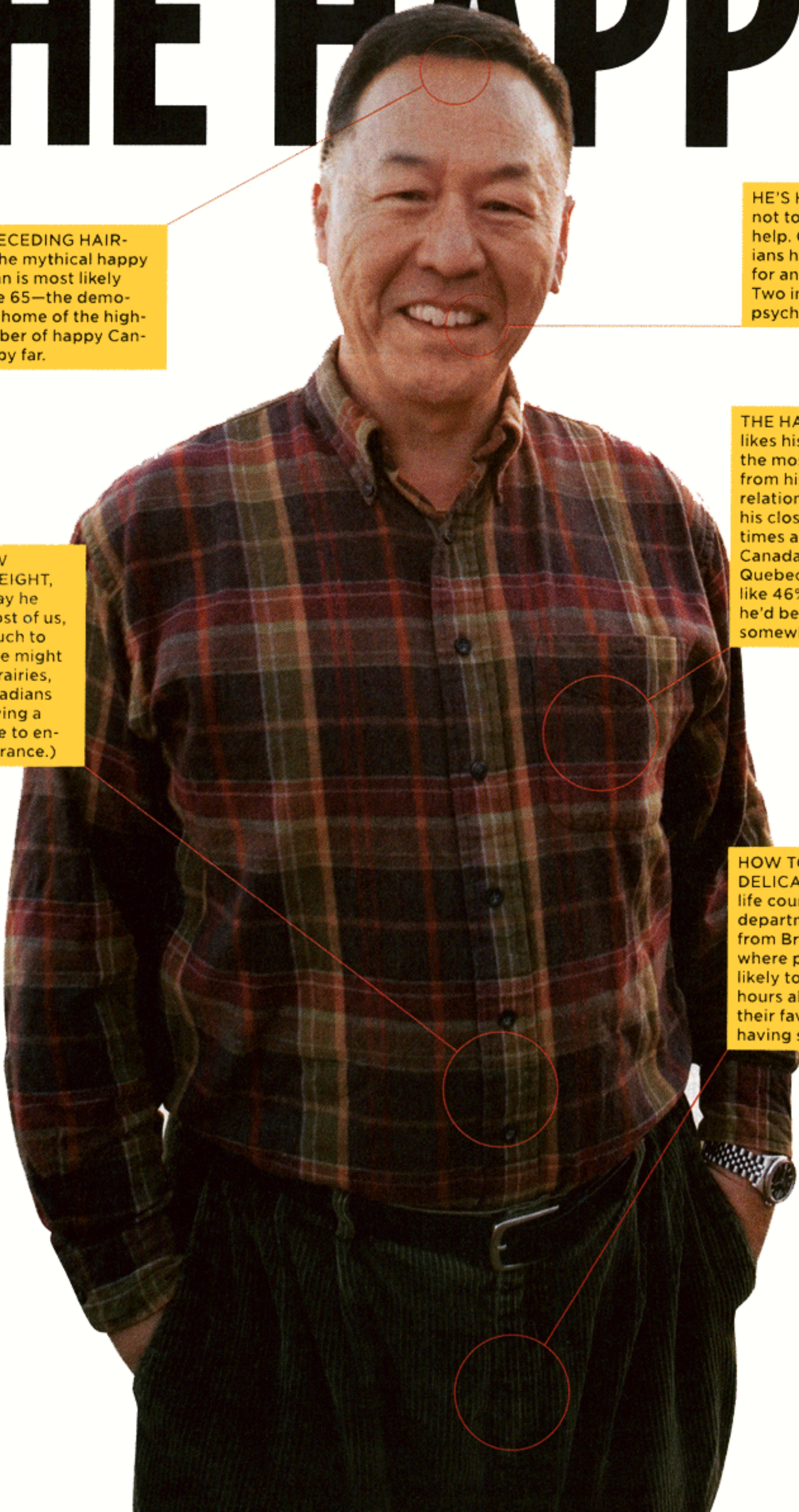


THE HAPPIES



THAT RECEDING HAIR-LINE? The mythical happy Canadian is most likely over age 65—the demographic home of the highest number of happy Canadians, by far.

HE'S HAPPY, but that's not to say he doesn't need help. One in four Canadians has taken medication for anxiety or depression. Two in five have seen a psychiatrist or counsellor.

SURE, HE'S A FEW POUNDS OVERWEIGHT, but he likes the way he looks. And like most of us, he wouldn't do much to change it. (Well, he might if he lived in the Prairies, where 37% of Canadians could imagine having a medical procedure to enhance their appearance.)

