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## THE SATISFIED POOR

*Development of an Intervention-Oriented Theoretical Framework to  
Explain Satisfaction with a Life in Poverty*

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**ABSTRACT.** Positive life satisfaction in poverty represents in well-being research the so called satisfaction-paradox. In poverty studies the state of being satisfied with a life in poverty has been explained by either shiftlessness of the people expressing it or by conscious decision of the individual for a poverty life. This article in contrast develops a constructive explanation to the problem in order to create the possibility for intervention and thus reduction of the social and material costs for society and strain to the poverty stricken individual. A theoretical framework is developed that integrates the theory of learned helplessness (Seligman, 1978), the theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1975) and the subjective quality of life models (Campbell, Converse and Rodgers, 1976). The interpretation shows new ways how to avoid the existence of the satisfaction paradox at least in a part of the concerned individuals and hence opens the possibility to increase overall well-being in the society.

### INTRODUCTION

The state of being satisfied with objectively unsatisfactory living conditions such as a poverty-level of living, represents according to Zapf (1984, p. 25) in the quality of life research a well-being position called the "satisfaction-paradox".

Public opinion tends to explain the satisfaction-paradox as a result of either conscious decision or shiftlessness, and so promotes the stigma and rationalizes the existence of poverty. Researchers of well-being, however, have demonstrated the existence of the satisfaction-paradox in diverse countries and explained it by, among other reasons, the adaptation or resignation of these poor individuals to their poverty situation (Ipsen, 1978; Zapf, 1984, p. 25).

In either case, people living in this satisfaction-paradox may be in a situation that is comparable to a "dead-end road", insofar as their below poverty-level of living is dysfunctional to their future well-being. Additionally, being satisfied with that state leaves them without incentive to take action to change the situation, which makes them long-term-dependent on emergency services. In fact, it may only provide an incentive to become better consumers of various stop-gap programs

designed for the needy — however short-term the intent of the programs may be.

From a social policy point of view these families represent a dysfunctional factor in the system, as long as the possibility for betterment exists. The declared principles of “short-term emergency assistance” and “help for self-help” that should be accomplished through social policy (Lampert, 1981) are no longer effective in the case of resigned or satisfied individuals. Once they become long-term poor they serve as examples of the inadequacy of the design of assistance programs (Maelicke, 1987). Either the programs are of inadequate help to people in their specific situation or the target groups were not appropriately identified and understood as the focus of programs that would be adequate in their cases. Both possibilities cause unnecessary costs or waste to society, and strain to the individuals concerned, such as high crime rates, increased spouse and child abuse, and loss of potential human capital. Thus, for the good of society, the determinants of the satisfaction-paradox should be better understood that intervention can take place.

#### THEORETICAL POSITIONING OF THE SATISFACTION-PARADOX

The “satisfaction-paradox” as a phenomenon evolves from the research on quality of life, which refers primarily to the understanding of the well-being of people individually or in groups and the well-being of the environment in which these people live (Environmental Protection Agency, 1973). Researchers basically discuss two approaches to the concept: one subjective and the other objective (Zapf, 1984, p. 19).

The objective approach describes well-being with observable, normatively defined standards as high, low, middle or even optimal. Thereby it is assumed that basic needs are objectively identifiable, and usable legislatively for social policy programs (OECD-Social indicators program, 1973; McCall, 1975, p. 241; Zapf, 1984, p. 19). This objective approach can be principally modeled as follows (Volkert and Lang, 1979, p. 5).

Level of Living → Quality of Life

Fig. 1. Objective model of quality of life.

Researchers supporting the subjective approach argue, instead, that “. . . quality of life refers to human experience, and the criteria of

quality of life are those dimensions of life by which people experience levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction” (Terhune, 1973, p. 22). Hence they include both subjective and objective measures of the well-being concept in their models (Volkert and Lang, 1979, p. 6; Campbell, Converse and Rodgers, 1976).



Fig. 2. Quality of life model with objective and subjective components.

