

2009

## The power of positive thinking: the effects of self-esteem, explanatory style, and trait hope on emotional wellbeing

Fiona Jane Davies  
*University of Wollongong*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/theses>

### University of Wollongong

#### Copyright Warning

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study. The University does not authorise you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site.

You are reminded of the following: This work is copyright. Apart from any use permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part of this work may be reproduced by any process, nor may any other exclusive right be exercised, without the permission of the author. Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright. A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material.

Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.

Unless otherwise indicated, the views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the University of Wollongong.

### Recommended Citation

Davies, Fiona Jane, The power of positive thinking: the effects of self-esteem, explanatory style, and trait hope on emotional wellbeing, Doctor of Philosophy (Clinical Psychology) thesis, School of Psychology - Faculty of Health & Behavioural Sciences, University of Wollongong, 2009. <https://ro.uow.edu.au/theses/3038>

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: [research-pubs@uow.edu.au](mailto:research-pubs@uow.edu.au)

## **NOTE**

This online version of the thesis may have different page formatting and pagination from the paper copy held in the University of Wollongong Library.

## **UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG**

### **COPYRIGHT WARNING**

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study. The University does not authorise you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site. You are reminded of the following:

Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright. A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material. Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.

**THE POWER OF POSITIVE THINKING: THE EFFECTS  
OF SELF-ESTEEM, EXPLANATORY STYLE, AND TRAIT  
HOPE ON EMOTIONAL WELLBEING**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the award of the degree  
Doctor of Philosophy (Clinical Psychology)

from the

University of Wollongong

By

**Fiona Jane Davies**

B.A. (Hons), MPsych (Applied)

School of Psychology  
Faculty of Health and Behavioural Sciences

2009

# **Certification**

I, Fiona Jane Davies, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Clinical Psychology), in the School of Psychology, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledge. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Fiona Jane Davies

Date:

# Table of Contents

<a href="#">Certification</a> .....	ii
<a href="#">List of Tables</a> .....	v
<a href="#">List of Figures</a> .....	vi
<a href="#">Acknowledgements</a> .....	vii
<a href="#">Publications from this research</a> .....	viii
<a href="#">Abstract</a> .....	ix
<a href="#">Chapter 1: Adolescent mental health and emotional wellbeing</a> .....	1
<a href="#">1.1 Adolescent mental health</a> .....	1
<a href="#">1.2 Emotional wellbeing as a marker of risk</a> .....	2
<a href="#">1.3 The need for prevention</a> .....	3
<a href="#">1.4 Positive thinking as a target of intervention</a> .....	5
<a href="#">1.5 Summary &amp; conclusion</a> .....	7
<a href="#">Chapter 2: Positive thinking and emotional wellbeing</a> .....	9
<a href="#">2.1 Emotional wellbeing and mental health</a> .....	11
<a href="#">2.1.1 The tripartite model</a> .....	13
<a href="#">2.1.2 Evidence supporting the tripartite model in adolescents</a> .....	14
<a href="#">2.1.3 Emotional wellbeing in adolescence</a> .....	18
<a href="#">2.2 Self-esteem</a> .....	20
<a href="#">2.2.1 Theories of self-esteem</a> .....	24
<a href="#">2.2.2 Self-esteem and emotional wellbeing</a> .....	28
<a href="#">2.2.3 Self-esteem and mental health</a> .....	30
<a href="#">2.2.4 Future directions for research on self-esteem and affect</a> .....	33
<a href="#">2.3 Explanatory Style</a> .....	33
<a href="#">2.3.1 Theories of explanatory style</a> .....	35
<a href="#">2.3.2 Explanatory style and mental health</a> .....	39
<a href="#">2.3.3 Explanatory style and emotional wellbeing</a> .....	44
<a href="#">2.3.4 Future directions for research on explanatory style and affect</a> .....	44
<a href="#">2.4 Trait Hope Theory</a> .....	46
<a href="#">2.4.1 Trait Hope and Mental Health</a> .....	49
<a href="#">2.4.2 Trait Hope and Emotional Wellbeing</a> .....	50
<a href="#">2.5 Summary and Conclusion</a> .....	51
<a href="#">2.5.1 The distinctiveness of self-esteem, explanatory style, and trait hope</a> .....	51
<a href="#">2.5.2 Gender differences</a> .....	53
<a href="#">2.5.3 The current thesis</a> .....	54
<a href="#">Chapter 3: Study 1</a> .....	56
<a href="#">3.1 Introduction</a> .....	56
<a href="#">3.1.1 Aim</a> .....	58
<a href="#">3.1.2 Hypotheses</a> .....	58
<a href="#">3.2 Method</a> .....	59
<a href="#">3.2.1 Participants</a> .....	59
<a href="#">3.2.2 Materials</a> .....	59
<a href="#">3.2.3 Procedure</a> .....	61
<a href="#">3.3 Results</a> .....	61
<a href="#">3.3.1 Descriptive Statistics</a> .....	61
<a href="#">3.3.2 Correlational Analyses</a> .....	62
<a href="#">3.3.3 Gender Differences</a> .....	65