THE HAPPY CANADIAN likes his job, but derives the most happiness from his family or his relationship. He talks to his closest friends several times a week. And he loves Canada. (Unless he's from Quebec, in which case, like 46% of people polled, he'd be just as happy living somewhere else.)

HOW TO PUT THIS DELICATELY? A good sex life counts in the happiness department—unless you're from British Columbia, where people are more likely to choose a few hours alone or playing their favourite sport over having sex.

ST CANADIAN

How happy are you? To find out, we asked 3,000-plus people how they feel about **family, jobs, sex, money, and what gives them the most pleasure.**

Turns out Canadians are a pretty happy bunch. But just which Canadians are the happiest? Read on. BY KEN MACQUEEN

Look in the mirror, fellow Canadians. Wink. Give a little wave. Blow a kiss. Odds are you like what you see. Oh, maybe you're not "hot," but three in 10 of you think you're at least an eight on that proverbial zero-to-10-point scale. And, odds are, there's a special someone who shares that opinion; someone whose love enriches your life. In fact, allow yourself a blush, for you rate quite well on the old *Love-Oh-Meter*, if you do say so yourself. And you do. True, you could lose a few pounds. Well, most of you, but let's not obsess about such things. Because—know what?—when you gaze into that mirror, the odds are astronomically high you see before you the face of happiness.

that unite us, but joy is one of them. From sea to sea to sea, 84 per cent of respondents told *Maclean's* they were happy. Some 55 per cent wouldn't live anywhere else. Another 39 per cent are happy Canadians who could see themselves living in another (read winter-free) country. Asking that question in February instead of June would have been a greater test of Canadian's geographic loyalty.

Still, embrace the joy. Happiness, it seems, is not the fleeting, skittish butterfly of romantic poetry. Happiness is as durable as a hockey puck, as ubiquitous as a dandelion, and, for all that, as complex as Revenue Canada's worst tax form. Yes, sad to say, money is a part of the calculus; even happiness has an income cut-off.

should not be discounted. Those satisfied with their looks are happy people. Almost 60 per cent of Canadians polled rated themselves an impressive seven or higher on a zero to 10-point scale, where 10 means "you are extremely satisfied with your physical appearance." Not surprisingly, those results marched in virtual lockstep with people who said they were very happy and financially satisfied. Conversely, the nine per cent who rate their looks a three or lower are far more likely to call themselves unhappy, to be dissatisfied with their finances and to be popping anti-depressant or anti-anxiety medication. "Being dissatisfied with your appearance definitely makes a big difference to whether you're happy or not," says pollster Greg Lyle, managing director of Innovative Research.

Body weight is another indicator of self-worth. Three-quarters of all respondents said they needed to lose some weight. One-quarter wanted to lose 25 lb. or more—a finding that matches almost exactly a Statistics Canada estimate that 5.9 million Canadians (almost one-quarter of the adult population)—are obese, based on their body mass index. Just one in five of those surveyed by *Maclean's* felt they were at the ideal weight. They may be too hard on themselves. Stats-

WHO'S HAPPIER?



Canadians are a shiny, happy people. Fat and happy, you might say. Ridiculously, disproportionately, world-class happy. It's a proven fact, within the margin of error of plus or minus 2.8 to 3.2 percentage points—as calculated for *Maclean's* in a series of national surveys by the Innovative Research Group using their Canada 20/20 online panel.

There's no denying it; some 140 years after Confederation, there are few enough things

How happy are we, and what makes us so? We're happy you asked.

THE WAY WE LOOK

Happiness is not skin deep... exactly. But a healthy self-regard for one's appearance

HOW WE DID IT:

Innovative Research Group, a Toronto-based research and strategy firm, polled 3,340 Canadians in three separate surveys of its online Canada 20/20 panel. The three surveys, conducted between May 31 and June 18, have margins of error ranging from 2.8 to 3.2 per cent.



Can estimates that 9.4 million Canadians—39 per cent of the adult population—have a normal body weight. Of those surveyed by *Maclean's* who said they'd packed on 25 or more excess pounds, a substantial 69 per cent were dissatisfied with their appearance. It doesn't



WHICH RELIGION HAS THE BEST SEX?

Evangelicals (ahem, 69% satisfied) are happiest.

Jews (29%) are less satisfied than Catholics, Protestants and atheists.

follow, though, that all were unhappy. Those carrying excess pounds are more prone to unhappiness, but the vast majority, especially of those carrying less than 25 unwanted pounds, aren't sweating it. "Almost 15 per

HOT OR NOT?