By conceptualizing quality of life in this way, researchers have laid the grounds for empirical findings that demonstrate *individual discrepancy between the results of objective and subjective well-being measures* (Zapf, 1984, p. 23). Two kinds of discrepancies were found: First there were people that were living on a rather privileged level according to objective measures were still expressing dissatisfaction about their quality of life. They were later called the “frustrated privileged” and the phenomenon “the dissatisfaction-dilemma” (Zapf, 1984, p. 24). Secondly there were people living on an objectively unsatisfactory level and still expressing satisfaction with their quality of life. These were named the “adapted people” and exemplify the phenomenon of the “satisfaction-paradox” (Zapf, 1984, p. 25).

Assuming that there was more than a technical explanation to these two phenomena, Zapf (1984, p. 25) integrated the two prevalent cases with the usual well-being positions into the following scheme.

		Subjectively perceived quality of life	
		Positive	Negative
OBJ. WELL-BEING	+	Well-being	Dissonance (Dissatisfaction-dilemma)
	-	Adaptation (satisfaction-paradox)	Deprivation

Zapf, W. (1984): The four well-being positions. In: Glatzer and Zapf: Lebensqualität in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1984, p. 25.

Fig. 3. Four positions of well-being.

TRADITIONAL EXPLANATIONS OF THE  
SATISFACTION-PARADOX

Representing an individual discrepancy between *subjective* and *objective* quality of life measurement, the satisfaction-paradox is a "classic" problem in quality of life research (Zapf, 1984, p. 24). Principally there are two kinds of explanations for his discrepancy: a technical methodological explanation, and behavioral reasoning.

Andrews (1981) summarized the technical explanations of this discrepancy. Mainly criticized are:

- the lack of accuracy in both objective and subjective measures,
- the fact that individuals are asked to judge contents which they could not prepare and think about before,
- that there is very often no linear relationship between subjective and objective variables, and
- that there are affective aspects in subjective answers which are not all linked to the objective conditions they are meant to judge.

The behavioral explanations, in contrast, focus on:

- the fact that individuals express higher satisfaction because of a change only if they improve in comparison to a relevant reference group, and not if they improve collectively with the whole society (Easterlin, 1974; Duncan, 1975);
- the fact of social desirability of behavior that, in the case of life satisfaction, expects positive feed back and denial of dissatisfaction (Roos, 1978; Kozma and Stones, 1988);
- the fact that expressing dissatisfaction is part of cultural socialization and, so far, partly independent from personal experience (Allardt, 1973; Chamberlain, 1988; Vaughan *et al.*, 1985; Veenhoven, 1987);
- the fact that privileged people are more flexible in their standards and thus tending more to criticism and dissatisfaction (Inglehardt, 1977);
- the fact that income as an objective measure is not a valid indicator for well-being in the group of the very wealthy, because the satisfaction of basic needs (Maslow, 1954) lets new needs such as self-actualization and self-esteem evolve (Diener *et al.*, 1985);

- the fact that individual standards that are not determined by the situation could still change the perception of the objective situation. Thus two different individuals can perceive the same set of objective indicators differently (Campbell *et al.*, 1976; Abbey and Andrews, 1985);
- the fact that people in poverty may resign and therefore adapt their standards to the objectively “poor” situation (Ipsen, 1978);
- the fact that people in general are not able to stand the mental stress caused by lasting dissatisfaction or unhappiness (in short, cognitive dissonance), and hence change their subjective evaluations of the situation by rationalization to a satisfactory result (Glatzer, 1978) implying Festinger’s theory (1978).
- the fact that satisfaction with objective living conditions and with “life as a whole” increases with age (Berger-Schmitt, 1987; Latten, 1989).

Although there are most recent research articles on individual discrepancies of the objective and subjective measures, since about 1985 the discrepancies themselves have not anymore been the center of interest for quality of life researchers, because the subjective approach has become more and more accepted, the discrepancies between subjective and objective well-being measures have played a critical role only in research concerned with methodological questions (Abbey and Andrews, 1985) and the refinement of well-being indicators for social accounting and politics (Fletcher and Lorenz, 1985; Berger-Schmitt, 1987; Johnston, 1988).

