Canadian adolescent perspectives on self-criticism and self-compassion: The role of parent-youth relationships and culture

by

Kevin J. de Leon

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ABSTRACT

CANADIAN ADOLESCENT PERSPECTIVES ON SELF-CRITICISM AND SELF-COMPASSION: THE ROLE OF PARENT-YOUTH RELATIONSHIPS AND CULTURE

Kevin de Leon
University of Guelph, 2017

Advisor: Dr. Susan S. Chuang

This study explored the family context, the parent-adolescent relationship, and the ways in which Canadian adolescent youths conceptualized, understood, and viewed self-criticism and self-compassion in their everyday lives. Ten immigrant youths (five Filipinos and five Africans) aged 12-18 years old, were interviewed about feeling down, disappointment, failure, as well as the ways in which they felt or experienced positivity and their relationships with their parents. Qualitative thematic analysis was used to analyze the youths’ responses. The youths discussed a broad range of concepts, views, and ideas connected to self-criticism, self-compassion, and parent-adolescent relationships including re-focusing to an optimistic perspective during tough times, negative states of laziness and overthinking, conflicts with peers and parents and how these stresses are internalized and felt, feeling consumed by sadness and mistakes, anger and regret from mistakes, acknowledging distresses as temporary, feeling heard and understood by their mothers, and speaking to fathers only when permission was required.
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Introduction

According to the Canadian Mental Health Association (n.d.), approximately 3.2 million Canadians between the ages of 12 and 19 years of age are at risk for developing depression. Currently, 5% of males and 12% of females in this age group have had a major depressive episode and suicide is the second leading cause of death in 15 to 24 year old Canadians (Canadian Mental Health Association, n.d.). Depression has been found to negatively impact individuals’ functioning across various domains, including psychosocial, occupational, and physical health (Kelly, Zuroff, & Shapira, 2009). Researchers have been exploring possible antecedents to depression and how to foster healthy ways of coping with it in everyday life. These explorations have included the investigation of related psychological concepts. More specifically, self-criticism, an intense inner scrutiny and judgment of the self (Shahar et al., 2012), has been linked to depression (e.g., Kelly et al., 2009). This harsh, internally focused judgment can affect multiple aspects of the self such as one’s feelings, thoughts, personality traits, and appearance (Longe et al., 2010). Self-critical individuals were also found to be more vulnerable to depression, less receptive to treatment, and were more likely to relapse even if they had responded positively to prior treatment (Kelly et al., 2009). Thus, researchers have been investigating ways to minimize this punitive inner evaluation such as through self-compassion (e.g., Shahar et al., 2012).

Self-compassion, which has been associated with positive psychological health (e.g., Neff, 2003a, 2008), has been proposed as a way to minimize the negative self-talk and self-judgment that are characteristic of self-criticism (e.g., Shahar et al., 2012). When individuals are self-compassionate, they treat themselves with kindness, understanding, and acceptance (Neff, 2008). By viewing their own pain and failures with the same kindness and understanding that
they may offer others, individuals who are self-compassionate can diminish the negative effects associated with self-criticism and depression (e.g., Diedrich, Grant, Hofmann, Hiller, & Berking, 2014).

Self-compassion and its possible role as an antidote to self-criticism may be particularly relevant for youths. Adolescence is a time of identity creation and tinkering (Jaitva & Cerezo, 2014) and, as a result, youths may be particularly susceptible to environmental influences, including family, peers, and the media. These influences can create significant pressures and stresses on youths, serving as the bases of self-evaluation. Consequently, youths may internalize these pressures and develop unreasonably high expectations for themselves, resulting in self-criticism (e.g., Shahar et al., 2006). Despite these implications, there is a dearth of research regarding the factors in developing positive avenues to combat youths who are self-critical, such as self-compassion.

Specifically, one area that is particularly unexplored is family relations and its role in fostering self-compassion among youths. For example, Neff and McGehee (2010) explored the role of family relationships in developing self-compassion and found that mothers in heterosexual relationships who were critical hindered development of self-compassion in youths, whereas supportive mothers fostered self-compassion in youths. In this study, however, fathers’ roles were not explored, nor were other family members. Although the researchers found that youths reported higher levels of self-compassion in safe and supportive environments (i.e., functional families), they did not explore the contributions of each individual family member’s role, nor the possible underlying mechanisms or processes that influenced the youths. These findings limit our understanding of possible influences that fathers may have in developing or
inhibiting both self-criticism and self-compassion in their children; it is important to consider the roles of parents of any gender.

Currently, there is a limited understanding of how, specifically, family relationships impact the development of self-compassion in youths. Therefore, the focus of this study is to explore the family context, the parent-child relationship, and how youths conceptualize, understand, and view self-criticism and self-compassion in their everyday lives.

**Literature Review**

In the following sections, I will discuss self-criticism within the context of mental health issues, namely depression. Then, I will focus on self-compassion and its connection to psychological health and well-being. Upon outlining these psychological constructs, I will review them within the context of psychological interventions. Adolescence and identity will also be discussed, followed by connecting this developmental stage to self-criticism and self-compassion. Next, I will review the parent-adolescent relationship, self-criticism, and self-compassion. Moreover, I will discuss the role of culture in self-criticism and self-compassion, followed by an examination of mental health in Filipinos and Africans. Happiness will also be briefly discussed.

**Self-Criticism**

As part of Sidney Blatt’s (2004) training at the Western New England Institute for Psychoanalysis, he found a clear distinction in his two patients who were diagnosed with depression. The distinctions were based on the patients’ experiences in their everyday lives, their personalities and traits, and the way in which their mental illness manifested, such as seen in the ways they viewed themselves and others. These differences in Blatt’s patients led to his
development of two forms of depression: anaclitic depression and, of greater interest to this study, introjective depression.

Blatt’s first patient, Helen, showed characteristics of anaclitic depression, which is when the individual focuses on being abandoned and unloved by the mother. During Helen’s sessions, she focused on feelings of being unwanted and unloved, primarily due to feelings that her parents abandoned her (her parents had divorced when she was young), and the emptiness and loneliness from the numerous affairs she had with men after she divorced; she often described being used and abused in each instance.

Blatt’s second patient, George, displayed characteristics of introjective depression. Derived from the psychological term introjection, the cognitive process by which a person internalizes attitudes, values, or characteristics of others, individuals who suffer from this form of depression are intensely scrutinizing and judging themselves. Feelings of self-loathing, guilt, and blame are characteristic of this depression and these individuals often expend energy and focus into activities that can diminish or decrease their feelings of inferiority, worthlessness, and shame. Moreover, these feelings are usually reflections of the depressed individual’s introjections. Blatt often refers to this depression as ‘self-critical’ depression (Blatt, 2004).

George found that his ability to work and focus was beginning to wane as his feelings of depression intensified. Although he had reached considerably high success in his career, he was unable to feel satisfied and proud of his accomplishments, despite the tremendous amounts of work and energy he placed into his work and how driven he was to receive recognition for his efforts. George found it difficult to say ‘no’ to others, fearing that he might offend or hurt them. He described feeling empty and anhedonic because others appeared to be so impressed with him when he felt he did not deserve their praise, which made him feel corrupt and evil on the inside.
His feelings of depression revolved around feeling guilt, blame, and low self-worth. His mind was constantly barraged with feelings of self-doubt, fearing punishment, criticism, and disapproval from others.

As illustrated in George’s case, introjective depression revolves around self-criticism. People who are self-critical tend to have unreachable expectations; standards that they have internalized from their parents’ (or parental figures’) values and attitudes. When they cannot meet these expectations, these individuals feel ashamed and guilty. They feel worthless because they sense that others will be disappointed with them and criticize them for their inadequacies (Blatt, 2004).

Self-criticism has also been linked to other mental health issues, including social anxiety (Iancu, Bodner, & Ben-Zion, 2015; Kopala-Sibley, Zuroff, Russell, & Moskowitz, 2014), mood disorder (Teasdale & Cox, 2001), and self-injury (Glassman et al., 2007; Klonsky & Moyer, 2008). For example, Iancu, Bodner, and Ben-Zion (2015) examined the relationship between social anxiety and self-criticism. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (2013), individuals with social anxiety disorder (SAD) avoid others because they fear that they will be scrutinized for saying or doing ‘the wrong thing,’ causing them to feel embarrassed or humiliated. These individuals would also describe feeling inferior to others, focusing on others’ views of them and sensing that they are being criticized and rejected (Iancu et al., 2015). Iancu and colleagues found that those with SAD scored high on self-criticism. They also found that self-criticism was the strongest predictor of social anxiety in comparison to low self-esteem, low self-efficacy, and dependency. Thus, it is imperative to explore ways to minimize this punitive inner judgment, including through self-compassion.
Self-Compassion

In Buddhism, compassion is an important tenet of the Eastern philosophy (Salzberg, 1995). To show compassion for a person means to acknowledge his or her conflict or distress with openness and kindness. There is a focus on being nonjudgmental and accepting of individuals’ failures, mistakes, and shortcomings, understanding that these experiences are a part of being human, creating a sense of a ‘common humanity.’ Compassion, however, is not only intended for others, but also for the self. By directing compassion inwards, individuals can alleviate their own psychological distress by being nonjudgmental, understanding, and kind to themselves (Neff, 2003a).

When Neff (2008) conceptualized self-compassion, she described three components: (a) self-kindness, being less judgmental and scrutinizing of one’s failures and mistakes by being understanding and kind to oneself; (b) common humanity, acknowledging that one is not alone in one’s suffering, and that pain and loss are experiences all humans share; and (c) mindfulness, an objective awareness of one’s pain, feelings, and emotions, viewing them with clarity and as part of a ‘bigger picture.’ These elements of self-compassion, though conceptualized as separate constructs, are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they work in tandem. For example, for individuals to be mindful, they must acknowledge and understand their feelings and thoughts with openness and clarity, but to do so, they must also be less judging and critical of themselves (i.e., self-kind). This movement away from scrutinizing the self allows individuals to understand that failures and mistakes are a part of being human, and that it is acceptable to feel negatively (i.e., common humanity).

By being self-compassionate, individuals can diminish over-identification and rumination. These cognitive processes have been found to play a role in some individuals’
mental health issues because they can contribute to feeling that they are alone in their suffering (i.e., overidentification; Neff, 2003a), which is then reinforced through repetitive negative thinking (i.e., rumination). Through self-compassion, it is possible to change the mindset from a cycle of negative thoughts about the self to a more balanced perspective. Self-compassion can aid in dealing with the challenges individuals face in their lives, helping them understand that the feelings and thoughts that are associated with their distress are not forever-lasting and inescapable. By being self-compassionate, individuals can acknowledge and accept their suffering, failures, and mistakes without becoming completely fixated in them (Neff, 2003a).

Self-compassion has been linked to various aspects of psychological health and well-being. For example, individuals who are self-compassionate have higher ratings of happiness, optimism, and general positive affect (Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007). Conversely, individuals who are less self-compassionate are less likely to engage in self-care when they are physically ill or are experiencing stress (Hall, Row, Wuensch, & Godley, 2013). Also, individuals diagnosed with depression have significantly lower levels of self-compassion in comparison to those who have never been depressed (Krieger et al., 2013). Furthermore, Werner and colleagues (2012) found that individuals with SAD reported less self-compassion. The link between self-compassion and psychological health has implications regarding its role as a possible antidote to underlying factors such as self-criticism. Therefore, it is also important to investigate how self-compassion is related to self-criticism.

**Self-Criticism and Self-Compassion Interventions**

Considering the numerous links researchers have found among self-criticism and mental health issues, including depression, social anxiety disorder, and some eating disorders (Dunkley, Masheb, & Grilo, 2010; Kelly et al., 2009; Iancu et al., 2015), various methods, treatments, and
concepts have been explored in order to directly address self-criticism and the concerns connected to it. Some researchers used self-compassion as the driving force in their interventions to address self-criticism and associated mental health issues. Some argued that self-compassionate individuals are able to accept their negative feelings and thoughts by being warm and understanding toward themselves (Neff et al., 2007). By acknowledging a common humanity and accepting that they are worthy of compassion, self-critical individuals can move from scrutinizing and judging themselves to a healthier perspective of themselves and their circumstances, minimizing their inner critics.

Shahar and colleagues (2012) used an emotion-focused two-chair dialogue to increase self-compassion in their participants to determine how levels of self-criticism are affected. Emotion-focused therapy (EFT) views emotion as a fundamental component in constructing the self (Greenberg, 2004). Centred on empathy, authenticity, and unconditional acceptance, the therapist implements a number of interventions in order to help clients better understand, acknowledge, accept, change, or regulate their emotions, depending on the behaviours that emerge during treatment (Greenberg, 2004; Shahar et al., 2012).

EFT views self-criticism as a conflict between two parts of the self: the inner critic, who harshly judges the self, and the experiencing self, who passively accepts these criticisms (Greenberg & Watson, 2006). During the two-chair work, the client is asked to imagine and act out a dialogue between the inner critic and the experiencing self, literally using two chairs. During this conversation, the client moves from one chair to the other, speaking as each part of the self, while he is guided by the therapist in order to explore his emotions. The client often feels anger, hatred, and/or contempt when he is the inner critic. When he is the experiencing self, he often feels powerless, hopeless, shame, fear, and sadness.
The aim of this intervention is to guide the client in joining the two parts of the self. The therapist helps him transform his feelings of anger, hate, and contempt into compassion and empathy toward the experiencing self. The client is also assisted in responding to the criticisms from the inner critic with assertiveness so that he can overcome his feelings of helplessness and fear. By using EFT, Shahar and colleagues were able to elicit self-compassion in their participants, resulting in decreased levels of self-criticism, anxiety, and depressive symptomology (Shahar et al., 2012).

In addition to EFT, other interventions that elicit self-compassion or its constituents have been found to minimize aspects of self-criticism. Specifically, compassionate mind training (CMT), mindfulness based stress reduction (MSBR), and dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT), have been identified as effective treatments or possible treatments for self-critical individuals (Barnard & Curry, 2011).

