Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.
Massey University Library  Thesis Copyright Form

Title of thesis: Illusions, Well-Being, and Health

(1) (a) I give permission for my thesis to be made available to readers in the Massey University Library under conditions determined by the Librarian.
(b) I do not wish my thesis to be made available to readers without my written consent for ______ months.

(2) (a) I agree that my thesis, or a copy, may be sent to another institution under conditions determined by the Librarian.
(b) I do not wish my thesis, or a copy, to be sent to another institution without my written consent for ______ months.

(3) (a) I agree that my thesis may be copied for Library use.
(b) I do not wish my thesis to be copied for Library use for ______ months.

Signed

Date 28/2/91

The copyright of this thesis belongs to the author. Readers must sign their name in the space below to show that they recognise this. They are asked to add their permanent address.

NAME AND ADDRESS

DATE

K.M. Lavell
Illusions, Well-Being, and Health

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Psychology, at Massey University.

Keren Mary Lavell

1991
ABSTRACT

The present study investigates unrealistically positive biases in human thought, and their relationship with subjective well-being and perceived physical health. Taylor and Brown (1988) refer to these biases as illusions, as most individuals hold more positive perceptions for themselves than they do for most others. Three separate illusions exist - self-perception, control, and expectations for the future - and these are claimed to be an important element of mental health. Traditionally, definitions of mental health have included accurate perception as a criterion. Recent evidence has found that those with accurate perception are instead mildly depressed, while those who have unrealistically positive perceptions are non-depressed. The present study extends the research on illusions and depression, to examine the illusions in relation to well-being and health.

A self-report questionnaire, consisting of five scales, was completed by 300 Psychology students. The Anderson (1968) scale of personality trait adjectives was used to assess self-perception. For control, items were based both on previous experimental measures (Langer & Roth, 1975) and on locus of control measures (Rotter, 1966). Optimism was assessed using the Weinstein (1980) scale. The Mental Health Inventory (Viet & Ware, 1983) was used to measure well-being, and the Cohen Hoberman Inventory of Physical Symptoms (Cohen & Hoberman, 1983) was used to assess perceived physical health.

Three distinct illusions were found. Self-perception was related to positive well-being; control was not related to the outcomes. Optimism was related to positive and negative well-being, and to physical health, and was the strongest predictor of the outcomes. As the measures of self-perception and control were developed for the present study, further research is necessary to confirm their suitability. To the extent that relationships were found, Taylor and Brown (1988) were supported. The present study finds that illusions play a small but significant role in both subjective well-being and physical health.
I would like to express my most sincere gratitude to my supervisor Kerry Chamberlain. His excellent knowledge of the research process, and his thorough supervision, have been invaluable. I would also like to thank him for his constant support and advice through each stage of this thesis.

Finally, I would like to say thank-you to my family, for the encouragement and reassurance they gave me every step of the way.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** ................................................................. iii

**LIST OF TABLES** ........................................................................ vi

**INTRODUCTION** ........................................................................ 1
  - Background ............................................................................. 1
  - The Nature of Illusions: The Need for Definition ..................... 4
  - Consequences of Illusions ...................................................... 7
  - Subjective Well-Being ........................................................... 9
  - Perceived Physical Health ...................................................... 10
  - Measuring the Illusions ......................................................... 12
  - Measuring the Outcomes ....................................................... 14

**METHOD** ................................................................................ 16
  - Pilot ...................................................................................... 16
  - Respondents .......................................................................... 16
  - Procedure ............................................................................. 16
  - Survey Content ...................................................................... 17

**RESULTS** ................................................................................. 20

**DISCUSSION** ........................................................................... 25
  - The Nature of Illusions ........................................................ 25
  - Measurement Issues ............................................................. 26
  - Illusions and Perceived Physical Health .................................. 28
    - Control Theory and Health ................................................. 29
  - Illusions and Well-Being ...................................................... 30
    - Negative Well-Being ......................................................... 30
    - Positive Well-Being ........................................................ 31
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illusions and Well-Being: Theoretical Issues</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illusions: Beneficial or Harmful?</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellbeing Project</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Means, Standard Deviations, Alpha Coefficients, and Intercorrelations of the Illusions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Correlations Obtained Between the Three Measures of Illusions, MHI, MHI well-being, MHI distress, and CHIPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Correlations Obtained Between the Measures of Illusions and the Third-Order Factors of the MHI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multiple Regression Data for MHI well-being, MHI distress, CHIPS, and the Illusions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>