



## Social Technologies

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### *For Immediate Release*

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## The Future of Happiness

*MTV / Social Technologies / AP Study Finds Today's Youth Pragmatic in Their Pursuit of Happiness*

**Washington, DC, July 27, 2007**--What makes 12-24 year olds happy? That was the question MTV executives hired the futurist consulting and research firm Social Technologies to answer earlier this year.

"We knew friends and technology would be important to this demographic, but going in we also had the preconceived notion that 12 to 24 years olds were slightly indifferent, self-serving, and perhaps even a bit apathetic," explains Andy Hines, Social Technologies' director of custom projects, who led the study.

In the end, the results surprised him. "The biggest thing we learned was never judge a book by its cover." Here's why.

### The findings

"Youth will continue to perplex adults in their pursuit of happiness," according to the report's executive summary. "They will exhibit a careful mixture of idealism and aspirations, tempered with a grasp of realities and practicalities."

#### ▪ Transitional Tradition

- **BFF.** Friends are and will continue to be the most important relationships contributing to youth happiness. *80% of the youth polled say that having lots of close friends is very or somewhat important; 23% say that when they go out with friends, they stop feeling unhappy.*
- **Parents Needed.** Despite minor annoyances, youth will continue to depend on parents as a vital source of security and happiness. *Nearly half of the respondents mentioned at least one of their parents as a hero.*
- **Religion a la Carte.** Youth will increasingly seek happiness via spirituality and faith. *"I'm not religious, but having spiritual life is important," says Steven B., 21, of Atlanta. "There needs to be a purpose for life. If I didn't have it, I don't know where I'd be."*
- **My Family Commitment.** A resurgence of interest among youth in traditional family structures will gain momentum. *90% of respondents say they think it is likely they will be married to the same person their whole life.*

#### ▪ All About Me

- **No Body's Perfect.** Body image and traditional routes to good health will be important aspects of happiness for many youth. *"At my school, skinny is*



*what everyone's trying to be," says Vanessa A., 13, of Philadelphia. "People make fun of fat and also of the skin-and-bones look."*

- **Money Matters.** Money is increasingly seen by youth as a means rather than an end. Relative wealth and status are more important than absolute. *73% say the kind of stuff they have makes them happy. 69% say they want to be rich, but 51% say it is not at all likely or not too likely that they will actually be rich.*
- **Almost Famous.** Youth, especially younger people, fantasize about fame, but are savvy enough to know it is unlikely and most will settle for a good career. *"I want to be famous or a skater or a basketball player, but I don't think it will happen," says Nik O., 12, of Phoenix. Zachary G., 13, of Philadelphia says: "In the future, I want more peace and just a better life... a good job, and to take care of the kids."*
- **My Life, My Time, My Way**
  - **Take Control.** Youth will take control of their own happiness. *91% say they have goals for the future (81% have career/work goals, 64% education, 62% family, 63% money, 48% travel, 17% sports, while 12% are hoping for fame).*
  - **No Challenge Too Extreme.** Youth see few obstacles in their pursuit of happiness that they cannot overcome. *Concern for the future causes stress for only 20% of the 13–17 year olds polled, but 40% of those 18–24 years old feel concern.*
  - **Unplugged Meltdown.** Technology will stress youth... only when it's unavailable. *"I'd be stressed if I didn't have a cell phone," says Cole M., 15, of Atlanta.*
  - **Uniquely Generic.** Growing youth individuality and self-expression will be tempered by the need to fit in, rather than rebel. *83% said they'd rather be their own person than fit in with their peers. Two-thirds of those surveyed said they are happier in a group. We sensed a rebellious streak, but it was clearly not too far outside of peer group or family norms.*
- **Virtual Community**
  - **Tech Me.** Technology will be important for staying in touch and for the pleasure of the moment. *37% of youths polled say they play videogames to stop unhappiness. 61% say technology helps them make new friends. In the 24 hours before the survey, half of the respondents said, they sent a text message; 71% said they received one.*
  - **Virtual & F2F.** Youth will make little distinction between face-to-face and virtual friendships. They will have many friends they may never meet in person. *62% of youths polled have used social networking sites like MySpace and FaceBook; 53% have created their own profiles on such sites; 33% say they have friends online they've never met in person.*

### Happiness Analyzed

The bottom line is that today's youth define happiness differently than previous generations did, the Social Technologies team determined.