58% of us say our looks rate at least a 7 out of 10. But 46% need to lose at least 15 lb., and a quarter need to lose more than 25.



cent of those who should lose 15 to 25 lb. are unhappy," says Lyle. "Relatively speaking," then, most heavyweights have a good level of happiness, he says. "There are a lot of people going around with a few extra pounds who don't feel too bad about it."

Gender plays a role in perceptions of appearance and, therefore, of happiness. While 61 per cent of men are satisfied with their looks, just 54 per cent of women have a similar high opinion of themselves. About a third of both genders have a "neutral" opinion about their looks, while seven per cent

of men and 11 per cent of women are dissatisfied with their appearance.

This gender disconnect filters through much of the *Maclean's*/Innovative poll results. Some 28 per cent of women would not rule out plastic surgery or other medical procedures to boost their appearance, while just 17 per cent of men would consider the idea. As a group, 82 per cent of women were happy, a statistically insignificant difference from the 85 per cent of blissed-out Canadian men. Still, "momma's little helper" is more than a great song lyric. "If you look at those having sought counselling, if you look at taking drugs for anxiety, those are all very heavily women," says Lyle. "Is that the way the world is, or are women just more honest?"

THE LOVE CONNECTION

You do not have to be in a romantic relationship to be happy, but it sure helps, says Lyle. "People who are alone are definitely more unhappy than people who are in a relationship," he says. That said, 79 per cent of singletons consider themselves happy, a very respectable score. But a remarkable 88 per cent of those in a relationship rate themselves as happy. So close is the correlation, says Lyle, "if you ask people 'are you in a relationship,' we're effectively asking them 'are you happy?'" Well, not entirely: 11 per cent of those in relationships are "not very happy" and one per cent are "not at all happy." When a relationship goes bad, it goes really bad. "If you are unhappy in a relationship," says Lyle, "you're unhappy in the rest of your life." In fact, in response to another question—"Thinking about the past year, what single event in your own life



52% of Canadians are happy in their jobs

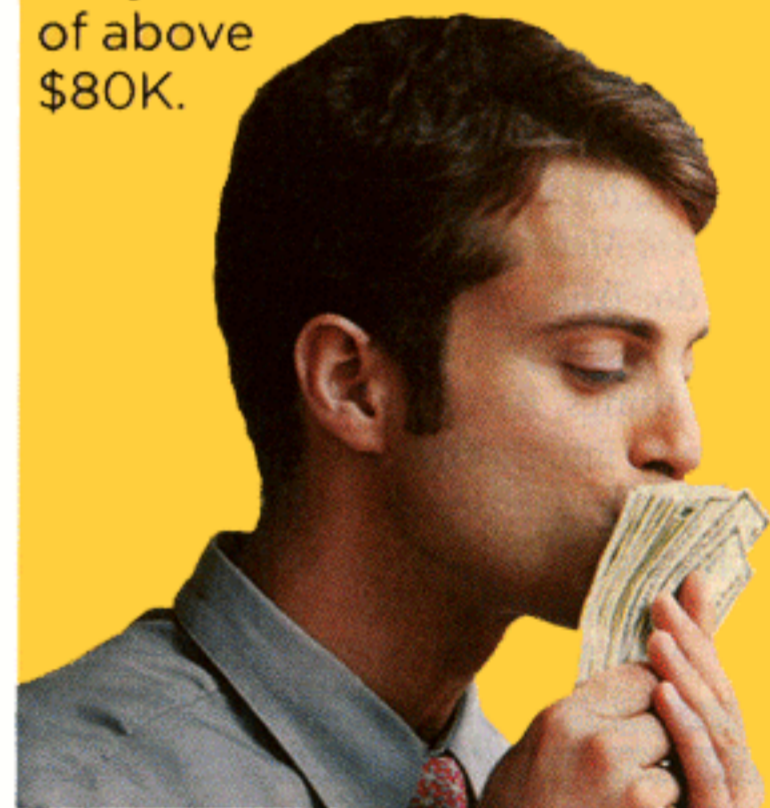
made you the most happy?—a small but plucky 0.5 per cent listed getting divorced or separated as the year's highlight.

The sexual chemistry of a relationship is another key ingredient to happiness, just as it's shown to be in those Viagra advertisements. Ninety per cent of those who reported a good sex life also rated their overall lives as happy. Conversely, notes Lyle, "if you're unhappy in your sex life, you're unhappy overall." And what constitutes a happy sex life? Well, on a scale of zero to 10, rising from "extremely unhappy" to "extremely happy," almost half of Canadian respondents, 47 per

CAN MONEY BUY HAPPINESS?

