

Part II

Objective Reality and Its Effects on Subjective QOL

This part of the book describes the effects of objective conditions of reality and their effects on subjective aspects of QOL.

As briefly mentioned in Chap. 2 of this book, Michalos (2008) made the distinction between objective and subjective indicators of QOL and as such identified four conditions:

1. *Paradise*: People's living conditions are good, and they accurately perceive their living conditions as good too.
2. *Real Hell*: People's living conditions are bad, and they accurately perceive these conditions as bad too.
3. *Fool's Paradise*: People's living conditions are bad, but they inaccurately perceive their living conditions as good.
4. *Fool's Hell*: People's living conditions are good, but they inaccurately perceive their living conditions as bad.

Cummins (1997) made a similar case and argued that objective and subjective approaches to QOL are essential but may be poorly related to each other. He asserts that one cannot enhance QOL without taking into account both dimensions. He illustrates this argument by classifying people in four different groups depending on objective and subjective quality-of-life factors:

1. Good objective quality of life and good subjective quality of life. This condition is referred to as "well-being" and coined as the "happy rich."
2. Good objective quality of life and bad subjective quality of life. This condition is referred to as "dissonance" and is coined as the "unhappy rich."
3. Bad objective quality of life and good subjective quality of life. This condition is referred to as "adaptation" and is coined as the "happy poor."
4. Bad objective quality of life and bad subjective quality of life. This condition is referred to as "deprivation" and is coined as the "unhappy poor."

Of course, the "well-being" (the happy rich) and "deprivation" (the unhappy poor) conditions are self-explanatory. In these two conditions, objective reality matches

subjective reality, and the effects on subjective well-being are noncontroversial. The controversy lies in the other two mismatching conditions: “dissonance” (the unhappy rich) and “adaptation” (the happy poor). These unmatched conditions may be the cause of the moderate-to-low correlations between objective and subjective indicators of QOL (see Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976; Dale, 1980; Diener, Sandvik, Seidlitz, & Diener, 1993; Knox & MacLaran, 1977; Kuz, 1978).

One explanation for the discrepancy between objective and subjective effects on subjective aspects of QOL may be in the fact that people subjected to adversities adapt to these conditions to maintain an homeostatic level of subjective well-being. This is referred as “adaptation” typically characterized by the “happy poor.” Similarly, objective and subjective reality do not match in relation to the “unhappy rich” (or the dissonance condition). In regard to people who live in positive circumstances (e.g., wealthy people who are devoid of ailments and other stresses and strains in life), they may have too high aspirations. The high aspirations may explain their dissatisfaction with life despite their positive circumstances. That is not to say that this is the only explanation accounting for the modest correlations between objective and subjective indicators of QOL. There are other explanations. An example may be the fact that the measures do not capture similar life domains (Hayo & Seifert, 2003).

This part of the book focuses on the effects of objective conditions on subjective aspects of QOL. Objective conditions are actual conditions related to the individual’s demographic circumstances (e.g., age, marital status, income, education, gender, among others), biological circumstances (e.g., genetics, physiology, brain chemistry, drugs, and other physical conditions and behaviors), psychographic circumstances (e.g., the effects of lifestyle, interests, opinions, and activities), and socioeconomic, political, and cultural circumstances (e.g., social change, income inequality, unemployment, economic fluctuations, inflation, welfare, democracy, and cultural acculturation and efficacy).

References

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