Recall, during the process of building their collages, participants were also interviewed by the experimenter to better understand why certain descriptions were

used. The interviews also allowed us to determine whether the collages were constructed in a thoughtful manner (i.e., were participants placing random descriptions on their collages or were they using only meaningful ones?). Our qualitative results provided further support for our hypotheses. We examined responses from participants in each condition (happier vs. less happy) to note similarities within a condition as well as differences across conditions. We have selected two quotes from the interviews for the 'cool kid' collages, in which at least 60% of the participants in each of the conditions offered similar substantive remarks. The first quote represents a happier adolescent's description and the second quote represents a description made by an adolescent who was classified as being less happy, according to our global happiness questionnaire. First, when asked to describe why he chose certain labels for his cool kid collage, a 10th grade boy who rated himself as being 'extremely happy' responded:

I know a lot of cool guys are into sports... not just watching, but actually playing, but some are more into stuff like acting for a career so they do theater. Theater isn't my thing, but it doesn't mean guys in theater aren't cool. I basically think everyone is cool in some way... I think everyone is nice, fun in their own way, helpful, smart... so that's why you see so many different things on my collage.

Here, the 10th grade boy views a 'cool kid' quite positively, using words such as 'nice, fun, helpful, and smart.' The 10th grade boy also holds a more open view of a 'cool kid,' appreciating the nuances of what it means to be 'cool,' rather than oversimplifying the social role and assuming that all cool kids will be essentially the same.

In contrast, when asked the same question, an 8th grade boy who rated himself as being 'somewhat happy' responded:

I bet most people would agree with me even if they are from a different state. It's all in the basketball shoes or the clothes you wear. You can tell. There are the cool people and then you have the not so cool; there's no in-between. And, you know which group you are in. So, the brand names and all the stuff on here are what all cool kids have or want... I think cool kids are the ones who are spoiled by their parents because they are given so much. They end up being annoying and shallow...

Here, this 8th grader has a rigid view of a 'cool kid,' noting that 'There are the cool people and then you have the not so cool; there's no in between.' He also believes that 'most people' would agree with his generally negative and oversimplified description of the 'cool kid' as being 'spoiled... annoying and shallow.'

Quantitative results for 'quiet kid' collage

We obtained additional support for hypothesis 1 using a different social role (i.e., a less favorable role)

in this study. Results for the quiet kid collage replicate our findings for the cool kid collage. Planned contrasts revealed that compared to their counterparts, happier adolescents used more positive descriptions ($M=8.33$ vs. $M=3.24$, $F(1, 58)=9.61$, $p<0.01$, $d=2.48$) but fewer negative descriptions ($M=2.66$ vs. $M=3.47$, $F(1, 58)=2.04$, $p=0.02$, $d=0.52$) on their 'quiet kid' collages. Collages of happier adolescents were also viewed by our raters as being more positive than those of less happy adolescents ($M=3.72$ vs. $M=3.08$, $F(1, 58)=2.52$, $p<0.01$, $d=0.66$). Therefore, hypothesis 1B is supported.

Again, we found that happier adolescents were less likely to form their stereotypes based on what people have (hypotheses 2A and 2B). Specifically, planned contrasts revealed that happier adolescents relied on fewer products, ($M=4.62$ vs. $M=6.01$, $F(1, 58)=2.52$, $p<0.01$, $d=0.66$) and fewer brands ($M=4.18$ vs. $M=6.03$, $F(1, 58)=3.93$, $p<0.01$, $d=0.90$) to describe a 'quiet kid' than their less happy counterparts. Finally, we found that 'quiet kid' collages created by happier adolescents had more total elements than those created by less happy adolescents ($M=25.43$ vs. $M=22.42$, $F(1, 58)=2.38$, $p=0.01$, $d=0.62$), providing additional support for hypothesis 3.

