

## Chapter 1

### PLAN OF THIS CATALOG

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- 1/1 **Relevance of happiness**
  - 1/2 **State of the study of happiness**
    - 1/2.1 Intriguing findings
    - 1/2.2 Stagnating progress
    - 1/2.3 Need for research compilation
  - 1/3 **World Database of Happiness**
    - 1/3.1 Focus on ‘overall appreciation of life as-a-whole’
    - 1/3.2 Structure of the database scheme
    - 1/3.3 Inventories in the database
    - 1/3.4 Place of this catalog of correlational findings
  - 1/4 **Differences with current practices in research compilation**
    - 1/4.1 Focus on findings
    - 1/4.2 Conceptual specificity
    - 1/4.3 Completeness
  - 1/5 **Value for research synthesis**
    - 1/5.1 Homogeneity of the data
    - 1/5.2 Preparation for comparative analysis
    - 1/5.3 Preparation for causal analysis
  - 1/6 **Summary**
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**Intro** This catalog is part of the ‘World Database of Happiness’. That database is a ‘Finding browser’. It contains results of empirical investigations on a specific subject, in this case, on subjective appreciation of life.

The World Database of Happiness consists of several related inventories, one of which is this Catalog of Correlational Findings. The position of that catalog in the database system is explained in more detail in [section 1/3](#).

Correlational research findings on happiness are summarized in standard abstracts, which provide information on measurement, statistics and sampling. These abstracts are stored in this catalog.

The abstracts are rubricated in subject-categories. Within each subject-category, the findings are ordered by nation; within nations the findings are ordered by year of investigation. This is to facilitate comparison across time and culture. This catalog presents the subject-categories in alphabetical order. Browsing the subject-index allows an overview.

The aim is to bring together the scattered empirical findings and prepare for synthetic analysis. It is assumed that this will contribute to the understanding of happiness. This text explains why that is worth trying, and how this catalog can contribute to this purpose.

## **INTEREST IN HAPPINESS**

Happiness is a highly valued matter. In utilitarian moral philosophy it ranks as the highest good, and recent survey studies also show high rankings in the value hierarchy of the general public. Consequently there is broad support for public policies that aim at greater happiness for a greater number.

The relevance of happiness as a goal of social policy is growing. The better we succeed in eliminating pressing problems such as hunger and plagues, the more we move to abstract goals such as happiness. Individualization also presses for higher ranking of happiness. One of the manifestations of this development is the growing emphasis on 'quality-of-life', rather than mere quantity of life years, in health care.

The higher happiness ranks on the public agenda, the greater the demand for scientific information on the matter. To select the right interventions, we must know the main determinants of happiness. We must also have a view on consequences of happiness, to detect possible self-destructive effects and to appraise synergy with other values.

There is also a rising interest among individual citizens. Because happiness is becoming ever more prominent in the personal life of many people, there is a great demand for explanation and advice. The number of 'how to be happy' books increases and the contents have shifted gradually from matters of morals and mental hygiene to the 'art of living'. The greater the choice of life-styles in modern society, the greater is the demand for solid information about the consequences for health and happiness.

## 1/2 STATE OF THE STUDY OF HAPPINESS

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### 1/2.1 Intriguing findings

### 1/2.2 Stagnating progress

### 1/2.3 Need for research compilation

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Over the ages the subject has absorbed a lot of thought. Happiness was a major theme in early Greek philosophy and gained renewed interest in the later West-European Enlightenment. The philosophic tradition has produced a lot of ideas, but little operational knowledge. In fact, philosophers have raised more questions than they have answered. Most of the controversies they have raised could not be solved by the logic of reasoning. Settlement on the basis of reality checks has long been encumbered by lack of adequate research techniques.

The advent of the social sciences promised a breakthrough. New methods for empirical research opened the possibility to identify conditions for happiness inductively and even to test theories. This instigated a lot of research, most of which has been embedded in the newly established specialization of 'social indicators research' and 'health related quality of life research'.