Glatzer (1987), Andrews and Whitley (1985), and Chamberlain (1988) refined the theoretical definition of the four well-being positions, including the satisfaction-paradox. They thereby increased the differentiation, and enhanced the understanding of the subjective and objective factors. The objective factor was differentiated into life domains and the subjective factor into three dimensions: general, cognitive (satisfaction) and emotional (happiness, positive and negative affect).

Crosstabulating the more differentiated dimensions leads to more *specific kinds* of the “satisfaction paradox” or the “privileged dilemma” (Glatzer, 1987; Berger-Schmitt, 1987; Diener *et al.*, 1985), as well as to

*new well-being positions* (Chamberlain, 1988). However for the purpose of this article these specifications do not contribute new explanations of the phenomenon. Solely the reasoning by Ipsen (1978) (that resignation to objective living conditions leads to a positive level of satisfaction) is considered the most comprehensive explanation among those mentioned above and needs to be explored more specifically in its behavioral aspects.

#### ADAPTATION OF STANDARDS AS A KEY COPING STRATEGY

The behavioral explanations for the development of the satisfaction-paradox are all based on the assumption that dissatisfaction is a psychological state that cannot be endured by an individual in the long run because of the associated cognitive tension (Festinger, 1957). The individual, consequently, has two alternatives to reduce this tension; either he or she changes the situation so that it meets his or her standards, or the standards are adapted to the situation (Glatzer, 1987). If the latter choice is made, a state of mental satisfaction is produced and the satisfaction-paradox is established. Hereby the researchers account for the possibility that the adaptation of standards could be either "pretended" as in the case of social desirability (Roos, 1978; Kozma and Stones, 1988) or "real" as in the case of resignation (Ipsen, 1978).

For the development of a new intervention-oriented theory to the development of the satisfaction-paradox resigned adaptation, rather than social desirability, is assumed to be the relevant explanation. Further reasoning about why resigned adaptation is chosen as a coping strategy has been discussed by Ipsen (1978), Berger-Schmitt (1987) and Latten (1989). Whereas Berger-Schmitt and Latten only report findings on the positive correlation between age and the establishment of the satisfaction-paradox, Ipsen explains the phenomenon in a more comprehensive way.

Ipsen's theory is based on research on a West German sample of people living at the minimum level. He found that 53% were satisfied with their living conditions and thus expressing the general satisfaction-paradox. His main argument is based on the hypothesis that, if such a large portion of the poor is satisfied with life ("mass-phenomenon"),

there must be societal pressure to adapt that, in turn, results in a positive level of satisfaction. The societal pressure, in Ipsen's theory, is caused by the growth and development of capitalism, with which he associates two major changes at the individual level:

(a) a decreasing number of self-controllable and autonomous life domains and,

(b) a high median level of material well-being in the society.

From these changes he draws two conclusions that explain poor individuals' satisfaction with life.

(a) Not being satisfied with life when the majority of the population is satisfied is associated both with failure in promoting positive change of the situation and "pretended" satisfaction with life in order to avoid being a "failure".

(b) Since the general level of material well-being is so high and the people are lacking control in diverse life domains, individuals face high material and nonmaterial cost to effect positive change. Hence even small changes are difficult to bring about. Dissatisfaction in spite of relatively "small" changes would negate all the effort that was undertaken, so even small achievements would increase satisfaction with life.

In general, researchers have agreed to explain the satisfaction-paradox as adaptation of personal standards to an undesirable situation. Only Ipsen (1978) took the question beyond simple identification of the behavioral to ask "why", and added the concept of resignation as an explanation of this coping strategy. However his rationale points out macro-social developments as causes for resignation. For an intervention-oriented explanation of the satisfaction-paradox a micro-social perspective that allows recommendations for individuals is necessary and a taskforce for social policy concern, that tries to avoid longterm-poverty to which the satisfaction-paradox leads. For that reason explanations of persistent poverty are investigated in the following paragraph.