Qualitative results for 'quiet kid' collage

Our qualitative results provided further support for our hypotheses. Again, we examined responses from participants in each condition (happier vs. less happy) to note the similarities within a condition as well as the differences across conditions. We have selected two quotes from the interviews for the 'quiet kid' collages, in which at least 60% of the participants in each of the conditions offered similar substantive remarks. The first quote represents a happier adolescent's description and the second quote represents a description made by an adolescent who was classified as being less happy, according to our global happiness questionnaire. When asked to describe why she chose certain labels for her quiet kid collage, a 10th grade girl who rated herself as being 'extremely happy' responded:

It's kinda hard to do this, because quiet kids who don't have a lot of friends can be nice or mean, cool or not cool, rich or poor... I don't know that all quiet kids are really the same. I consider myself to be popular but I am also really quiet. Some quiet kids aren't popular so it just depends... I guess it depends on who you ask because if you ask me, so many things describe them... quiet kids who don't have a lot of friends can be fun to hang out with. They can be a good friend to people, and they are good people.

Similarly to the 'cool kid' collage, this 10th grader has a positive stereotype of a 'quiet kid without a lot of friends,' explaining that they 'can be fun to hang out with. They can be a good friend to people, and they are

good people' (hypothesis 1). Additionally, this 10th grader demonstrates an appreciation for the nuances present in the social role – 'nice or mean, cool or not cool, rich or poor... I don't know that all quiet kids are really the same' (hypothesis 3). She goes on to say that 'many things describe them'; clearly, she does not have an oversimplified stereotype, but has a flexible and complex view of the social role.

In contrast, when asked the same question, a 10th grade girl who rated herself as being 'somewhat happy' responded:

I think anyone else who does this will have similar tags on here. The quiet kids tend to be very shy. When you're shy, you don't try to make friends so you end up isolating yourself from your social surroundings, which means you have very few friends. I think the quiet kids don't really care where they buy their clothes so Target would make them happy... or even Kmart or T.J. Maxx. I think it's the rowdy popular kids who are the ones who end up with the expensive handbags and shoes and stuff like that... It's true that quiet kids don't have a lot of friends. I don't think they're very confident. They're also not too friendly or fun to talk to.

Compared to the 10th grader who rated herself as 'extremely happy,' this participant has a more negative view of the social role (hypothesis 1), explaining that '[She doesn't] think they're very confident. They're also not too friendly or fun to talk to.' This participant also makes an oversimplified statement about the social role, saying 'I think anyone else who does this will have similar tags on here' (hypothesis 3).

Taken together, our quantitative and qualitative results provide solid support for our hypotheses. In the next section, we discuss the contributions and limitations of our work and conclude with future research directions.

General discussion

Summary

The following picture emerges from our quantitative and qualitative results. We found that happier adolescents hold more positive and nuanced stereotypes of others than those who are less happy. Our results were consistent across different social roles (cool kid vs. quiet kid roles). Specifically, happier adolescents were more positive and open to different descriptions (e.g., some are athletic but some are slugs; some are tough but some are wimpy) to describe a single social role, whereas adolescents who were less happy were more negative and held oversimplified stereotypes of a social role (e.g., *all* are unpopular; *all* are boring). It is worthy to note that because of this pattern (happier adolescents having more nuanced views of each role), their collages were significantly larger (i.e., containing more descriptions). Interestingly, happier adolescents'

collages contained fewer products and brands, suggesting that happier adolescents may focus less on superficial cues such as what people have (or do not have) in their interactions with and impressions of others. Focusing less on material possessions may indicate that these adolescents may also be less materialistic. In addition to running counter to the values that most parents would like to instill in their children, research suggests that materialism disrupts children and adolescents' development into happy (Kasser, 2002), healthy (Linn, 2004) and balanced adults (Schor, 2004).

Another finding worthy of more discussion is the degree to which happier (*vs.* less happy) adolescents (7th/8th graders and 10th/11th graders) incorporated nuances into their stereotypes. This is a particularly robust finding, given that Chaplin and Lowrey (2010) found that, in general, 7th/8th graders had a tendency toward greater rigidity (*i.e.*, less nuanced view of others) than did 10th/11th graders (not taking into account levels of happiness). Thus, our data showed that having a more (less) nuanced stereotype of others across grades is a function of the level of happiness. We did not find gender, region, or age differences in the level of happiness or in the relationship between happiness and the degree to which adolescents hold nuanced views of others. Taken together, these findings suggest that adolescents' happiness is an important driving force behind how rigidly they hold their stereotypes.

