

## Chapter 6

### USE OF THIS CATALOG

---

- 6/1 Use for what**
    - 6/1.1 Understanding of happiness
    - 6/1.2 Understanding of related phenomena
  - 6/2 How to use**
    - 6/2.1 Synthetic studies
    - 6/2.2 Theory development
    - 6/2.3 Orientation for new research
  - 6/3 Use by whom**
    - 6/3.1 Scientific community
    - 6/3.2 Policy makers
    - 6/3.3 General public
  - 6/4 Strong- and weak point of this catalog**
    - 6/4.1 Strong points
    - 6/4.2 Limitations
  - 6/5 Summary**
- 

**Intro** The usefulness of this catalog can be elucidated in three ways. First, by arguing the substantive relevance of its data, in other words, *what* purposes empirical data on happiness can serve. The second way is to mention some methodological applications, *how* the data can be used. The third way is indicating the users, *who* will make use of this information.

## 6/1 USE FOR WHAT

---

### 6/1.1 Understanding of happiness

- *Determinants of happiness*
- *Consequences of happiness*

### 6/1.2 Understanding of related phenomena

---

Information about correlates of happiness is of course relevant for a better understanding of happiness and provides information for policies aiming at greater happiness for a greater number. The data in this catalog can contribute to a better understanding of other matters as well.

#### 6/1.1 Understanding of happiness

This data collection can improve the understanding of happiness in two ways. Firstly it helps to assess determinants of happiness, which is required for findings ways to improve happiness. Secondly it will provide a view on the consequences of happiness, which is required for appraising the desirability of happiness.

##### *Determinants of happiness*

The inventory is first of all a tool for identifying *conditions for happiness*. It provides an overview of the factors that are statistically related to happiness and also provides access to the findings that indicate causality. Because the collection covers investigations from all over the world, it provides a basis for identifying possible universal conditions for happiness. Its scope also allows the charting variations in conditions for happiness across cultures and through time. Psychological contingencies can be made visible as well by this data-collection.

##### *Consequences of happiness*

This data-collection not only helps to identify determinants of happiness, but also inform about its *consequences*<sup>1</sup>; that is on the side effects of enjoying life or not. As such the data provide an empirical reference for value-orientation. If side effects are typically negative (e.g. if happiness render passive and egoistic), that is of course an argument against the greatest happiness principle. If side-effects appear positive on a balance (e.g. if happiness make people loving and open), that pleas for greater priority to happiness<sup>2</sup>

#### 6/1.2 Understanding of related phenomena

Data on happiness can be used in many other relevance-contexts as well. Hence this data-collection has broader applications.

One application is in the study of social inequality. Inequality in life-chances is sometimes measured by difference in happiness between social categories; deprivation is

---

<sup>1</sup> Data about sequel of happiness can be found in subject-category 'Life history: Later life' (L 8.3\*).

<sup>2</sup> For a review of the literature on consequences of happiness, see Veenhoven (1988) and Veenhoven (1989)

seen to manifest in lower happiness. In this vein, Manning Gibbs (1972) considered the emancipation of American Blacks in the post-war decade. He observed a growing difference in black- and white happiness, rather than a diminishing of the difference. The data-collection allows similar comparisons through time, for instance comparison of differences in happiness between social classes, between males and females, and between age-categories. The general point is here that happiness is used as an *indicator* for something else. Happiness is used to indicate other phenomena as well, in particular change in happiness. Improvement or deterioration of happiness is used to assess 'adjustment' to life-change and for measuring 'effectiveness' of social programs and personal therapies. Such applications of the concept can also profit from this data-collection.

Another application is in studies that focus on 'determinants of health'. Happiness is an important determinant of health; it is e.g. a good predictor of longevity (Deeg 1989). Consequently, the searches for determinants of health overlaps to some extent with determinant of happiness. The general point is here that happiness often figures as an *independent variable*; a source of effects referred to as 'consequences' above. In that way the variable is also used in studies about 'resistance to stress', 'success in love' and 'political protest'. For example, some theories about political behavior hold that dissatisfaction with life makes people receptive for radical beliefs. This data-collection allows a check of the implication that radicals are typically unhappy. (See subject-categories P 8.3.2 and P 8.4.2)

A variant of this approach is the use of happiness as a *mediating* variable. For instance, the theory that happiness works as a buffer to stress.

## 6/2 HOW TO USE THIS DATA-COLLECTION

---

### 6/2/1 Synthetic studies

- *Review studies*
- *Meta analyses*
- *Comparison across nation*
- *Comparison through time*

### 6/2.2 Theory development

- *Inductive enlightenment*
- *Deductive theory testing*

### 6/2.3 Orientation for new research

---

Methodologically, the data-collection can be used in three ways: for the integration of available research, for theory development and for orientation on new research. All these applications make research-effort more cumulative.