In the 20th century more than 3000 empirical studies have dealt with the matter; in the beginning mainly as a side issue in studies about health and aging, but currently also as a main subject. This stream of research is growing. Reviews can be found with Diener (2000) and Veenhoven (1997).

### 1/2.1 Intriguing findings

This new line of research has produced several unexpected results, for examples see below.

- Happiness is not relative. Enjoyment of life appears not to depend on comparison, in particular not on social comparison. This finding contradicts cognitive theories of happiness and supports affective explanations. (Veenhoven 1991, 1995).
- Happiness is not very trait like; over a lifetime it appears to be quite variable. This finding does not fit notions of stable personality in psychology, or the theory of persistent inequalities in sociology. (Veenhoven 1994, Ehrhardt et al 2000).
- The majority of mankind appears to enjoy life. Unhappiness is the exception rather than the rule. This is at odds with the results of misery counting in sociology. (Veenhoven 1993).
- Happiness tends to rise in modern societies. This contradicts longstanding pessimism about modernization (Cummins 2000).
- In modern western nations happiness differs little across social categories such as rich and poor or males and females. The difference is rather in psychological competence (Headey and Wearing 1992). This result is at odds with current sociology of deprivation.
- Differences in happiness within nations (as measured by standard deviations) tend to get smaller. This contradicts notions about growing inequality. (Veenhoven 2002.)
- Liberalist intuition is confirmed in the finding that people tend to be happiest in

individualistic society, but the socialist expectation that people will be happier in a welfare state is not corroborated. (Veenhoven 2000b)

## 1/2.2 Stagnating progress

As yet this recent empirical research on happiness has not crystallized into a sound body of knowledge. Preliminary questions about conceptualization and measurement are now fairly well solved, but the understanding of determinants and consequences of happiness is still very incomplete and tentative. There are several reasons why the growing stream of empirical research has not yet brought greater understanding. In addition to complexities in the subject matter, there are several practical problems.

### *Lack of overview*

The first and most simple reason for the lack of progress is lack of coordination. There is high redundancy in the research effort; the same issues are investigated over and over again, in the same way. As a result, the range of variables considered is still rather small and methodological progress slow.

A related problem is that research findings are very scattered. Most observations are in fact bibliographically irretrievable. Consequently, many of the findings get lost.

### *Conceptual confusion*

The second reason is the confusion of tongues. As there is no consensus on use of words, it is quite difficult to select the data that pertain to happiness as defined here. Moreover the matter is measured in different ways. Getting an overview of the research findings requires first of all selecting studies that measured happiness as defined here, and next a grouping by comparable indicators.

### *Little view on contingencies*

A more basic reason for the stagnation lies in the dominant research approach. The bulk of empirical happiness studies consist of cross-sections in particular countries. Typically investigators try to identify universal conditions for happiness using their local correlates. For instance, the observation in American studies that the happy tend to have high incomes is seen to mean that money buys happiness everywhere and that the basic underlying mental process is social comparison.

Yet, conditions for happiness are probably not the same at all times and at all places. Neither are its consequences. Though there are obviously several universal requirements for a happy life (such as food and possibly meaning), most effects seem to be contingent on characteristics of the person and situation. For instance, happiness correlates strongest to income in poor and socially unequal countries, and most so among materialistic persons. Usually, such contingencies cannot be detected in single studies in one country. They can be identified only if many studies are compared in a systematic meta-analysis. This requires first of all that the available data be compiled.

### *No view on macro level*

Further, correlational studies within nations cannot grasp macro-social conditions for happiness. As their focus is on differences in happiness within nations, they are blind to variation in happiness across nations. Therefore, current research has as yet little relevance for major political discussions such as the priority of continuous economic

growth, preserving the welfare state or promoting social coherence. Investigation of such matters requires cross-national studies, preferably in a semi-longitudinal design. Such studies are scarce as yet, but we can do a lot by comparing the available one-nation studies. Again this requires compilation of the available data.

#### *Little view on causality*

Lastly, correlations say little about cause and effect. If rich Americans tend to more happy, this does not prove that money buys happiness, because happiness can also boost earning chances. Separation of cause and effect requires panel studies and experiments. Such studies are scarce as yet, and the results difficult to retrieve. Progress requires at least that these scattered findings be brought together.

