AN APPLICATION OF MULTIPLE DISCREPANCIES THEORY (MDT) TO SENIORS

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ABSTRACT. MDT posits that satisfaction and happiness are functions of 7 perceived discrepancies, viz., between what one has and wants, relevant others have, needs, deserves, has had in the past, expected to have and expects to have. The theory and its historic antecedents are explained. The theory was applied to a sample of 450 seniors from 4 areas of Ontario. Briefly, MDT accounted for about a third of the variance in reported life satisfaction for the whole group and both sexes separately, and about a quarter of the variance in happiness.

INTRODUCTION

The first two sections of this paper contain the basic hypotheses of Multiple Discrepancies Theory (MDT) and a review of their historical antecedents and supporting evidence. The next section summarizes the sample and methods used to test some aspects of the theory. Following that there is an analysis of global satisfaction and happiness in terms of satisfaction in a variety of domains, e.g., health, housing, family relations, etc. The last section contains the results of applying MDT to a data set consisting of about 450 people aged 60 to 89.

MULTIPLE DISCREPANCIES THEORY (MDT)

The discussion from here to the sample and methods section is abbreviated from Michalos (1985). Readers who are familiar with that paper may proceed immediately ahead. The basic hypotheses of MDT are as follows:

(H1) Reported net satisfaction is a function of perceived discrepancies between what one has and wants, relevant others have, the best one has had in the past, expected to have 3 years ago, expects to have after 5 years, deserves and needs.

(H2) All perceived discrepancies, except that between what one has

and wants, are functions of objectively measurable discrepancies, which also have direct effects on satisfaction and actions.

(H3) The perceived discrepancy between what one has and wants is a mediating variable between all other perceived discrepancies and reported net satisfaction.

(H4) The pursuit and maintenance of net satisfaction motivates human action in direct proportion to the perceived expected levels of net satisfaction.

(H5) All discrepancies, satisfaction and actions are directly and indirectly affected by age, sex, education, ethnicity, income, self-esteem and social support.

(H6) Objectively measurable discrepancies are functions of human action and conditioners.

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

A variety of insights from several well-known theories are incorporated into MDT. As I have mentioned in all my earlier publications, I originally followed Campbell, Converse and Rodgers (1976) and Andrews and Withey (1976) fairly directly. Crosby (1982) used several gap hypotheses in conjunction, and cited seven other people who had also used multiple discrepancies, namely, Davis (1959), Runciman (1966), Gurr (1970), Williams (1975), Berkowitz (1968), Adams (1965) and Patchen (1961). Goodman (1974), Carp, Carp, and Millsap (1982), and Oldham, et al. (1982) should also be listed as labourers in the same vineyard.

(H1) refers to seven different perceived discrepancies. The idea that net satisfaction is a function of the perceived discrepancy or gap between what one has and wants is at least as old as the stoic philosophy of Zeno of Citium around 300 B.C. In the form of aspiration theory, Lewin et al. (1944) gave the idea a new start. More recent confirmations of the basic hypothesis have been reported by Bledsoe, Mullen and Hobbes (1980); Canter and Rees (1982); Cherrington and England (1980); Campbell, Converse and Rodgers (1976); Andrews and Withey (1976); Michalos (1980, 1982, 1983, 1985); and Crosby (1976, 1982).

The idea that net satisfaction is a function of the perceived discrepancy between what one has and relevant others have can also be found before the birth of Jesus Christ, namely, in Aristotle's *Politics* in the fourth century B.C.