

A recent study shows that, on average, American men now report themselves happier than women do. This is the opposite of what was found in the early 1970s, when women tended to report themselves happier than men.

The study has been greeted like a special gift from heaven by people who want to return to "traditional" gender roles, and has had the immediate effect of

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raising the happiness level of one group of Americans: conservative radio talk

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show hosts who claim in an excited way that it proves the feminist movement has made women less happy with their lives.

Of course, for the past 15 years, these very same people have been arguing (1) that women's empowerment has come at the cost of men, lowering their self-esteem, and decreasing their satisfaction in marriage as they have been forced to do more housework.

The new study finds that, on the contrary, today more men report

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themselves very satisfied with their lives than in the early 1970s. Researchers have discovered the same trends in women's and men's relative happiness in many industrial countries, including Britain. So perhaps (2) the women's

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movement has helped men more than women, relieving them of the burden of feeling they must be the sole providers for their families and introducing them to the pleasures of less rigid definitions of masculinity.

But before we conclude that the feminist movement has made women less

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happy than they used to be, we need to recognise one important point. (3) Self-reports of happiness vary according to people's expectations of how much satisfaction they deserve, making them much more subjective and variable than other measures of well-being.

(4) Women today are far less likely to report low self-esteem, feelings of worthlessness, poor health or severe depression than in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. So when we hear that fewer women report themselves very happy today than in the early 1970s, it's important to remember that back then women had

much lower expectations. Married women in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s often

6 [] told interviewers that their marriage was happy because "he's never hit me" or he "hardly ever" spent his entire salary at the local pub. Single women who

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answered Help Wanted advertisements for "active college graduate for typing" or

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"cheerful receptionist wanted — must be neat and attractive" counted themselves
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lucky if they weren't fired when they gained a little weight.

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Today, some women do feel pressured to "do it all" and feel frustrated when they can't. And most women have much higher expectations for good

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treatment — both at work and at home — than their mothers and grandmothers.

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Take the question of satisfaction in marriage. (5) Where women in the late 1960s said that happiness was having a husband who was hard-working enough to be a good provider, women today want a husband who is emotionally supportive. Whether she believes that describes her husband is now the single best indicator of a woman's happiness in marriage. The second-best indicator is how fair she believes the household division of labour to be.

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It is not surprising that these higher expectations lead women to feel disappointed if their husbands don't meet them. (6) But the solution to these tensions is not to try to convince women, to lower their expectations. Instead, let's continue to raise the percentage of men who rise to those expectations.

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(1) Cheap digital technology is revolutionizing the way news is gathered, spread and perceived — and in doing so, it is creating a controversy. The world has been shocked by the pictures of United States troops abusing Iraqi [] 2 [] prisoners and the beheading of a U.S. contract worker. These events were 3 [] 4 [] recorded by participants or bystanders. The images were posted on the Internet, making them freely accessible around the world. In other words, 5 [] 6 [] journalists played no part in recording or interpreting the images. No editor 7 [] decided how the pictures should be handled or published. Government censors 8 [] and public relations staff could do nothing.

Bypassing the traditional channels for spreading news has a time-honored 9 [] history. During the 1989 pro-democracy movement in China, activists and 10 [] supporters spread news by fax, completely sidestepping state television, radio and newspapers. Today, the technology has changed. It is cheaper and faster than ever before, and since the Internet has a global reach, the main barriers to publishing — cost and geography — have vanished. The result is explosive. 11 [] 12 [] 1 3 []

No one can agree whether the powerful combination of digital cameras and the Internet amounts to the democratization of news, an opportunity for propaganda or an exercise in bad taste. (2) What is clear is that unfiltered, uncensored images are now starting to drive the menu of the mainstream news. If shocking pictures appear on the Internet, it gives the mainstream media the right to show them as news. The unstoppable proliferation of 14 [] images of executions, massacres and torture on the Internet presents news 15 [] 16 [] 17 [] editors with a constant challenge. On one hand, the pictures of the prisoner

abuse could reasonably be published, because they revealed a hidden truth
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about the occupation of Iraq. On the other hand, the beheading was shameless
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propaganda.

The march of technology is bound to make such problems felt even
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more strongly. A blog by an Iraqi received attention for its vivid description of
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daily life as the war unfolded. The diary is being turned into a film. The
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next step will be video blogs, with images from digital cameras, webcams,
mobile phones and palmtop computers. Those with a desire and a little
technology will have the chance to write, shoot, edit and distribute video
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journalism on their own, even from the field.

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(3) So the challenge to traditional journalism, over who decides what news is
and how it should be filtered, will only intensify, and so will the debate about
whether undigested news is objective, useful and moral.

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