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Faking a smile will only make you feel worse

By Michael Kesterton
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Social Studies: A daily miscellany of information by Michael Kesterton

Would it kill you to smile?

"When was the last time you flashed a fake smile at the office?" The New York Times asks. "For some, it may be just another mundane aspect of work life - putting on a game face to hide your inner unhappiness. But new research suggests that it may have unexpected consequences: worsening your mood and causing you to withdraw from the tasks at hand. In a study published this month in the *Academy of Management Journal*, scientists tracked a group of bus drivers for two weeks, focusing on them because their jobs require frequent, and generally courteous, interactions with many people. ... After following the drivers closely, the researchers found that on days when the smiles were forced, the subjects' moods deteriorated and they tended to withdraw from work. ... But on days when the subjects tried to display smiles through deeper efforts - by actually cultivating pleasant thoughts and memories - their overall moods improved and their productivity increased."

You didn't sell out

"[T]he idea that midlife crises are common is a myth, experts say," *Livescience.com* reports. " 'It makes for good novels or good movies, but it is not really accurate,' said psychologist Margie Lachman of Brandeis University in Massachusetts. 'There is no specific time in life that predisposes you to crisis,' said Alexandra Freund, a life-span researcher at the University of Zurich in Switzerland. ... One of the popular misconceptions is that midlife crises are spurred by a sudden realization that the values and goals of youth have been abandoned for more comfortable, and achievable, aspirations; that the person has 'sold out.' Freund finds such concerns puzzling. 'Selling out to whom?' she asked. In the process of figuring themselves out, young people will wrestle with establishing personal goals and values. After young adulthood, however, personality remains relatively stable for the rest of one's life, researchers have found. As for goals, new ones are usually variations of the original goal and are aligned with the person's core values, Freund said. ... It's not the values that usually change, it's the approach."

Monkeys have self-doubt

"Monkeys trained to play computer games have helped to show that it is not just humans that feel self-doubt and uncertainty, a study says. U.S.-based scientists found that macaques will 'pass' rather than risk choosing the wrong answer in a brainteaser task," *BBC News* reports. "Awareness of our own thinking was