Through CMT, self-critical clients learn to create self-soothing, self-reassuring, and caring thoughts, feelings, and imagery (Gilbert & Irons, 2004). In order to create these thoughts and feelings, the clients focus on developing feelings of compassion toward themselves, helping to minimize their self-judgment (Barnard & Curry, 2011). By using self-compassion as a lens, the clients were asked to think of memories or create images that included attributes associated with compassion for the self, including empathy, warmth, and acceptance (Gilbert & Irons, 2004). Researchers who have used this approach with self-critical individuals found lower levels of depression, anxiety, shame, paranoia, and obsessive-compulsive symptoms (Gilbert & Procter, 2006; Mayhew & Gilbert, 2008).

Other interventions have focused on mindfulness rather than all three components of self-compassion. For instance, mindfulness based stress reduction (MSBR) focuses on enhancing
mindfulness, rather than self-compassion directly, but has been linked to increases in self-compassion and positive affect with decreases in rumination and anxiety (Shapiro, Astin, Bishop, & Cordova, 2005; Shapiro, Brown, & Biegel, 2007). MSBR enhances mindfulness by training the clients to develop an openness and acceptance to their circumstances. Through this training, the patients learn to actively acknowledge their surroundings and experiences, resulting in more balanced awareness of their lives (Shapiro, Brown, Thoresen, & Plante, 2011). This intervention has implications regarding other forms of treatment that enhance mindfulness. For example, Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) combines cognitive behavioural therapy and mindfulness. In DBT, the therapist demonstrates acceptance and encouragement toward the clients so that they learn to acknowledge their own thoughts and feelings in order to be more self-kind (another component of self-compassion) and aware (Barnard & Curry, 2011). Although there are currently no studies that have explored the relationship between DBT and self-compassion, Nicastro, Jermann, Bondolfi, and McQuillan (2010) examined the link between DBT and mindfulness and found increases in mindfulness and more balanced, nonjudgmental views of the participants’ own experiences.

Although some of these interventions have implications regarding the link between self-criticism and self-compassion, the literature is still scarce with a limited understanding of those who may be particularly affected by these psychological constructs. For example, these studies were primarily focused on adult participants with clinical diagnoses (e.g., depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder). Although self-criticism was initially introduced through a clinical lens, engaging in research in a non-clinical population may uncover new information that would further our understanding of this phenomenon. This idea also extends to self-compassion and whether it is helpful in everyday life for non-clinical individuals. Moreover, the focus on
adulthood (i.e., 18 years old and above) has limited our understanding of these phenomena. Considering the negative impacts self-criticism has been related to, as well as the positive impacts self-compassion has demonstrated, it may be helpful to examine these attributes in the earlier stages in life such as seen during adolescence.

**Adolescence**

Youths are constantly evaluating and judging themselves as they re-construct their sense of self (Tanaka, Wekerle, Schmuck, & Paglia-Boak, 2011). During this period, youths may be particularly susceptible to influences from their family, their peers, and the media. As a result, these influences can create unreachable expectations that the youths internalize, leading to overwhelming feelings of pressure and stress. Due to these expectations, the youths may be more vulnerable to developing some mental health issues such as self-criticism (e.g., Zuroff, Koestner, & Powers, 1994). This vulnerability could be particularly pronounced during the identity forming phase of adolescence.

**Adolescence and Identity**

Research on adolescent identity development is grounded in Erikson’s (1968) Theory of Identity and Developmental Stage Theory. Erikson (1963) described adolescence as a critical time to explore and develop a sense of self. During this time, youths identify where they fit in society, as well as their roles within it. Further, Erikson discussed the search for personal identity during this time which involves consistency, structure, and continuity as it relates to the self and its roles. Identity was believed to be influenced by various factors and is rarely formed through strictly unconscious means. Rather, conscious elements, such as one’s values and beliefs, and external factors (e.g., one’s culture) can influence how the identity is formed.
Erikson (1968) described identity development in stages, with each phase building on the last. Erikson deemed the adolescent stage, called identity versus identity confusion, as the critical period for one’s development. This stage involves the individuals’ evaluation of themselves and their contexts. During adolescence, self-evaluation often includes the youths’ beliefs about how they are viewed by others, which may be particularly detrimental as this period of development also involves overidentification and adolescent egocentrism (Neff & McGehee, 2010). During each stage, a moment of ‘crisis’ is experienced where the individuals must resolve a newfound life perspective in order to continue developing (Erikson, 1968). By continuing their exploring through self-evaluation, youths can resolve their identity crisis by merging their views and others’ views of themselves, the cultural values, and their skills. However, if they are unable to successfully facilitate integration of these different elements, youths’ identity confusion can persist, extending the time that they use to evaluate themselves. Thus, if youths remain in identity confusion, they may emphasize or ignore these different elements to varying degrees, pressuring themselves to perfect areas of their lives and criticizing other areas, possibly resulting in self-criticism.

**Self-Criticism in Adolescence**

According to Blatt (2004), early experiences with overly critical and scrutinizing parental figures are internalized and used as the lens through which individuals see themselves and others. These individuals sometimes avoid others, believing that they cannot live up to their standards, thus feeling unworthy and ashamed (Zuroff, Koestner, & Powers, 1994). Despite Blatt’s developmental emphasis and his view of the role of parents on self-criticism, there are few studies that have examined self-criticism during the earlier stages of life. Zuroff and colleagues (1994) attempted to address this gap. They investigated the relationships between
parenting practices and self-criticism in later life. More specifically, they examined 5-year-old children with restricting and rejecting parents and their impacts on the youths’ self-criticism at ages 12, 18, and 31 years old. They found that children with rejecting and restricting parents at age 5 were more likely to be self-critical at age 12, especially if the same-sex parent followed this parenting style. This self-criticism continued from age 12 to 31, particularly for females. Males, however, were more likely to have inhibited aggression later in life. Also, the findings also revealed that youths who were self-critical were less engaged in social activities during high school. The researchers found that youths who were self-critical at age 12 were less satisfied with their social relationships at age 31, and were significantly less satisfied with parenthood. Lastly, youths who were self-critical at age 12 were found to have fewer years of education by age 31 which, particularly for males, predicted lower occupational status. Overall, the self-critical youths were found to have poorer adjustment later in life. Thus, the high stability of self-criticism from an early age to later in life may have implications regarding the importance of examining self-criticism in early life and how interventions during early childhood may be important to explore. These findings also stress the importance of examining the role of parents in developing self-criticism.

**Self-Compassion in Adolescence**

Self-compassion may be a powerful antidote to self-criticism (e.g., Shahar et al., 2012). Considering that many youths experience significant pressures from various domains, such as academic achievement, becoming popular, looking and feeling attractive, and having and fulfilling aspirations, self-compassion may be particularly helpful for youths during these tribulations (Neff & McGehee, 2010). Specifically, youths who become accepting and kind toward themselves through self-compassion may help them deal with being overly self-
scrutinizing and self-judging when experiencing failures or shortcomings, especially as they begin to experience and learn new things. By acquiring a mindful perspective, youths can also learn to minimize their overidentification and rumination on negative ideas and feelings. When they are more cognizant of a common humanity and understand that they are not alone in their experiences, youths may feel less isolated and more equipped to deal with social foibles and rejection. Unfortunately, few researchers have explored the relationship between self-compassion and self-criticism in adolescence with some researchers defining self-compassion more broadly among youths.

Neff and McGehee (2010) compared self-compassion in youths and young adults and found several different links between their levels of self-compassion and well-being. Specifically, they found that self-compassion was negatively related to depression and anxiety in both groups. The youths with greater levels of the personal fable, which is a form of adolescent egocentrism in which the youths believe that others cannot understand or sympathize with their experiences because they are special and unique, were less self-compassionate. Those with supportive mothers and healthy, functional families reported greater self-compassion and those with critical, unsupportive families reported less self-compassion. Further, those with secure attachments (being comfortable with and accepting of intimacy) reported greater self-compassion. Conversely, those with preoccupied attachments (being jealous and “clingy”) and fearful attachments (being distrustful of others and feeling inadequate) reported lower levels of self-compassion. Of significant interest is the fact that self-compassion was found to be a significant partial mediator between maternal support, family functioning, and well-being, which further emphasizes the role parents can have with regard to their children’s mental health. By fostering self-compassion (or self-criticism depending on the mother’s level of support), parents
can influence how youths respond to themselves in times of distress. Thus, it is important to further explore the role of parents in the development of youths’ self-compassion and self-criticism.

**Parent-Adolescent Relationships**

The family context is arguably one of the most influential systems in an individual’s life. According to Family Systems Theory (Cox & Paley, 1997), each family member is interdependent and has a reciprocal influence on one another. Within the family system, there are various subsystems that interact, including dyads (e.g., parent-child, parent-parent) and triads (e.g., parent-child 1-child 2, parent-parent-child). Some of the literature indicates early experiences with caregivers as having an impact on self-criticism and self-compassion (e.g., Yu & Gamble, 2009). Many researchers have used Bowlby’s (1969, 1973) attachment theory as a framework to better understand the origins of self-criticism and self-compassion. A secure attachment between parent and child creates the foundation for interacting and developing relationships with others throughout one’s life. It fosters trust in others to respond warmly during times of distress and vulnerability due to their positive relationships with parents and caregivers (McElhaney, Allen, Stephenson, & Hare, 2009). Further, this confidence extends to people’s own abilities to handle challenges (McElhaney et al., 2009). A secure attachment has also been linked to an ability to openly experience, feel, and communicate both positive and negative emotions, which is similar to certain aspects of self-compassion; namely, mindfulness. However, interactions with parents that are described as unresponsive, cold, or distant tend to negatively affect children’s self-schemas, which are then internalized and become the framework that they use to view themselves and others (Bowlby, 1969, 1973). These early relationships become the templates that children use which, in turn, are predictive of future interactions with others. These
schemas then influence how they respond, react, and behave in interpersonal relations (Mongrain, 1998). Furthermore, the reactions and responses they receive from others could also be used to further evaluate themselves, whether these other individuals respond warmly or coldly, and could aid in the maintenance of their self-criticism and self-compassion. Thus, the relationship between parents and their children should be examined as it relates to self-criticism and self-compassion.

**Parent-Adolescent Relationships and Self-Criticism**

Zuroff and colleagues (1994) discussed the long-term impact that restricting and rejecting parents had on youths’ self-criticism and its maintenance in later life. Similarly, other researchers have explored the roles that parents can play in their children’s self-criticism. For example, Yu and Gamble (2009) examined the mother-adolescent relationship, its link to self-criticism, as well as the mothers’ level of personal self-criticism. They found that self-critical mothers had more self-critical adolescent children, suggesting an intergenerational connection. They also found that self-critical mothers were less warm and more power assertive toward their children (e.g., yelling at children for being bad). These findings support Bowlby’s attachment theory: cold, unresponsive, aggressive, and distant parent-child relationships can negatively influence children’s views of themselves (i.e., self-schemas; Yu & Gamble, 2009).

From the child’s perspective, how they view their parents and how they perceive their relationships with them can also affect levels of self-criticism. For example, Brewin, Firth-Cozens, Furnham, and McManus (1992) found that youths who consistently reported poorer parenting were those with high levels of self-criticism. Also, this highly self-critical group reported the lowest levels of parental care, highest levels of overprotection from their mothers, and had the worst relationships with their mothers.
Along similar lines, Mongrain (1998) found that individuals who are self-critical tended to expect impatience, coldness, criticalness, or rejection from their parents. This finding was primarily based on Bowlby’s (1969, 1973) attachment theory as it relates to relational scripts; self-critical individuals anticipate negative responses and interactions from either of their parents because of the working models they have developed from their relationship. Subsequently, these individuals broaden these models and generalize their interactions with their parents to other social situations, expecting similar aloof and critical responses from others, thus contributing to their distancing behaviour. If self-critical individuals do tend to withdraw because of their early experiences, it may influence depressive and social anxiety symptomology, possibly due to the limited situations in which their negative self-views can be challenged. Considering these findings, if parents have the ability to facilitate, develop, and maintain self-criticism in their children, they may also be able to influence self-compassion in their children.

**Parent-Adolescent Relationships and Self-Compassion**

Individuals with secure attachments have been found to use a variety of coping strategies, including active coping strategies (e.g., discussing their problems with others) and internal coping strategies (e.g., acknowledging one’s limitations. Some of these benefits may be linked to other aspects of self-compassion. For example, learning to recognize one’s own limitations, which may be a part of acknowledging a common humanity and can be more easily viewed with a mindful perspective, may allow a person to be more self-kind, the final component of self-compassion. These studies on positive parent-adolescent relationships indicate that secure attachments may positively influence self-compassion in youths; self-compassion may be a by-product of having a secure attachment. In order to explore the effects of attachment on self-
compassion, it is imperative to investigate the role of the parent-child relationship within the context of attachment and self-compassion.

Pepping, Davis, O’Donovan, and Pal (2015) explored the differences in self-compassion as it relates to attachment and parenting. They found that those whose parents were cold, over-protective, and rejecting were less self-compassionate. They also found that attachment anxiety mediated this relationship. Individuals with attachment anxiety were characterized by having received inconsistent responses during times of distress, therefore learning that expressing the need for nurturance and care will only sometimes receive an appropriate response, resulting in feeling anxious regarding seeking comfort and support from others. This attachment style can be evident in those with high levels of self-criticism. If parents are cold, unresponsive, critical, aloof, and inconsistent, their children are likely to grow up to be highly self-critical and less self-compassionate.