#### RESEARCH ON PERSISTANT POVERTY

In traditional research on determinants of persistent poverty, poor people are seen either as victims (lack of opportunity) or blamed (deviant values and attitudes) (Kane, 1987). The satisfaction-paradox

would be associated with the latter classification, and thus provide no new explanation to the phenomenon. However, there are two publications that propose to integrate these opposing arguments on persistent poverty. They argue that "... both culture and structure operate to produce a psychology of learned helplessness among some poor" (Rabow *et al.*, 1983, p. 428; Kane, 1987).

Both publications focus on the long-term poor, but not on the satisfaction-paradox. Rabow *et al.* (1983, p. 419) make the case for the use of the theory of learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975) as a framework to explain persistent poverty, on the basis of Ball's (1968) description of "the strength of irrational and nonrational responses to frustration in the folk subculture of Southern Appalachians".

They characterized, for this subculture, the prevalent behavior for those who seemed unable to become independent as follows (pp. 420—422):

- their behavior is not aimed on alleviating the frustrating conditions, but rather providing temporary relief from the frustrating conditions;
- fixated, regressive, aggressive and resignative behavior instead of individualized, independent, autonomous and assertive behavior;
- the belief in luck serving the psychological function of preserving the self esteem in the face of failure;
- powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, value isolation, self-estrangement, and social isolation;
- delay and avoidance behavior in matters that invoke anxieties about control;
- lacking autonomy, mastery, trust, a sense of worth and no common values with the majority of the population.

After reviewing the behavioral findings of Ball in 1968 (motivation theory), Merton in 1957 (adaptation theory) and Seeman, 1975 (theory of alienation) Rabow *et al.* (1983) conclude that Seligman's theory is the only adequate way to integrate and explain the prevalent kinds of behavior. The compatibility of the descriptions above with Seligman's theory is obvious. These researchers argue that the process of learning helplessness could be the result of low pay-off from poverty programs



which suffer from inadequate design, or social workers' prejudices about the abilities of participants in the programs, for example. In turn, this low pay-off can be perceived as personal failure and thus encourage the establishment of the satisfaction-paradox.

THE THEORY OF LEARNED HELPLESSNESS BY  
SELIGMAN THEORETICAL MODEL

Learning helplessness means to learn that the determinants of an undesirable situation cannot be controlled by the concerned individual. In other words the individual learns that the probability of change of the negative situation is the same whether or not he tries to cope with it. The consequences are threefold: motivational, cognitive and emotional deficits develop in the individual's disposition.

In brief the motivational deficit consists of retarded initiation of voluntary responses and is seen as a consequence of the expectation that outcomes are uncontrollable. If the organism expects that its responses will not affect some outcome, then the likelihood of emitting such responses decreases. Second, the learned helplessness hypothesis argues that learning that an outcome is uncontrollable, results in a cognitive deficit since such learning makes it difficult to later learn that responses produce that outcome. Finally the learned helplessness hypothesis claims that depressed affect (resignment) is a consequence of learning that outcomes are uncontrollable." (Abramson *et al.*, 1978, p. 50)

The process that leads to the state of "learned helplessness" can be described as follows (Abramson *et al.*, 1978, p. 50).

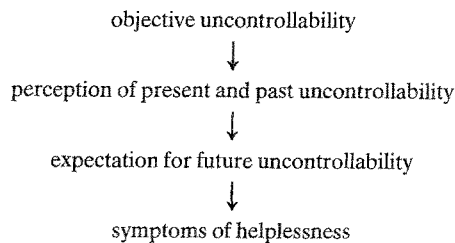


Fig. 4. The Seligman model of learned helplessness.

## REFORMULATION OF THE THEORY

Historically the theory of “learned helplessness” was formulated on the basis of experimental findings performed on animals. When trying to reproduce the findings with human beings, the following critique evolved. The framework does not allow one to derive when and how perceived uncontrollability leads to the expectation of controllability in future events. This lack mandates work to further discriminate between general or specific, and chronic or acute helplessness.

In order to distinguish those different types of helplessness Abramson *et al.* (1978) reformulated the theory by integrating attribution theory into the framework. The theoretical framework now can be described as follows.

