

SOCIETY

Happiness Paradoxes

THE SOURCES: "Paradox of Declining Female Happiness" by Betsey A. Stevenson and Justin Wolfers, in *American Law and Economics Association Annual Meetings*, 2008, and "Social Inequalities in Happiness in the United States, 1972 to 2004: An Age-Period-Cohort Analysis" by Yang Yang, in *American Sociological Review*, April 2008.

GEORGE MCGOVERN AND George Wallace were running for president, Bangladesh had just become a country, and *The Godfather* was on movie screens when the first researchers from the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago began asking Americans whether they were "very happy," "pretty happy," or "not too happy." Thirty-six years later, the pattern of the annual answers they have given looks paradoxical.

Over the last three decades women have narrowed the pay gap with men, blasted ahead of them in education, and seen a slight rise in the amount of time their husbands spend tending house. Yet they are less happy than they were before these changes occurred, according to Betsey Stevenson and Justin Wolfers, of the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. The researchers express the female happiness shortfall in complex statistical equations. But its magnitude is roughly equivalent to the difference in misery between a state with 4 percent unemployment and one with 12.5 percent.

Stevenson and Wolfers suggest that women might be less happy than in the past because of increased anxiety as they struggle to balance traditional female roles with new competi-

tion in the unisex marketplace. The two researchers question whether women might have exaggerated their well-being in earlier surveys because they wanted to say what they thought researchers wanted to hear. And they wonder whether higher expectations might also contribute to the happiness deficit. The increased opportunity to succeed in new realms may have increased the "likelihood of believing that one's life is not measuring up," they write.

Another surprising finding is that older people are happier now than when they were young, writes Yang Yang, a sociologist at the University of Chicago. "Overall levels of happiness increase with age," she says. Forget the likelihood of declining health, loss of employment, and a shrinking network of friends. Older people tell researchers that these take a toll, but are counterbalanced by the benefits of retirement. The happiness meter seems to rise steadily until about age 70, then begins to level off.

Aside from the alternative, old age is not normally a sought-after state. But contrary to expectations, Yang finds, in general the odds of being happy improve five percent with every decade of life.

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The Global Warming Diet

THE SOURCE: "Food-Miles and the Relative Climate Impacts of Food Choices in the United States" by Christopher L. Weber and H. Scott Matthews, in *Environmental Science and Technology*, May 15, 2008.

WORRIED ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENTAL cost of eating Chilean grapes

in January? Eager to help curtail global warming by grilling only locally grown beef? Then pay more attention to what you eat and less to geography. Surprisingly, write two engineers at Carnegie Mellon University, consumers can do more to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions by shifting family menus one day a week from red meat and dairy products to chicken, fish, or vegetables than they can by buying 100 percent locally grown food.

Christopher L. Weber and H. Scott Matthews found that the delivery of food from producers to grocery stores accounts for only four percent of America's food-related greenhouse-gas emissions. Most of the environmental impact of food is the result of things that happen during the production phase. Transportation as a whole accounts for only 11 percent of food's life cycle emissions, and international air freight only two percent of that.

No matter how it is measured, Weber and Matthews write, "red meat is more greenhouse-gas intensive than all other forms of food," because of the long supply chains of animal feed. Dairy products are second. They are about half as intensive as red meat, calorie for calorie. Fruits and vegetables take about the same toll on the environment as chicken, fish, eggs, and nuts. The impact they have on the environment is less in the production phase, but greater in delivery and transportation.

Weber and Matthews estimate that if the average household bought every food product locally, it could save about as much energy in a year