

## 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

## EXCERPT

## *Sic Transit Gloria* Doctorate

*The case of Robert Mugabe gets one thinking about this most peculiar of academic nods [the honorary degree]. . . . In June the University of Massachusetts at Amherst rescinded the honorary doctorate it had bestowed on Zimbabwe's longtime president in 1986.*

*Last year the University of Edinburgh similarly withdrew its 1984 degree. . . . Maybe The Economist will cancel Mugabe's subscription next. . . . Are honorary degrees really such silly things that we should mock their bestowal or withdrawal? . . . They do seem to lack core importance in the academic enterprise. . . . On the other hand, eliminating honorary degrees would knock commencement ceremonies down yet another notch, to some still undiscovered level of boredom.*

—CARLIN ROMANO, literary critic for *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and critic at large for *The Chronicle Review*, July 11, 2008

as if it cut back on driving by 1,000 miles. If it substituted a bean or vegetable casserole for roast beef every Sunday, it could save the equivalent of the greenhouse gases produced by

driving 1,160 miles. If red meat were eliminated altogether, it could save emissions equal to driving 8,100 miles a year.

There are many reasons to buy

local food, including the taste of fresher, riper produce. But for the average family, saving the environment by reducing "food-miles" is not the most important.

## POLITICS &amp; GOVERNMENT

## The Inside-Out City

**THE SOURCE:** "Trading Places" by Alan Ehrenhalt, in *The New Republic*, Aug. 13, 2008.

REMEMBER THE BREATHLESS spate of news stories when the first few couples moved into converted department stores in downtowns across America about a decade ago? Debunkers of this trend have pointed out the minuscule numbers ever since. Even so, writes Alan Ehrenhalt, executive editor of *Governing* magazine, cities are truly undergoing a complicated and profound "demographic inversion."

Central cities are becoming lighter in hue and deeper in pockets. Atlanta

is shifting from an overwhelmingly black city to one where African Americans are teetering on the verge of minority status. Before September 11, 2001, about 25,000 people lived south of the World Trade Center in Manhattan. Now the same area is home to 50,000. Charlotte, North Carolina, has 12,000 people living downtown, and will have more when its supply of homes catches up with demand. Vancouver, British Columbia, houses 20 percent of its 600,000 residents in two square miles at the city's heart.

Chicago, "Hog Butcher for the World, Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat," is becoming like 19th-century

Vienna, where the people who can afford it live close to the center, and the poor and newcomers live on the outskirts, writes Ehrenhalt of the city where his grandfather operated a tailor shop on the site of what is now the University of Illinois science complex. Not even assistant professors live near the campus now. Too expensive.

The demographic inversion doesn't represent the abandonment of the suburbs or a mass movement of inner-city immigrants fleeing inflated gas prices. Rather, "the massive outward migration of the affluent that characterized the second half of the 20th century is coming to an end," Ehrenhalt says. The deindustrialization of the city, with its consequent loss of jobs, also heralds the loss of the noise and grime that accompanied them. Random street violence, while beginning to increase, is not the spec-