<u>3.3.4 Multivariate Analyses</u> .....	65
<u>3.3.5 Confirmatory factor analysis of positive thinking variables</u> .....	68
<u>3.4 Discussion</u> .....	75
<u>3.4.1 Findings</u> .....	75
<u>3.4.2 Limitations of the current study</u> .....	78
<u>3.4.3 Summary</u> .....	80
<u>Chapter 4: Study 2</u> .....	81
<u>4.1 Introduction</u> .....	81
<u>4.1.1 Aim</u> .....	82
<u>4.1.2 Hypotheses</u> .....	83
<u>4.2 Method</u> .....	83
<u>4.2.1 Participants</u> .....	83
<u>4.2.2 Materials</u> .....	84
<u>4.2.3 Procedure</u> .....	85
<u>4.3 Results</u> .....	85
<u>4.3.1 Cross-sectional analyses for Year 8</u> .....	85
<u>4.3.2 Gender Differences in Year 8</u> .....	87
<u>4.3.3 Multivariate Analyses for Year 8</u> .....	88
<u>4.3.4 Longitudinal analyses</u> .....	89
<u>4.3.5 Correlations between Year 7 and Year 8</u> .....	91
<u>4.3.6 Structural Equation Models</u> .....	94
<u>4.4 Discussion</u> .....	104
<u>4.4.1 Findings</u> .....	105
<u>4.4.2 Limitations of the current study</u> .....	107
<u>4.4.3 Summary</u> .....	110
<u>Chapter 5: General Discussion</u> .....	112
<u>5.1 Distinctiveness of self-esteem, trait hope, and explanatory style</u> .....	112
<u>5.2 Positive thinking and emotional wellbeing</u> .....	113
<u>5.2.1 Global self-esteem</u> .....	116
<u>5.2.2 Explanatory style</u> .....	118
<u>5.2.3 Trait hope</u> .....	120
<u>5.2.4 Gender differences</u> .....	122
<u>5.2.5 Stability of self-esteem and trait hope</u> .....	123
<u>5.3 Clinical implications of the current research</u> .....	124
<u>5.4 Future directions for research and theory</u> .....	126
<u>5.4.1 Further research</u> .....	126
<u>5.4.2 Intervention studies</u> .....	129
<u>5.4.3 Theoretical developments</u> .....	130
<u>5.5 Summary and conclusion</u> .....	131
<u>References</u> .....	133

## List of Tables

Table 3.1	Means and Standard Deviations.....	62
Table 3.2	Pearson Correlations Between Measures.....	64
Table 3.3	Univariate F Tests for Gender.....	65
Table 3.4	Tests of Between-Subjects Effects.....	67
Table 3.5	Fit Statistics for Confirmatory Factor Analysis.....	69
Table 3.6	Fit Statistics for Confirmatory Factor Analysis for Self-esteem, Hope, and Explanatory Style.....	70
Table 4.1	Means and Standard Deviations for Year 8.....	86
Table 4.2	Pearson Correlations Between Measures for Year 8.....	87
Table 4.3	Univariate F Tests for Gender in Year 8.....	88
Table 4.4	Tests of Between-subjects Effects for Year 8.....	89
Table 4.5	Univariate F Tests Comparing Students Participating in Both Years to Students Participating in Year 7 Only.....	91
Table 4.6	Pearson Correlations Between Measures for Year 7 and Year 8.....	93
Table 4.7	Estimates for the Path From Year 7 Positive Thinking to Year 8 Affect, Controlling for Year 7 Affect and Year 8 Positive Thinking.....	96
Table 4.8	Standardised Regression Weights for the Paths From Year 7 Affect to Year 8 Positive Thinking, Controlling for Year 7 Positive Thinking.....	97
Table 4.9	Standardised Regression Weights for the Path From Year 7 Positive Thinking to Year 8 Affect, Controlling for All Year 7 .....	99