### 1/2.3 Growing need for research compilation

A main priority is therefore to gather the available research findings on happiness and to present these in a comparable format. Without a complete and detailed view on the available data, there will be little cumulation of knowledge. This need for a focused catalog of research-findings becomes ever more pressing. The higher the pile of research reports the greater the need for a good data collection.

Now that more than 3000 studies have been published, the heap of data has grown too big to be handled by narrative research reviews. At the same time the stockpile becomes ever more suitable for quantitative meta-analysis. Yet meta-analysis requires much investment in gathering of relevant research and in homogenizing the findings. Investment is particularly high if one wants to cover all the world's research. Such investments are made in capital-intensive fields such as pharmacological research, but uncommonly in this field. The few meta-analyses of empirical happiness research are based on small collections, e.g. Stock et. al. (1983). As yet, all have been one-time shots, leaving no common database to build on. Hence each new investigator has to make a new start. Not surprisingly few do so.

## 1/3 WORLD DATABASE OF HAPPINESS

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1/3.1 Focus on ‘overall appreciation of life-as-a-whole’

1/3.2 Structure of the database scheme

1/3.3 Inventories in the database

1/3.4 Place of this ‘Catalog of Correlational Findings’

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The World Database of Happiness has been developed to overcome these problems. It departs from a clear definition of happiness and gathers the available findings on that matter. This ‘Catalog of Correlational Findings’ is part of that database.

### 1/3.1 Focus on ‘overall appreciation of one’s life as-a-whole’

The word 'happiness' is used in various ways. In the widest sense it is an umbrella term for all that is good. In this meaning it is often used interchangeably with terms like 'well-being' or 'quality of life' and denotes both individual and social welfare. Here the word happiness is used in the more limited sense of subjective enjoyment of life. Happiness is defined as *the degree to which an individual judges the overall quality of his/her own life-as-a-whole favorably*. In other words: how much one likes the life one leads. This concept is discussed in more detail in the next chapter (2).

### 1/3.2 Structure of the database

The database puts the available findings together. This stocktaking involves four steps:

- Tracing studies on happiness, all over the world.
- Selecting those studies, which measured happiness in an acceptable way.
- Summarizing the results of these studies in a common terminology and by comparable statistics.
- Ordering of the findings by subject, method and population.
- Storing of the information in related inventories.

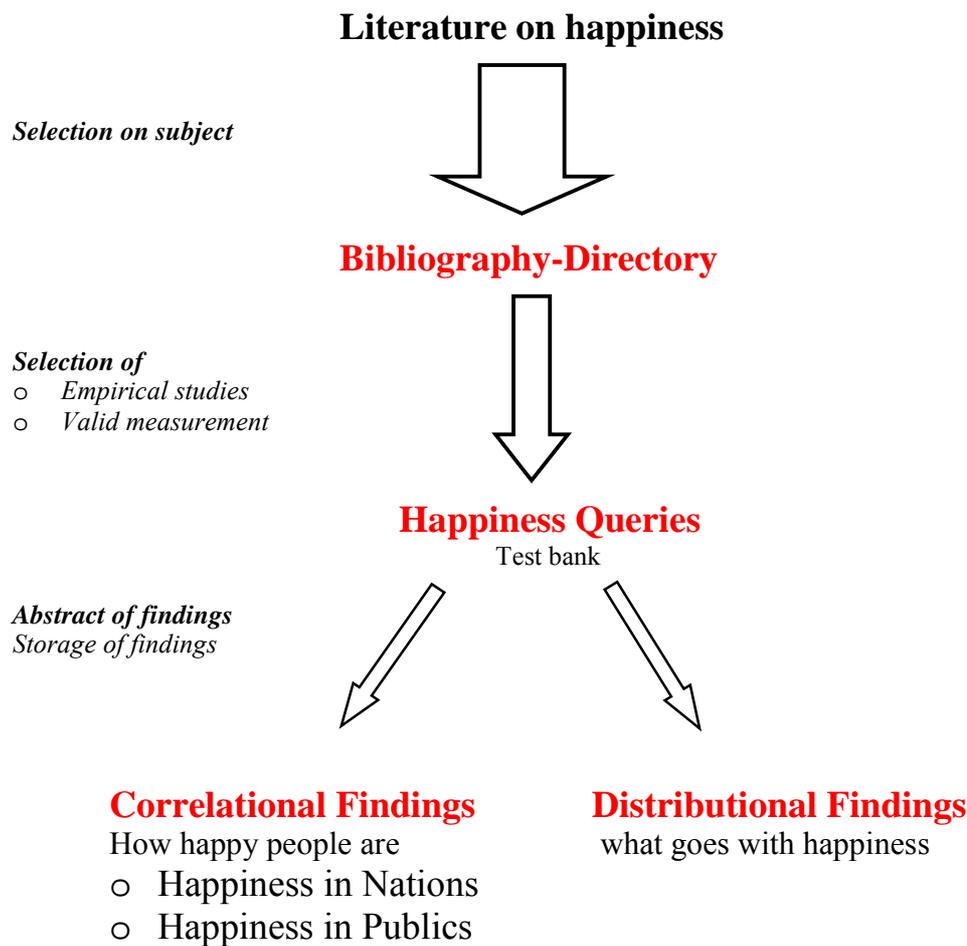
The flow chart on the next page shows how that works.

