

The Smile You Should Never Use



▶ Whether you're jittery during a second date, interviewing for a job, or stuck in a mind-numbing conversation about your neighbor's baby's feeding schedule (she loves pumpkin, but carrots make her gassy), you probably put on a smile to make it seem like you're actually having a good time. But not only is grinning when you're not into it a major mood suck, it's also counterproductive to getting what you want. Luckily, experts have a better technique for seeming psyched in any situation.

Nothing to Grin About

You might think a smile's a smile, but that's not true...and there's proof that your phony expression likely looks as unnatural as Tara Reid's body. In a study of more than 15,000 people conducted by Richard Wise-

A faux grin may seem like the best fallback when you can't drum up a real one. But if your goal is to charm people and get what you want, that plastic smirk isn't doing you any favors.

BY ANNA DAVIES

man, PhD, professor of psychology at the University of Hertfordshire, in England, 72 percent of participants could spot a genuine smile versus a painted-on one.

The reason the two types look different is that they originate in distinct regions of the brain, and each involves a separate set of muscles. A legit smile comes from the limbic system, the area associated with emotions, whereas a false one stems from the motor cortex, which controls voluntary actions.

Body-language expert Janine Driver, author of *You Say More Than You Think*, points out the signs that prove a grin is for real: Your cheeks lift, crow's-feet appear around the outer edges of your eyes, and the smile is wide, symmetrical (rather than lopsided), and lasts only a few seconds.

And once people register that you're faking, it's a turn-off: A study from Blaise Pascal University in Clermont-Ferrand, France, discovered that when people see a real smile, the reward circuits in their brain light up. Conversely, researchers hypothesize that being on the receiving end of an insincere smile may cause activity in parts of the brain that process negative emotions.

"Humans value authenticity, because we depend on social cues for communication," explains Guy Winch,

You, You, You

PhD, author of *The Squeaky Wheel*. "So when an expression doesn't match an emotion, it's apparent to outsiders that something is off, and that can undermine trustworthiness."

The Real Deal

Okay, so pretending you're enjoying yourself will backfire...but you can't come right out and, for example, tell your mother-in-law that you'd rather clean a frat-house bathroom than make small talk with her. Luckily, there's a solution: Instead of forcing a smile, conjure up an authentic one using a technique experts call deep acting.

"When you're in an unpleasant situation, shift your focus to memories or future plans that bring you real happiness," Winch says. So if your MIL asks a nosy question, like when you're finally going to make her a grandmother, redirect your thoughts to a sexy romp you had or your Caribbean vacay before responding. "Now when you smile, it will feel and look natural," Winch explains. "Essentially, you're training your brain to pull up positive emotions on demand." As a result, not only will it put you in a better mood, your mother-in-law (or whomever you're talking to) will be more receptive to anything you say or any request you make.

Another way to coax out a legit smile is to take a cue from other people. You know the expression "Smiling is contagious"? Turns out, science backs it up. "Emotional contagion is a real phenomenon. When we surround ourselves with happy people, we're more likely to feel happy as well," says Christopher Peterson, PhD, codirector of the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Michigan. Say you're heading into a stressful situation, like a brainstorming session with your boss. Having a quick conversation with your cool, upbeat coworker beforehand or even glancing at a photo of you and your boyfriend beaming

"By shifting your focus to things that actually make you happy, you'll cultivate an authentic grin that enhances your mood."

into the camera can help put you in a positive frame of mind.

Just make sure you eventually find an outlet for your true feelings, because bottling it up won't do you any good, warns Marianne LaFrance, PhD, professor of psychology at Yale University and author of *Lip Service: Smiles in Life, Death, Trust, Lies, Work, Memory, Sex, and Politics*. After a nerve-racking experience, call up a friend or go out with your guy and tell him about it. ■

Stars Caught Faking It!

If anyone can pretend to be psyched, it's celebs, right? Nope.



● Spotted: a not-so-enthusiased Jessica Szohr. Her set jaw and bared teeth are two super obvious fake-smile signals.



● Kelly Rowland is playing nice for the camera, but the lack of movement around her eyes proves she's so not into it.



● See how Carrie Underwood's smile is a bit lopsided? Proof that the country cutie is going through the motions.

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