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EXPLANATORY STYLE AND DEPRESSION:

THE ROLE OF ACTIVITY

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

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Dedicated to my parents
Howard Anthony and Sheila Elizabeth Findlay
For your continual love and support
And to my late grandmother
Lily Irene Findlay (Erb)
For teaching me that
“Every little bit helps…”
Abstract

Learned helplessness theory and its subsequent reformulation propose that a pessimistic explanatory style renders an individual vulnerable to depression. A large body of literature has supported this association within various samples and utilising a range of methodologies. No prior study has explored explanatory style and depression among a New Zealand sample of clinically depressed adults. Furthermore, no prior research has examined the role of activity level or activity type in relation to these variables. Given the importance of behavioural activation in recovery from depression, Study 1 aimed to bridge this gap. The sample consisted of 29 adult clients diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) and receiving a 20 session protocol of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) as part of The Depression Study; a treatment outcome study conducted at Massey University, Albany, Auckland, New Zealand. Data were derived from intake assessment scores for explanatory style and depression severity, as measured via the Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ) and Beck Depression Inventory–Second Edition (BDI-II) respectively. Data were also derived from several activity level and activity type indices formulated for Study 1 by the use of information contained within activity charts; a tool used for a between-session task (homework) conducted early in CBT. Study 1 supported an association between a pessimistic explanatory style and depression severity and provisional support was found for the proposed model of the current project, implicating the role of activity among interactions between explanatory style and depression. In collecting data for Study 1 it became apparent that an adaptation to the activity chart may yield greater information particularly with regard to activity type, such as the extent to which social interaction occurred. Study 2 of the current research project aimed to compare the original activity chart with the adapted chart, by grouping The Depression Study clients according to whether they completed the original \((n = 15)\) or the adapted \((n = 8)\) activity chart, and comparing the data obtained. Mann-Whitney \(U\) tests confirmed that the adapted chart was more successful in collecting information regarding social interaction and ratings for mastery and pleasure. It is suggested that the adapted chart could be more beneficial in contrast to the chart typically used in CBT to date; this advantage could extend across both research and clinical settings for the examination of client activity.
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Table of Contents

Abstract ......................................................................................................................... iii

Acknowledgements ...................................................................................................... iv

List of Tables ................................................................................................................ x

List of Figures ............................................................................................................. xi

LITERATURE REVIEW ................................................................................................. 1

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW .............................................................................. 1

CHAPTER 1: Definition, History, and Theories of Explanatory Style ......................... 2

Major Depressive Disorder: Definition, prevalence, and assessment ....................... 2

The learned helplessness theory ................................................................................... 4

The reformulated learned helplessness theory .............................................................. 7

Terminology of explanatory style ................................................................................... 8

Optimism and pessimism: Definition and research approaches ..................................... 8

Related constructs ......................................................................................................... 11

Summary .......................................................................................................................... 12

CHAPTER 2: Explanatory Style and Depression; Empirical Support ......................... 13

Empirical support with child and adolescent populations ......................................... 14

Predictions of the reformulated learned helplessness theory ...................................... 14

The development of explanatory style .......................................................................... 17

Empirical support with tertiary student populations .................................................. 17

Predictions of the original learned helplessness theory ............................................... 18

Predictions of the reformulated learned helplessness theory ...................................... 18

Empirical support with adult populations ................................................................... 19

Predictions of the original learned helplessness theory ............................................... 19

Predictions of the reformulated learned helplessness theory ...................................... 21
CHAPTER 3: Explanatory Style Research; Useful Considerations .......................... 28

Explanatory style for negative versus positive events ......................................... 28
Alternative explanations ......................................................................................... 30
Methodological limitations in explanatory style research ...................................... 32
  Design issues in published research ................................................................. 32
  Categorisation of depression ............................................................................. 33
  Measurement of causal attributions or explanatory style .................................... 34
  Measurement of life events .................................................................................. 36
  Potential confounding factors ........................................................................... 36
Overall conclusions of explanatory style research ............................................... 37

CHAPTER 4: Cognitive Behaviour Therapy for Depression .............................. 41