As one can see, the information is stored in five inventories. In the scheme these are depicted in fat. This ‘Catalog of Correlational Findings’ is right at the bottom of [scheme 1/3.2](#).

Section 1/3.3 will shortly consider each of these inventories and next section 1/3.4 explains how this Catalog of Correlational Findings relates to the other inventories.

## Scheme 1/3.2

## Flow chart World Database of Happiness



## 1/3.3 Inventories in the database

The World database of happiness consists of the following five related inventories:

**Bibliography**

All publications on happiness are entered in the 'Bibliography of Happiness', which involves a detailed subject index. Currently it involves 3062 titles. This listing allows an overview of the field and helps to trace literature on specific issues.

Most publications in the bibliography are books and journal articles; however, the collection is not limited to 'authorized' publications. Grey reports and mere data-files are also included. The main reason is that the publication process involves some systematic biases, one of which is under-reporting of non-correlations. By deliberately including 'unpublished' data, this database allows a more realistic view of conditions for happiness. Therefore, meta-analyses based on this database can yield conclusions that differ from impressions based on narrative literature reviews.

Reports of empirical investigations are selected from this collection. Research reports are indexed by their methodological characteristics. This helps to single out suitable studies, for instance, to trace the scarce panel studies and experiments that bear information about causality. The next step is selection of investigations that used

acceptable indicators of happiness. This selection is based on the above concept of happiness and consequently on an assortment of indicators that fit this concept. Results of the selected studies are entered in the research inventories.

### **Directory of investigators**

Names of authors are stored in the 'Directory of Happiness Investigators', which now contains 3334 names, and some 2000 recent addresses. This directory is linked to the bibliography, which is indexed by subject. Therefore one can easily select specialists. Because the bibliography is also indexed by year of publication, one can also identify the currently most active researchers.

### **Catalog of Happiness Queries (test bank)**

All the acceptable indicators are listed in the 'Catalog of Happiness Measures'. This catalog orders the indicators by happiness-variant, time reference and method of assessment. It provides full text of questions and observation schedules, and summarizes the available psychometric data. The catalog links to the studies that used these measures, and thereby provides an easy overview of the scores yielded by the same indicators in different populations. The catalog is quite useful for selecting indicators and for comparison results afterwards. It is also a valuable tool for identifying instrument effects.

Currently there are 571 acceptable indicators of happiness, mostly single questions. These indicators have been used in some 2000 studies. When implemented, the information on these measures will be linked to the findings in the data inventories discussed below. Reliability estimates will be automatically fed into the planned meta-analysis routines.