#### 6/2.1 Research synthesis

The catalog provides a good starting point for several methods of research-integration. It is particularly suited to the following methods:

##### **Review studies**

Regular state-of-the-art reviews are essential for the cumulating of knowledge on happiness. Yet such studies have become scarcer over the years because the field is ever more difficult to oversee. This collection of research findings solves that problem largely, because it presents a complete overview of the available findings in a well-accessible format.

The catalog saves reviewers a lot of time and effort: the literature has already been sifted out and organized. Almost all the available reports have been closely inspected for relevant data and the findings are presented in a surveyable way. The design of the catalog guards against the common fallacies of conceptual confusion and against mixing up of empirical observations with theoretical conclusions. Because every finding is presented with a page reference, reviewers can easily find their way back to the original literature.

An example of this application is the earlier mentioned study 'Conditions of Happiness' (Veenhoven, 1984a). That book reviewed empirical happiness-research up to 1980 on the basis of an earlier version of this data-collection.

##### **Meta-analysis**

The collection is particularly suited for quantitative research reviewing. It allows easy identification of studies that involve comparable findings. The pre-selection on indicators of happiness guarantees that all the findings concern the same subject. Identification of methodological comparability is easy, because extracts provide information about population, sampling, measurement and statistics. Much of the present day meta-analyses work in fact with too heterogeneous data.

On several subjects the data are sufficiently rich and homogenous to allow quantitative meta-analysis. This is for instance the case with data on the relationship of happiness to 'sex', 'age' and 'income'.

### **Comparison across nations**

As the findings are grouped by nation, the catalog also allows a comparison of correlates of happiness across borders. As noted earlier, cross-nation comparison is one of the ways to distinguish culture-specific conditions for happiness from universal ones.

### **Comparison through time**

Findings are filed by subject-category and within subject-categories by nation. Within each nation-set, the findings are presented in chronological order. This latter presentation allows an easy identification of possible changes in the pattern of correlation through time. Trend analysis is important for assessing causality and can also be informative for policy applications.

## **6/2.2 Theory development**

This data collection also facilitates the understanding of the basic processes underlying happiness. It provides opportunities for indicative illumination and for systematic theory testing.

### **Inductive illumination**

One way to understanding is to go through the facts and consider their theoretical relevance. This can be called a 'drag-net method'. In that metaphor the facts stand for fish and is the net the whole of explanatory notions. This method does not only detect the findings that fit preexisting theories; it also makes us aware of phenomena we cannot easily explain.

This collection of findings is quite suited to this method. Firstly it provides a broader scope than separate primary studies can offer. Secondly, its 'findings' provides more condensed information than the 'observations' in any primary study. Thirdly, the collection brings unexpected findings to light, often findings that were marginal in the original investigation, but are quite telling in another light. Fourthly, the database allows a view on the wider pattern of findings. An example is that happiness appeared to be more strongly related to marriage in individualistic cultures.

An illustration of this approach can be found in Veenhoven 1984 and 1996.

### **Deductive theory testing**

Another road to understanding is to derive predictions about happiness from a theory and then test these inferences. Such tests can be performed on the findings in this collection. An example is the above-mentioned test of the theory that happiness is relative. Ideally one might prefer tests on primary data that are especially gathered for a particular test, but practically test on such secondary data is often the best feasible, especially when the test requires costly comparison across time and nations.

## **6/2.3 Orientation for new research**

Above all, the catalog provides an overview of the available research. In comparison with current reviews it provides a much more complete- and detailed view. As such, the catalog is a useful source for newcomers to the field, who want to orientate in relevant

themes for research. Good orientation on what has already been done helps to prevent double work, and sharpens awareness for possible variations.

Consultation of this catalog can also help to select appropriate indicators of happiness and measures of other variables. The catalog presents operationalizations in much detail. That provides the interested investigator with a lot of examples and enables the selection of indicators that provides the best opportunities to compare with earlier research.

## 6/3 USE BY WHOM

---

### 6/3.1 Scientific community

### 6/3.2 Policy makers

- *Social policy*
- *Therapy*
- *Care*

### 6/3.3 General public

---

This data collection is meant for the scientific community in the first place. Further it is also of interest for policy makers and the general public

### 6/3.1 Scientific community

In section 6/1.1 we have seen that this data collection is a useful tool for social scientists that are involved in the study of happiness. Section 6/1.2 indicated that it can also be of use for scientists in other fields.

### 6/3.2 Policy makers

Happiness is of relevance in various policy issues and gains an ever more prominent place on the agenda. In social policy, happiness is at least one of the goals. In some of the care domains it is even a quite important goal, for instance in palliative healthcare and in psychotherapy.

