

Enter Symbol: US Quote Charts News GO Find Symbol:

NEWS & COMMENTARY: COMMENTARY

▶ Top Worldwide

▶ Regions

▶ Markets

▶ Economy/Politics

▼ Commentary

Bloomberg Columnists

Market Insight

▶ Sports

▶ Culture

▶ Bloomberg RSS

▶ Audio/Video Reports

Bloomberg Columnists

▶  E-Mail This Story ▶  Printer-Friendly Format



Mark Gilbert is a columnist for Bloomberg News. The opinions expressed are his own.

Money, Sex, Happiness Come to the Bank of England: Mark Gilbert

March 24 (Bloomberg) -- It's not often the words "sex" and "Bank of England" inhabit the same sentence. David Blanchflower's appointment to the central bank may change that.

Blanchflower is an economics professor at Dartmouth College in the U.S. The U.K. government announced this week that he will replace Stephen Nickell from June 1 on the bank's Monetary Policy Committee, which meets monthly to set interest rates.

So the game begins of trying to gauge the new policy maker. Is he a dove or a hawk? A maverick or a conformist? A man whose glass is half-full of champagne or almost drained of hemlock? What makes him tick? What's he interested in?

It turns out that Blanchflower is interested in sex. Well, who isn't? Specifically, though, the economist has investigated the relationship between how often people get laid, how much money they have, and how happy they say they are.

"Money, Sex and Happiness" was published in the Scandinavian Journal of Economics in 2004, and was co-written by Blanchflower and Andrew Oswald of Warwick University in the U.K. The study uses responses from 16,000 Americans, and is based on surveys taken from 1988 to 2002.

"Sexual activity enters strongly positively in happiness equations," the authors say in the paper. "The more sex, the happier the person." You would struggle to get anyone to disagree.

Four Times a Week

Blanchflower's paper attempts to quantify how much happier making love makes you. "Having sex at least four times a week is associated with approximately 0.12 happiness points." I'm not clever enough to work out exactly what that means; I'll have to rely on the assertion in the paper that it's "a large effect."

Asked about happiness, 55 percent of the survey respondents described themselves as "pretty happy," 11 percent were "not at all happy," while a bit more than 33 percent were "very happy." Once the sex goes away, though, the happiness decreases. Of those who said they didn't have sex in the previous year, just 29 percent were "very happy," while 16 percent of the chaste were "not at all happy."

In a list of 19 activities, sex is the one that "produces the single largest amount of happiness." Commuting to and from work turns out to be the least enjoyable thing people do. Maybe the bus and train companies should introduce more sleeper cars.

Can't Buy Me Love

There are some more surprising results buried in the analysis. It argues there's no link between your bank account and your bedroom athletics. "What is the connection between income and frequency of sex? It is zero for both men and women," the paper says. "We know from these equations that money does seem to buy greater happiness."

RESOURCES:

 Bloomberg TV

 Bloomberg Radio

 Markets

But it does not buy more sex. Money, it seems, does not buy more sexual partners."

Sleeping around, committing adultery and copulating with prostitutes or gigolos won't boost your smile quotient. "The happiness-maximizing number of sexual partners in the previous year is calculated to be one," the authors write. "People who say they have ever paid for sex are considerably less happy than others. Those who have ever had sex outside their marriage also report notably low happiness scores. Homosexual activity has no statistically significant effect in a happiness equation."

Celibate Singles

Thinking of popping the question to your fiance, or heading back to college? Only one of these will boost your chances in the mating game. "Married people have much more sex than people with other kinds of marital status," the report says. "Despite the stereotypes, students have, if anything, less sex than the average person their age."

There's even a handy benchmark against which to measure your, ahem, frequency. "The median American adult has sex two or three times a month. Among those aged under 40 years old, the median individual has sex once a week. About 10 percent of under-40 Americans say they have sexual intercourse at least four times a week."

There is at least one precedent for sex at the U.K. central bank. Eleven years ago this week, Rupert Pennant-Rea resigned as deputy governor of the Bank of England. Pennant-Rea, a former editor of the Economist, was outed by the Sunday Mirror newspaper for having a three-year affair with a freelance journalist.

Making Whoopee

Betraying your wife isn't typically a reason to chuck in your job. Smuggling your girlfriend into the office to make whoopee on the boss's carpet, though, easily beats misuse of the office photocopier at the Christmas party. On March 21, 1995, Pennant-Rea quit.

Blanchflower told Bloomberg reporter Craig Stirling this week that he plans to emulate his predecessor, Nickell, and be a "free thinker" at the Bank of England. "The bottom line is, how do consumers feel, how do households feel?" he said. "It doesn't seem that happiness levels are as high or maybe as high as they should be."

In a May 2005 paper called "Happiness and the Human Development Index," Blanchflower and Oswald say that rich nations overemphasize economic growth. "The industrialized countries should, in our judgment, use a broader conception of well-being than the height of a pile of dollars," they write. Maybe we should "substitute the goal of Gross National Happiness for the more traditional economist's objective of Gross National Product."

At the past four central bank meetings, Nickell has been the sole advocate of lower borrowing costs. Wouldn't it be nice if Blanchflower found a way to combine calling for interest rate cuts with an exhortation for more lovemaking?

To contact the writer of this column:
Mark Gilbert in London at magilbert@bloomberg.net.

Last Updated: March 23, 2006 19:03 EST

Advertisement: Learn to trade Currency.

SPONSORED LISTINGS

Hot Rocking Stock Picks

Tired of losing trades? Our proven stock picks are ready to rock tomorrow with 150 percent plus returns. Don't miss out-get real winners! Make money with the pros-click here today.

www.profitstockpicks.com

Tomorrow's Hot Stock Pick

Free reports, picks, and tips on potentially huge winners. Penny stocks, undervalued, and undiscovered situations. Unique ideas to make money now.

www.rocketstockpicks.com

The Two Best Gold Investments For 2006

Sign up for DailyWealth, a free daily e-letter, and immediately receive this investment research report free. Get the two great gold investments in the world right now.