The common objective of cognitive approaches .................................................... 41
Cognitive therapies versus cognitive behaviour therapies .................................... 41
Beck’s Cognitive Therapy ...................................................................................... 43
  History of development ...................................................................................... 43
  Overview of the approach .................................................................................. 44
  Cognitive theory and practice .......................................................................... 45
Summary ............................................................................................................... 48

CHAPTER 5: The History and Value of Behavioural Activation ....................... 49

Behavioural interventions in CBT ........................................................................ 49
Definition, history, and theories of behavioural activation .................................... 49
Behavioural activation as a component of CBT for depression ........................... 52
Empirical support for behavioural activation ....................................................... 53
  Comparisons of cognitive behaviour and behavioural therapies .................... 53
  Summary and critique of the component analyses .......................................... 56
  Follow-up data of the component analyses: Relapse prevention ...................... 58
Summary ............................................................................................................... 60

CHAPTER 6: Behavioural Activation in the Context of Activity Type ............. 61

Engagement in pleasant activities ....................................................................... 61
Engagement in mastery-inducing activities ......................................................... 62
Client beliefs and individual differences .............................................................. 63
Engagement in social interaction ........................................................................ 64
Induced mood and activity type choices ................................................................. 65
Quantity versus quality in the efficacy of behavioural activation ....................... 66
Summary .................................................................................................................. 68

CHAPTER 7: Cognitive Mechanisms of Change.................................................. 69
Empirical support for cognitive mechanisms of change ...................................... 69
Explanatory style change via CBT .......................................................................... 74
Mechanisms of change: Important considerations ............................................... 76
Summary .................................................................................................................. 78

THE PRESENT STUDIES ................................................................................. 79

CHAPTER 8: Study 1 Aims and Rationale ........................................................... 79
Overall aim and rationale ...................................................................................... 79
Proposed framework ............................................................................................. 80
Compatibility of theories ...................................................................................... 81
Specific aims and rationale ................................................................................... 84
Path 1 in the model .................................................................................................. 84
Path 2 in the model .................................................................................................. 85
Path 3 in the model .................................................................................................. 86
Paths 1 and 2 in the model .................................................................................... 88
Summary ................................................................................................................ 92

CHAPTER 9: Study 1 Method ............................................................................ 93
Overview of data collection .................................................................................. 93
Therapist training and monitoring ....................................................................... 93
Participants ............................................................................................................ 95
Recruitment and screening .................................................................................. 95
Description of sample ........................................................................................... 96
Treatment ............................................................................................................... 98
Data collection ....................................................................................................... 99
Measurement instruments .................................................................................... 99
Explanatory style .................................................................................................. 99
Depression severity ............................................................................................... 103
The use of activity charts in clinical practice ..................................................... 105
The use of activity charts in the present study ...................................................... 106
The measurement of activity level ................................................................. 108
  Time in activity (Duration) ........................................................................... 108
  Range of activities (Variety) ......................................................................... 109
  Frequency of activity changes (Frequency) ................................................. 110
  Example of activity level indices ............................................................... 111
The measurement of activity type ................................................................. 112
  Active and passive ....................................................................................... 112
  Social and nonsocial ................................................................................... 112
  Mastery and pleasure frequency ................................................................ 113
  Mastery and pleasure magnitude .............................................................. 113
Summary of methodology ........................................................................... 114

CHAPTER 10: Study 1 Results ......................................................................... 115
Overview of data treatment ........................................................................ 115
Preliminary analyses: Detection of outliers .................................................. 116
Data analysis approach .............................................................................. 118
Results ....................................................................................................... 120
  Aim 1 ......................................................................................................... 120
  Aim 2 ......................................................................................................... 123
  Aim 3 ......................................................................................................... 125
  Aim 4 ......................................................................................................... 127

CHAPTER 11: Study 2 .................................................................................. 134
Background to the present study ................................................................ 134
  Overview .................................................................................................. 134
  Rationale, aim, and hypotheses ............................................................... 134
Method ....................................................................................................... 136
  Study variables ........................................................................................ 137
Results and preliminary discussion ............................................................ 138
  Social interaction ....................................................................................... 138
  Activity chart completion quality ........................................................... 138