#### **Social policy**

Findings on happiness can serve social policy in several ways. First they can help to identify pockets of dissatisfaction that are not recognized in the political process, or reversed, dismiss the exaggerations of lobbyists. Secondly, the findings provide clues about the probable effects of interventions, such as income suppletion, job creation and housing schemes. Lastly, the findings bear information about the relative effectiveness of the policy regime as a whole. This use of the findings is discussed in more detail in Veenhoven 1995 and 2002.

Part of the research on happiness has been instigated for these reasons, but the use of the outcomes has been limited so far. One reason is that voiced demand still carries more weight than silent suffering. Another reason is that some policy makers are disenchanted with the results. Happiness appears to be largely independent of the conditions they try to improve and, consequently, people thrive equally well in nations with modest social security (as noted in section 4.2). This does not mean that happiness is insensitive to all policy. The findings suggest that happiness responsive to improvements in legal security, interest articulation and tolerance.

Though apparently unwelcome in some circles, the message is still relevant. Sooner or later the findings will find their way in the policy process, in particular when cuts in social expenditure requires real priority setting.

#### **Therapy**

Findings on happiness can also guide therapeutic interventions at the individual level, both in curative medicine and in psychotherapy. The need for monitoring quality-of-

life outcomes is now widely recognized in the therapeutic professions and has given rise to a broad stream of research, with its own journals and research associations. In that tradition quality of life is typically measured using multi-dimensional inventories, that cover all the quadrants in the fourfold scheme presented in section 4.1. That practice devoids the findings of a clear meaning. Therefore the field can profit very much from the selection of more focused findings in this collection. Though this selection comprises only 10% of the research effort

### **Care**

Happiness is a more prominent aim in the care for children, elderly and disabled persons. That goal is particularly relevant when chances for autonomy and improvement are small. Hence happiness is an important outcome variable in this trade. At the individual level it can serve to monitor the treatment of particular patients. At the organizational level it informs about the performance of clinics and departments.

### **6/3.3 General public**

Journalists often use the collection and this use will probably increase in the future. As noted above, there is an increasing demand for information about happiness for personal clarification and for orientation in lifestyle choices. That demand materializes in a continuous stream of documentaries on happiness, both ego-documents and popularizations of scientific research.

## 6/4 STRONG- AND WEAK POINTS OF THE CATALOG

---

### 6/4.1 Strong points

### 6/4.2 Limitations

---

Like any tool, this data-catalog has its pros and cons. Its qualities should be compared to alternative sources of information about research-effort in the field; that is, with narrative literature-reviews on happiness, and with data banks that allow secondary analysis of surveys that involved indicators of happiness.

#### 6/4.1 Strong points

This catalog provides first of all a *broad overview* of the available research-findings on happiness. It covers more publications than any review-study at this moment. Though various data-archives involve a lot of information on happiness as well; these systems do not provide a comparable overview as yet. Data-archives provide good access to large-scale surveys. This specialized catalog also involves many smaller studies, among which highly relevant experimental studies and small-scale follow-ups.

The data-collection is *conceptually homogeneous*. It is based on an explicit definition of happiness and a consecutive selection of studies. This greatly improves the possibilities for comparison and interpretation. Most literature-reviews on in the field use more diffuse conceptions. Data-archives typically provide no conceptual pre-selection at all.

The findings in this catalog are presented in a *theoretically organized* way. Not only are the findings rubricated by subject matter, but also within subject-categories they are organized in such a way that indications of causal effects come to the attention and that variants of the same are systematically distinguished. See the introduction to chapter 4. This pre-arrangement is a great help for a fruitful analysis. It prevents much of the confusion that currently clouds the field. Some of the available literature-reviews also emphasize these distinctions, but apply them only illustratively. Data-archives do not involve any such theoretical pre-organization.

Likewise, the presentation of the findings facilitates *comparison across nations and time*. In each subject-category, the findings are ordered by nations and in each set of nations by year of investigation. This is a great help for comparative analysis. Some literature-reviews also compare across time and borders on some subjects. However, such presentations are incidental rather than systematic. Data-archives provide good opportunities for comparative analysis, but do not provide the user with a pre-organized presentation for that purpose.

The catalog presents data with *much detail*. Each finding is reported in a separate mini-abstract, which involves information about 1) measurement (of both happiness and the correlate), 2) population, 3) sampling, 4) time and 5) statistics. Eventual elaborations are reported in detail as well. Moreover the mini-abstracts involve page-reference to the original reports. In this respect the catalog differs markedly from current literature-reviews that rather report the pattern of findings as perceived by the reviewer. In principle, data banks can provide even more detail. However, accessibility is often problematic.

