

What Makes You Happy?

By JOHN E. GIBSON

Here is a scientific look at the factors which affect your contentment with life

HAPPINESS has long been considered a subject for philosophers and poets. Recently, however, science has been taking a look at the matter; psychologists and sociologists in leading universities and research foundations have been putting happiness under a microscope. To throw more light on why some people are happy and others aren't, the investigators have conducted exhaustive studies and surveys. Here are some of their findings.

■ **What percentage of Americans are happy?** A consensus of the findings of four leading surveys on this question shows that between 50 and 60 percent rate themselves as quite happy; close to 30 percent regard themselves as only moderately happy; and slightly more than 10 percent as definitely unhappy.

■ **Does the age at which you marry affect your happiness?** It depends on whether you are a man or a woman. Studies at the University of Minnesota show that women who marry during their 20s experience the greatest happiness. Those who marry at 30 or later tend to be somewhat less happy. And those who were the most unhappy and dissatisfied with life were found to have married before 20.

The investigators found, however, that man's age at marriage did not affect his happiness to any appreciable extent.

Women who marry "too young" or "too old" tend to become the most dissatisfied when their children grow up.

Women who are the same age as, or older than, their husbands tend to be unhappier than those who are younger than their husbands. They notice this particularly at middle age.

The happiest husbands and wives

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of Minnesota made a careful study of hundreds of couples selected from various walks of life. The couples were divided into two groups: the happy and the unhappy. Then each person was rated on a five-point "attractiveness"

scale, ranging from 1, homely, to 5, extremely attractive.

Happy and well-adjusted husbands and wives scored the highest ratings for attractiveness.

This relationship between happiness

and good looks was found to hold true to an even greater extent with women than it did with men.

The happiest couples were those where both husband and wife were more or less equally attractive.

■ **Are men as happy as women?** A nationwide poll showed that most women think that men lead happier and more interesting lives, and scientific studies give strong support to this view.

Investigations have shown that women are more subject to feelings of depression and discontent than men, and are more easily irritated and upset by commonplace annoyances.

Psychologists have also found that women have a narrower range of interests, and tend to lack man's capacity for wholehearted enjoyment in many areas of living.

■ **Does a job affect happiness?** It has much more to do with your happiness than you may realize. If it is absorbing, if it provides for full expression of your ability, it can make up for disappointments in many other areas of life.

If you are happy with your work, if you have found the job that's "right" for you, you are luckier than 37 percent of all Americans; for a nationwide Gallup survey has shown that only 63 percent of the nation's breadwinners really enjoy their work. Most of the rest told interviewers that, if they were to begin all over again, they would choose an entirely different field.

This suggests that one of the most effective ways of protecting your happiness is to spend plenty of time and thought in choosing your occupation.

■ **Does income affect happiness?** All studies show that the happiest people are neither rich nor poor; and that the rich would be happier if they had less, the extremely poor happier if they had more. So the happiest are in the middle-income bracket. There is little relationship for most people between how much money they earn and how much happiness they experience.

What does have a direct bearing on your happiness (and this applies to everyone) is your attitude toward money. Wide-scale surveys have shown that, of the people who regard plenty of money as essential to happiness, only a small percentage rate themselves as happy; and that the men and women who regard themselves as the happiest are those who rate love and having a congenial family as far more essential to happiness than financial independence.

■ **What separates the happy from the unhappy?** Regardless of a person's status in life, or the situation in which he finds himself, he has the choice of two attitudes: being thankful for what he has, or regretting the fact that he doesn't have more.

Which of the two attitudes you adopt will have a greater bearing on your happiness than any other single factor. The more often you assume the first, the happier you will be. And the more frequently you adopt the second, the more unhappy you will make yourself. This holds true whether you have much or little, whether you are famous or obscure. The choice is yours.