Contributions

Our research makes several contributions. First, we add to the understanding of how positive affective/emotional states, such as happiness, may contribute to greater social skills. The fact that our happier respondents were less rigid in how they viewed both a favorable and a less favorable social role suggests that these respondents would be less likely to engage in antisocial activities, such as snubbing or other forms of exclusion. This conjecture clearly needs to be addressed empirically. Second, our research adds to the growing field of positive psychology by shedding light on how happiness may be tied to lower levels of materialism in adolescents (which has been shown with adults). Third, our study focuses on adolescents, a population that needs more attention from researchers in the field of positive psychology. The majority of work in this important field has been conducted with adult samples and, although it is important to demonstrate relationships between positive affective states and particular benefits (for any age), we believe it is particularly critical to examine these relationships at earlier ages to assist with the design of potential interventions.

Limitations

Although our study makes a number of contributions, there are several limitations that are worthy of discussion. First, we only investigated the relation between happiness and stereotyping with two social roles. Although it can be argued that using such familiar and different roles provides a clear-cut context for determining whether differences exist as a function of happiness, it would be useful to investigate additional, more distal roles. Second, the collage methodology has limitations that have been well documented elsewhere (Chaplin & John, 2005, 2007; Chaplin & Lowrey, 2010), including the possibility of prompting respondents with ideas they may not have generated on their own. Despite the limitations, this method has the strong benefit of providing very rich data (both qualitative and quantitative). Third, we examined the relationship between happiness and stereotyping in a narrow age range. Although focusing on the adolescent population has its merits, such as providing insight into the importance of cultivating feelings of happiness in a population that is particularly vulnerable to being overly critical of themselves, our conclusions here cannot simply be lifted and applied to younger or older populations.

Future research

There are several avenues for future research. First, additional age groups should be investigated to determine whether younger children demonstrate similar patterns of stereotyping based on their level of happiness. As mentioned previously, the ability to develop appropriate interventions, coupled with the knowledge of when such interventions ought to begin, should enhance their effectiveness.

Second, the issue of causality should be addressed. Although this study did not experimentally manipulate happiness to be able to definitively claim causation, the directionality of our argument (*i.e.*, happiness → stereotypes) is reasonable for two reasons: (1) we add to the body of literature that also shows that mood influences impression formation. These prior studies have experimentally induced mood (*i.e.*, put individuals into a good/bad mood) to show the influence of mood on individuals' impression formation (*e.g.*, Abele & Petzold, 1994); (2) the mood congruency effect, which predicts that a positive (*vs.* negative) emotional state is likely to *lead to* more (*vs.* less) positive judgments, would also predict that young people who are happier are likely to learn to process information through a more positive lens. Nevertheless, more research on the causal direction of the relationship between happiness and stereotyping is needed. For example, it is possible that there might be a positive feedback effect where being happier leads

to having a more positive view of others, which consequently leads to being happier individuals.

Finally, it would be interesting to examine the complex interaction between happiness and materialism. Previous research has shown that individuals who are more materialistic report lower levels of happiness (e.g., Kasser, 2002). What is not yet known are the boundary conditions for the relationship between happiness and materialism: At what stage of life does this relationship begin? When is it most pronounced? When is the relationship the weakest? What other factors influence the relationship between happiness and materialism (e.g., income, ethnicity)? What we also do not know is whether happiness leads to lower levels of materialism, or whether those who are less materialistic experience greater happiness. Although our study views happiness as a predictor, an experimental manipulation of happiness is the only way to definitively show causation.

In conclusion, our results indicate a strong relationship between happiness and more nuanced stereotyping, and suggest a relationship between happiness and lower levels of materialism. While we do not yet know the direction of the relationship, the very existence of such a relationship should be critical information for those in positions of authority over adolescents (e.g., parents, teachers, coaches, church leaders, etc.). Being armed with this knowledge should aid such role models in their interactions with adolescents. Although much more research needs to be conducted to flesh out the exact nature of these relationships, it is our hope that the study reported here will encourage additional investigation into this important issue.

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