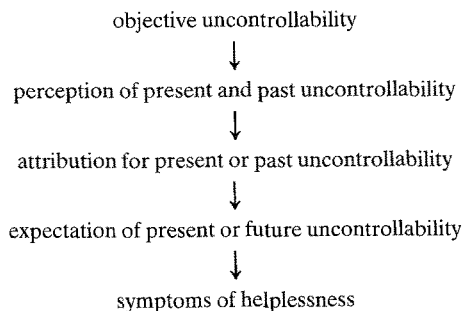


Fig. 5. The Abramson *et al.* model of learned helplessness.

The different types of helplessness are derived from the following three types of possible attribution dimensions: stability, locus of control, and generality. How and to whom an individual attributes the outcome of a response to an undesirable situation determines the expectation of this individual for future situations, be they similar or dissimilar.

Since the attribution dimensions are described in detail in all major publications on learned helplessness, the following Table I will be cited to illustrate the attribution combinations.

One's attributional style may contribute to the development of emotional, cognitive, and/or motivational deficits. For example, Abramson

TABLE I  
Formal characteristics of attribution and some examples

Dimension	Internal		External	
	Stable	Unstable	Stable	Unstable
Global Failing student	Lack of intelligence (Laziness)	Exhaustics (Having a cold, which makes me stupid)	ETS gives unfair tests. (People are usually unlucky on the GRE)	Today is Friday the 13th. (ETS gave experimental tests this time which were too hard for everyone.)
Rejected woman	I'm unattractive to men.	My conversation sometimes bores men.	Men are overly competitive with intelligent women.	Men get into rejecting moods.
Specific Failing student	Lack of mathematical ability (Math always bores me.)	Fed up with math problems (Having a cold, which ruins my arithmetic)	ETS gives unfair math tests. (People are usually unlucky on math tests.)	The math test was from No. II. (Everyone's copy of the math test was blurred.)
Rejected woman	I'm unattractive to him.	My conversation bores him.	He's overly competitive with women.	He was in a rejecting mood.

Note. ETS = Educational Testing Service, the maker of graduate record examinations (GRE). In: Abramson *et al.* (1978, p. 57).

*et al.* (1978) suggest that an internal, stable, global attribution style is most likely to be related to learned helplessness.

LEARNED HELPLESSNESS, LONGTERM-POVERTY,  
AND THE SATISFACTION-PARADOX

The theory of learned helplessness does not account for the phenomenon of the satisfaction-paradox by itself. But, *in combination with* the theory of "minimization of cognitive dissonance" by Festinger (1957), it is a potentially useful way to extend researchers' explanation of the satisfaction-paradox.

"Learned helplessness" is the end-state of a process where the individual learns that the negative events occurring to him are not controllable by himself. The effects of this learning process are three-fold: (1) low motivation to take further action to change the situation, (2) frustration (with the consequences of their actions) that turns into depression and resignation and (3) lower general learning ability in similar coping situations (Seligman, 1979, p. 42).

In the case of coping with poverty the situation of "learned helplessness" can come about through poverty programs that are poorly designed for specific situations or individuals (Gurin and Gurin, 1970). An individual, being newly in a crisis and not able to judge the adequacy of an assistance program for his specific situation, may attribute the reason for ineffectiveness of an inadequate program as a failure of himself and try other coping strategies, e.g. other assistance programs. However, if this person has this experience over and over again and with different programs, a learning process can begin. The individual may be led to the perception that he or she is "helpless" or "lacking the control" over the factors which are contributing to the crisis situation.

Concluding from the theory of "learned helplessness" by Seligman, the people concerned become passive. According to the research on help-seeking patterns (Engler, 1988, p. 41) helpless people switch from seeking "instrumental help", that supports their own coping resources, to seeking "in-kind-help" such as emergency services that no longer involve their own coping capacities. Their coping behavior will thus be

ineffective or unrelated to solving their general poverty situation and lead to a long-term dependency on emergency services. Having learned that they are helpless, these poor will adjust to their situation by rationalizing the cognitive dissonance that arises from the stigma of poverty (Festinger, 1978), which in turn allows them a positive level of satisfaction with life.