Mindfulness in parenting has similarly been explored as a method to improve children’s well-being and the parent-child relationship. For example, Duncan, Coatsworth, and Greenberg (2009) argued that being mindful parents include five components: (a) listening to their children with undivided attention; (b) being accepting and nonjudging not only of their children and their experiences, but also of themselves and their own personal experiences; (c) recognizing and acknowledging both their emotions and their children’s emotions; (d) being able to self-regulate; and (e) feeling compassion for their children and themselves. Thus, parents who are mindful will feel compelled to respond to their children when they are distressed with comfort, warmth, and kindness due to feeling empathy and compassion for their children. Through self-compassion, they will also be more forgiving of their own efforts and respond to their own difficulties with the same warmth, comfort, and kindness that they offer their children. Thus, by teaching parents
to be mindful, they can learn to be more compassionate toward themselves and their children, which consequently will improve the parent-child relationship and their children’s well-being. For example, Geurtzen and her colleagues (2015) found that mindful parents, particularly those who showed non-judgmental acceptance, had adolescents with lower levels of internalizing problems (e.g., depression, anxiety). These parents also reported that they were non-judgmentally accepting of their own parenting, which is similar to displays of self-compassion. Considering the benefits of teaching self-compassion and mindfulness to parents and the effects they have on their children, it is important to examine the parent-adolescent relationship as a context in which self-compassion can influence youths’ well-being.

**Culture and Self-Criticism**

Extending beyond the family context, cultural context can play a role in how individuals perceive and shape themselves, often based on the values that are tacitly embedded in one’s society. For example, Western cultures, such as the United States and Canada, which have been identified as individualistic, often promote the focus on self-enhancement because the self is seen as independent of others. Conversely, in Eastern cultures, such as Japan, China, and Taiwan, the self is commonly viewed as intertwined with those who are closest; how one person acts directly affects and influences those who are around him or her (Chang & Asakawa, 2003). According to Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, and Norasakkunkit (1997), the focus on harmony and interdependence can foster self-criticism. Though self-criticism is often viewed as a negative trait in the literature (i.e., something that should be reduced or shifted), some collectivistic cultures, such as seen in Japan, view self-criticism as a positive trait used to improve the self, which benefits both psychological and social elements. By being more accepting of their failures and less focused on their successes, self-criticism encourages individuals to continually
acknowledge and correct their mistakes and shortcomings. This ongoing personal improvement, some researchers argue, is important in collectivist cultures because constant awareness of one’s shortcomings in order to improve is vital to function with others and maintain social harmony (e.g., Heine, 2003; Heine et al., 2001; Kitayama et al., 1997).

Research comparing Western cultures to Eastern cultures has revealed this difference in self-enhancement versus self-criticism. For example, Heine, Takata, and Lehman (2000) found that Canadian students were less likely to believe that they underperformed in comparison to an average classmate on a mock intelligence test (i.e., self-enhancement), whereas Japanese students were less likely to believe that they outperformed an average classmate (i.e., self-criticism). Similarly, Lo, Helwig, Chen, Ohashi, and Cheng (2011) investigated cultural differences between Eastern (Chinese and Japanese) and Western (American and Canadian) cultures regarding attitudes of their own positive and negative traits. Although they found that both Easterners and Westerners engage in both self-enhancement and self-criticism, the patterns remained: East Asians demonstrated less self-enhancement and more self-criticism, while the Western group showed more self-enhancement and less self-criticism.

Even though some Eastern cultures promoted constructive self-criticism rather than emotional self-criticism (Kurman, Yoshihara-Tanaka, & Elkoshi, 2003), researchers revealed a relationship between self-criticism and mental health issues, including depression, regardless of the emotional nature of the criticism (e.g., Liu, Chen, Tsai, Wu, & Hong, 2012). Therefore, methods to reduce self-criticism may still be relevant in other cultures, especially if self-criticism is promoted or seen as a positive trait. Considering that self-compassion initially spawned from Eastern philosophy, it is important to explore how it may influence or be influenced by self-criticism in other cultures.
Happiness

Current research exploring mental health and well-being have used a number of terms interchangeably to describe concepts related to optimal psychological functioning, including well-being, life satisfaction, and happiness (Natvig, Albrektsen, & Qvarnstrom, 2003). However, there are nuanced differences among these terms that have led to understanding positive mental health states challenging, especially when comparing and contrasting studies that have used these differing terms. For example, life satisfaction is seen as a holistic evaluation of one’s life (Veenhoven, 1996). This satisfaction has been linked to various positive aspects of one’s life, such as increased life satisfaction due to social support. Similarly, happiness has also been viewed as a general, encompassing evaluation of one’s life. However, a major distinction between these two terms is that life satisfaction is the outcome of this evaluation, while happiness is the outcome of positive experiences in general, typically involving or focusing on signification relationships with others (Haller & Halder, 2006). Furthermore, while some research has found links between life satisfaction and positive views of certain domains (e.g., family, school, and peers), these same links may not be equally pronounced or important for one’s perceived happiness.

The role of social relationships and networks in happiness has been widely examined. Many investigators have identified the significance of relations with others (e.g., Haller & Halder, 2006). However, there appears to be varying degrees of happiness depending on the contexts in which one may be living. For example, those in Eastern countries, such as individuals from Japan, connect happiness to social harmony (relationship-based) while individuals from the United States connect happiness to personal achievement (Uchida & Kitayama, 2009). Although numerous studies have found that social relationships do play a significant role on the level of
happiness one feels, individuals from different countries, specifically those from the Philippines or African countries, may experience and evaluate their happiness differently. More specifically, it is unclear as to the influence of culture on the individuals’ levels of happiness for those of Filipino or African descent.

**Culture and Self-Compassion**

Self-compassion, which originated from Asia (Brach, 2003), may be perceived and valued differently across cultures. Given that Canada is multicultural, it is important to explore potential differences in self-compassion regarding its definition, importance, and prevalence in various groups. For example, Neff, Pisitingkagarn, and Hsieh (2008) examined the ways in which self-compassion differed among individuals from the United States, Taiwan, and Thailand. Self-compassion was found to be highest in Thailand and lowest in Taiwan, while levels were in the middle for those from the United States. Also, individuals from Thailand were significantly less self-judging, isolating, and overidentifying than those from both the United States and Taiwan, and were significantly higher in self-kindness and mindfulness. This is unsurprising considering the cultural climates of each nation. Thailand, which is largely influenced by Buddhism, acknowledges compassion for the self and others as an important component of life (Brach, 2003). Thai culture views mistakes, shortcomings, failure, and suffering as central aspects in being human and that, through these mistakes and suffering, one can learn and improve themselves and their lives. Conversely, Taiwan is largely influenced by Confucianism, which focuses on harmony, modesty, humility, and self-improvement via constant self-evaluation (Zhang, 2003) and “looking after one’s conduct” (Neff et al., 2008, p. 270). Similar to the literature on Japanese culture and self-criticism, Taiwanese culture emphasizes self-evaluation in order to identify faults and shortcomings so that they can be ‘corrected.’ More
specifically, this culture uses shame and self-judgment as a means to improve the self. In the middle of this cultural spectrum is the United States. Self-enhancement tends to be the main focus of North American countries, commonly in Canada and the United States. Furthermore, there can be a hesitation from parents with regard to criticizing children in order to avoid affecting their self-esteem. Yet, there can also be a sense of competition and focus on self-sustenance that would inhibit the growth of self-compassion, thus resulting in moderate levels of both self-criticism and self-compassion (Neff et al., 2008).

Though self-compassion originated from Buddhism and Eastern philosophy, it may still be relevant for other cultures, especially considering the prevalence of mental health issues across the world. For example, Ghorbani, Watson, Chen, and Norballa (2012) investigated self-compassion within the context of Muslims in Iran. They found that self-compassion in Muslims predicted greater levels of self-esteem and overall satisfaction, and lower levels of depression and anxiety. Similarly, Edwards, Adams, Waldo, Hadfield, and Biegel (2014) used Biegel’s Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction for Teens group intervention and found that the youths’ levels of self-compassion increased while levels of stress and depression decreased. Considering these findings, it is important to further extend the literature on self-compassion in other cultures. Specifically, this study will be focusing on Filipino and African descent.

**Mental Health in Filipinos**

One population that has received limited focus is the families from the Philippines. Statistics Canada’s National Household Summary (2011) reported that Filipino families were the leading country of birth among people who immigrated to Canada between 2006 and 2011. Unfortunately, our current understanding of Asian families has primarily focused on Chinese families from Mainland China (e.g., see Chuang, Moreno, & Su, 2012). However, the cultural,
political, and economical contexts of the Philippines are significantly different. This idea can also extend to differences between the Philippines and other East Asian countries with regard to self-criticism and self-compassion.

Currently, Filipino Americans, in comparison to other Asian groups, seek and utilize mental health services the least (Abe-Kim et al., 2007). Furthermore, Filipinos often seek help from loved ones rather than from professionals (Bello, Pinson, & Tuliao, 2013), despite prevalence rates of mental disorders being between 80 and 140 cases per 100,000 (Tuliao, 2014). Similar to other groups, Filipinos’ feelings of stigma negatively affect their intentions to seek professional help, primarily due to the perceived public stigma and the surrounding attitudes of utilizing professional help (Tuliao, 2014). However, Pesigan, Luyckx, and Alampay (2014) found that the parents of Filipino youths and young adults can have a direct effect on their children’s psychological well-being by demonstrating acceptance and support. This finding needs to be further explored since Filipinos have been found to prefer help from their family members.

**Mental Health in Africans**

According to Caldwell, Assari, and Breland-Noble (2016), there has been limited research conducted on African American and African Canadian youths, particularly with regard to mental health issues despite the multiple risk factors this group often encounters, including unsafe living environments, socioeconomic challenges, trauma, and racial stress. These risk factors have been connected to various mental health issues, which have led to the identification of this population as a group vulnerable to developing depression and anxiety. For example, some research has found that these youths experienced depression at higher rates than did youths from other ethnic groups (e.g., Wu, 1999). Despite these concerns, studies have indicated that
African American youths received significantly less mental health support, spent less time in treatment compared to Caucasian youths, and were less likely to complete treatment even if they did receive treatment (Algeria, Carson, Goncalves, & Keefe, 2011; Angold et al., 2002; Garland et al., 2005; Merikangas, Nakamura, & Kessler, 2009; Wu et al., 2001). Therefore, it is important to explore the ways in which support and aid can be provided to African youths who are experiencing mental health challenges.

Some research has identified the importance of parents rather than peers in buffering African youths from reaching high levels of anxiety and depression (Caldwell et al., 2016). Furthermore, extended families have also been viewed as important to supporting healthy emotional development in these youths. However, it is unclear the extent to which these types of support can be informative to the development of mental health challenges, specifically with regard to the development of self-criticism. There is a dearth in the literature examining African parents’ role in their children’s development of self-criticism, as well as self-compassion.

**Present Study**

The present study explored how Filipino Canadian and African Canadian youths understand self-criticism and self-compassion in their lives and the extent to which their parents and their cultural contexts (culture of origin and culture of residence) influenced these conceptualizations. Specifically, the research aims were to investigate how Filipino- and African-Canadian youths make sense of: (a) their engagement in and experiences of self-criticism and self-compassion (e.g., their significance, nature, effects); and (b) the role of parents and culture in shaping their engagement in and experiences of self-criticism and self-compassion.
Methods

Participants

The present study included 5 Filipino Canadian youths (all identifying as females) and 5 African Canadian youths (4 females, 1 male) between the ages of 14 and 19 years of age. Youths were recruited from the Greater Toronto Area in Ontario, including Mississauga, Toronto, and Scarborough, as well as Guelph. In order to participate in this study, youths met the following criteria: (a) be of Filipino or African descent, either first- or second-generation immigrants; (b) be in high school; and (c) live in a two-parent (mother, father) family. Although inclusion of other caregivers (e.g., same-sex parents, single parents, step-parents) would further illuminate the extent to which significant relationships with adults influence youths’ development of self-criticism and self-compassion, considering the exploratory nature of this study, the author felt that focusing on mothers and fathers only would be an important first step in this area of research, especially considering the dearth of research on fathers’ roles.

Procedures

Upon receiving approval from the University of Guelph’s Research Ethics Board, snowball sampling and word of mouth were used to recruit participants. Youths under 18 years of age who were interested in the study first sought permission from one of their parents/guardians. The interested youths then contacted the author via e-mail or phone, during which the author conducted a pre-screen interview. Considering that this study was an early exploration of Filipino-Canadian and African-Canadian youths’ views of self-criticism and self-compassion, convenience sampling was used in order to focus specifically on these cohorts of youths.
Interested youths were given dates and times so that the screening interview could be conducted. In this interview, the youths were asked for their age, grade, where they were born, and who is in their family (e.g., mother, father, sibling; not personal information). If the youths agreed to participate, they received a package, which included the consent form and background questionnaire. The completed package was collected at the time of the interview. Interviews took place in the youths’ homes with either of the parent(s)/guardian(s) present in a nearby room. These interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Upon completion of the interview, youths were given $10 cash as compensation for their participation.

**Background Questionnaire**

The questionnaire gathered demographic information regarding the youths’ age, gender, school grade, citizenship status, household and family information (including number of siblings), parents’ education level, citizenship status, and the date of immigration for their parents and themselves.

**Interviews**

Due to the explorative nature of the current study, semi-structured interviews were used because of its flexibility in answering research questions while giving participants room to add rich, detailed, and nuanced meaning to phenomena (Galletta, 2012). By providing the participants with this space to add texture to complex ideas, semi-structured interviews can allow “narratives to unfold” (Galletta, 2012, p. 2) while including discussion of the underlying contexts that may play a role in these narratives. In this study, an interview guide was used (see Appendix A) to address the different components of self-criticism and self-compassion. The interview questions were pre-set to ensure consistency across youths. First, questions focusing on the youths’ descriptions of themselves as well as their perceptions of their parents’ views were
asked, such as, “can you describe yourself in terms of your abilities, skills, or talents?”; “what are your strengths or things that you’re good at?”; and “do you think that your mom/dad sees it as a strength of yours?” Next, questions related to self-criticism and self-compassion were asked, such as “what are your weaknesses or things that you’re not good at?”; “if you could change 3 things about yourself, what would they be?”; “have you ever experienced tough times?”; and “are you hard on yourself?” Finally, questions regarding parental criticisms were asked, including “does your mom/dad criticize you about [it]?”

