

## Chapter 6

# STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THIS BIBLIOGRAPHY<sup>1</sup>

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### 6/1 Strengths

- 6/1.1 Conceptual focus
- 6/1.2 Manageable numbers
- 6/1.3 Good coverage
- 6/1.4 Detailed subject classification
- 6/1.5 Powerful search tools
- 6/1.6 Links to findings
- 6/1.7 Links to full texts

### 6/2 Weaknesses

- 6/2.1 Wider wellbeing not covered
  - 6/2.2 Coverage not exhaustive
  - 6/2.4 Subject classification imperfect
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Like any tool, this bibliography has its pros and cons, and the user should be aware of this fact.

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<sup>1</sup> Last update 1-1-2018 by Ruut Veenhoven

## 6/1 Strengths

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- 6/1.1 [Conceptual focus](#)
  - 6/1.2 [Manageable numbers](#)
  - 6/1.3 [Good coverage](#)
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  - 6/1.7 [Links to full texts](#)
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### 6/1.1 Conceptual focus

This bibliography limits to happiness in the sense of ‘the subjective enjoyment of one’s life-as-a-whole’. All publications included in this bibliography have been read to see whether this topic is addressed or not.

This bibliography includes publications that deal with happiness as defined here but label the subject differently and therefore fail to appear in literature searches on the key-word ‘happiness’.

‘ This collection is conceptually more homogeneous than any other available bibliographical source on subjective well-being.

### 6/1.2 Manageable numbers

As a result of the selection on conceptual focus, this bibliography is not ‘polluted’ by publications that use terms like ‘happiness’ or ‘life-satisfaction in its headlines, but actually deal with other matters than the ‘subjective enjoyment of one’s life-as-a-whole’ addressed here. Consequently, the number of publications included is much smaller than might be selected when making a key-word search on ‘happiness’. To date (January 2018), a search on ‘happiness’ in Google Scholar will yield more than 1,5 million hits, whereas this focused bibliography now lists some 12.000 publications, that is less than 1% of the titles brought up by Google. Though still many publications, this amount is better manageable.

### 6/1.3 High coverage

Within the conceptual focus of happiness defined as ‘the subjective enjoyment of one’s life-as-a-whole’, the bibliography covers almost all the literature in the field. It covers journal articles just as well as current abstract systems do, because it was put together using these abstract systems. Relevant books are well covered as well as in current computerized library catalogues. Many books and other texts found in library catalogues are scanned by our expert readers for context, to decide, whether, they

can be included.

An advantage of our bibliography is that it contains publications on happiness, that cannot be traced by either abstract systems or library catalogues, such as, congress papers, grey reports and barely traceable contributions in readers or chapters in books. As a result, this collection is by far the biggest and most exhaustive about happiness as the subjective enjoyment of one's life as-a-whole, even though it may still be incomplete.

#### **6/1.4 Detailed subject classification**

This bibliography involves a fine-grained subject classification, the categories of which are inter-linked. This is a main advantage over mere lists of publications. The subject matter of scientific journal articles can to some extent be identified by computer scanning of abstracts, but subject matters in books and grey reports cannot. Moreover, the information given in abstracts is very limited, in particular in the many articles in which happiness is only a side issue. In this bibliography, the fine-grained subject classification helps you to locate information in separate chapters or paragraphs, which would otherwise be untraceable bibliographically. As such, this bibliography is the most informative bibliographical source on happiness as the subjective enjoyment of one's life-as-whole available today.

#### **6/1.5 Powerful search tools**

The website is equipped with the following powerful search tools:

- Search on keyword, using an index with many synonyms
- Search on subject, using a fine-grained classification, with links to related subject categories
- Search on author and bibliographical features, such as journal and year of publication
- Search on language of the text
- Search on words used in the title
- AND-AND, OR-OR and AND-OR searches

Selections of publications appear in a table-like format, in the columns for which sorting is possible; these selections can be printed and saved.

#### **6/1.6 Links to findings**

Selected publications are presented on a standardized 'publication page'. Next to bibliographical information, these pages involve links to pieces of information that have been extracted from that publication and have been entered in other collections of this World Database of Happiness.

For example, if a publication reports the results of a study on happiness among cancer patients, standardized summaries of the separate findings will appear in the Collection of Distributional Findings, in this case in the section of Special Publics, Medical Patients. If the study also assessed the association of happiness

with the stage of disease, that finding will be reported in the Collection of Correlational Findings, in this case in the section on Illnesses. As such, this bibliography allows an easy overview of links with related research literature.

The publication pages can also be printed or saved separately.

### **6/1.7 Links to full texts**

Most entries in this bibliography provide a link to the full text of the publication. Most of these links go to electronic versions of texts available on the web, either Open Access or for sale. Some of the links lead to full texts available only in this Bibliography, typically 'grey' research reports and unpublished dissertations.

## 6/2 Weaknesses

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6/2.1 Wider wellbeing not covered

6/2.2 Coverage not exhaustive

6/2.4 Subject classification imperfect

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Advantages often bring disadvantages

### 6/2.1 Wider well-being not covered

The conceptual focus of this bibliography has its price. The restriction to happiness denoted as 'the subjective enjoyment of one's life' involves the elimination of the far broader literature on 'objectivist' conceptions of the good life. Likewise, the restriction to an 'overall evaluation of life-as-a-whole' involves a loss of relevant information. The restriction to 'overall' appreciation of life leaves out studies on various interesting aspect appreciations such as 'meaningfulness', 'security' and 'variedness'. The limitation to 'life-as-a-whole' also restricts the view on well-researched life domains such as 'work' and 'marriage'.

Yet the alternative is more problematic. Inclusion of all these matters would give an ill-digested mass of literature that would be too heterogeneous to further understanding, and certainly not suitable to form the basis of a meta-analysis. Like blinders help horses to concentrate on their way in turbulent traffic, this conceptual restriction prevents us getting lost in the complexities of well-being.

### 6/2.2 Coverage not exhaustive

Though the aim of our bibliography is to include all scientific publications on the subjective enjoyment of one's life-as-a-whole, this bibliography does not cover all available publications on this subject. Its coverage of publications in Dutch, English and German is probably very good. The coverage of Romance languages is probably rather incomplete; the coverage of Oriental languages is deficient. We know that many studies on happiness have been published in Japanese, but we have only managed to lay our hands on a few.

Even in the languages well covered, this bibliography tends to lag abstract systems and library catalogues. A great deal of this bibliography is source from these resources and therefore, necessarily, the bibliography falls behind.

### 6/2.3 Subject classification not ideal

Any classification involves making choices, determining to sort things one way or the other, and our subject classification is no exception to this. We compensate for this inherent limitation, by adding links to related subjects and the additional use of key words, but this will not prevent some topics in the field of happiness, as defined, being underrepresented or not represented at all.

A more practical problem is that the subject classification has developed incrementally and for this reason, early entry publications have been sorted using a less differentiated classification than was used for more recently entered publications. In some cases, this problem has been solved by carrying out a reclassification of texts in a field, but a reclassification of all 12.000 publications has not been done yet.

Still another limitation is that the application of the classification is not error and omission free. Double classification of subjects addressed in a publication yield inter-rater correlations of about +.60.