# the Urban-Rural Happiness Gradient:

Growing up in a City Will Make You Unhappy
Later in Your Life.

AND:

No Urban Malaise for Millennials

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Growing up in a City Will Make You Unhappy Later in Your Life

No Urban Malaise for Millennials

bonus: towards urban unhappiness theory

bonus2: brfss

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# What we know so far: the Urb-Rur Happiness

#### **Gradient**

- [my signature argument: cities are bad: aok.mooo.com]
- we know that humans are least happy in largest places
- o (assuming that a country is not very poor)

o [i take this to extreme to push understanding]

- o for literature review see my: "Happiness and Place: Why Life Is Better Outside of the City"
- compare to: "Triumph of the City: How Our Greatest Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier, and Happier" by Ed Glaeser
- he got it already wrong in the title!

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#### What we don't know

- don't know the effect of size of a place in childhood/adolescence on SWB later in life
- ostudies about migration, incl urban-rural or rural-urban are not exactly about a place where one grew up
- o nor they focus on current urbanicity or control for it
- this study is inspired by Lederbogen et al 2011:
   "City living and urban upbringing affect neural social stress processing in humans." Nature
- oit found (like Simmel!) city unhealthy for human brain
- o and added that urban upbringing damages brain

# my study

- US GSS
- "Which of the categories on this card comes closest to the type of place you were living in when you were 16 years old?" and it is farm, and steps of urbanicity
- a caveat:
- o assume 16yo urbanicity is a place where a person grew up
- o actually i'd say not that likely that urbanicity will be very different at 16 from that in most of childhood/adolescence
- sure, noisy measure, but not useless: should have some signal!

others assume the same! and publish in ASR

	1	2	3
lace 16yo (base: country)			
farm		0.027***	0.017**
-50k		0.004	-0.012+
50k-250k		0.006	-0.008
city sub		0.014*	-0.009
250k-		-0.013*	-0.020**
norcsiz (base: country):			
lt 2.5k	0.007	0.007	0.008
2.5-10k	-0.009+	-0.007	-0.002
10-50k	-0.011*	-0.008	0.000
uninc med	0.004	0.006	-0.001
uninc Irg	-0.005	-0.001	-0.011*
med sub	-0.014*	-0.010+	-0.011+
Irg sub	-0.025***	-0.017*	-0.018*
50-250k	-0.038***	-0.033***	-0.012+
gt 250k	-0.078***	-0.067***	-0.024***
sual controls	no	no	yes
J	57709	57613	51687

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#### conclusion

- people who grew up in cities are less happy later in their lives above and beyond unhappiness associated with currently living in a city
- the negative effect of urbanicity in one's youth is about as strong statistically and practically (effect size) as effect of urbanicity of current place
- there may be a happiness benefit to growing up at a farm

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### No Urban Malaise for Millennials

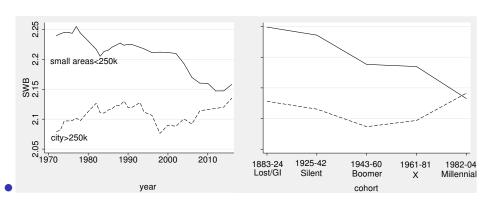
bonus: towards urban unhappiness theory

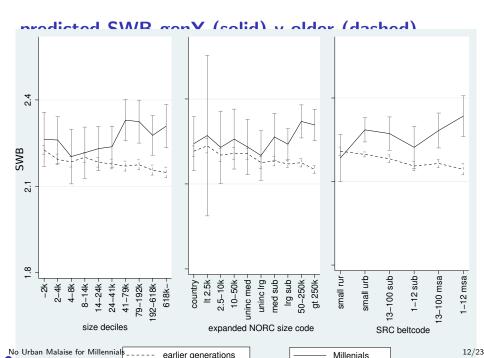
bonus2: brfss

# this study

- US GSS
- Millennial/genY: 1982-2004

# avg SWB: cities (dashed) v smaller areas (solid)





#### conclusion

- Millennials (1982-2004) happiest in large cities
- SWB gap of genY v others in largest cities is as big as \$100k in family income!
- osomething wrong with Millenials! :)
- everyone else happiest in small towns and rural areas
- yet the advantage of rural living is declining:
- o rural Americans are becoming less happy relative to urbanites
- again, for this and more:
- oaok.mooo.com

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# why city is bad? what is the mechanism?

- unnatural to almost any life!
- obet even pigeons and rats must be city unhappy
- o (can study happiness in animals, (eg Weiss et al., 2012)
- life does not belong with concrete, asphalt and glass
- yes, largest cities must be crowded by definition!
- and crowding is bad for all mammals including humans and rats (Calhoun, 1962)
- ook, bees and ants thrive in crowding, but we're different!
- city is unhealthy to human brain (Simmel, 1903, Milgram, 1970, Lederbogen et al., 2011)

# why? what is the mechanism?

- some of happiness killers:
- o commodification, inequality, and social comparison (eg Radcliff, 2001, Lane, 2000)
- overwork, rat race, consumerism, and conspicuous consumption (Leonard, 2010, Kasser, 2003, Frank, 2012)
- o also light, air, and noise pollutions
- o and information pollution (advertising!)
- and they are all centered and exemplified in cities!

# my problem with economics

- it's economists like Glaeser who push urbanism most
- to them humans are rational
- o and whatever humans do is good for them by definition!
- and so cities must be good, because they grow
- and since to them utility≈\$, cities must be good, too:
   most \$ made and spent in cities
- SWB lowest in cities? no problem! just assume that SWB is part of utility function just like pair of socks:
  - "happiness is a commodity in the utility function in the same way that owning a car and being healthy are" (Becker and Rayo, 2008, p. 89).

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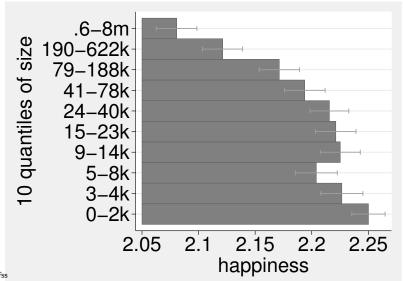
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bonus2: brfss

bonus3: city misery in pictures

bonus2: brfss 18/23

# happiness gradient smooth except 3rd decile



bonus2: brfss

# most miserable and happiest counties from BRFSS

county	density	happiness
St. Louis city MO	5.7k	3.18
Bronx NY	>30k	3.18
Kings NY (Brooklyn)	>30k	3.2
Johnson KS (close to Kansas city)	1.1k	3.51
Shelby TN (some of Memphis)	1.2k	3.54
Douglas CO (borders Denver)	.3k	3.56

bonus2: brfss 20/

# most succesful cities less happy that non city avg!

- avg for counties that are nonmetropolitan areas: 3.41
- Economist's Quality of Living; Mercer's Best cities
- Boston; Suffolk County MA: 3.29
- NYC; NY County (Manhattan): 3.31
- Chicago; Cook County IL: 3.39

bonus2: brfss 21/23

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### pictures

•https:

//theaok.github.io/junk/extracted\_figures.pdf

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