**Thematic Analysis**

Thematic analysis was used to examine the youths’ responses because of the flexibility it allows with regard to “theoretical freedom” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). Thematic analysis is not bounded by any theory, which has been identified as one of the benefits of this qualitative approach. This form of analysis is used to identify, form, and discuss emergent patterns and themes within the data. One key component of thematic analysis is its organization while maintaining detail and richness, which occurred in six phases: after collecting the data, I immersed myself in the interviews through multiple, active readings to develop initial thoughts of possible patterns and messages. During this phase, I began transcribing the data, which was helpful in familiarizing myself with the data. I then generated initial codes to build the foundation on which I viewed and understood any patterns or themes of self-criticism or self-compassion; my subjective perspective was included considering the interpretive nature of this form of analysis. Next, I searched for concrete themes by exploring and connecting my preliminary thoughts through examining the relationships between my codes and inter-rater’s codes, overarching themes, and sub-themes if any were present. I then began reviewing my themes by analyzing my main and sub-themes, in addition to re-examining the codes I previously
developed. Following my review, I defined and named my themes upon careful analysis of each theme, which solidified their meanings and relationships with one another. Lastly, I collected all of the messages and themes and produced the report. In order to ensure rigour, a graduate research assistant independently coded the transcripts of each participant. Further, this research assistant met with the author on numerous occasions in order to review the themes and subthemes for accuracy and representativeness. The following results present the participants’ views, experiences, and thoughts, but pseudonyms were used to protect their identities.

**Results**

Four patterns were generated from the analysis of the Filipino and African youths’ responses. These included: (a) youths’ understandings of their identities; (b) experiences and descriptions of negative feelings (e.g., feeling down, disappointment, and failure) and the contexts that triggered these feelings; (c) patterns of youths’ positive thinking and happiness (e.g., self-compassion, gratefulness, and acceptance); and (d) the detailed interactions with their mothers and fathers in various contexts and their impact on youths’ socioemotional development.

**Youths’ Self-Descriptors**

When youths were describing themselves in various situations, they discussed both positive and negative traits. The positive traits included four subthemes (strong, compassionate, a good work ethic, and artistic) and two negative traits emerged (lazy and being an overthinker).

**Re-focusing to an optimistic outlook during challenges.** Many of the youths described themselves as being generally positive (7 youths). This description primarily focused around optimistic and hopeful outlooks, as well as outward expressions of happiness and friendliness (see Table 1 for definitions). For instance, Michelle (18, Filipina) explained:
Whenever I have problems, I don’t think of the negative side…I’ll always look at the bright side. Like, why did it happen to me? … I feel like I can use the things I’ve learned from the past to make my new relationship better.

Often, being positive and optimistic were discussed within the context of negativity and shifting one’s view and focus away from that negativity. Michelle commented on being a positive person and explained how she focuses on the positives of negative situations and feelings because “everything happens for a reason and has a positive and bright side to it.” She elaborated and described feeling happier and stronger due to this shift in focus. Similarly, Victoria (14, Filipina), who also described herself as being a positive person, explained:

I like to look on the bright side of things, so I’m pretty optimistic… I just like to think of things from a different perspective. Like, when something’s going wrong, I think about it differently. I try to understand different sides of things.

**Remaining strong and maintaining poise during tough times.** Strength was described as a mental fortitude associated with maintaining one’s poise and portraying an ideal self during times of distress or conflict. For example, Michelle described herself as being strong because others have labeled her as strong. Although she stated that she may not truly feel her inner strength, she discussed how she might display strength and by learning from negative or difficult situations, she will become stronger. She shared examples of times she displayed strength, including after conflicts with her family and ex partner. She described her friend’s questioning on her ability to maintain her poise and strength during these difficult times. Michelle explained that, although her circumstances may not be ideal and may make her feel down, she continues to smile and continues to place effort on helping those involved feel happy. She described this
strength, “they always see a smile on my face. Even though I always cry at night, all they think is I'm OK, that I've already moved on from the past.”

However, Michelle consciously created a façade of outward positivity while feeling sad, which was a part of her way of dealing with issues and an ability that she developed, but was used as her description of strength:

> When you know how to handle tough times. When you feel that it's OK if you're hurting as long as the other people are OK. It's better to pretend that you're OK just for them not to see that you’re not OK—that you're suffering…but when it comes to tough times, I always try to be strong because I know there's no choice but to be strong.

**Demonstrating elements of compassion to significant others.** Some youths (6 youths) described themselves using elements of compassion, including being kind, caring, loving, or accepting. For example, Donna, a 14-year-old Filipina girl, described herself as caring:

> … if my family or if my friends were to feel sad or upset, I’ll make sure that I’m there for them. Make sure that I'm here to listen to you. If you need me, I'm here. Text me. I'm just there for them. I support them in whatever they do.

Being available as a source of support for others was a common element among the youths’ descriptions (6 youths). For instance, kindness was defined by Rachel (15, African), “…someone that you can come and talk to and not judge others.” Kindness was also associated to being friendly, as Michelle explained, “…whenever someone approaches me, they always tell me that I’m kind because I talk to them. It feels like we’ve known each other for a while.”

**Work ethic and motivation as they relate to youths’ identities.** Some youths discussed their work ethic, usually within the context of their schooling and possessing the ability to avoid procrastination (3 youths). For instance, Sabrina (14, African) described her good work ethic, she
explained, “I’m definitely not a procrastinator. Whenever I get an assignment at school, I look at it right away; I don’t put it off to the last minute…I never give up.” Similarly, Christopher (17, African) described himself as driven with regard to his work ethic and his avoidance of procrastinating:

[I’m] motivated to complete certain tasks at certain times…I'm also determined to finish what I start…Sometimes you're not motivated to start at certain times, but I do ensure that I do finish.

Further, Lily (16, African) discussed why her work ethic is strong and connected it to her overall sense of being: “ever since I was a kid, I tend to go for higher standards. My parents always encourage to set higher goals and be a better person.”

_Art and creativity as conduits of feelings and emotions._ Two youths, Victoria and Tania (14, Filipina; 14, Filipina) focused on their artistic ability and creativity and described themselves as such, particularly in relation to their feelings and emotions and how they utilized their art and creativity as a conduit to engage in their feelings in and emotions. For example, Victoria identified and described herself as artistic:

I'm an artist, so I like to create things. I like to make art. I'm taking all 4 years, so to me, being creative is just expressing myself. I have my own style…I like to draw my feelings out because I feel like it's helpful. I just put my feelings on a canvas. I splatter everywhere. Different colours. It turns out to be really pretty in the end. I feel like it's a good way to put your feelings out instead of being aggressive or really putting yourself down. Put your feelings on a canvas and it helps you.

Both youths described their art as a conduit or release of their feelings and described the contexts in which they use their artistic ability, as well as how these expressions affect them.
Tania explained, “I paint my feelings on a canvas—express my feelings on a canvas. (I) feel more positive and can show how I feel about myself through visual arts.” Victoria described feeling more relieved and calm. Although initially she may be feeling overwhelmed and crying, eventually, she loses herself in her drawing or art-making and forgets about these negative emotions.

**Negative traits.** The youths also used negative traits to describe themselves. Specifically, two themes emerged, which included laziness (3 youths) and being an overthinker (2 youths). See Table 2 for definitions of these negative traits.

**Laziness as a barrier to action.** Laziness was a more negatively-toned attribute that some youths used to describe themselves. It was described as a difficulty in finding energy to engage in actions that one wants to engage in, as well as including prolonging attempts to engage in certain desired activities. For example, Michelle shared her thoughts on being lazy when it came to her career goals and aspirations:

> I'm going to college because, before, I promised myself that when I get to Canada, I'm going to study hard, I'm going to go to University, but no. I became lazy because, before, in the Philippines, I always think about "oh I'm already done high school" in the Philippines, but now I'm in high school again. I'm back in high school. I'm already in college. Why is it happening to me? I felt lazy to study more. I just want to finish high school.

She also shared examples of times she felt lazy outside of the academic context. More specifically, she spoke about her feeling lazy with her peers and at her workplace. For instance, she shared an anecdote about times she has called in sick to work in order to avoid going in.

Although she would like to earn more money, she would allow this laziness to dictate her
attendance and, therefore reduce the amount of money she would earn. She explained that she would question her actions and decisions in these situations and would thus deem herself as lazy.

Although Michelle seemed to struggle with being lazy, she talked about how she has accepted this negative quality in herself:

...I'm always so lazy. I don't know why. I can't help it. I know I'm lazy and I can't do anything about it. It's okay with me because that's me. If [my parents] tell me I'm lazy, okay. I think I'm going to be lazy forever and I'm okay with it because maybe that's a part of me that I can't…it's always gonna be a part of me, even though I don't want it to be within me.

Sabrina, a 13-year-old African youth, also described herself as being lazy. She defined Laziness as, “… the days where I don’t have anything to do and I don’t have anything planned, so basically, I just usually stay in my room and listen to music or watch TV shows.” Similar to Michelle, Sabrina seemed to accept her self-description of laziness to some extent, “there’s nothing wrong with it, but I do it too much on a daily basis…it’s not right. I wasn’t like that before. Before I came here.” Thus, despite laziness being seemingly viewed as a negative attribute to possess, these youths who identified as being lazy seemed to accept this description as a part of their being. Furthermore, these youths described a contrast in their level of laziness from before immigrating to after.

*Overthinking and ruminating on imagined or previous emotional events.* Three youths described themselves as being overthinkers, seemingly across many, if not most, contexts in their lives. Overthinking was described as being heavily focused, consumed, or immersed in one’s own thoughts. For example, Michelle explained overthinking in the context of negative thoughts. She described having multiple running thoughts about fictional events that had not yet occurred.
More specifically, she began to develop thoughts about her boyfriend cheating on her. She described feeling overwhelmed and crying because of these thoughts and that, despite knowing they had not happened and that her boyfriend would not engage in infidelity, she would become overly worried and distraught. A 13-year-old Filipina, Diane, also described her overthinking, specifically during situations that may spark overthinking, which then interferes with her daily activities:

I overthink a lot. I think about the situation. "I don't know about this. I don't know about that. I don't know if I did this well. I don't know if I failed." Different scenarios just come up in my mind. That just distracts me from everything else. If I were to overthink while doing homework, I kind of like stop doing my homework properly. I'll just get blinded by my thoughts… you think of the worst case scenario even though there's so much more other better things that could happen than that.

Overthinking was also used as an effective way of learning from past mistakes, problem-solving, evaluating, and seeking solutions to scenarios. For example, Victoria described her thinking process after acting in a way that she felt did not match with her view of herself. She explained that she thinks of ways that she could have acted in more acceptable or advantageous ways, what she could have or could not have changed in the moment, and her eventual acceptance of being unable to “fix the past” and shifting her focus to her present and future actions, such as “fixing herself.”

**Feeling Down, Disappointment, and Failure**

The youths described various contexts and triggers that would influence or instigate negative feelings, with a particular focus on feeling down or disappointed. Many of these negative feelings were discussed within the context of experiencing failure.
Feeling down. The youths described feeling down using words such as sadness, worry, bothered, and being upset. Five themes emerged from their responses with regard to feeling down: (a) familial issues and/or conflicts; (b) friendship issues and/or conflicts; (c) insecurity; and (d) grades/ schooling.

Familial issues and conflicts. Many of the youths identified arguments and/or disagreements with family members, which caused conflict or strife, as scenarios in which they felt down. For instance, Diane described a family fight that she experienced, which involved her parents and her sister. She felt worry and sadness because of the arguments between her sister and her parents, although this fight did not harm her relationship with her sister. She did, however, express wanting to avoid the “negative vibes” which she felt was “destroying” her family. Diane explained that by speaking to her sister about her conflict with their parents, she felt better and that she can “tell her anything.” Diane also explained that she has conversations with her family after their arguments, which further helped alleviate her negative feelings.

Although other youths also identified open discussions with their siblings as being helpful, not all youths shared this experience:

Yeah, I've talked to him about [arguments with the mother], but he doesn't say anything. So, I don't talk to him anymore. One time, [when I told] my brother he made my mom have problems, [he responded with] “our mom is like this, she's always like that.” I'm gonna be like, "can you please stop? It's me [and] mama's problem. Not you. Can you please stop adding to our problems? Because I actually don't care about your problems. Only mom. Because whatever we do about you, you don't listen to us. (Michelle, 18, Filipina)
Other youths (3 youths) also described negative reactions to their attempts of having conversations about the arguments. For example, Christopher explained that his parents, specifically his mother, reacted negatively because she interpreted his questioning as “challenging” her. Consequently, he reduced these types of conversations to avoid further strife. He simply “stands there, listens, and takes it as it is.” Similarly, Lily’s mother would “shut down” her questions. Lily explained that she no longer speaks to her parents when she is feeling down due to these experiences.

Familial arguments were also found to affect the youths’ sense of self. More specifically, some internalized the conflicts and felt doubt regarding their goodness as people, worthiness, lovability, and whether their parents were proud of them. These youths described feeling sadness because of these thoughts (5 youths).

**Friendship issues and conflicts.** Arguments with friends were also identified as situations that would influence some youths’ feeling down. Conflicts with peers were often seen as irreparable with concerns revolving around friendships ending. For example, Victoria described having lost multiple friends, which made her feel down. Further, she internalized these broken relationships and began to believe that she was the problem and that there is something wrong with her:

Some people just don’t like me or they feel like using me…I get upset. One day, they’re friends with me, and then the next day, they just leave me like that…But because things have happened like that, pretty constant things repeating itself…sometimes I have trust issues, so now I just don't really open up to people that much about myself.

The youths also viewed these arguments as being pushed away by others who have grown close, resulting in losing significant others over time; youths described losing others from middle
school to high school as being inevitable. Diane explained that others “letting go” of their friendship over few or seemingly small situations caused her to feel negatively about herself and wondered whether she was “that” kind of person. She questioned whether she was a kind or bad person, causing her to feel sad and withdrawing from others. Sabrina shared this sentiment, describing insecurity associated with these arguments and wondering if she was the “problem.” She explained some of her thinking, “…maybe I’m the problem. Maybe I’m the reason why people decide not to talk to me anymore.”