DISCUSSION ............................................................................................ 140

CHAPTER 12: Discussion of Specific Findings .............................................. 140
Study 1: Findings and tentative conclusions ................................................................. 140
Path 1 ........................................................................................................................... 141
Path 2 ........................................................................................................................... 142
Paths 1 and 2 ............................................................................................................... 143
Path 3 ........................................................................................................................... 147
Differential associations across indices ................................................................ 148
Activity level indices: Explanatory style versus depression severity .................... 148
Explanatory style indices: Negative versus positive events ................................. 150
Summary and conclusions of Study 1 findings ..................................................... 152
Study 2: Findings and conclusions ........................................................................ 153

CHAPTER 13: General Discussion ...................................................................... 156
Conceptual overlap and alternative explanations .................................................. 156
Limitations of the research .................................................................................... 160
Implications for mental health .............................................................................. 167
Implications for clinical practice ........................................................................... 167
The importance of continued clinical research ..................................................... 170
Suggestions for future research ............................................................................. 171
Concluding comments ........................................................................................... 175

REFERENCES ........................................................................................................... 177

APPENDICES .......................................................................................................... 204

APPENDIX A: Original Activity Chart .................................................................... 205
APPENDIX B: Adapted Activity Chart .................................................................... 208
APPENDIX C: Variable Descriptions ....................................................................... 211
APPENDIX D: Descriptive Statistics of Study 1 Variables/Indices ......................... 212
APPENDIX E: Summary Table of Significant Study 1 Correlations ....................... 213
## List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1</td>
<td>Demographic characteristics of <em>The Depression Study</em> participants</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2</td>
<td>Intercorrelations ($r$) between ASQ subscales in the present study and those of Hjelle et al. (1996) and Peterson et al. (1982)</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3</td>
<td>Pearson’s product-moment and Spearman’s Rho correlation coefficients and significance values, between activity level indices and explanatory style indices</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4</td>
<td>Pearson’s product-moment and Spearman’s Rho correlation coefficients and significance values, between depression severity and activity level indices</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5</td>
<td>Pearson’s product-moment and Spearman’s Rho correlation coefficients and significance values, between depression severity and explanatory style indices</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6</td>
<td>Pearson’s product-moment and Spearman’s Rho correlation coefficients and significance values, between activity type variables and explanatory style indices</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 7</td>
<td>Pearson’s product-moment and Spearman’s Rho correlation coefficients and significance values, between depression severity and activity type variables</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 8</td>
<td>Median recording percentages and Mann-Whitney $U$ test statistics and exact significance values as a function of activity chart completed</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

Figure 1 The proposed model; the reciprocal relationship between explanatory style, activity, and depression severity.................... 81

Figure 2 Example of Beck’s Five Part Model, displaying the interrelationships between cognitions, behaviour, emotions, and physiology................................................................. 83

Figure 3 Example segment of a typical activity chart, with one cell completed with an activity, mood rating, and mastery rating, for illustrative purposes......................................................... 105

Figure 4 Example of a hypothetical activity chart, partially completed with example activities, for illustrative purposes............... 111

Figure 5 Scatterplot showing the association between the Duration activity level index and the Positive Events explanatory style index.................................................................................. 122

Figure 6 Scatterplot showing the association between the Duration activity level index and the Overall Composite explanatory style index.................................................................................. 122

Figure 7 Scatterplot showing the association between the Variety activity level index and depression severity......................... 124

Figure 8 Scatterplot showing the association between the Frequency activity level index and depression severity ...................... 124

Figure 9 Scatterplot showing the association between the Negative Events explanatory style index and depression severity........ 126
Figure 10  Scatterplot showing the association between the Positive Events explanatory style index and depression severity……………………126

Figure 11  Scatterplot showing the association between the Overall Composite explanatory style index and depression severity……. 127

Figure 12  Scatterplot showing the association between the Pleasure Frequency activity type variable and the Positive Events explanatory style index………………………………………….. 129

Figure 13  Scatterplot showing the association between the Mastery Magnitude activity type variable and the Positive Events explanatory style index………………………………………….. 130

Figure 14  Scatterplot showing the association between the Pleasure Magnitude activity type variable and the Positive Events explanatory style index………………………………………….. 130

Figure 15  Scatterplot showing the association between the Pleasure Magnitude activity type variable and the Overall Composite explanatory style index………………………………………….. 131

Figure 16  Scatterplot showing the association between the Pleasure Magnitude activity type variable and depression severity……. 132