A schematic step-wise description of the integration of the three research branches (theory of learned helplessness, theory of minimizing cognitive dissonances and behavioral quality of life research) shall illustrate the above rationale. It further shall help to identify the critical concepts for empirical tests, that should follow a study like the presented one, in order to justify the practical existence of the hypothesized relationships that allow intervention.

#### THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

According to the rationale it is the task to incorporate the model of quality of life (Figure 2), as well as the learned helplessness model (Figure 5). The evolving problem is that these two models as presented have no concepts in common that can be used as linkages. Therefore the following basic assumption is made: it is assumed with Festinger (1957) that low satisfaction with life or specific living conditions causes a cognitive tension that cannot be endured for a long time and therefore motivates the individual to take action for change. This action (coping strategy) can consist of actions that change the objective situation or of those that change only the perception of the objective situation. On the basis of this assumption, the quality of life model (Figure 2) is extended by the motivation concept which brings it into the following forms (see Fig. 6).

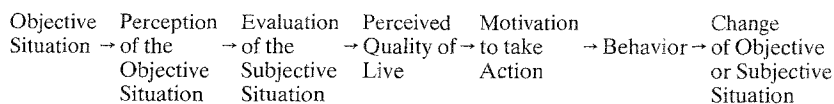


Fig. 6. Expanded quality of life model.

With the incorporation of the motivation concept into the quality of life model, the two models now have a concept in common, and can be linked for an integrative description of how the satisfaction-paradox develops. The integration itself is built on the assumption that the motivation to take action for change is influenced by both the perception and evaluation of the objective characteristics of the situation (living conditions) and the perception and attribution of the degree of controllability of the situation. The operational framework can then be graphed as follows.

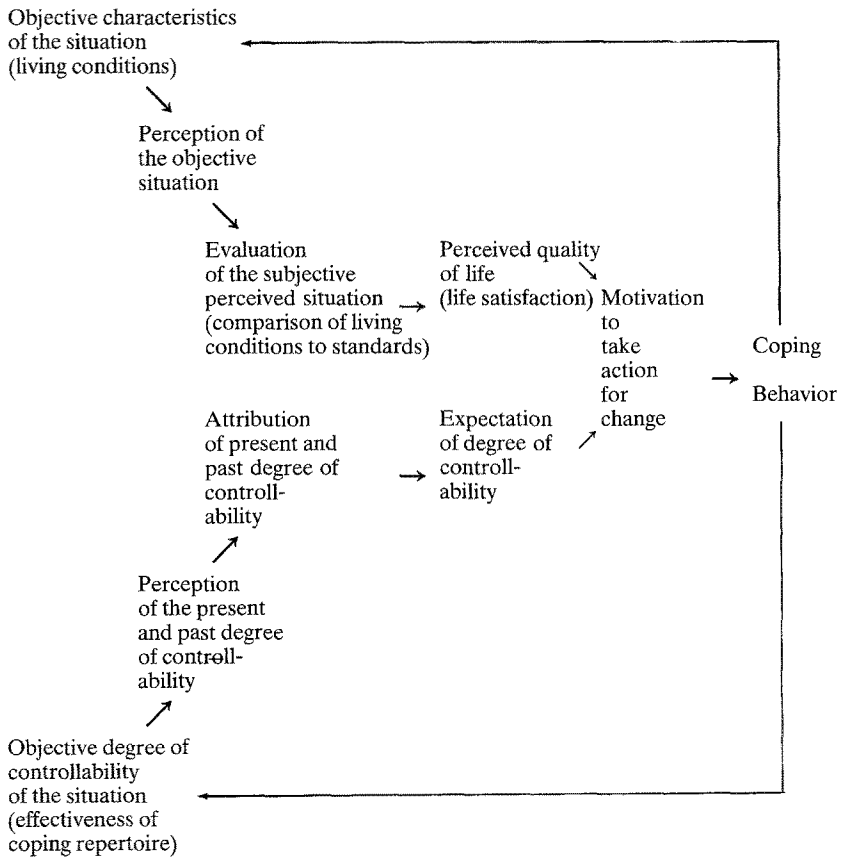


Fig. 7. Research model.