Other youths identified significant relationships that became the source of their unhappiness. They discussed situations where they were taken advantage of, private conversations with others being used against them, and trying to maintain a faux appearance of happiness so that others do not feel unhappy. For example, Michelle explained that others can very easily act like they care about you, but will give you “fake advice.” They would also share personal information or stories and gossip with other people. She identified these others as friends who appear to want to help, but yet, are the ones who “bring you down.”

In contrast to some youths’ feelings of sadness after experiencing conflict with close others, one youth, Rachel, described feeling angry with her peers after engaging in an argument. She explained that she felt compelled to apologize after some time had past. However, after ruminating and speaking with her mother about the situation, she was still angry about the situation and that she was glad to know that she was not “crazy” for feeling that way.

**Insecurity and worthlessness.** Two youths discussed situations where they felt insecure and worthless. Insecurity was defined as feeling a lack of confidence in oneself. Although this insecurity was connected to certain contexts, such as one’s physical appearance or when browsing social media websites, Victoria connected insecurity to worthlessness, explaining,
“sometimes I’m not confident in myself in anything. Sometimes I get dependent on others to try to boost my self-esteem up…but there are times when I can’t seem to make myself happy.” This lack of confidence and feeling of worthlessness was directly connected to feeling down.

**Academic achievement.** Most youths identified their grades and general academic achievement as having effects on feeling down. Unsurprisingly, the importance placed on academic achievement was directly related to parents’ reactions and the potential disappointment they might feel or display. Some youths, however, identified their schooling as important to them rather than connecting its importance to their parents’ expectations. For example, Sabrina shared worry about her grades not being enough so that she can go on to medical school. She described losing confidence when it came to her academics, describing “not being good enough”, particularly with her mathematics average. Christopher, who also identified his academics as a context in which he can feel down, viewed its importance more holistically and explained that poor grades can “eat [him] up”:

> Usually it really bugs at me for a long period of time. Sometimes it's just a duration of a whole day or an entire week or maybe weeks or months. When you don't want to think about it, it'll re-surface. Sometimes you'll be doing something, you see something and it'll trigger inside you and it'll come back up and it'll sometimes ruin your entire day. Let's say for instance I got a 50 on a test or something. Maybe later in the week, somebody else took that exact same test but got a 60 or 70. Even though those aren't the greatest kinds of marks I would achieve for, I'd be like, “even they got better than me.”

Christopher connected the importance of academics to his future, and explained his focus on the “long run” as it related to certain courses. Although Christopher did not directly link his
coursework to any specific career, he instead described the importance of success as the ability to support oneself and his significant others (e.g., family).

**Feeling disappointment.** Three themes emerged when the youths discussed the contexts, reasons, and triggers for feeling disappointment in their lives. These themes were: (a) academics; (b) selfishness; and (c) self-centeredness.

*Academics.* Most youths (7 youths) identified their academics as creating feelings of disappointment rather than feeling down. Disappointment was often linked to feelings that they could have “done better” with respect to their grades, citing challenges with procrastination, motivation, time management, and work ethic. Some youths extrapolated these challenges to other aspects of their lives and used their descriptions as a means of social comparison with their peers. As Christopher explained:

> [Procrastination] is particularly the one because it transfers into so many other areas, like school…on the days where I provide myself excuses and not do homework for a certain amount of time, then I stay up for extended periods of time, then I wake up in the morning really groggy and then just repeat the cycle all over again…it disappoints me because I know that I can achieve better than I actually am right now and I see others doing it, some more with ease than others. There are people who work really hard and get the marks that they need, and if they achieve better than me, then I am a little envious and disappointed in myself for not putting in that type of work ethic because I know I have the potential to do something like that.

Other youths described elements of frustration, particularly regarding their effort levels not being accurately represented in their grades. For example, Rachel described her disappointment and effort, “…I try to work hard to get good grades and when I study and don’t
Some youths who discussed feeling disappointment also described a desire to avoid disappointing their parents, which in turn increased their own feelings of disappointment. For example, Rachel explained that her parents’ sacrifice to immigrate to Canada so that she and her siblings can “make something out of ourselves” caused her parents to feel disappointment whenever she or her siblings did poorly in school, something she often aims to avoid.

One youth shared her disappointment about her schooling in an unexpected way. Diane shared her concern over studying “too” much, which reduced her free time to spend with her peers. She explained, “then I feel so bad because I feel selfish. I feel like I’m only caring for my own studies and I don’t have time to speak with other people.” She further described feeling stressed and overwhelmed due to her studying, which causes her to “block everyone out”. These series of events, she explained, made her feel disappointed, which typically occurred during exam or final project periods.

**Failure.** During moments of failure or mistakes, four themes emerged with regard to the emotions, thoughts, and feelings the youths experienced. These themes were: (a) sadness/being upset; (b) disappointment; (c) angry/annoyed; and (d) lessons learned.

**Sadness and being upset.** Some youths experienced sadness as a result of their mistakes and failures, which included feeling consumed by or being focused on their thoughts and emotions. For example, Michelle explained her sadness has lasted for many hours, involving overthinking and crying. Deborah, who also described feeling sad about her mistakes, explained that she focused entirely on her failure and “doing better than I did.”
Disappointment. Experiencing failure and mistakes were connected to disappointment, which primarily revolved around failing to meet one’s own goals and expectations. These goals and expectations were often discussed within the context of school and academics and some youths linked their academics to career aspirations. Effort was also a focus of some youths’ responses:

...when you're at such a high mark and then you get such a low mark and then you just--it puts you all the way down, your average. It kind of makes me feel disappointed because then I'm basically throwing out all of the effort I did just to get to the high mark and then I just go all the way down because of one mistake. (Victoria)

By feeling this disappointment, some youths explained becoming strongly focused on improving their results to help minimize feeling disappointed, including studying more for subsequent exams and projects, attending summer school to improve their grades, and asking peers and teachers for additional help. However, with this focus, feelings of pressure arose in some conversations, resulting in added stress on their academic and career aspirations.

Disappointment from failure also resulted in feeling shame, which, for Christopher, was connected to his effort and capabilities in school. He explained it in relation to his pride:

I know that I'm capable of doing it and if I don't reach that capability, then I feel ashamed or saddened. Sometimes your pride takes a bit of a hit because you have all these kinds of grades. I know that my pride takes a bit of a hit but I don't want to share that so that others will know because I don't want my reputation to be tainted with others.

Other participants did not describe an avoidance to sharing their failures. In fact, some found disclosure and discussion with peers and family members to be helpful, which aided in motivating and maintaining their focus on improving and learning from their mistakes.
Anger. Some responses included feelings of anger or annoyance toward oneself. Some youths described feeling regret because of their mistakes, which further intensified their self-anger. Specifically, they focused on thoughts such as what they could have done differently, what they should have done, and how others reacted or felt because of their mistakes. Some youths felt anger because the known alternative actions would have avoided making mistakes or failing at important tasks. With respect to others, some youths were concerned about how they “came off,” hoping that they did not hurt others’ feelings or that they appeared in certain ways toward them. Specifically, Rachel was worried that others may view her as a person who intentionally hurts others. She expressed deep regret about these sorts of mistakes and described wishing for alternative outcomes or other chances to rectify the mistake she made. This concern led her to feel very upset and angry with herself.

Lessons learned. Although many youths felt negative affect because of their failures and mistakes, particularly with their grades and school, some described more positive perspectives upon reflection. For example, Michelle did not interpret her failure as a poor attempt or lack of doing one’s best, but rather as opportunities to improve, grow, and learn. As she illustrated:

Once I stop, I'm gonna think about it in a positive way. I can still try again. Once I failed, it doesn't mean I can't try, right? … I solve the problem I have or the failure and therefore, how can I make it better? How can I be successful on that one?

Similarly, Rachel explained that she tended not to focus entirely on her mistakes because of these additional opportunities to improve and expand her knowledge. She also explained that if her disappointment became too intense, she shifted her focus entirely to learning from her mistakes and making it a priority.

Positive Thinking and Happiness
Positive thinking. The youths discussed various aspects of their ability to think positively, specifically during or after experiencing negative affect resulting from feeling down, disappointment, failure, or mistakes. More specifically, five themes emerged: (a) acknowledgement of temporary distress; (b) avoidance/distraction; (c) shifting to objective/positive views; (d) positive memories/events; and (e) self-talk.

Acknowledgement of temporary distress. During moments of negative affect, such as feeling upset or sadness, the youths described an ability to recognize the temporariness of their emotional states and situations. Some youths’ views were almost reactionary and contrary, such as knowing that they will feel happy after their sadness, or gain clarity after moments of confusion or distress (3 youths). Often, these emotions in hindsight would be triggered solely through thought. Specifically, some youths (2) explained that they would will themselves into thinking positively and believing that they would feel happiness after the negative situation. For example, Michelle explained that when she is feeling sad and is crying, she thinks to herself that she will eventually experience “good things” and that “this stuff won’t matter anymore.” Her mantra, as she described it, was, “the best things are yet to come and everything happens for a reason. Once you suffer, that means that something good is coming to you.” A key aspect of this acknowledgement is the confidence of eventuality. These youths were certain that a positive response will counteract the current negative situation or feelings as it was simply a matter of time. For example, Deborah explained that when she was feeling down, she would think to herself, “this is just how I feel right now. But, watch. Later, I’m going to feel so much better.”

In addition to willing themselves to believe in the eventuality of positivity and temporariness of their current situations, some youths identified external factors as being helpful in their awareness and recognition, such as significant others who present positive and optimistic
outlooks, or those who are able to bring the temporariness to the forefront of their thoughts through discussion and conversation. For instance, Diane explained that she ensured that she surrounded herself with positive people and during bouts of feeling down, she would reach out to her peers to “lighten up her day.” Diane seeks comfort from others, often receiving statements like, “things will be okay.” However, some youths explained that they are only able to acknowledge the temporal aspects of their feelings and situations by avoiding or distracting themselves.

**Avoiding and distracting oneself.** Many of the youths found it difficult to think positively during or after they had experienced failure or sadness. Instead of shifting their thoughts to the temporal nature of their feelings or situations, some simply avoided thinking about their experiences that led to their feeling down, disappointment, or failure. Thus, distraction was a common tool in shifting thoughts from the triggers and contexts through which the youths felt down and disappointment, such as by consuming media (e.g., watching YouTube videos, listening to music) or through art (e.g., painting, drawing). These youths did not describe thinking back to the situations that initially triggered their negative feelings but rather, they avoided these thoughts completely.

**Perspective shifting.** Some youths described actively shifting their perspectives of their circumstances through critical reflection and deep thinking. By purposefully viewing their feelings, thoughts, and emotions in differing ways, the youths described being able to elicit positive thinking and feelings either during the moment or afterwards. For example, Michelle described what this perspective shifting meant for her during moments of sadness over the breakup with her significant other:
I always think of the saying, "every cloud has a silver lining." I always think about that. Whenever I feel sad, instead of thinking about the positive side, I [used to] think about the negative side...Instead of thinking that I'm not gonna be okay, I'm not gonna get over him, I [now] think about me being happy without him. Me finding a way better man than him and that's gonna be my revenge to him. “Hey, sorry. I found a better guy than you.” And that works.

Similarly, some youths (3 youths) described an ability to view events and situations in a more balanced manner, rather than strictly viewing them as positive or negative. They discussed acknowledgement of some positive components, such as a friendship being previously strong, but also the negative aspects, such as seeing their friend as not being truly “nice” after an argument. Rachel discussed this in more detail:

I think about what good came out of it. If you had an argument with your friend, it might mean that maybe your friendship is done, she's not a nice friend, or you might feel very sad that you're going to lose her. But you might think that if she really was a good friend, would we be fighting right now?

**Positive memories.** Recall of positive memories was a strategy that two youths used to help activate their positive thinking. They described recalling times when they were feeling down, but overcame the conflict or stressors that occurred, which they deemed as positive memories overall. These youths also commented on the feelings that they had in the moment, but after they subsided, focused on how “it wasn’t that bad”. They also commented on the strength and resilience they developed as a result of experiencing negative events while also recalling the temporariness of these events. Further, this strength and resilience were used as reminders that
they can overcome current feelings of distress or sadness, and so these recollections helped in sparking more positive or balanced thinking.

Additionally, these youths would simply recall positive events, such as birthday parties and vacations, and focusing on the positive people who were present during those events. Similarly, during moments of sadness or feeling down, some youths refocused and looked forward to upcoming positive events that they expected will help elevate their moods or bring them to more positive situations and thinking. Thus, these strategies allowed these youths to remember the past or ignore their current circumstances. These strategies also helped them reconsider the duration of their current feelings and distress, allowing them to refocus to more positive thinking.

**Self-talk.** Two youths used their internal dialogues to invoke feelings of positivity, toward themselves and themselves. For example, Victoria might compliment her physical appearance to elicit feelings of confidence. She also described reflecting on positive quotes that she would hang up in her room to help elicit this self-talk. Deborah would actively tell herself that other opportunities will arise, and so there is no need to feel down or negatively about her current circumstances or that her mistakes have resulted in “the end of the world.”

Self-talk was also used to refocus and raise thoughts of gratitude, religion, faith, and appreciativeness. For instance, Diane discussed feeling down about her grades and feeling upset that she wasn’t doing well in school. However, through self-talk, she would think about God and her parents, refocusing toward the various opportunities that their family’s immigration has granted her, including having an education.

**Happiness.** For the most part, the youths (7 youths) described themselves as happy, if not happier than others. They also discussed the various situations and contexts that elicited feelings
or acknowledgement of happiness in their lives, as well as their perspectives on others’ happiness. These conversations helped illuminate two themes of “happiness triggers”: (a) relationships with significant others; and (b) alone time.

