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Regular features

Why black women are happier today

Commentary By Yolanda Young

More black women are smiling these days. And that's not just me talking: Using data from the National Opinion Research Center's [General Social Survey](#), which has tracked Americans' mood since 1972, researchers found that black women are becoming happier as white women's happiness decreases. While white women continue to be happier overall, the data show the "happiness gap" has closed significantly.

Why? One reason is that black women were much less happy to begin with, so any improvement at all will be measured as considerable progress. Though one might be tempted to credit the women's rights movement of the '70s with raising our spirits, a closer look reveals that the civil rights movement played a more significant role.

Justin Wolfers, a professor at The Wharton School and co-author of the paper, "[The Paradox of Declining Female Happiness](#)," analyzed the survey data to see how the civil rights and women's movements might help explain these trends. He found that the feminist revolution focused on narrow issues — rights over marriage, children born out of wedlock and abortion — which did not necessarily translate to increased happiness for women, who were mostly white.

French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, said the women's movement also suffered from social fragmentation: "If (women) belong to the bourgeoisie, they feel solidarity with men of that class, not with proletarian women; if they are white, their allegiance is to white men, not to Negro women."

But black women, unable to hide their identity or elevate their national status, joined in solidarity with all black people. This resulted in a cohesive civil rights movement that led to improvement in housing, education and employment — as well as the dissolution of social and legal constructs that had previously demoralized African Americans.

Wolfers' paper contains an additional curiosity — black men, who are less educated and in many ways besieged in this society, still report being slightly happier than black women. One explanation for this might be that the unhappiest black men — such as those who are incarcerated or homeless — were not included in the survey. Another might be that black women's increased independence and wealth relieve the pressure and stress traditionally placed on their men. One thing is clear: Like women, it is all very complicated.

Yolanda Young is the founder of www.onbeingablacklawyer.com.

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[jgalt](#) (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 3d 9h ago

"Virtually 9 of 10 black adolescents will not have their father in the household.

The #1 predictor of: incarceration--teen pregnancy--drop outs--poverty..." (HHS)

"One thing is clear"...

The rest of society suffers horribly (forget the children) from those indices.

Here is a term you will NEVER see as an ad hominem by libertards:

"SINGLE-MOTHERS"

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[criticalthought](#) (38 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 3d 7h ago

jgalt, what is your angle against the 'libertards'? Help me understand.

Libs generally believe in a much larger social safety net, much more sex ed and reproductive health attention, etc. They seem to acknowledge the societal pressure of single motherhood and have their set of agenda items to address it.

Or are you saying that they don't use the term as a modern day 'scarlet letter'? I'm fuzzy right now; caffeine is just beginning to kick in.

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[stevek](#) (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 3d 6h ago

Equality in misery. What a nice concept.

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They seem to acknowledge the societal pressure of single motherhood and have their set of agenda items to

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address it.

Nice platitudes. But no results on those "agenda items."
80% of inner city births out of wedlock.

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