# List of Figures

Figure 3.1	Confirmatory factor analysis for one factor model .....	71
Figure 3.2	Confirmatory factor analysis for three factor model.....	72
Figure 3.3	Confirmatory factor analysis for self-esteem.....	73
Figure 3.4	Confirmatory factor analysis for trait hope.....	73
Figure 3.5	Confirmatory factor analysis for explanatory style.....	74
Figure 4.1	Structural equation model with standardised estimates for Year 8 fear, controlling for Year 7 fear, self-esteem, explanatory style, and trait hope.....	100
Figure 4.2	Structural equation model with standardised estimates for Year 8 sadness, controlling for Year 7 sadness, self-esteem, explanatory style, and trait hope.....	101
Figure 4.3	Structural equation model with standardised estimates for Year 8 hostility, controlling for Year 7 hostility, self-esteem, explanatory style, and trait hope.....	102
Figure 4.4	Structural equation model with standardised estimates for Year 8 joviality, controlling for Year 7 joviality, self-esteem, explanatory style, and trait hope.....	103



# Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Patrick Heaven, for his support and patience during completion of my thesis. I would also like to thank Dr Joseph Ciarrochi for his ideas on thesis topics and statistical assistance.

Thanks are also due to the Catholic Education Office, and especially to the students and teachers of the high schools involved in this research. Their generous participation made this thesis possible.

Finally, particular thanks are due to my husband, Dr Paul Ginns, for his technical help, feedback on drafts, emotional support and encouragement during the years of my candidature. I could not have done it without you.

## **Publications from this research**

Ciarrochi, J. V., Heaven, P. C., & Davies, F. (2007). The impact of hope, self-esteem, and attributional style on adolescents' school grades and emotional well-being: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Research in Personality, 41*, 1161-1178.

Davies, F., Heaven, P. C., Ciarrochi, J. V., & Vialle, W. J. (2005). The effect of cognitive variables on emotional states in adolescence. *Australian Journal of Psychology : Combined Abstracts of 2005 Australian Psychology Conferences*, 199.

# Abstract

Historically, personality and psychopathology have been viewed as conceptually distinct, but recently there have been calls for integrative models. Similarly, the traditional view of mental disorders has been that they are qualitatively different to normal mental states. However, this view has recently changed with a consensus starting to emerge that emotional wellbeing and psychopathology are on a continuum. In particular, the tripartite model of Clarke and Watson (1994) has been influential in understanding the links between affect and psychopathology, proposing that high negative affectivity is related to both anxiety and depression, and low positive affectivity only to depression. Longitudinal research over multiple time points is needed in order to clarify the above relationships and their trajectories over time, as well as to address the nature of developmental change and stability.

Despite this, there is little research available on the link between emotional wellbeing—particularly specific emotional states such as sadness—and mental health over time. In addition, many personality variables have been studied in relation to mental health that have not had the same attention in the realm of emotional wellbeing. This thesis examines one such group of variables and their relationship to emotional wellbeing.

Appraisal theories suggest a link between emotional states and the perceptions of events, and the variables included in this research come from this tradition. The phrase ‘positive thinking’ is used in this thesis to refer to cognitive styles that involve positive appraisals of the self, the world, or the future. The specific constructs studied

provide a mix of two well-established and widely studied variables (self-esteem and explanatory style) and one newer and less studied variable (trait hope).

Study 1 examined the cross-sectional relationship between the three positive thinking variables and four emotional states (fear, sadness, hostility, and joviality) among 785 Year 7 students. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis suggest that the three positive thinking variables are distinct, as do the different patterns of relationships between the positive thinking variables and the emotional states.

Study 2 included 660 of the same students one year later in order to examine the longitudinal relationship between the positive thinking variables and emotional wellbeing. When all three positive thinking variables were included in the structural equation models, there were unique effects for each variable. Specifically, high self-esteem predicted lower fear and sadness, high trait hope predicted increased joviality, and positive explanatory style predicted lower hostility one year later. The positive thinking variables showed moderate stability over time, broadly consistent with prior research.

Overall, the results of this thesis indicate that self-esteem, explanatory style, and trait hope have important and unique effects on emotional wellbeing in early adolescence. These findings have implications for clinical practice, particularly for prevention and early interventions programs for anxiety and depression. The reasons for the specific relationships found in this thesis remain unclear, and further development of the theoretical and research base in this area would be worthwhile.