HOPE AND HAPPINESS: A COMPARISON OF SOME DISCREPANCIES

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ABSTRACT. This paper presents a comparison of Canadian and American university students on happiness and satisfaction as measured by the Satisfaction and Happiness Survey (Michalos, 1985). For the American sample, the findings for other measures of satisfaction and happiness, as well as for hope as measured by the Hope Index (Staats and Stassen, 1986), are also reported. American students had slightly higher means on both overall satisfaction and happiness with life as a whole than the Canadian students. The greatest perceived gap for American students was between what one has now and expects to have in the future while for Canadian students it was between what one has and what one needs. Both Canadian and American students reported greatest satisfaction with health and lowest satisfaction with financial security and paid employment. For the American sample, of the other satisfaction, happiness, and hope measures, a global happiness measure had the highest correlation with both overall satisfaction \( r = 0.62, p < 0.0001 \) and happiness with life as a whole \( r = 0.55, p < 0.0001 \). Reasons for the observed differences between the two samples are suggested and future research directions are discussed.

This paper represents the preliminary report of the Newark, Ohio contribution to the Guelph international survey of satisfaction and happiness, and an international test of the multiple discrepancies hypothesis of net satisfaction (Michalos, 1985).

In the context of social indicators and quality of life, American national level surveys (Andrews and Withey, 1976; Campbell et al., 1976) found that overall satisfaction was not well predicted by demographic variables and that about 90 percent of the variance was unexplained. Self-perceptions are generally more predictive than objective attributes of subjective well-being, and subjective well-being is more predictive of happiness than are objective circumstances (Diener, 1984). Not only is happiness an important feature of quality of life, but physicians (Gottschalk, 1985) have also shown that positive emotional states such as hope are related to physiological changes in the immune system and are predictive of individual survival (Beck et al., 1985).

An important question then is how are these self perceptions arrived

at since they are not simply or directly based on objective assessment. The idea that we determine our happiness and life satisfaction in relation to personal standards seems likely. What are the standards, what are the natures of the comparisons, and are there important communalities among different persons? These are indeed questions worthy of a major effort.

Personal standards may reflect in part ideographic individual dispositions whose antecedents are yet unspecified. However, considerable evidence indicates that we often compare ourselves to others whom we consider similar to us in relevant dimensions (Festinger, 1957). As Michalos (1985) notes, the idea of discrepancies comes from various sources such as social comparison theory and equity theory. Previous researchers have dealt with a few discrepancies on a much smaller scale than that suggested in Multiple Discrepancies Theory (MDT).

In addition to providing data relevant to the MDT, the view taken here is that one's wants or hopes as well as perceptions of similar others are most important individual determiners of happiness and satisfaction. The present study will describe the Newark, Ohio sample, compare their satisfaction level with those of the benchmark Canadian sample (Michalos, 1985), and then discuss the results of a Hope Index and other happiness and satisfaction measures.

**METHOD**

*Subjects*

Participants were 270 university students enrolled in an Introductory Psychology course at the Newark regional campus of the Ohio State University (OSUN). There were 130 males and 140 females. The demographic characteristics of the sample as well as those for the comparison Canadian sample are given in Table I. The OSUN and University of Guelph students were similar in sex and marital status characteristics. The OSUN students tended to be younger (17—19 years) than the Guelph students (20—22 years), reflecting the earlier age for entering college for American students as well as the predominance of freshmen in the OSUN sample. While 69 percent of the Guelph students were not employed, over 60 percent of the OSUN