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**Life Orientation and Life Satisfaction:  
An Exploration of a Homeostatic Model  
of Subjective Wellbeing**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Science  
in  
Psychology

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2005

**Dedicated**

**with optimism about the future**

**to my brother**

**David R. J. Findlay**

**and all who struggle**

**with mental illness**

## Abstract

The main purpose of the current study was to explore the relationship between life orientation (optimism-pessimism) and life satisfaction. Cummins' (e.g. 1998) homeostatic model of subjective wellbeing was used as the basis for this exploration. The model was proposed to account for the fact that population life satisfaction within Western countries is repeatedly found to fall within the range  $75 \pm 2.5$  percent of the scale maximum score (%SMS). The theory proposes that optimism is involved in the regulation and maintenance of subjective wellbeing. Two other variables, self-esteem and control, are thought to be involved in the regulatory system, however optimism was explored in light of the limited research into the connection between this variable and life satisfaction. According to the homeostatic theory, extreme adverse life events can disrupt the homeostatic system, causing a temporary decline in subjective wellbeing. The sample consisted of 200 adults from the general population of New Zealand. These were volunteers recruited within shopping centres in the Auckland area. Participants were administered a questionnaire consisting of two scales; the Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R) and the Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI). The LOT-R is a measure of dispositional optimism-pessimism, and the PWI is a measure of life satisfaction. Additionally, the questionnaire consisted of a section designed to elicit basic demographic information, as well as details pertaining to recent experiences of significant life events. The most notable findings were as follows: After controlling for the effects of student and outlier data, the average level of life satisfaction for the current sample was 71.01 %SMS; life orientation accounted for 42 % of the variance in life satisfaction; and the experience of significant negative life events caused a decrease in mean life satisfaction. It is concluded that, overall, the findings provide support for the homeostatic model. Further research is needed to clarify the nature of the relationship between life orientation and life satisfaction. Suggestions for future research, and implications for mental health, are discussed.

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