

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

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

New York, N.Y. – May 20, 2010 – 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.

**TABLE 1
HAPPINESS INDEX**

The Harris Interactive Happiness Index is calculated by taking an average (mean) of those who strongly agree with statements 1- 4 and 7 and strongly disagree with statements 5,6,8,9 (see Table 2)

Base: All adults

	2008	2009	2010
All Adults	35	35	33
Gender			
Men	33	34	32
Women	36	36	35
Gender/Marital status			
Single women	34	34	30
Married Women	39	38	39
Race/Ethnicity			
White	35	35	32
African-American	35	41	40
Hispanic	32	36	39
Income			
\$34,999 or less	32	31	28
\$35,000 – \$49,999	33	34	34
\$50,000 – \$74,999	36	39	34
\$75,000+	38	36	38
Age			
18-24	29	32	26
25-29	31	31	30
30-39	29	31	27
40-49	33	32	31
50-64	36	37	37
65+	47	45	44
Disabilities			
People with disabilities	36	33	34
People without disabilities	35	36	33
Political Party			
Republican	39	37	34
Democrat	33	36	34
Independent	34	33	33
Education			
High school or less	35	33	31
Some college	35	36	35
College graduate	34	36	34
Post graduate	36	39	36

**TABLE 2
HAPPINESS INDEX STATEMENTS**

“Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements.”

Base: All adults

		AGREE (NET)	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	DISAGREE (NET)	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Not sure
I have positive relationships with my family members	%	92	64	28	6	3	2	3
My relationships with friends bring me happiness	%	91	59	32	6	4	1	3
At this time, I’m generally happy with my life	%	80	40	39	18	14	4	3
My spiritual beliefs are a positive guiding force to me	%	73	44	29	21	10	12	6
I feel my voice is not heard in national decisions that affect me	%	72	38	33	22	15	7	6
I frequently worry about my financial situation	%	66	29	37	32	21	10	2
I rarely worry about my health	%	52	17	36	46	31	15	2
My work is frustrating	%	38	13	25	51	22	29	11
I rarely engage in hobbies and pastimes I enjoy	%	34	11	24	64	33	31	2

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100 percent due to rounding

**TABLE 3
HAPPINESS INDEX STATEMENTS – TREND**

“Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements.”

Percent saying “Strongly/Somewhat Agree”

Base: All adults

	2008	2009	2010
	%	%	%
I have positive relationships with my family members	92	90	92
My relationships with friends brings me happiness	93	91	91
At this time I’m generally happy with my life	83	81	80
My spiritual beliefs are a positive guiding force to me	77	74	73
I feel my voice is not heard in national decisions that affect me	73	67	72
I frequently worry about my financial situation	65	67	66
I rarely worry about my health	49	54	52
My work is frustrating	37	36	38
I rarely engage in hobbies and pastimes I enjoy	32	33	34

**TABLE 4
FREQUENCY OF CONVERSATION TOPICS**

“How often in the past week have you spoken about the following topics?”

Base: All adults

		OFTEN (NET)	Very often	Somewhat often	NOT OFTEN (NET)	Not very often	Not at all
The weather	%	71	24	47	29	22	6
The economy	%	59	23	36	41	28	13
TV shows and/or movies	%	56	15	41	44	32	12
Politics	%	51	21	30	49	28	21
Health care reform	%	47	18	29	53	31	22
Sports	%	42	16	26	58	27	31
Education	%	40	14	26	60	32	28
Religion	%	38	15	23	62	30	32
Celebrity/Entertainment gossip	%	23	5	18	77	33	44
Fashion	%	14	2	12	86	28	57

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100 percent due to rounding

**TABLE 5
HAPPINESS INDEX – BY AMOUNT/TYPE OF CONVERSATION**

The Harris Interactive Happiness Index is calculated by taking an average (mean) of those who strongly agree with statements 1- 4 and 7 and strongly disagree with statements 5,6,8,9 (see Table 2)

Base: All adults

	2010
All Adults	33
Talkers (talk very or somewhat often about all 10 topics)	26
“Light” talkers (talk very or somewhat often about TV shows/movies, weather, celebrity/entertainment gossip, sports and fashion)	32
“Serious” talkers (talk very or somewhat often about politics, the economy, health care reform, education and religion)	39
The Silent types (talk not very often or not at all about all 10 topics)	22

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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