

Annual Happiness Index Finds One-third Of Americans Are Very Happy

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Those who discuss serious topics happier than those who discuss lighter topics

True happiness is complicated. Family and relationship issues can impact happiness, as can work issues, health concerns, money problems, spiritual life and even the ability to spend time doing what one likes and enjoys.

Even constantly watching news coverage of natural disasters and thwarted terrorist attacks can impact one's happiness.

And, with all that in mind, it is probably not surprising that the Harris Poll Happiness Index has edged downward this year from 35% of Americans who said they were very happy in both 2008 and 2009 to 33% who say so this year.

These are some of the findings of a Harris Poll® survey of 2,755 U.S. adults surveyed online between April 12 and 19, 2010 by Harris Interactive.

Happiness among different groups

There are many things which impact one's happiness including age, gender and income:

* Women are more likely to be happy than men are (35% vs. 32%) and married women are more likely to be happy than women who are single (39% vs. 30%);

* The older one is, the more likely they are to be happy. Those between 18 and 24 years old have a Happiness Index score of 26% while those 25-29 are at 30% and 30-39 year-olds are at 27%. This continues to rise and those 65 and older have a Happiness Index score of 44%, one of the highest of all demographic groups;

* Maybe money can buy happiness? Those with a household income of less than \$35,000 a year have a score of 28% compared to 38% for those with a household income of \$75,000 or more a year;

* In 2008, African Americans had a Happiness Index score of 35% which rose to 41% last year and has stayed high at 40%. Hispanics also saw an increase over the past three years and are currently at 39%, while Whites dropped from 35% last year to 32% this year.

Many of the statements which create the index have stayed the same over the past year in terms of how Americans feel.

For example, four in five Americans (80%) say, at this time, they are generally happy with their life compared to 81% who said this last year. One that has shown a larger shift than the rest is political in nature.

In 2008, almost three-quarters of U.S. adults (73%) felt their voice was not heard in national decisions that affect them. Last year this dropped to 67%.

Perhaps due to the recent health care battles and other political disputes in Washington and in state capitals across the nation, this number has gone back up this year to 72%.

Talking and Happiness

What one speaks about and how often they do so can also impact how happy they are. Seven in ten Americans (71%) say, in the past week, they often discussed the weather, while 59% spoke often about the economy, 56% discussed TV shows and/or movies, and half (51%) discussed politics.

Additionally, just under half say they often discussed health care reform (47%) while two in five talked about sports (42%), education (40%), and religion (38%). Just under one-quarter (23%) of Americans say they spoke about celebrity/entertainment gossip and 14% spoke about fashion.

There is an interesting correlation between how often people spoke about these ten topics-specifically the lighter subject matters versus the more serious ones-and how happy they are.

It may seem that talking about TV shows, movies and celebrity gossip rather than politics or religion would make one happier, but the reverse is actually the case.

Among serious talkers, that is those who talk about politics, the economy, religion, health care reform and education often, 39% are very happy. Among lighter talkers, or those who talk about TV shows and/or movies,

weather,celebrity/entertainment gossip, sports and fashion often, 32% are very happy.

Those who talk about ALL ten of these topics very or somewhat often have a Happiness Index score of 26% while those who talk about NONE of them very or somewhat often have a score of 22%.

So what?

Happiness matters and being truly happy impacts almost everything around one's life. It also helps insulate people when bad things happen.

A happy person is more likely to look at the bad that occurs and say sure, that isn't good, but these other things are going well. They make lemonade when handed lemons. But, only 33% of Americans are currently very happy.

It is likely that the non-happy two-thirds of adults in the country are fueling the angst and anger seen across the country. Maybe the happy Americans should share their secret to staying happy.

Methodology

This Harris Poll was conducted online within the United States between April 12 and 19, 2010 among 2,755 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population.

Where appropriate, these data were also weighted to reflect the composition of the adult online population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments.

Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words "margin of error" as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population.

Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

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