ABSTRACT. I review the recent literature on satisfaction and happiness, identify some plausible next steps to take at the frontiers of the research field and offer some suggestions to facilitate those steps. Using partial correlation techniques, substantial levels of covariation are found among the variables that are used in predictions of satisfaction and happiness with life as a whole from satisfaction with specific domains (e.g. family life, health). Using path analysis, confirmation is found in a dozen domains for a model which has satisfaction as a function of a perceived goal-achievement gap, and the latter as a function of comparisons with previous best experience and the status of average folks. Using discriminant analysis, satisfaction with family life is found to be a powerful and predominant discriminator among three groups, identified as Frustrated (dissatisfied and unhappy), Resigned (satisfied and unhappy) and Achievers (satisfied and happy).

1. INTRODUCTION

The structure of this paper is as follows. There is a review of some of the anomalies that have been encountered by social indicators researchers (section 2), and an overview of studies exploring various explanatory hypotheses of the anomalies (3). Plausible next steps are considered in the fourth section (4). Beginning with section (5), I report the results of a small survey undertaken at Guelph to at least prepare the way for others to take the important next steps on a grander scale. The methods and sample are described (5) and some basic statistics are provided (6). Substantial intercorrelations among domain satisfaction scores and life as a whole satisfaction and happiness scores are shown (7). A path model of satisfaction and happiness, called simply the Michigan model, is examined in relation to a dozen domains (8). Types of satisfaction are distinguished (9), and there is a brief conclusion (10).

2. ANOMALIES AS PRODS TO RESEARCH

Nobody ever needed social indicators to learn that different people often have different feelings about the same things. That, after all, is what makes a horse race. Nevertheless, it is precisely this commonplace phenomenon that
has stimulated much of the current research on so-called subjective or percep­tual social indicators. We want to know why different people often have different feelings about the same things. If one asks oneself why this question seems so pressing, I think the answer must be because much more often, most of the time, most people feel practically the same way about most things. For very good physical, biological and social reasons most people are more similar than dissimilar to each other. If it were not so, then within any society the habits of communication, entertainment, transportation, eating, working, and so on would be unmanageable. Without plenty of uniformity, we would have plenty of chaos. We expect and in more or less subtle ways we cultivate and construct uniformity. Consequently, non-uniform, unexpected, unplanned phenomena confront us as anomalies. Moreover, perceived anomalies are necessary conditions of scientific research. When nothing is regarded as strange and unaccounted for, nothing is regarded as in need of explanation. The perceived need for an explanation of something is the threshold of scientific investigation, and probably magic, religion and philosophy for that matter. (This is basically Kuhn’s (1962, 1977) view.)

The social indicators movement has generated its own anomalies. For example, although Cantril (1965, p. 194) reported a rank order correlation of 0.67 between his socioeconomic index and people’s ratings of their present life on the Self-Anchororing Striving Scale, he also found that

the rank order correlation between the index and personal economic concerns was 0.01, with national economic concerns, −0.05; and with national social concerns, −0.01 — all indicating a complete lack of any relationship.

(Cantril, 1965, p. 201) Campbell (1972) reported that nearly half of the relatively poor white American respondents in a ‘large-scale urban survey’ described themselves as ‘very satisfied’ with their housing. Schneider (1975) reported significant differences between American cities when appraised using objective versus subjective indicators. Duncan (1975a) noticed that although there was an increase in the standard of living of respondents in Detroit from 1955 to 1971, there was no increase in the reported satisfaction with the standard of living. Allardt (1976) found that material level of living and reported satisfaction were independent. Hankiss et al. (1978) reported similar levels of perceived quality of life for people living in countries with dissimilar scores on a developmental index. Michalos (1980b) reported that although Americans were over five times as vulnerable to violent crimes as Canadians, national surveys in 1973 and 1974 revealed that roughly 40 per-