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What Happy People Don't Do

By RONI CARYN RABIN

Happy people spend a lot of time socializing, going to church and reading newspapers — but they don't spend a lot of time watching television, a new study finds.

That's what unhappy people do.

Although people who describe themselves as happy enjoy watching television, it turns out to be the single activity they engage in less often than unhappy people, said John Robinson, a professor of sociology at the [University of Maryland](#) and the author of the study, which appeared in the journal *Social Indicators Research*.

While most large studies on happiness have focused on the demographic characteristics of happy people — factors like age and marital status — Dr. Robinson and his colleagues tried to identify what activities happy people engage in. The study relied primarily on the responses of 45,000 Americans collected over 35 years by the [University of Chicago's](#) General Social Survey, and on published "time diary" studies recording the daily activities of participants.

"We looked at 8 to 10 activities that happy people engage in, and for each one, the people who did the activities more — visiting others, going to church, all those things — were more happy," Dr. Robinson said. "TV was the one activity that showed a negative relationship. Unhappy people did it more, and happy people did it less."

But the researchers could not tell whether unhappy people watch more television or whether being glued to the set is what makes people unhappy. "I don't know that turning off the TV will make you more happy," Dr. Robinson said.

Still, he said, the data show that people who spend the most time watching television are least happy in the long run.

Since the major predictor of how much time is spent watching television is whether someone works or not, Dr. Robinson added, it's possible that rising unemployment will lead to more TV time.

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