The theoretical model is basically a systems framework with a feedback function. Thus, changes and behavioral processes can only be described if one imagines that this "circle" is passed through over and over again. A process that takes place over time, such as the formation of a "poverty career", will thus be describing only critical developments and stages and minimizing the routine processes that contribute to reaching the critical stage. This, in turn, leaves the model flexible for individual differences due to personal characteristics and environmental settings.

A person who falls into poverty is, according to the model, facing the situation where the objective characteristics of his situation (living conditions) have deteriorated. This person is assumed to have a more or less efficient coping repertoire that is related to the degree of controllability of the situation. His motivation to become active to change the undesirable situation depends now on diverse circumstances:

- whether or not he perceived the negative change of the objective situation and, if so, whether realistically or not,
- whether or not the negative change of his living conditions is still in the range of the tolerance of his standards,
- whether he has the adequate coping strategies in his repertoire and perceives them as potentially efficient,
- whether he attributes the present and past degrees of controllability in a way that is associated with personal mastery rather than with helplessness.

In summary the person will be motivated to take action for change when satisfaction with life is low and/or the expected degree of controllability of the situation is positive. The person will have low or no motivation to become active when satisfaction with life is high and or the outcome of an activity is expected to be negative or indifferent.

#### EXPLANATION OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SATISFACTION-PARADOX ON BASE OF THE MODEL

Integrating the satisfaction-paradox into the model of the study means explaining how the poor become satisfied with objectively dissatisfac-

tory living conditions. The model therefore allows the previously usual explanation of adaptation of standards as well as resignation. The more complex explanation which is developed in this study describes the satisfaction-paradox as a result of a contradictory motivational status of the individual which represents a cognitive dissonance.

This cognitive dissonance consists in the fact that *simultaneously the motivation to change the situation is high*, because of realistic appraisal of the same and the resulting low satisfaction with life *and the motivation to change the situation is low*, because the individual has, through the experience with ineffective poverty programs, learned that he is not in control of the determinants of his poverty situation and it therefore makes no sense to act at all.

In other words being unhappy with the living conditions and yet "knowing" that all available coping-strategies will have no positive effect on the situation, creates a cognitive dissonance within the individual, that he will try to reduce according to Festinger. This reduction can be achieved either by finally using an effective coping-strategy or by the reevaluation of the perceived situation with adapted (lowered) standards.

In the latter case the satisfaction-paradox is established directly. In the case of successful coping, one has to differentiate between getting instrumental help and getting in-kind help.

The instrumental help, implying the personal coping capacities of the individual, can eliminate the helplessness reasons and lead the individual out of the satisfaction-paradox on a long-term basis. The in-kind help, in contrast, reinforces the satisfaction-paradox. The use of, e.g., an emergency food program brings relief from hunger, however on a short-term basis. Hence in-kind help is a "successful" coping strategy, increasing satisfaction with overall life and lowering the motivation for further action. Being a successful coping experience, the use of in-kind help reduces learned helplessness, insofar as the individual learns that he has again an effective coping strategy available. This knowledge however will increase his motivation to use the in-kind help, knowing it brings immediate relief, and make him a "good" consumer of these services. His instrumental strategies in contrast will still underly the helplessness cognition and the satisfaction-paradox is established on a longterm basis.