Yes. 40% of unhappy Canadians have a household income of under \$40K.

Only 17% have an income of above \$80K.



cent, rated their amorous activities a seven or higher. On a Richter scale, this would constitute window-popping, wall-toppling, life-threatening seismic activity.

It should be noted that Canadians, happy as we are, aren't obsessed with sex. There

are two other activities that we enjoy more. Eighteen per cent of respondents listed "a nice meal with your partner" as the activity they enjoy most. Seventeen per cent—almost as many—chose "having a few hours to yourself." Having sex was the top choice for 15 per cent, but the devil is in the

Almost one in four Canadians polled called in sick at least once in the past year when they weren't really sick.



detail. Sex was the first choice for 22 per cent of men, but only eight per cent of women. A few hours alone was the choice of 22 per cent of women, but just 13 per cent of men. One can't but notice the potential for conflict in those divergent desires. And yet, somehow—possibly through gritted teeth—we remain happy.

Both genders agree that an afternoon with the kids ranked in sixth place, behind an evening out with friends and participating



The religious are more likely (63%) to be unhappy with their tax bill than atheists (46%). They also don't like the idea of raising immigration levels (42%, versus just 29% of atheists).

in your favourite sport or activity. Let the record show that "eating chocolate" is the first choice of just one per cent of respondents, despite all the bogus Valentine's Day polls ranking it way up there with sex. A roll in the hay, the genders concur, beats a Rolo in the hay by a wide margin.

WORKING FOR YOUR MONEY

If you are going to be happy, it helps immensely if you like your job, even if that means, for 26 per cent of working Canadians, toiling away in a cubicle. The correlation between people who are happy with their job and happy with life and their financial situation is among the highest in the poll. The 47 per cent of people who are content with their jobs tend to be satisfied with the whole package: they're in close contact with friends and family, they have better sex and a generally sunny view

of life. The 34 per cent at the other end of the scale who are dissatisfied have greater isolation from family and friends, less satisfactory sex and a dimmer view of life.

The 54 per cent who are satisfied with their financial position are also likely to be happy, with a greater likelihood of being in a relationship. The 34 per cent who are dissatisfied with their finances are less likely to be happy, less likely to be in a relationship and are more prone to a dismal sex life.

The series of surveys show some of the stresses and strains of daily life. The burden of job responsibility is the single biggest source of stress for one-quarter of the workers who responded to the survey. Co-workers ranked second, surprisingly enough, at 13 per cent. Bosses were in a rough tie for third place, part of an unholy triumvirate including long hours and unsatisfactory pay. Half of respondents agreed with the statement: "Canada's economy may be doing well overall, but it is still tough for people like me to get by." The highest agreement, 73 per cent, was from those with a household income of less than \$40,000 a year, and from women, by a significant margin over men. Some 59 per cent of Canadians polled say they probably couldn't afford a home in their current community if they were looking today. Some 34 per cent of Canadians polled are renters, 25 per cent own their homes mortgage-free, and 41 per cent hold a mortgage—11 per cent owe \$150,000 or more.

Finding a job during this employment boom is no longer the preoccupation it was two decades ago. "But your ability to get by

is a big deal," says Lyle. "There's a lot of hidden pressure on Canadians that doesn't necessarily show up in the cost of living index, particularly the cost of housing." Unhappy people are more likely to be renters, he says. "If you have a paid-off house in Vancouver, you have no excuse not to be happy."

It has to be asked: does money buy happiness? The definitive answer is, well, to a point—the point being \$40,000 a year. Of those making less than that, just 70 per cent rated themselves happy. Bumping



63% of us are somewhat or very satisfied with the health care we received in the past year.

that annual income up just one category, to the \$40,000-to-\$59,000 range, made a world of difference. In that group, 90 per cent were happy, virtually identical to the 91 per cent happiness rating of those clearing more than \$80,000 a year. "You don't need to have a huge amount of money to be happy, you just

WHAT MAKES US UNHAPPY?

Bad sex. 25% of those with an unsatisfying sex life are unhappy, versus just 10% of those with a satisfying sex life.



need to be out of the stress zone," says Lyle. "That said, there are many people with higher household incomes that still feel financial stress, and they're unhappy. But it's hard not to feel stress when you're below \$40,000."



