

TITLE:

*New research uncovers some anti-intuitive insights into how many people are happy
--and why*

5 Compared with misery, happiness is relatively unexplored terrain for social scientists. Between 1967 and 1994, 46,380 articles indexed in Psychological Abstracts mentioned depression, 36,851 anxiety, and 5,099 anger. Only 2,389 spoke of happiness, 2,340 life satisfaction, and 405 joy.

10 Recently we and other researchers have begun a systematic study of happiness. During the past two decades, dozens of investigators throughout the world have asked several hundred thousand representatively sampled people to reflect on their happiness and satisfaction with life--or what psychologists call "subjective wellbeing." In the U.S. the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago has surveyed a representative sample of roughly 1,500 people a year since 1957; the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan has carried out

15 similar studies on a less regular basis, as has the Gallup Organization. Government-funded efforts have also probed the moods of European countries.

We have uncovered some surprising findings. People are happier than one might expect, and happiness does not appear to depend significantly on external circumstances. **Although** viewing life as a tragedy has a long and honorable history, the responses of random samples of people

20 around the world about their happiness paints a much rosier picture.

In the University of Chicago surveys, three in 10 Americans say they are very happy, **for example**. Only one in 10 chooses the most negative description, "not too happy." The majority describe themselves as "pretty happy." (The few exceptions to global reports of reasonable happiness include hospitalized alcoholics, new inmates, new psychotherapy clients, South

25 African blacks during apartheid, and students living under conditions of economic and political oppression.)

How can social scientists measure something as hard to pin down as happiness? Most researchers simply ask people to report their feelings of happiness or unhappiness and to assess how satisfying their lives are. Such self-reported well-being is moderately consistent over years

30 of retesting. **Furthermore**, those who say they are happy and satisfied seem happy to their close friends and family members and to a psychologist-interviewer. **Their** daily mood ratings reveal more positive emotions, and they smile more than those who call themselves unhappy. Self-reported happiness **also** predicts other indicators of well-being. Compared with the depressed, happy people are less self-focused, less hostile and abusive, and less susceptible to disease.

35 We have found that the even distribution of happiness cuts across almost all demographic classifications of age, economic class, race and educational level. **In addition**, almost all strategies for assessing subjective well-being--including **those** that sample people's experience by polling them at random times with beepers--turn up similar findings.

Interviews with representative samples of people of all ages, **for example**, reveal that no time of

40 life is notably happier or unhappier. **Similarly**, men and women are equally likely to declare **themselves** "very happy" and "satisfied" with life, according to a statistical digest of 146 studies by Marilyn J. Haring, William Stock and Morris A. Okun, all then at Arizona State University. Alex Michalos of the University of Northern British Columbia and Ronald Inglehart of the University of Michigan, summarizing newer surveys of 18,000 university students in 39

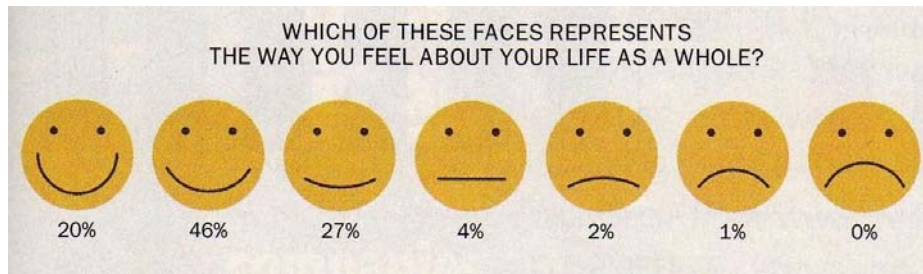
45 countries and 170,000 adults in 16 countries, corroborate **these findings**.

Knowing someone's ethnicity **also** gives little clue to subjective well-being. African-Americans are only slightly less likely than European-Americans to feel very happy. The National Institute of Mental Health found that rates of depression and alcoholism among blacks and whites are roughly equal. Social psychologists Jennifer K. Crocker of the University of Michigan and

50 Brenda Major of the University of California at Santa Barbara assert that people in disadvantaged groups maintain self-esteem by valuing things at which **they** excel, by making comparisons within their own groups and by blaming problems on external sources **such as** prejudice.

Probing for happiness.

Researchers use various methods to survey people's subjective sense of well-being. Some employ images (top), other use words (middle), but all questions essentially come down to asking people how they feel about their lives. Different techniques yield remarkably similar results; we have collated data from almost 1,000 surveys of 1.1 million people to arrive at a global estimate of reported subjective well-being (bottom). –D.G.M. and E.D.



“In most ways my life is close to my ideal.”