### **Distributional findings**

Part of the findings in selected studies concerns the distribution of happiness, that is, observations on how happy people are in the population under investigation. These findings can be reported in frequency distributions (f.e. 35% very happy, 55% pretty happy, 10% unhappy), or summarized in statistics of central tendency such as the mean and standard deviation. These distributional findings are classified by population.

The inventory of distributional findings has a special section for studies in representative nation samples. This 'Catalog of Happiness in Nations' lists the distribution of responses to acceptable questions on happiness in nationwide samples. Currently the inventory contains the results of 1534 surveys in 93 nations between 1946-2000. As such it provides a basis for an international statistics of happiness. The data are ordered by question type and by year and nation. Thus the catalog allows comparison across nations and through time.

The data on *average happiness* serve to identify the macro-social factors that mark off more and less livable societies. These data are also of use for monitoring social progress and decline. The data on *dispersion of happiness* in nations can be used in comparative studies of inequality in life chances. The uses of these data are spelt out in more detail elsewhere (Veenhoven 1993 chapter 8, Veenhoven 2000c).

### **Correlational findings (this catalog)**

Most of the findings are correlational, and bear information about differences in characteristics of happy and unhappy people, irrespective the level of happiness. The

observed relationship is summarized using statistics, such the correlation coefficient. The research findings are condensed in standard abstracts, which provide detail about measurement, population and time. These abstracts are ordered by subject matter. For instance, there are 204 abstracts of research findings on the relation between happiness and 'age'. Currently this inventory contains 6290 findings from 662 studies in 97 nations, 1911-2000. These abstracts are easily retrieved.

#### **1/3.4 Place of this 'Catalog of correlational findings'**

This catalog is positioned right at the bottom of scheme 1/3.2. The standard abstracts in this catalog involve links to the other inventories.

Each of the abstracts of correlational findings involves a link to the bibliography, so that one can get to the original report of the investigation. Through the bibliography one can also get to the directory and contact the author, if still available.

The abstracts also specify what indicator of happiness has been used in that study. Full information is provided by a link to the Catalog of Happiness Queries.

The abstracts link also to the catalogs of distributional findings. So the user can also how happy the subjects were and compare to the level in similar populations

## 1/4 DIFFERENCES WITH CURRENT PRACTICE OF RESEARCH COMPILATION

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### 1/4.1 Focus on findings

### 1/4.2 Conceptual specificity

### 1/4.3 Completeness

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This database is a new tool for research-synthesis. It stores research results at the level of *findings*, and is therefore called a '**finding browser**'. The differences with current tools for research compilation can be summarized as follows:

#### 1/4.1 Focus on findings

This database is more than a bibliographical guide to the literature. Its finding catalogs provide direct access to research results. The database differs also from data-archives. Data archives provide access to 'raw' data, while this finding browser presents the results of earlier data-analysis.

#### 1/4.2 Conceptual specificity

This inventory is based on a specific concept of happiness. It does not include everything ever associated with the term, but is limited to observations based on measures of 'overall appreciation of one's life-as-a-whole' (defined in more detail in chapter 2). In that respect it differs from most reviews and meta-analytic studies, which typically refer to broader matters, such as 'satisfaction' or 'subjective well-being'<sup>1</sup>. This specificity differs also from current practice with data-archives, where variable labels are typically quite variable.

#### 1/4.3 Completeness

This database also differs from current review studies in its presentation of *all* the findings, rather than summarizing a 'trend in findings'. In these respects it resembles the "Human Area Files" in anthropology, which is an inventory of observed behaviors in non-western societies ordered by society type.

##### *No methodological selection*

Synthetic studies often limit to studies that meet certain methodological criteria, e.g. representative sampling or ratio level of measurement. This database selects only on indicators of happiness used. It ensures that all the data pertain to the same thing. Methodological requirements vary with the use of the data. Therefore, the standard abstracts in this catalog of correlational findings provide much methodological detail.

##### *Grey literature included*

Data for this collection is largely drawn from publications on happiness in books and

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance review-studies by Argyle (2001), and Diener (1999,2000), and meta-analyses by Stock et al (1983)

journal-articles. However, this database is not limited to findings that reached 'authorized' publications. Grey reports and mere data-files are included as well.