“The characteristic that will most shape their current and future pursuit of happiness may be a deep-seated pragmatism,” explains project manager Traci Stafford Croft, who traveled to three cities (Philadelphia, Phoenix and Atlanta) with MTV’s staff to interview about five dozen 12-24 year olds. Thereafter, the Associated Press surveyed another 1,200 youths to further flesh out the findings.

In the end, the research showed that it is a popular misconception that today’s youths are self-absorbed and indifferent to social issues. “This might reflect the fact that they have a good grasp on reality and are simply being practical about what they get upset about or involved in,” Croft explains.

“No, this generation is not likely to march in DC to protest the war in Iraq,” adds futurist Hines. “But they do care about the country, the environment, and the planet. They are just showing it in a way that is different from their parents and grandparents.”

As for the helicopter parents, known to swoop in to “protect” their offspring in this group, well, that was the finding that most amazed the Social Technologies team.

“We thought the kids would really resent having their parents come in and make a fuss at school or on the playing field, but the youths didn’t feel as if that was an obstacle to their happiness,” Croft concludes. “Sure, it was a little embarrassing for them, but ultimately they said they appreciated that their parents are looking out for them. And if you think about it, that’s just good common sense.”

### **For more information**

Download the entire MTV Happiness Study: <http://www.socialtechnologies.com/mtv.aspx>.

Schedule an interview with Andy Hines or Traci Stafford Croft. Email: [hope.gibbs@socialtechnologies.com](mailto:hope.gibbs@socialtechnologies.com).

### **About ) Andy Hines and Traci Stafford Croft**

**Andy Hines** is director of consulting at the global research firm Social Technologies. He has taught future studies at the University of Houston, worked as a partner at the analyst firm Coates & Jarratt, and been an organizational futurist at Kellogg, Dow Chemical, and other global organizations. Hines has an M.A. in futures studies, and co-founded and served as executive director of the Association of Professional Futurists. *Thinking About the Future* (Social Technologies, 2006) is his third book. He is also an expert speaker, facilitator, and writer who has facilitated hundreds of workshops and published numerous articles about aspects of future studies.

**Traci Stafford Croft** is a consulting futurist at Social Technologies who is responsible for developing new and existing client relationships while also contributing to project content in the areas of consumer trends and scenario planning as well as internal corporate networking, communications, and innovation processes. She has worked for and with many Fortune 500 companies including Ford Motor Co., where she was recognized for her individual contributions to Ford’s 2006 Corporate Sustainability Report and for her subject-matter expertise in the areas of Aging Population and Changing Physiology.

### **About ) Social Technologies**

Social Technologies is a global research and consulting firm specializing in the integration of foresight, strategy, and innovation. With offices in Washington, DC, London, and Shanghai, Social Technologies serves the world’s leading companies, government



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agencies, and nonprofits. A holistic, long-term perspective combined with actionable business solutions helps clients mitigate risk, make the most of opportunities, and enrich decision-making.

### **About) MTV**

MTV Networks, a unit of Viacom (NYSE: VIA, VIA.B), is one of the world's leading creators of programming and content across all media platforms. MTV Networks, with more than 100 channels worldwide, owns and operates the following television programming services: MTV: MUSIC TELEVISION, MTV2, VH1, mtvU, NICKELODEON, NICK at NITE, COMEDY CENTRAL, TV LAND, SPIKE TV, CMT, NOGGIN, VH1 CLASSIC, LOGO, MTVN INTERNATIONAL and THE DIGITAL SUITE FROM MTV NETWORKS, a package of 13 digital services (all of these networks are trademarks of MTV Networks). MTV Networks connects with its audiences through its robust consumer products businesses and its more than 95 interactive properties worldwide, including online, broadband, wireless, and interactive television services and also has licensing agreements, joint ventures, and syndication deals whereby all of its programming services can be seen worldwide.

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