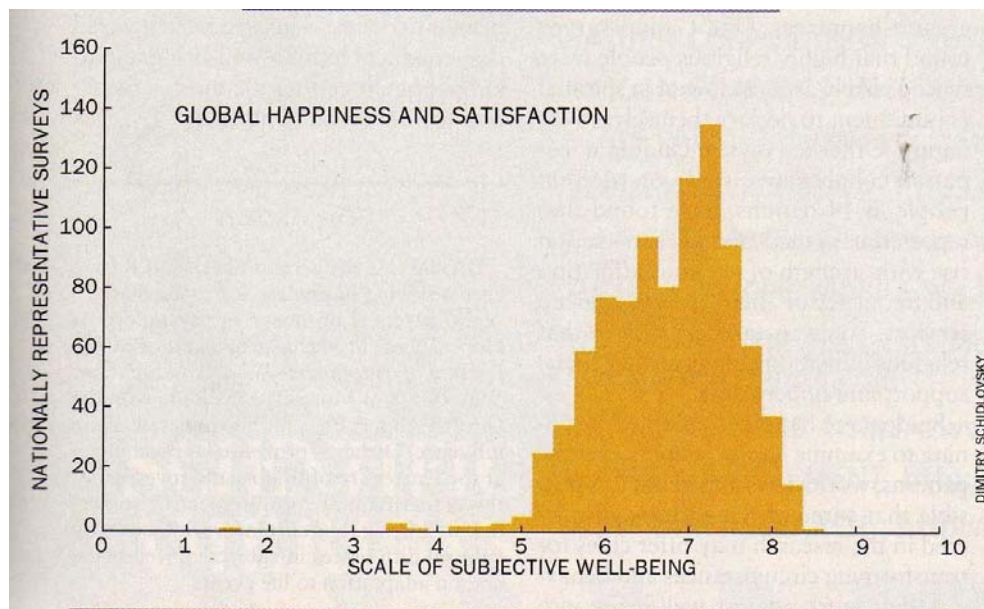
“The conditions of my life are excellent.”

“I am satisfied with my life.”

“So far I have gotten the important things I want in my life.”

“If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.”

Do you strongly disagree, disagree, slightly disagree, neither agree nor disagree, slightly agree, agree or strongly agree?



Subtitle 1: _____

Wealth is also a poor predictor of happiness. People have not become happier over time as their cultures have become more affluent. Even though Americans earn twice as much in today's dollars as they did in 1957, the proportion of those telling surveyors from the National Opinion Research Center that they are "very happy" has declined from 35 to 29 percent.

Even very rich people--those surveyed among Forbes magazine's 100 wealthiest Americans--are only slightly happier than the average American. Those whose income has increased over a 10-year period are not happier than those whose income is stagnant. **Indeed**, in most nations the correlation between income and happiness is negligible--only in the poorest countries, such as

5 Bangladesh and India, is income a good measure of emotional well-being.
Are people in rich countries happier, by and large, than people in not so rich countries? It appears in general that **they** are, but the margin may be slim. In Portugal, for example, only one in 10 people reports being very happy, whereas in the much more prosperous Netherlands the proportion of very happy is four in 10. **Yet** there are curious reversals in this correlation
10 between national wealth and well-being--the Irish during the 1980s consistently reported greater life satisfaction than the wealthier West Germans. **Furthermore**, other factors, such as civil rights, literacy and duration of democratic government, all of **which** also promote reported life satisfaction, tend to go hand in hand with national wealth. **As a result**, **it** is impossible to tell whether the happiness of people in wealthier nations is based on money or is a by-product of
15 other felicities.

Subtitle 2: _____

Although happiness is not easy to predict from material circumstances, it seems consistent for those who have it. In one National Institute on Aging study of 5,000 adults, the happiest people
20 in 1973 were still relatively happy a decade later, despite changes in work, residence and family status.

In study after study, four traits characterize happy people. **First**, especially in individualistic Western cultures, they like themselves. **They** have high self-esteem and usually believe themselves to be more ethical, more intelligent, less prejudiced, better able to get along with
25 others, and healthier than the average person. (Such findings bring to mind Sigmund Freud's joke about the man who told his wife, "If one of us should die, I think I would go live in Paris.")