One reason for this strategy is that the original investigator does not publish many findings that may be relevant in a meta-analysis because they appeared not to be relevant in the context of his report. Another reason is that the publication process involves some systematic bias, one of which is under-report of non-significant correlations.

By deliberately including 'unpublished' data this database allows a more realistic view of conditions for happiness. Therefore, meta-analyses based on this database can yield conclusions that differ from impressions based on narrative literature surveys.

## 1/5 VALUE FOR RESEARCH SYSTHESIS

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### 1/5.1 Homogeneity of the data

### 1/5.2 Preparation for comparative analysis

### 1/5.3 Preparation for causal analysis

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This catalog does not present a full synthesis of empirical happiness research, but limits to the *preliminary phase of data gathering and -organization*. All research-synthesis requires that one selects relevant studies, takes out relevant information and summarizes that information in a uniform way. This catalog elaborates that phase more systematically than usual in research-synthesis. Criteria for selection are more explicit, coverage is more exhaustive, and notation of findings more uniform. Unlike current studies, it presents the pre-organized data in full detail.

In fact, many review-studies are sloppy in this respect. It is often unclear how the data are gathered and organized. Narrative review-studies (verbal summaries of the literature) typically report trends and conclusions only, and do not emphasize much on presenting the data on which inferences are based. As a result, it is difficult to check the conclusions of such studies; the critical reader has to go through the entire literature. Also, it is mostly quite difficult to build on earlier research-synthesis. As the pre-phase is not systematically reported, the next reviewer must start all over again and has to go through an even greater pile of literature. Not surprisingly, enthusiasm for research-synthesis is relative low in the richest fields.

#### 1/5.1 Homogenization of data

The comparability of the findings is enhanced in several ways: Firstly by the *selection* on subject (i.e. entering in bibliography or not) and on indicator (i.e. entering in test bank or not). Secondly, the findings are described in a *common terminology*. The techniques of investigations are described in a standard language that is defined explicitly. Correlated factors are denoted by standard names that are part of the classification by which findings can be searched. Thirdly, distributional findings are presented on a *common scale*. Transformation procedures have been developed for this purpose, which can be applied automatically on the frequency distributions in the inventory of distributions and on the frequency tables in the inventory of correlations. Fourthly, the correlational findings are homogenized as far as possible. The system involves several routines for converting different statistics to a *common effect size*. Lastly, the data-system allows the selection of comparable studies, both with respect to methodology and population.

#### 1/5.2 Preparation for comparative analysis

Current reviews focus typically on the main stream of findings and on universals. This catalog is designed to bring out varieties. Therefore, all the findings are presented with full detail about measurement, population and sampling. For the same reason, the presentation of findings - within subject-categories - is ordered by nation and time.

### 1/5.3 Preparation for causal analysis

Identifying causes and effects requires focusing on the experimental- and panel-studies. This catalog is designed to present these scarce data in such a way that they do not get lost in the bulk of simple correlational findings. For that purpose, each subject-category has sub-categories on developmental aspects; for instance, in the presentation of findings on the relation between happiness with income, 'current' income is distinguished from 'earlier' income, 'change' in income and 'later' income. This way of presentation is standard in all subject-categories.

## 1/6 SUMMARY

This catalog is part of the 'World Database of Happiness', which contains results of empirical investigations on 'happiness', in the sense of 'life-satisfaction'.

This catalog presents *correlational findings*, that is, observations about conditions that differ systematically between happy and unhappy persons. These findings on happiness are summarized in standard abstracts, which provide information on measurement, statistics and sampling. These abstracts are stored in this database.

Abstracts are rubricated in subject-categories. Within each subject-category, the findings are ordered by nation; within nations the findings are ordered by year of investigation. This is to facilitate comparison across time and culture. This catalog presents the subject-categories in alphabetical order. Browsing the subject-index allows an overview.

The aim is to bring together the scattered empirical findings on happiness to prepare for synthetic analysis. This endeavor differs from earlier synthetic studies in that it is more homogenous and complete

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