DESCRIPTION OF THE LEARNED HELPLESS,  
SATISFIED POOR EMERGENCY SERVICE USERS

In case the theory above was empirically confirmed, the possibility of intervention is given, because there are longterm-poor that can't be described as primarily shiftless or primarily dysfunctional values. They rather are in a situation that could have been avoided and probably could be revised. In order to do so it is necessary to empirically identify the learned helpless and satisfied poor emergency service users. Therefore the main concepts that have to be operationalized in a empirical study are concluding from the presented theory:

The learned helpless and satisfied users of emergency services would show two different kinds of satisfaction paradox: long-term satisfaction-paradox caused by the learned helplessness in instrumental coping with the determinants of their poverty and a short-term satisfaction paradox caused by the dysfunctional encouragement of the learned helpless symptoms through use of "in-kind" or emergency assistance. The learned helpless and satisfied emergency food service users should thus express the following characteristics:

- a positive level of satisfaction with life;
- the helplessness symptoms that involve their own coping resources (instrumental coping);
- a high level of experience with emergency assistance programs.

The symptoms of learned helplessness in the case of instrumental coping are further differentiated on the basis of the theoretical argumentations (Seligman, 1978):

- an internal attribution of failure,
- a negative expectation of the controllability of the determinants of poverty in the future,
- a motivational deficit concerning the willingness to participate in instrumental coping strategies, and
- instrumental coping strategies have been perceived to be ineffective for them and the coping strategies that involve participation in emergency programs are associated with high effectiveness.

## CONCLUSIONS

The developed theoretical framework represents a step towards a constructive explanation of the satisfaction-paradox, that in the light of the above introduction has been given to few attention in the past. From the developed theory of the creation of the satisfaction-paradox results the idea of a "poverty-career" of dysfunctional character for both the government and the poverty-stricken individual that causes material and social costs as described. In case an empirical study could proof the existence of learned helpless and satisfied poor, and, further in case this group of poor had a politically considerable size in a sample of emergency service users, a taskforce is created in the following dimensions:

(1) The disposition of an individual to learn helplessness should be investigated at the start of a crisis and special attention should be given to at-risk individuals, e.g. in the form of therapy that neutralizes helplessness factors and corrects attributional styles. Above that an assistance that focusses on the attributional "health of program participants should generally be offered.

(2) Any individual in poverty should still be considered a whole person, able to think and make decisions about him or herself. This means that not only should the social worker decide about remedies, but the individual needs to know his choices and be informed about the experiences other people have had with the existing programs so that learning can take place (see also Kane, 1987).

(3) The kind of assistance that programs are offering should be investigated in terms of effectiveness over time. That means, on one hand, that the administrator should know exactly the goals of the program as well as the past successes and failures. On the basis of these results the screening process should be modified in order to appropriately target the group. On the other hand, it means to react directly to the needs of the poor in the beginning of their crises by providing what is needed to develop and maintain a social network which could result in quicker and more effective changes of their situations.

The end purpose would be to design assistance that is more responsive to needs of those seeking aid. The amount of money and personal assistance could, in certain cases, exceed official standards, without

exceeding budgetary limits because of the flexibility of individually tailored assistance.

In remembrance that the perception of quality of life and the evaluation as well as the corresponding coping-processes are highly individualistic, the proposed taskforces do not seem as revolutionary as they may seem from an administrative perspective. Changes according to these recommendations would increase efficiency and further achievement of the goals of social policy on both a short-term and a long-term basis. In the short term perspective, the learned helpless and satisfied poor would be saved from a "fate" that causes strain to them and in the long run costs could be saved to the society.

Appropriate intervention and prevention could work against the perpetuation and thus culturization of poverty. Since many different factors may contribute to one's vulnerability to the experience of poverty the education of *all* young people should pay special attention to the attributional styles of students, especially in the case of failure.

Finally it has to be acknowledged, that the question whether helplessness of the poor comes about in a learning process that is enhanced by the design of poverty programs, from the attitude of social workers towards the capabilities of their clients or, as public opinion suggests, by deficient psychological dispositions of the poor, it not yet solved. In general there is probably a multivariable picture of the development of the satisfaction-paradox, that also incorporates the possibilities that "learned helpless" respondents could have entered their poverty career because of a psychological predisposition or lifestyle effects. Considering the social policy interest in the people expressing the satisfaction-paradox, the quality of life research that first identified the phenomenon should further investigate the concept in an interdisciplinary way. The future results can, then, lead to more discriminating recommendations for policy makers and administrators.

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