**Relationships with significant others.** Nearly all the youths (9 youths) identified and discussed the importance of their relationships with significant others in their feeling happiness, including relationships with partners, parents, siblings, and peers. Some participants explained that their loved ones sparked their own feelings of happiness because of their positive dispositions, which led them to seek and engage in activities that made them feel happy and positive, such as going out, playing video games, listening to music, and watching television or movies. Unsurprisingly, quality time with significant individuals in their lives was critical in making the youths feel happy. Some activities that youths engaged in with their family members, partners, and/or peers maintained their feelings of happiness included sharing meals, playing board games, watching films, and going shopping. Additionally, simply reflecting on these relationships provided youths with feelings of gratitude, which subsequently increased their happiness and/or acknowledgment for themselves that they were happy. These relationships provided them with evidence that they were loved, further reinforcing their feeling happiness.

**Alone time.** Many youths (8) shared the happiness they experienced when they were able to be by themselves to engage in their personal activities and interests such as being out in nature, watching movies or YouTube videos, reading, and painting or drawing. This time also helped some youths in reflecting on their circumstances, allowing them to view matters in different ways. They explained this retreat as giving themselves a “break” from the stresses of life. Moreover, some youths (3 youths) simply enjoyed these individual activities and preferred
to spend much of their free time this way rather than explicitly spending their free time with others.

**Others’ happiness.** Most youths (8 youths) considered themselves as being equally or happier than others. For example, Victoria explained that she felt as happy as others because teenagers likely encounter the same problems as she does, such as arguments with peers, insecurities, and challenges with school. Similarly, another youth explained that she believed that she was equally as happy as her peers because she did not have many overwhelming issues and experiences. Rather than comparing oneself to others, Rachel described feeling equally as happy as others because she “knew [her] worth” and that by being able to acknowledge the parts of her life that make her happy, she did not feel compelled to compare herself to others. She believed that youths who compared themselves with others could lead them to feelings of unhappiness.

Most youths (7 youths) did acknowledge that each individual’s circumstances vary from person to person, including their reactions and feeling toward these circumstances, but they believed that it was unlikely that others were significantly less happy than them. Their reasoning was because their peers appeared to look happy. Many youths looked toward social media outlets, such as Facebook and Instagram, as means to gauge whether others were generally happy.

However, two youths, Victoria and Tania, did identify social media as a reason or trigger for their unhappiness, explaining how much fun and excitement others appeared to be experiencing, while they were not. Conversely, Diane and Rachel cited social media as evidence of others feeling less happy than them, particularly on Facebook. They explained that some individuals post “statuses” about their unhappiness, dissatisfaction, or their problems; something that they would not ever do. Considering that these individuals were willing or open to sharing
their unhappiness with others, they felt that this was an indication of the extent or severity of
their unhappiness.

For those who thought they were happier than others (3 youths), they identified certain
abilities or attributes as important to feeling more happy than those around them, such as being
able to feel or demonstrate gratitude, letting go of grudges, and working through negative
emotions and “not acting happy when I’m not.” By combining these attributes with “common”
elements of happiness, such as having good people around them, doing well in school, and
engaging in fun activities, these youths felt it was possible for others to feel similarly happy as
them.

**Parent-Adolescent Conversations and Relationships**

The youths discussed a number of elements related to their conversations with their
parents, including the contexts and reasons why they conversed, the content of their discussions,
how they felt during and after their conversations, and their overall impressions of their
relationships with their parents. This section will be divided into conversations between the
youths and their mothers and their fathers.

**Conversations with the mother.** There were a number of topics that the youths identified
having conversations about with their mothers. These topics were: (a) relationships (romantic,
platonic, and familial); (b) school and/or grades; (c) television/media/news; and (d) general
updates. The youths’ overall impressions of their relationships and conversations with their
mothers will also be discussed.

**Relationships.** Most of the youths explained that they spoke with their mothers about
their various relationships with others, including partners, siblings, or peers. Some of these
conversations were sparked because the youths actively sought their mothers’ advice, while
others were confronted by their mothers after being “caught” crying or showing some other sort of emotional distress. Otherwise, the youths discussed their relationships with their mothers during general, day-to-day conversations. These conversations were rarely raised because of emotional distress or while feeling down.

When youths were feeling down, their conversations with their mothers typically involved arguments or conflicts with their partners or peers. Most of these conversations resulted in the youths feeling heard and understood. Some youths identified their mothers as being the only individuals in their lives who could understand them. For example, Tania would actively sought out her mother’s support and advice during moments of conflict with peers because she knew her mother had encountered similar challenges during her youths:

If my friends didn’t invite me to their house and I felt excluded, I [would] feel down and disappointed… they invited only one person because they feel like they’re closer to them more than me…it’s been repeating a lot and nothing really happens. [Mom] told me to find new friends and to be careful. I trusted her…she understands me because she would get excluded too with her friends when she was young. I never knew that some people would do that to her and [then] it happened to me.

Some youths actively avoided speaking with their mothers because they did not want to worry or upset them, irrespective of how affected they were by the circumstances that are causing them to feel down. For example, Diane explained that she would avoid sharing her conflicts with peers with her mother once she was no longer upset about the situation. She would then go to her mother to help her reflect on her decisions and feelings. She described feeling validated by knowing that she is not “crazy” for feeling upset or angry with her friends due to these conversations. Similarly, some youths would weigh the severity of their feelings and
situations before going to their mother. Danielle, for example, explained that if she was continuously encountering a problem that upset her or made her feel down, she would eventually go to her mother for advice and comfort.

Two youths would only speak with their mothers if the problem was not too severe. For example, Lily explained that for situations that really upset her, she would turn to her peers or keep it to herself rather than speak with her mother.

Other youths (n = 4) refused to speak with their mothers and would simply lie if they were seen crying, saying they were watching a dramatic movie, for example. Although some of these youths stated that they would not want to open up to their mothers about many topics, particularly when feeling down, some did express a desire to speak with their mothers during these times of feeling down or upset about their relationships. For the former group, some were quite adamant about not opening up to their mothers. For example, Paula stated that “[she’s] the last [person] I want to talk to.” For the latter group, their desire to speak with their mothers were complicated with various barriers preventing them from opening up to their mothers. For example, Victoria explained that she simply does not see her mom often enough due to her work schedule, so she did not know when a good time to speak with her about her relationship conflicts would be. Another youth, Tania, could not speak with her mother about her boyfriend despite wanting to because her mother did not know that she was dating someone. In fact, she was not allowed to be dating in high school according to her parents, which is why Tania could not open up to her mother about the conflict she was having with her partner.

Although slightly less prevalent, a few of the youths explained that they speak with their mothers when they were having challenges with siblings. However, these conversations were surprisingly sparked due to the conflicts the sibling(s) were having with the parents rather than
directly with the participants. For example, Diane explained that because her older sister was the “rebellious one,” she and their parents would often argue. These arguments, she described, were destructive to her family and upset Diane quite a bit. In addition to speaking with her sister about the situation, Diane would also talk to her mother about it.

**School and grades.** Beyond feeling down or having conflicts with partners and peers, youths would speak to their mothers about their schooling, but was not limited to their academic performance. Some youths would share updates on events occurring at their schools, some would talk about their schoolmates or teachers, and some would speak about school in general (e.g., academic aspirations, career goals, etc.). Some of these youths would reach out to their mothers seeking advice or support, whether they were struggling in a certain class or were experiencing challenges with peers or teachers. For example, Danielle explained what a conversation with her mother looks like:

> Whenever she sees me crying, she'll ask, "why are you crying? What's wrong? Did someone bully you in school or something?" She'll try to put herself in my shoes since they've probably experienced this too. "Don't mind them. Don't talk to them. Keep your distance from them." She'll say something that I want to hear that'll make me feel better but also help me learn as well…I feel better that I went to someone close…even though I still feel sad, I feel better in a way…maybe she feels kind of affected, [thinking] “my daughter is going through this.” No parent wants to see their child in a situation that brings them down.

**Television, media, and the news.** In day-to-day interactions, the youths identified television, the media, and the news as a common topic of conversation. Within these conversations, topics included TV shows that the youths and parent(s) watch together as well as
the news. Specifically, some of the Filipino youths identified the events occurring in the Philippines as a consistent topic of conversation; one youths, Diane, explained that her parents would sometimes ignore her because they were so engrossed in watching the news, “Mostly, I want to talk to them during dinner time, but they’re always watching the news, so then I can’t talk to them…but since the news is so interesting now apparently because of a new president, so, right now they’re not really listening to me.”

*General updates.* The youths, particularly those who explained that they speak with their mothers nearly every day, provided their mothers with general updates in their lives, whether that involved discussing school, their peers, relationships, or extracurricular activities. Some of these youths described these daily interactions as being able to speak with their mothers about “everything,” which they were quite happy with because they felt that their mothers played a dual role of mother and friend. These youths felt particularly comfortable discussing romantic relationships, as they felt that they could not share these details or desires with their fathers because they either “would not understand” or would not approve. These youths described their mothers as more understanding, while their fathers were more concerned with their academics and less about their “actual lives.” The majority of these youths described these relationships as close, but did not describe their relationships with their fathers in the same way.

*Conversations with the father.* Few of the youths described regularly speaking with their fathers. In fact, only five of the ten youths spoke to their fathers with some regularity; only stated that she speaks to her father when she feels down. For the other youths who did state that they spoke to their fathers, the topics revolved around school, television, general updates, and asking for permission.
Feeling down. Diane explained that she only spoke to her father when feeling down about her grades, but otherwise, she would speak to her mother about any other reason for feeling down, including romantic relationships, conflicts with peers, as well as academics. She explained that this was because her mother was more understanding, caring, and showed genuine curiosity about her life. Her father, on the other hand, was only interested in her performance at school and, otherwise, was not particularly interested in her life. However, she did describe one instance where she felt touched by his understanding after breaking up with a boyfriend:

That time, in grade 9, our relationship wasn't really good. We weren't really close. I wouldn't really go to him for my problems; I would go to my mom. I wouldn't really go to him with my problems because it might make him upset and all he's gonna do is yell at me and I don't want to hear that. That's why I go to my mom for most of my problems and stuff like that...basically, this year in grade 10, I feel like I'm more open towards my dad because this one thing happened. I cried over boys at the beginning of the year. My dad came downstairs and he was like, "what's wrong? Why are you crying?" I didn't want to tell him because it's boys. I know he doesn't want me to focus on that right now. He kept bugging me, "just spill it. Spill it already!" So I said, "so and so broke up with me" and he actually put his arm around me and comforted me and told [me], "you're gonna meet so many other people when you get older." That's what made me feel more open toward him because I thought, "wow, he's never done that before." It felt nice because I [thought], "maybe I could go to him for certain situations now." I feel more open towards him now. I feel like I could tell him things that I didn't feel like telling him before. So then I felt kinda happy. It really touched my heart; I never thought [he] would do this before.
School and grades. For those who stated that they do speak to their fathers with regularity, all of them identified their schooling as one of the main reasons for their conversations. Some of these youths did speak with their fathers seeking support or advice with regard to grades that they are unsatisfied with, but for the most part, these participants simply provided general updates to their academics, such as courses being taken, grades, and academic or professional paths they intend on taking. These youths did not share much beyond these updates, such as those shared with the mothers (e.g., extracurricular activities, peers, or romantic relationships).

Television. Some youths who spoke with their fathers identified television shows as a topic that they discussed. Although some discussed the news and movies, for day-to-day conversations, the majority of the youths simply spoke to each other about the TV shows that they both watch, although it was not explicit whether they watched these programs together or separately.

General updates. Some of the youths did talk to their fathers about the events going on in their lives, including stories about their peers, workplace, or school. Although these youths described these conversations as brief, such as simply answering “how was your day,” these youths did state that they were happy that they could talk to their fathers about these everyday scenarios or situations and were content with speaking to their moms about the other topics previously mentioned, particularly during times of feeling down or disappointment.

Permission. For a few of the youths, they explained that they only spoke with their fathers in order to ask for permission to go out, whether that be with friends or to school events. These youths were explicit that this permission seeking was the only reason why they would interact with their fathers. They explained that they either did not want to or could not connect
with their fathers, and so they only sort to communicating with their fathers for permission. They otherwise described their relationships with their fathers as contentious, such as having an angry father, a father who would often yell at them, or a father who simply did not want to or could not care about their lives outside of academia. Although some of these youths explained that they would very much like to be closer with their fathers, they explained that they either have tried and it did not go well, or it appeared to them that their fathers had no desire to do so. 

**Discussion**

The present study extends our current understanding on self-compassion and self-criticism in Canadian immigrant adolescents. Specifically, the primary goal of this study was to explore how these youths conceptualized, understood, and experienced self-criticism and self-compassion in their everyday lives, including the role of culture, and how their relationships with their parents affected these experiences and perceptions. The youths described views of self-criticism and self-compassion and provided greater insight by challenging our current literature. Specifically, their definitions of these constructs were more multidimensional.

**Self-Descriptions**

The youths in the present study provided insights on a variety of characteristics, both positive and negative, that revealed some connections to aspects of self-compassion, self-criticism, and identity. The findings have extended our current literature, providing a more comprehensive and complex view of youth development.

**Re-focusing to an optimistic outlook during challenges.** The youths used several terms to describe themselves in positive ways, which were important to their identities and self-descriptions. Many youths described themselves as being generally positive, which included elements of self-compassion. Neff (2008) defined self-compassion as being comprised of three
parts: (a) self-kindness; (b) common humanity; and (c) mindfulness. In the present study, the youths’ definition of being positive included a shift to optimism, hopefulness, and positivity within the context of feeling negative, which can be connected to self-kindness and mindfulness. According to Neff (2008), self-kindness involves a shift from self-judgment and scrutiny to being understanding and kind to the self, and this shift can be seen in the youths’ re-focusing to the “bright side” during moments of failure, sadness, or mistakes. By being understanding and kind toward one’s self during times of sadness or conflict, it then becomes possible to view their lives positively, to learn from one’s circumstances, and to moving past one’s negative situation. Additionally, this acknowledgement and acceptance of one’s feelings during moments of negativity are elements of mindfulness, which is the objective awareness of one’s emotions and movement to the “bigger picture.” In Neff’s research (2003a, 2008), the three composites of self-compassion were described as more intertwined rather than being mutually exclusive constructs. However, the youths’ definitions of positivity in the present study mainly focused on two of the three concepts (i.e., self-kindness and mindfulness). Current research on self-compassion often explored these three constituents together (e.g., Neff, 2003b, 2008; Neff et al., 2007), but the results of the present study suggest that the different components may hold different weight or importance for different individuals. In fact, common humanity was rarely acknowledged until the youths were directly asked about their views of others’ suffering; only then was a common humanity raised to the forefront. Thus, common humanity may not be relevant for this age range, which would be fitting given the prevalence of egocentrism that is characteristic of this group (Neff, 2003a). Common humanity might be an area that would then be important in developing in youths to reduce overidentification. It is therefore possible that age, culture, gender, and/or
education level may influence the degree to which these components are relevant in individuals’ lives during moments of distress, pain, or suffering.

