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Happiness Revisited, With a Gender Twist

By [Marci Alboher](#)

After posting my [entry on happiness](#), I realized that I probably should have acknowledged some of the noise that has been generated by recent studies reporting that women are less happy than men, including one study concluding that women were unhappier than they were 35 years ago.

Two of my colleagues have reported (and received extensive comments) on this new research by [Justin Wolfers](#) and [Betsey Stevenson](#). So rather than repeat it, I will direct you to David Leonhardt's original column, "[He's Happier, She's Less So](#)," and Steven D. Levitt's post, "Why Are Women So Unhappy?" on the Freakonomics blog (followed by "[The Debate on Female Happiness Heats Up](#)," posted yesterday).

Both writers posit a few reasons for women's apparent decline in happiness even as they (we) seem to have experienced advances on many fronts.

The biggest reason, which gets mention in the articles and postings and in many of the comments from the readers, boils down to some version of the classic "second shift" argument: regardless of the advances women have made in the workplace, they still seem to face the (often self-imposed) pressures of doing more at home than their male counterparts.

I talked about this with Virginia Rutter, a sociologist at [Framingham State College](#), who studies gender issues. and Ms. Rutter confirmed that these findings are, in fact, big news from a sociological perspective. What's important, she said, is that "trends in happiness are giving us a chance to talk about the costs of women getting ahead."

While we're talking about it, I suggest that we women start dropping the ball a bit where we can get away with it. It's what I call [imperfectionism](#). I haven't had a manicure or picked up an iron in years, and no one's noticed. I delete most e-mails when I get home from a vacation (I use an autoresponder that says to e-mail me again after a certain date). Geesh, some days I don't even manage to finish The New York Times.

Tags: [gender](#), [happiness](#), [research](#), [Women](#), [work/life](#)

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