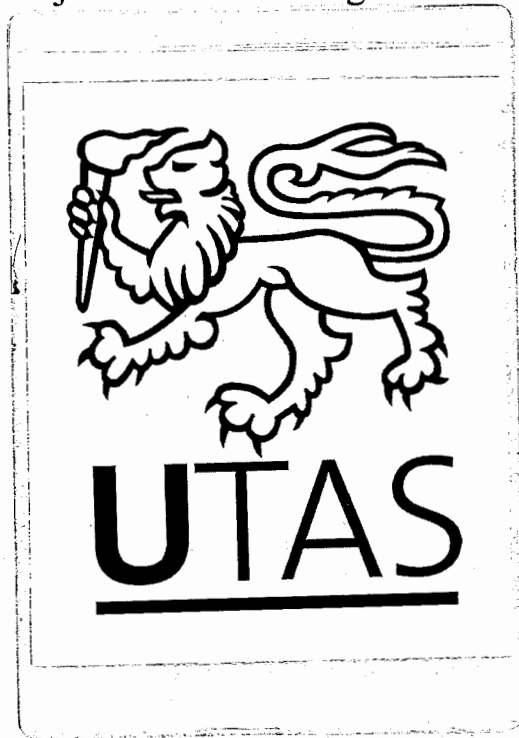


“No man is happy who does not think himself so”:  
The Subjective Well-Being of adolescents



By

Karena Jessup

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A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

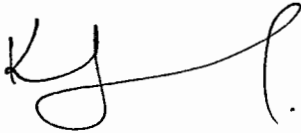
Faculty of Education  
University of Tasmania, Hobart

August 2006

## Declaration

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This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the thesis. To the best of my knowledge and belief no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis.



Karena Jessup  
16<sup>th</sup> August 2006

## Authority of Access

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# Acknowledgements

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Aristotle believed that humans were creatures whose lives were a process of moving toward an end. That there must be one final end of all ends. For Aristotle this was happiness. Subjective Well-Being is defined as an empirically-based examination of the causes and correlates of happiness, and is concerned with evaluations of well-being from the subject's perspective. Subjective Well-Being consists of two components – one cognitive (Life Satisfaction), and one affective (Positive and Negative Affect) – and it is these three concepts that constitute the three dependent variables in this study. It is proposed in this dissertation that there is a need to expand existing knowledge regarding the Subjective Well-Being of adolescents, and to see if past results can be confirmed with a large, Australian sample. In this study, the independent variables of personality and psychosocial variables are considered, as well as institutional experiences and competencies, mental health, risk behaviours and beliefs, life events, and goals and life planning.

The dissertation centres on a sample of 2094 Grade 8 and Grade 10 students drawn from 73 schools in Tasmania, across government, Catholic and non-government sectors. Data were gathered as part of the Adolescent Health, Education, and Well-Being Project, which was funded by the Australian Research Council at the University of Tasmania, with the Tasmanian Department of Education and the Tasmanian Department of Health and Human Services as Industry Partners.

Three separate regression analyses were conducted on the dependent variables of Life Satisfaction, Positive Affect, and Negative Affect, and three different sets of predictors were found. This finding confirmed previous suppositions that the three components of Subjective Well-Being should be assessed separately (Diener, 1984, 1995).

The following variables were found to be significant predictors of Life Satisfaction: Confidence, Coping, Family Functioning, Suicide Ideation, Parent's Marital Status, Idealism, Mental Health, Confidence at Getting Desired Job, Family Finances, Internal Influences on Goal Setting, Number Of Close Friends, and Family Attachment. Internal Influences on Goal Setting, Coping, Confidence, and Confidence at Getting Desired Job were also significant predictors of Positive Affect, as were Extracurricular Activities, Benefits From Friendship, Benefits From Sport, Average Hours Spent Playing Sport per Week, Self-Assessed Success in Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE), and Voice. Mental Health was a predictor of Negative Affect as well as Life Satisfaction. External Influences on Goal Setting, Goal Ambivalence, Risk Acceptance, Neuroticism, and Involuntary Contact with Government Agencies were also significant predictors of Negative Affect. Variables that did not contribute significantly to the regression equations are also discussed. Partial correlations were conducted to assess the impact of the shared variables in the regression equations with interesting results. Limitations of the study, implications drawn from the results and suggestions for further research are also discussed.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

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No man is happy who does not think himself so.

– Marcus Aurelius (121 AD – 180 AD)

Over the centuries many philosophers and academics have held varying views on what constitutes happiness, and the value to be found in the pursuit of happiness. Still, questions remain unanswered: How happy are people across the life span? What are the possible predictors of happiness? This thesis seeks to address questions such as these by examining the happiness of adolescents. Happiness is conceptualised as Subjective Well-Being, which requires that the assessment of well-being come from the respondent's perspective. A need exists to examine people's personal assessments of their well-being and what makes them happy, rather than relying upon externally imposed evaluations. Hence the aptness of the Marcus Aurelius quote found above: "No man is happy *who does not think himself so*" [italics added].

## 1.1 Background to the Thesis Research

In recent years a great deal of attention has been given to research that centres on adolescents. This attention has come from professionals in a wide variety of fields. What has also been established is the importance of thorough enquiry and debate into the actual nature of adolescence (Heaven, 2001). This is recognised in the justification of the Adolescent Health, Education, and Well-Being Project (AHEWP) (Hogan, Carmichael, Crowley, & Easthope, 2000) within which the research central to this thesis was embedded. The AHEWP was a collaborative project funded by the Australian Research