Neff and colleagues (2007) explored the relationship among self-compassion, happiness, and optimism and found that those who are self-compassionate have higher ratings of optimism and happiness, but it is unknown what direction this relationship develops. In the present study, the youths described optimism and happiness as a part of their experiences, but it is unclear whether these youths would be deemed as self-compassionate or having above average levels of self-compassion without directly measuring it. Moreover, if they are self-compassionate, it is unclear whether they became self-compassionate due to their optimistic outlooks or if they developed optimistic outlooks due to being self-compassionate. Lastly, if each constituent of self-compassion does play different roles for different types of individuals, it would be important to explore the degree to which they affect one’s level of self-compassion, whether certain components are more important to fostering self-compassion, whether certain components are easier to increase than others, and whether certain components influence related positive psychological constructs, including optimism and happiness.

In addition to this shift in mindset to positivity and optimism, these youths identified their artistic abilities as being important to their self-descriptions and, more importantly, as their way to cope with pain or feeling down; this art included elements of mindfulness. By using their art as a conduit to entirely and completely feel their emotions in the moment (particularly while feeling down or disappointed), it helped bring clarity and an objective awareness of their pain and emotions. These findings are supportive of past findings of art therapy (e.g., Cheng, 2016; Perry & Malchiodi, 2015; Rappaport, 2014). For example, Coholic and Eys (2016) used a 12-week arts-based mindfulness program with vulnerable children (either those involved with child
welfare or mental health services) and measured how it would affect their self-concept and resiliency. Furthermore, this program aimed to develop or improve self-awareness, self-compassion, and empathy. The researchers found partial support for the program’s effectiveness, such as parental and self-reports of improved emotional regulation and increased confidence. However, the researchers did not report finding support for increased self-compassion or empathy, which are more relevant to this study. However, the findings supported the links between arts-based activities to increasing levels of mindfulness. Regarding the youths in the present study, two major differences in these studies are the age range (Coholic and Eys’ worked with children aged 8 to 12, while this study worked with adolescents) and the clinical status of Coholic and Eys’ participants. Unfortunately, studies on arts-based therapy have focused on clinical samples and vulnerable populations, such as refugee women and traumatized children (Kalmanowitz, 2016; Perry & Malchiodi, 2015). The findings of the current study suggest that arts-based techniques may be similarly helpful for non-clinical adolescents with their personal challenges. It is unknown, however, how these effects may be supported if the youths who engage in arts-based mindfulness programs are not self-described artists or interested in art at all. However, this idea is important because the mental health of clinical populations is likely to be more negatively afflicted with symptoms that are longer-lasting or more pervasive across various life domains. However, non-clinical individuals may only benefit from arts-based techniques during the moments of pain and suffering or immediately after those events rather than a holistic improvement to a clinically diagnosed problem.

There were two definitions of self-compassion that were unique to this sample: (a) strength and poise during difficult times; and (b) drive and motivation in academics. Research on self-compassion and self-criticism interventions focus on feelings after the moment and how
individuals view themselves as a result of those challenges, including how they were handled, how they reacted to them, and how they felt about themselves afterwards. Some examples of these foci can be seen in emotion-focused therapy, where the client learns to better understand, accept, and regulate their emotions (Shahar et al., 2012). Although these interventions primarily focus on handling overwhelming situations once they have occurred (i.e., reactive versus proactive strategies), presumably, the skills and techniques that the clients learn from these interventions would be helpful in moments of distress or difficult times. For example, they may be able to conjure up the caring thoughts, feelings, and imagery that are vital to compassionate mind training (Barnard & Curry, 2011). However, it is unclear how long-lasting these creations of self-soothing and self-reassuring thoughts are in individuals who often encounter emotional distress (e.g., individuals with clinical depression), nor is it apparent how readily available these thoughts are during moments of distress. Moreover, it is unclear how effective these thoughts may be in the moment of emotional distress without the guidance of a therapist. These interventions also do not address how to incorporate the clients’ (potentially) unhelpful coping strategies that they utilize in the moments of their distress, such as the current study’s youths and their strength during moments of suffering.

The youths in the current study who described being strong during moments of sadness or suffering instead described a façade of positivity in those moments, but did not discuss how they coped with their sadness afterwards beyond this façade. Michelle, for instance, described actively maintaining an outwardly positive and happy disposition despite feeling sadness internally and would only tend to her sadness, such as through crying, in private so as to protect significant others from worry (particularly her mother). Although it is unlikely that this method of coping is beneficial to others, particularly those in a clinical population, Michelle described
this strength as a crucial component of her coping after the breakup with her ex-partner. In contrast to the interventions previously described, this façade actively moves one away from awareness and acceptance of one’s suffering and purposefully shifts the mind to a positive outlook, irrespective of how that person is feeling. This strength does not involve a balanced, objective view of one’s feelings and pain but, rather, overlooks them for others’ sake. Thus, it is unclear how this active moment from a balanced perspective and acceptance of one’s suffering could influence the effectiveness of EFT or CMT. One important factor that would be helpful to determine would be the levels of these youths’ self-compassion. If, for instance, those who displayed this strength had lower levels of self-compassion in comparison to the patients that were a part of Shahar and colleagues’ (2012) study or Gilbert and Irons’ (2006) study, it would provide some context and reasoning if the interventions were not as effective.

Lastly, possessing a good work ethic is neither connected to nor contrary to self-compassion. The youths’ descriptions of a good work ethic focused on the academic context, one’s motivation levels, and one’s goals. The youths’ discussions around their work ethics also included words such as “driven” and “avoiding procrastination.” However, one youth in particular, Lily (16, African), connected her work ethic to her identity and found that by reaching her high goals, she becomes a “better person.” It appears that, by maintaining and remaining consistent with one’s good work ethic and high goals, these youths continue to solidify their personal identities, similar to Erikson’s (1968) Theory of Identity and Developmental Stage Theory. Lily also discussed her parents’ encouragement of these goals, which is an external factor that helped shape her identity of being a person with a good work ethic. There has been some research conducted on African-American parents’ roles on their children’s work ethic. For example, Lee, Padilla, and McHale (2016) found a positive relationship between fathers’ work
ethic and their children’s work ethic and school adjustment. This finding demonstrates the importance of African-American fathers in their children’s work ethic in school. It is, therefore, possible that fathers may further influence their children’s development of personal identity as it relates to their work ethic and ability.

**Negative states.** Laziness and overthinking emotional content were the negative states that some youths used to describe themselves and their experiences. Laziness was described as an inability to complete or engage in actions or activities that were desirable, such as receiving higher grades in school, attending work shifts, or partaking in certain excursions. Not being able to reach certain expectations and the negative feelings associated with it are key elements of self-criticism (Blatt, 2004). Self-criticism also includes worry over others’ disappointment, which was illustrated in Michelle’s description of laziness; she identified her laziness as a point of contention between her and her parents. However, in contrast to a major component of self-criticism, the youths who identified themselves as lazy also described an element of acceptance of their laziness, which speaks more to the self-kindness component of self-compassion (Neff, 2008). By being accepting of their laziness, the youths are giving themselves emotional space to be mindful of their circumstances and allowing them to view their laziness in a balanced way through acknowledgement and awareness. These findings are in line with past research. Specifically, an important element of self-compassion is the acceptance of one’s misdeeds or mistakes and approaching them with a balanced lens, which some existing interventions focus on, particularly mindfulness based stress reduction (Shapiro et al., 2005). Mindfulness that is taught in this approach aims to decrease rumination and anxiety by focusing on an openness and acceptance to one’s circumstances (Shapiro et al., 2011).
Overthinking of emotional content was discussed in two contexts: negative thoughts in general and learning from past mistakes in order to rectify them. Regarding negative thinking, Michelle described fables where her ex-boyfriend was cheating on her, which she acknowledged was unlikely, but still felt emotionally overwhelmed because of these thoughts. Similarly, Diane spoke to her overthinking in a general matter, where in which she felt “blinded” by her thoughts. Both of these examples are similar to rumination, which has been identified as a maladaptive coping strategy in those with mental health challenges, particularly when this repetitive thinking is centred on negative thoughts (Neff, 2003a; Burwell & Shirk, 2007). Rumination has been found to have subtypes, including brooding and reflection (Burwell & Shirk, 2007), which are comparable subtypes to the overthinking that was described in the present study. These subtypes of rumination have been found to alter and transform everyday stresses and (negative) emotions into depression (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991, 2004).

A common element between self-criticism and rumination is the immersive nature of individuals’ negative thinking, which has been described with words like “consumed” or “focused” (Neff, 2003a); these words were also found in the present study’s youths’ descriptions of overthinking. Thus, it is no surprise that the three youths who self-identified as overthinkers also discussed being consumed by and feeling down because of their constant, repetitive thinking, whether it was on fabricated stories or past mistakes or conflicts. This also lends support to Burwell and Shirk’s study (2007) on the distinction between brooding and reflection. They found that both brooding and self-reflection involve both adaptive and maladaptive components that are relevant to adolescents, especially with regard to how these subtypes of rumination work with other coping strategies. For example, the youths who described focused
thoughts on addressing past errors is similar to some of the literature on shame, which has been linked to self-criticism (e.g., Gilbert & Procter, 2006; Mayhew & Gilbert, 2008).

From an evolutionary standpoint, shame originated as a method to monitor one’s social rank and reputation (Gilbert & McGuire, 1998; Kim, Thibodeau, & Jorgenson, 2011). When a person feels shame, it is because the person feels that their actions and, subsequently, their “true” self is not in line with their view of their “ideal” self (Lewis, 1971). Thus, these individuals feel compelled to address their mistakes in order to rectify their social misdeeds. Moreover, this negative self-evaluation of one’s true self and ideal self has been found to preoccupy the minds of those who feel shame, reporting rumination on personal “defects” and distresses, resulting in decreased levels of empathy (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). The present study’s youths described this combination of rumination on negative thoughts and focus on correcting past mistakes, which may indeed lead to decreased levels of empathy, which has also been identified as a crucial component related to self-compassion and compassionate mind training (Gilbert & Irons, 2004). Consequently, decreased levels of empathy may therefore be related to decreased levels of self-compassion and reinforcing one’s self-criticism and shame. Moreover, brooding was linked to other maladaptive coping strategies, including avoidance, denial, and fleeing, all of which have been found to negatively affect adolescents’ mental health and depressive symptomology (Burwell & Shirk, 2007). Therefore, a combination of these various processes and their utilization as coping strategies may be deleterious to adolescents, whether they are clinically diagnosed with depression or are non-clinical individuals.

**Feeling Down, Disappointment, and Failure**

The youths’ discussions of feeling down, disappointment, and failure unveiled various links to parent-adolescent relationships, peer relationships, self-criticism, shame, and self-
compassion based interventions. In the following section, I discuss: (a) relational turmoil as a
spark to deep conversation; (b) internalizing peer conflicts and identity evaluation; and (c)
academic success as an internalized value and trigger to self-evaluation.

**Relational turmoil.** One major context for the youths’ feeling down revolved around
conflicts with family members. Although these conflicts mainly focused on the parent-adolescent
relationship (i.e., mother or father and youth participant), some conflicts were broader and
involved siblings. Interestingly, the youths’ feeling down were not always directly due to the
conflicts themselves, but rather because of conversations following the arguments. Some of the
youths described negative reactions from their parents when attempting to open dialogues after
arguments, all of which were “shut down” or resulted in further strife. These youths explained
that these attempts eventually led to the turning points in their relationships with their parents
where they made the decisions to no longer speak to their parents regarding more “serious
matters,” including conflicts or mistakes. These parental responses might be described as
unresponsive or even cold, which have been identified as being impactful on adolescents’ self-
As previously discussed, self-critical individuals expect negative responses from their parents,
including impatience, coldness, and rejection (Mongrain, 1998). When parents have imprinted
onto their children that they will respond in this way, the children learn that their actions result in
these sorts of responses, and so they are likely to use this information to extrapolate to their
interactions with others. Furthermore, these children may subsequently turn these cold,
unresponsive, and rejecting reactions inwards, all of which could affect their levels of self-
criticism. Thus, the youths who identified these sorts of responses from their parents may
similarly follow in this manner. However, a key component of this study that extends the
literature on self-criticism and parent-adolescent relationships is the inclusion of culture. Although there were a few Filipino youths who did speak with their mothers regarding their conflicts with positive results, only one African youth described speaking to her mother. The other African youths did not speak to their parents whatsoever. Conversely, some of the Filipino youths who did speak with their parents did describe positive responses, while the other Filipinos expressed either desire to speak with their parents or described attempts that were not entirely deleterious. These attempts at conversing with the parents did include both parents, for the most part, with only two expressly defying any attempts to speak with the father. This latter avoidance of speaking with the father is a common trait between the two cultural groups.

