

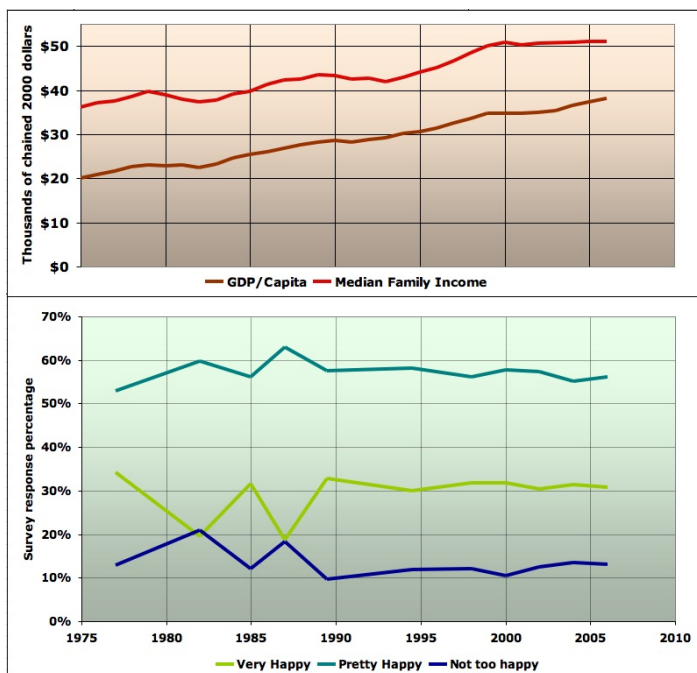


## Happiness, economic growth, and oil prices

Posted by [Stuart Staniford](#) on July 27, 2007 - 10:15am

Topic: [Sociology/Psychology](#)

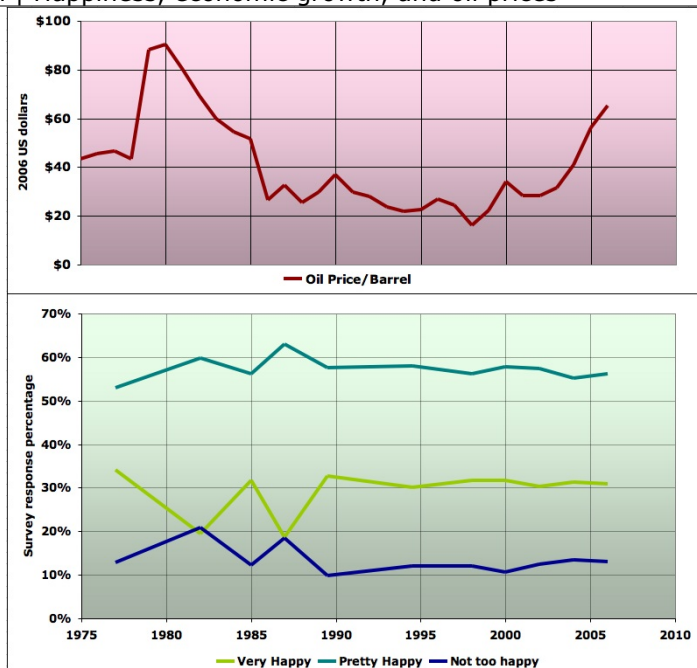
Tags: [happiness](#), [peak oil](#) [[list all tags](#)]



Top: US GDP per capita, and US median family income, in thousands of chained 2000 US dollars. (GDP from the [BEA](#), median family income from [Data 360](#), and population from the [Census Bureau](#)). Bottom: Percentage of persons who responded to the question "Taken all together, how would you say things are these days - would you say that you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?" with each of the three options. ([General Social Survey](#)).

The country getting much wealthier over the last few decades has had very limited effect on our aggregate happiness.

Furthermore, oil prices are fairly uncorrelated with happiness:



Top: Inflation adjusted oil prices/barrel ([BP Statistical Review of World Energy 2007](#)). Bottom: Percentage of persons who responded to the question "Taken all together, how would you say things are these days—would you say that you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?" with each of the three options ([General Social Survey](#)).

Conclusion: The absolute level of happiness of the US population is not very sensitive to macroeconomic variables. The approach of peak oil has not had a large effect on happiness so far. Interesting to watch how this develops.

Finally, I would say that I am "pretty happy". It would be interesting to know how personal happiness correlates with views on peak oil.

## Small Print

This is the happiness raw data:

		1972-82	1982B	1983-1987	1987B	1988-91	1993-1996	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006
Very Happy	1	4632	68	2352	64	1918	2240	891	881	415	419	920
Pretty Happy	2	7194	209	4179	216	3368	4332	1575	1603	784	738	1676
Not too happy	3	1755	73	903	63	571	891	340	293	170	180	390
Don't know	8	1	0	1	0	0	2	2	1	1	2	6
No answer	9	44	4	107	10	50	37	24	39	2	1	0
Not applicabl	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1393	1472	1518	4383

I plotted the center point of the aggregate time ranges, and the percentages in my graph neglect the don't know/not applicable responses. I cannot find an annual series for this survey question, though the survey is apparently performed annually.

Also, [Methodological Report 56](#) cautions:

21. Two separate context effects have distorted the time trend on personal happiness (HAPPY). First, personal happiness is higher for married persons when preceded by an item on marital happiness (HAPMAR). Marital happiness has preceded personal happiness on all surveys except 1972 and Form 3 in 1980 and Form 3 in 1987. To make a consistent series we have a) used the experimental comparisons in 1980 and 1987 to adjust the 1972 personal happiness figures and have eliminated the variant experimental forms in 1980 and 1987 (Smith, 1979). Second, personal happiness is lower when not preceded by the five-item, satisfaction scale (SATCITY, SATHOBBY, SATFAM, SATFRND, SATHEALT). This scale has routinely preceded personal happiness except in 1972, in 1985, on Form 2 in 1986, and on Forms 2 and 3 in 1987. Using the experimental comparisons in 1986 and 1987, we have adjusted the figures for 1972 and 1985 and have eliminated the variant forms for 1986 and 1987 (Smith, 1986).



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