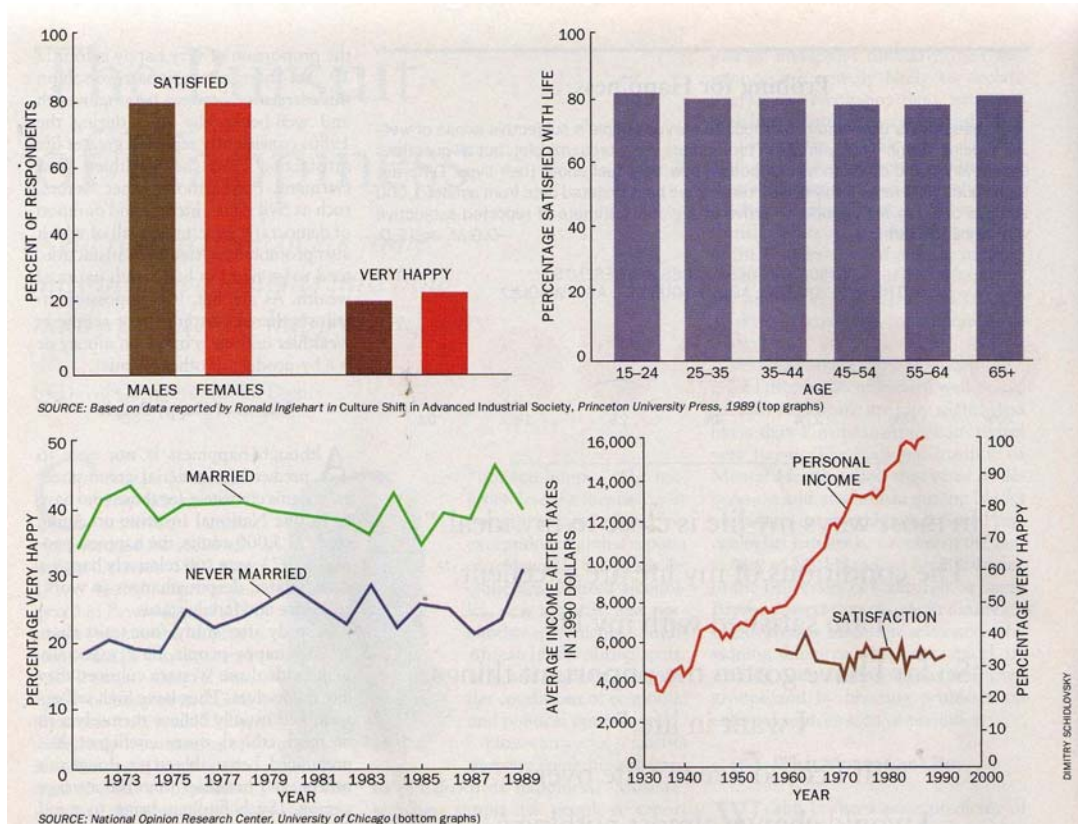
Second, happy people typically feel personal control. **Those** with little or no control over their lives--such as prisoners, nursing home patients, severely impoverished groups or individuals, and citizens of totalitarian regimes--suffer lower morale and worse health. **Third**, happy people
30 are usually optimistic. **Fourth**, most happy people are extroverted. **Although one** might expect that introverts would live more happily in the serenity of their less stressed, contemplative lives, extroverts are happier--whether alone or with others.

The causal arrows for these correlations are uncertain. Does happiness make people more outgoing, or are outgoing people more likely to be happy, perhaps explaining why they marry
35 sooner, get better jobs and make more friends? **If these traits** indeed predispose **their** carriers to happiness, people might become happier by acting in certain ways. In experiments, people who feign high self-esteem report feeling more positively about themselves, for example.

Whatever the reason, the close personal relationships that characterize happy lives are also correlated with health. Compared with loners, **those** who can name several intimate friends are
40 healthier and less likely to die prematurely. For more than nine out of 10 people, the most significant alternative to aloneness is marriage. **Although** broken marital relationships can cause much misery, a good marriage apparently is a strong source of support. During the 1970s and 1980s, 39 percent of married adults told the National Opinion Research Center **they** were "very happy," as compared with 24 percent of those who had never married. In other surveys,
45 only 12 percent of those who had divorced perceived themselves to be "very happy." The happiness gap between the married and the never-married was similar for women and men.

Religiously active people **also** report greater happiness. One Gallup survey found that highly religious people were twice as likely as those lowest in spiritual commitment to declare
50 themselves very happy. Other surveys, including a 16-nation collaborative study of 166,000 people in 14 nations, have found that reported happiness and life satisfaction rise with strength of religious affiliation and frequency of attendance at worship services. Some researchers believe that religious affiliation entails greater social support and hopefulness.

Students of happiness are now beginning to examine happy people's exercise patterns, worldviews and goals. It is possible that some of the patterns discovered in the research may offer clues for transforming circumstances and behaviors that work against well-being into ones that promote it. Ultimately, then, the scientific study of happiness could help us understand how to build a world that enhances human well-being and to aid people in getting the most satisfaction from their circumstances.



HAPPINESS APPEARS CONSISTENT across many different sectors of the population. Both sexes report roughly the same satisfaction with life (top left), as do various age groups (top right). Among the few consistent differentials is that between married and never-married people (bottom left); other data indicate that divorced people are less happy than either of these two groups. Happiness has remained relatively constant over time in the U.S., even as national income has increased (bottom right).

The Authors

DAVID G. MYERS and ED DIENER have been studying happiness for more than 10 years. Myers is professor of psychology at Hope College in Michigan and author of *The Pursuit of Happiness: Who Is Happy and Why* (William Morrow, 1992). He won the Gordon Allport Prize for his studies of group influence. Diener is professor of psychology at the University of Illinois and investigates the definition and measurement of subjective well-being. His current work focuses on cultural differences in subjective well-being and on adaptation to life events.