How to lose friends and influence people: Expressing positive emotion can increase perceived status in competitive contexts

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Expressing positive emotion is typically thought of as an affiliative signal that wins friends. Yet, research shows that individuals who express positive emotion after a win are liked less and considered less desirable friends than people who are inexpressive in victory (Kalokerinos, Greenaway, Pedder, & Margetts, 2014). Why, then, might winners express positive emotion following victory? We tested the possibility that positive emotion expressions in competitive contexts can serve to increase perceived status, thus creating an impression of formidability. In one study, we found that tennis players who expressed positive emotion after winning a point were more likely to win the following point. In two experiments, we found that winners who expressed positive emotion following a victory were perceived as higher status, more formidable, and more successful than people who suppressed positive emotion. In three additional experiments, we varied the context to understand why this effect occurs, manipulating *who* was on the receiving end of the emotion expression, *how* competent the winner was, and *whether* the winner was authentic in their emotion expression. The only variable that moderated the positive emotion status effect was perceived authenticity: Winners who were inauthentic in their emotion expressions were not seen as higher status than winners who suppressed their emotion. These findings extend understanding of positive emotion expressions, showing they are not only affiliative signals designed to promote social closeness, but in certain contexts can signal dominance. Hence, despite the relationship costs, winners may express positive emotion in victory to reap reputational benefits.