## 6/4.2 Limitations

One of the strong points marks also a limitation; the rigorous *selection* of happiness measures produces a homogenous data-collection, but requires on the other hand that several interesting studies be left out. This is for instance the case with studies that used Diener's Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS). That scale was not accepted as a valid indicator of happiness, because one of its items taps something slightly different. The scale has been used in a lot of studies that are otherwise quite acceptable. Selectivity has its price.

Though the catalog is quite homogenous with respect to happiness, there is a lot of *variability in the correlates* it lists. The variety of correlates is managed to some extent by the detailed subject-classification, which distinguishes conceptually similar chunks of correlates. Yet within the subject-categories there is still a lot of difference in measurement. For instance, 'physical health' (subject-category P 6) has been assessed in quite different ways. Differences in measurement limit possibilities for comparison. Differences in statistics used limit comparison as well. If the association between health and happiness is expressed in Gamma in one study and in a Pearson-correlation in another, we can often not establish whether the relationship is stronger in the former study than in the latter. Sometimes, reports present frequency-tables on the basis of which we could compute comparable statistics, but often such information is not available. Still, this catalog is superior to current literature-reviews in this respect. Literature-surveys typically ignore measurement differences. This catalog helps at least to acknowledge the problems. The very detail about measurement and statistics in this catalog makes these limitations so apparent. Problems of this kind play generally less in secondary analysis. Indicators used in large-scale survey-programs are mostly reasonably homogeneous and there is no problem with statistics.

Another limitation is in the nature of the findings. Most of the findings in this catalog are *zero-order* correlations. Zero-order correlations have the advantage that they are mostly well comparable. However a disadvantage is that zero-order correlations may be spurious, and for that reason not adequately reflect the true relationship between happiness and the correlated variable. Ever more studies deal with that problem by performing controls for spurious distortion, mostly by computing partial correlations or multiple  $\beta$ 's. These controls are reported in the excerpts as well, next to zero-order  $r$  one or more multiple order  $\beta$ 's. Yet the control-variables used are typically not the same across studies. The multiple-order findings are therefore less well comparable. This problem arises in literature reviewing as well; it is only less apparent in that case. In secondary analysis the problem can be solved by computing comparable multiple correlations afterwards.

The *presentation of findings* involves limitations as well. The catalog lists research-findings by subject. That means that the results of a study are cut to pieces. As a result, much contextual information gets lost. For instance, if a study compared the effects on happiness of change in income and change in marital status, that difference will not be easily visible, because the findings are categorized under different headings. This is particularly problematic in the case of path-analytic studies; though the separate excerpts mention the net effects when the other variables are controlled ( $\beta = \dots$  when controlled for...), the overview of all the interactions and the relative weights gets lost.

A last thing to mention is that this data-collection is *not complete*. Firstly, it is unlikely that the literature-search was hundred percent successful. We probably failed to trace relevant reports in other languages than English, Dutch and German. Secondly, the

reports located are not all excerpted as yet. In fact, half of the selected reports were waiting for entering at August 2001.

## 6/5 SUMMARY

Information about correlates of happiness is of course relevant for a better understanding of happiness and provides information for policies aiming at greater happiness for a greater number. The data in this catalog can contribute to a better understanding of other matters as well.

Methodologically, the data-collection can be used in three ways: for the integration of available research, for theory development and for orientation on new research. All these applications make research-effort more cumulative.

This data collection is meant for the scientific community in the first place. Further it is also of interest for policy makers and the general public

Like any tool, this data-catalog has its pros and cons. Its qualities should be compared to alternative sources of information about research-effort in the field; that is, with narrative literature-reviews on happiness, and with data banks that allow secondary analysis of surveys that involved indicators of happiness

**REFERENCES**

Deeg, D.J. & VanZonneveld, R. (1989)

*Does happiness lengthen life?*

In Veenhoven, R. (ed) 'How harmful is happiness? Consequences of enjoying life or not'.  
Universitaire Pers Rotterdam

Diener, E., Emmons, R.A., Larsen, R.J. & Griffin, S. (1985)

*The Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS)*

Journal of Personality Assessment, vol. 49, pp.71-75

Manning Gibbs, R.A. (1972)

*Relative deprivation and self reported happiness of Blacks 1946-1966*

Doctoral Dissertation, University of Texas at Austin

Veenhoven, R. (1984)

*Conditions of happiness*

Kluwer Academic, Dordrecht

Veenhoven, R. (1988)

*The utility of happiness*

Social Indicators Research, vol. 20, pp. 333-354

Veenhoven, R. (1989)

*How harmful is happiness? Consequences of enjoying life or not.*

Universitaire Pers Rotterdam, Den Haag

Veenhoven, R. (1995)

*The cross-cultural pattern of happiness. Test of predictions implied in three theories of happiness*

Social Indicators Research, vol.

Veenhoven, R. (2002)

*Why social policy needs subjective indicators*

Social Indicators Research, vol. 58, pp. 33-45