WHAT MAKES US HAPPY

A nice meal with my partner (18%)

A few hours to myself (17%)

Having sex (15%)

My favourite sport (12%)

An afternoon with the kids (9%)

ONE FAMILY UNDER GOD

Canadians, in the main, are not a particularly devout group. When it comes to Canadians, God works in mysterious ways. Asked if “God and spirituality is an important part of my daily life,” just 40 per cent said yes, while 45 per cent disagreed. But forget any notion of the faithless wandering in a desert of discontent. There is no statistically significant difference in happiness levels between atheists and those who have a religion, says Lyle. Still, the small sampling of Sikhs, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and practitioners of other Eastern religions scored an impressive 100 per cent happiness rating. And the survey’s small sample of evangelical Christians found a 100 per cent satisfaction level with their relationships—take that, Satan.

When it comes to kids, it appears that atheists happily flout God’s Old Testament admonition to “be fruitful and multiply.” Not only do atheists and agnostics have smaller families, they are far more likely to have no children at all. And a good thing, too, for atheist parents are more likely to be ambivalent about their wee ones. Asked if they would

have children “if you were given your life to live over again” a significant 13 per cent of atheists said no, while just four per cent of the faithful suffered offspring remorse.

Still, it’s hardly surprising that for the vast majority of Canadians, children and family are a source of joy and comfort. A remarkable 86 per cent of those who are happy talk with friends or family every day, while 33 per cent of those who are unhappy keep contact less than once a month. Having a close-knit family doesn’t depend on everyone living in the same community. In fact, for some, Lyle suggests, having a happy relationship with relatives may be *because* of the distance, rather than despite it.

When people were asked to name the best thing that had happened to them in the past year it was the hurly-burly of family life that topped the list. Only a job-related success came close to the photo-album fodder of weddings, births, pregnancies, vacations and graduations. New houses, cars or other purchases were way down the list. “It’s not about things,” says Lyle. “Things don’t appear to make us a whole lot happier.”

WHAT, ME WORRY?

Not all is bliss on the good ship Canuck. It wouldn’t be a Canadian survey without a level of complaint. The quality of public health rates surprisingly high. But, at best, there is a mixed view of the level of municipal services received. Just 27 per cent are satisfied with the quality of education and only one in five are content with their tax bills. A stunning 65 per cent are dissatisfied with the federal government’s action on environmental issues. The idea of increasing immigration levels is supported by just 30 per cent, despite a booming economy, an aging population and a looming labour shortage.

The results of the *Maclean’s*/Innovative survey come as no surprise to Michael Byers, an expert in global politics and international law at the University of British Columbia. The inward-looking concerns of Canadians seem almost petty in a global context, he says. “We have the luxury of being able to care

about relatively unimportant things.” His latest book, *Intent for a Nation*, is a call for Canada to shed its complacent bliss and take a greater role in shaping world affairs. “We might be very comfy and content within our gated community, but if the rest of the town is collapsing into anarchy and environmental degradation, you’ve got to wonder whether we really should wake up at some point and expend more effort to spread around the reasons for our happiness.”

Internationally, Canada’s level of contentment is almost off the charts, as measured over the past two decades in the World Values Survey. In 2000, the Canadian edition of the survey clocked in with an astounding 96 per cent feeling of happiness. To put that in a global context, one chart in the survey plots international levels of civil liberties, political rights, happiness and satisfaction on a vertical and horizontal axis. The calculation leaves Canada in the upper right corner of the graph, among a tiny cluster of elites, like Sweden, the U.S. and Australia. To be Canadian is to be born holding the deed to Park Place. “Canada is the envy of the world,” says Byers. “We have the eighth-largest economy on the planet with only about 32 million people, a remark-

THE HAPPIEST EVENT OF THE PAST YEAR

Good news from friends or family: 15.1%

Personal milestones (marriage/birth/pregnancy): 13.2%

Job accomplishments: 9.3%

My health: 8.2%

Making money/buying house or car: 5%

André Boisclair’s resignation: 0.3%



‘If I could do it all again, I’d have fewer kids.’

13% of atheists—and only 4% of everyone else—agree.

able situation. We have the second-largest chunk of real estate, with vast natural resources. And add on a functioning universal health care system, which, I don’t know about you, but it makes me feel secure.”

As Greg Lyle, the pollster, put it as he finished plowing through the tens of thousands of numbers that measured for *Maclean’s* the buoyant national mood on this 140th birthday. “If we weren’t happy,” he said, “who would be?” **M**