The youths also identified conflicts with their peers as reason to feel down. One major source of concern for some youths were friendships ending, causing some to turn inwards and feel negatively toward themselves resulting in withdrawal, sadness, and insecurity. These internal negative feelings are similar to Blatt’s (2004) definition of introjective depression and self-criticism, where in which individuals internalized attitudes and values due to their negative experiences with others. Moreover, this self-evaluation is an important step in adolescent identity development, particularly during the identity versus identity confusion (Erikson, 1968). However, there is currently no research exploring the ways in which self-criticism may influence adolescents’ identity development. Conceptually, the various effects self-criticism can have on the psyche and, subsequently, youths’ mental health would impact their identity development. If, for example, a self-critical youth is very judgmental and critical of herself and her mistakes, she may internalize and globalize these thoughts into a troubled and maladaptive identity that may influence various other aspects of her life.
Although it would be helpful to determine the severity of these youths’ mental health, there may be cause for concern considering the links between these internalizations and self-criticism. Additionally, some youths expressed unhappiness because they felt that they were taken advantage of, which may result in altered approaches, responses, and reactions to future social relationships and interactions. These youths’ self-schemas may be similarly influenced by their interactions with their peers, particularly during the adolescent stage if they rate these peer conflicts as highly disconcerting.

One domain that the youths identified which was beyond Blatt’s (2004) research on self-criticism is the role of social media. Although social comparison certainly plays a role in the development of self-criticism (e.g., Santor & Yazbek, 2006), due to the relatively recent wide usage of social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) particularly in younger demographics including adolescence, it is important to acknowledge this form of communication and community. Specifically, some youths felt insecure and worthless due to the images they viewed on their social media websites, such as peers enjoying themselves on vacation, fitness models on their Instagram feeds, and celebrities on Twitter. These youths described feeling sad because they “can’t look like that” and that their lives are simply not that exciting. Despite comparing themselves to strangers sometimes, their inability to reach these standards made them question their own lives and standards. These findings also lend support to Santor and Yazbek’s (2006) study which found that individuals who are self-critical actively and purposefully sought information that helped maintain their self-critical beliefs. Although their study focused on young adults, it may be relevant to youths who are likely to engage in social comparison as much, if not more, than University-aged adults. Moreover, considering the widespread usage of social media as an instant method to engage in social comparison, youths who are self-critical
may be able to constantly and rapidly seek evidence for their self-critical beliefs, resulting in increased levels of self-criticism and its associated harmful effects on mental health.

Academics was another important domain that the youths felt down, which resulted in internalized values and triggered the youths to engage in self-evaluation. Phrases used by the youths included “not being good enough” and feeling “eaten up” by grades. These phrases can be linked to two specific aspects of self-criticism and a lack of self-compassion: worthlessness and being consumed by one’s feelings (Blatt, 2004; Neff, 2003b). Of great concern is the fact that these youths identified schooling as important, separate to their parents’ desires and expectations, which speaks to the internalization of these values and beliefs. Considering that worthlessness and consumption of feelings both undergird self-criticism as well as other mental health issues, it is important to further explore these elements in Filipino and African youths.

However, there is one idea that the youths raised which extends our understanding of self-criticism: envying others’ academic success. Currently, the research on self-criticism focuses internally and revolves around feelings of shame and guilt, disappointment from others, and not being able to reach their own expectations (e.g., Blatt, 2004; Iancu et al., 2015). The findings from this study, however, involve an external element of social comparison: youths identified feeling envy because others were able to perform well in their academics while they were not, thereby increasing their judgment and criticism of their performance. These findings suggest that there may be a bidirectional influence of expectations on developing self-criticism. Placing expectations on yourself as well as others may have a compound effect on one’s self-evaluation if the goal is not accomplished.

**Feeling disappointment.** Many of the youths specified feeling disappointment rather than feeling down about their grades. This group primarily focused on improvement, stating that
they could have “done better” while identifying other factors that contributed to their grades, including procrastination, motivation, and time management. Regarding this focus on improving, Lewis’ (1971) definition of self-evaluation is fitting. Individuals who feel that their actions (and therefore its results) are not in line with who they believe they are or who they aim to be feel compelled to actively correct their mistakes so as to maintain their social aptitude and reputation (Kim et al., 2011; Gilbert & McGuire, 1998). In fact, Christopher used the words “pride” and “ego” when discussing his disappointment with grades, citing worry that his peers would shun him because his grades were low. He also explained that when he received poor grades, he would even attempt to avoid questions about his performance due to the competitive nature of his peer group; he described feeling ashamed when doing poorly in school, especially if or when his peers would learn of his poor performance. It appears that there is a distinct difference in feeling disappointment or feeling down when it comes to the youths’ academic performance. The former focused on addressing and fixing their mistakes in order to alleviate their disappointment, while those in the latter focused solely on the feeling itself through withdrawal and internalization. Thus, it may be important to further investigate this distinction and how self-compassion might address these two feelings differently across different contexts and domains.

**Feeling failure.** The youths described four themes during moments of failure, which included: (a) feeling consumed by sadness and overthinking mistakes; (b) effort as a measure and trigger of disappointment; (c) feeling anger toward the self and regret; and (d) evaluating mistakes as areas to improve. These four themes unveiled various connections to self-criticism, self-compassion, and interventions.

*Consumed by sadness and overthinking mistakes.* The youths who expressed sadness during times of failure described feeling consumed by their sadness, which included
overthinking about the situations that elicited these negative feelings. In addition to the contexts of academia and significant relationships previously discussed, failure, unsurprisingly, can also elicit overthinking and rumination, resulting in a feeling of being consumed by sadness. As Neff described (2008), a constant focus on one’s negative feelings may lead to overidentification, resulting in a lesser ability to acknowledge a common humanity. However, this particular model of variables has not yet been examined in African or Filipino youths, and considering the challenges both groups experience when seeking mental health support (e.g., Abe-kim et al., 2007; Algeria et al., 2011), it is important to further examine this interplay for these particular groups. Specifically, Bello and colleagues’ (2013) finding that Filipinos do not regularly seek nor utilize mental health services is a major concern, especially considering the constant failures that are a natural part of both education and adolescence. If these youths are feeling incredible, overwhelming sadness, it may be unlikely that they would seek mental health services given Bello and colleagues’ research. Further, for those in the present study who explained that they do not feel comfortable or do not want to speak to their parents when they feel down or are experiencing negative feelings, this may pose an even greater problem since Filipinos tend to reach out to loved ones first and if these first experiences are negative, it is even less likely that these youths would then go on to seek professional support.

Effort as a measure and trigger of disappointment. It is no surprise that the youths felt disappointed during times of failure or mistakes, which again, revolved around the academic context as well as its relationship to their career aspirations. These conversations involved feelings of pressure because of the constant efforts to improve upon their mistakes, which subsequently resulted in additional stress. These compounding effects are comparable to the unreasonably high standards that are characteristic of those who are self-critical (Blatt, 2004).
However, these youths’ efforts may simply be positive actions toward improving and could certainly be executed in healthy doses, and so it is also important to discuss the underlying feelings, thoughts, and motivations of these efforts, particularly with regard to how the youths feel about themselves before and after their efforts. For example, Christopher described feeling ashamed of his failures in school and that, even if he did not do too poorly in the grand scheme of his coursework (e.g., still above the class average, but not above his own expectations), he would continue to think about those mistakes later on. In fact, he stated that even after improving upon his grades in the class, he would still think back to his mistakes, which would still sadden him, affecting his pride. Therefore, disappointment may linger beyond what is typical for those who experience mistakes. Regarding rumination and overthinking, further exploration into the duration of these processes would be important to examine, particularly as it may relate to levels of self-compassion and self-criticism. Arguably, maintenance of these thoughts of mistakes would further solidify the associated maladaptive beliefs, thus decreasing levels of self-compassion and increasing self-compassion. This idea would be particularly relevant for the interventions previously described because their effectiveness may not be as pronounced for individuals whose thinking and rumination is long-lasting.

**Anger.** Emotion-focused therapy identified anger as one of the emotions clients may feel when acting as the inner critic (Greenberg & Watson, 2006). However, the youths in the present study who described feeling anger toward themselves also identified regret as part of their anger, which was not included in Greenberg and Watson’s view of self-criticism. Although the interventions that aimed to reduce self-criticism through self-compassion were able to do so (e.g., Shahar et al., 2012), it is unknown whether regret played a role in the participants’ levels of self-criticism. Furthermore, it is unknown how regret may influence those individuals’ feelings
of related mental health issues, including anxiety and depressive symptomology. Thus, regret may be an attribute that is connected to self-criticism and its related elements, such as shame.

Regret may only be an active element in feeling anger if rumination is involved. The youths in the present study described focusing their thoughts on what they could have done differently with regard to their mistakes. Thus, regret may only be impactful when it is associated with overidentification and rumination (including its two subtypes). Therefore, it is important to further explore regret and its role in self-criticism. Moreover, if it is an active agent in the development of self-criticism, it would be similarly important to explore the potential effect of self-compassion on feelings of regret.

*Evaluating mistakes as areas to improve.* Self-reflection within the context of making mistakes focuses on attempts to gain insight on these mistakes in order to find solutions to them (Treynor, Gonzalez, & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2003). The literature has shown an important distinction between those who experience worse outcomes when self-reflecting versus those who experience better outcomes: individuals who self-reflect on their mistakes and problems with a self-critical lens develop and utilize poorer strategies to regulate their emotions, while those who focus more on understanding their emotions and feelings as they reflected on their mistakes and problems demonstrated more adaptive emotional regulation strategies (Watkins, 2004; Kross, Ayduk, & Mischel, 2005). The youths in this study described processes and perspectives that were more in contrast with individuals of those who utilized a self-critical lens. Instead, these youths focused on learning from their self-reflection, as well as avoiding the perception that their failures were permanent. Instead, they believed that they could continue to keep trying in order to help facilitate solutions to the problems as well as developing learning environments to
improve upon themselves or their circumstances. Thus, they focused on learning how to turn their prior mistakes or problems into successes.

**Positive Thinking and Happiness**

The youths’ discussions also unveiled various connections between their thinking and happiness and positivity. More specifically, four themes emerged: (a) acknowledgement of temporary distress and distraction; (b) recollection of positive memories and positive self-talk; (c) the effects of significant others’ positivity; and (d) alone time as a break from the stresses of life.

**Acknowledgement of temporary distress and distraction.** Two major components of mindfulness that are particularly relevant to the youths in this study were: (a) sensory clarity, the ability to objectively acknowledge the feelings or emotions one is experiencing in the moment; and (b) equanimity, the ability to move away from overidentifying with one’s experiences to accepting and letting go of one’s circumstances (Cullen, 2011). Both aspects of mindfulness are important in objectively viewing distressing situations with clarity and objectivity, especially regarding how the situations relate to the “bigger picture.” By being mindful in these situations as well as afterwards, individuals would be more aware of the impact and longevity of their difficulties, which was described by the youths in the present study. For example, Deborah expressed awareness of her feelings in the moment in contrast to how she would feel after some time elapsed. However, one element outside of this understanding of mindfulness is the certainty of positive emotions that some youths felt were eventually coming during challenging times. For example, Michelle described her refocus to the happiness she would assuredly feel afterwards even during emotionally overwhelming moments. This description is different to the traditional definition of mindfulness because that definition focuses on accepting one’s circumstances,
allowing thoughts of both positive and negative emotions to come into the mind, and letting go of these emotions equally without dwelling or ruminating on them. Some of these youths, however, described dwelling and ruminating on positive emotions, irrespective of how they felt in the moment, which is more similar to avoidance of emotion rather than acknowledgement and acceptance. Arguably, these youths’ coping strategies are more closely related to distracting oneself from negative thoughts or experiences, which some youths utilized because they found difficulty in trying to elicit positive thinking.

Distraction has been identified in the literature as a process that is completely counter to rumination, which has been found to aid in reducing the negative moods that are often developed as a result of depressive rumination (Broderick, 2005). These ideas are contrary because rumination is a cognitive reactivation of negative thoughts and feelings that are repeated, resulting in strengthened depressed feelings and episodes (Broderick, 2005; Ingram, 1984). Distraction, however, involves focusing on positive thinking or engaging in positive activities, which has been found to attenuate depressive episodes (e.g., Nolen-Hoeksema, Morrow, & Fredrickson, 1993). The literature, however, acknowledges that distraction and repression may not be entirely adaptive coping strategies despite findings of reduced negative moods (e.g., Linehan, 1993). Therefore, the youths who described using distraction as their method to shift their thinking from negative feelings and emotions may not be attenuating this negativity as much as they could be, such as through the use of mindfulness. Although the use of art may be beneficial (Kalmanowitz, 2016), engaging in media consumption would likely be beneficial to mindfulness techniques to help in coping with negative situations. Broderick (2005) found that, although distraction was effective in reducing dysphoric mood in comparison to rumination, mindfulness was even more effective. However, Broderick utilized mediation as the primary
method to foster mindfulness in her participants, while none of the youths in the present study mentioned meditation as a strategy that they used. Therefore, it would be important to examine the various other ways mindfulness can be developed to help elicit positive thinking and happiness in youths in addition to meditation, especially considering that Broderick’s findings were based on young adults and whose negative moods were induced rather than individuals who were naturally experiencing negative moods. Moreover, it would be helpful to explore how a combination of distraction and mindfulness (not at the same time due to their inherent conflicting foci) would influence negative mood, and whether other forms of distraction affect mood differently. For example, the youths in the current study consumed media such as watching YouTube and listening to music. It is unknown which videos the youths watched when attempting to distract themselves, nor is it known what genres of music they were watching. If, for example, the youths who tried to distract themselves with YouTube videos watched media that were meant to instill happiness or mindfulness, presumably, these youths’ negative affect would likely be different to those who might watch upsetting or neutral videos.

Youths who found it easier to think positively during moments of sadness or suffering used two coping strategies that are similar to some techniques in compassionate mind training: recollection of positive memories and positive self-talk. In compassionate mind training, clients are asked to create compassionate thoughts, feelings, and imagery (Gilbert & Irons, 2004). When youths actively recall positive thoughts and memories, they may recall memories that involved components of compassion, including kindness and non-judgment. This recalling may also utilize positive self-talk, such as reminding one’s self on their past triumphs or successes. However, considering that the youths were quite vague about describing these memories, it is unclear how similar these recollections are in comparison to the imagery that is developed in
compassionate mind training. Moreover, these youths’ thoughts revolve around tangible events that occurred, rather than developing thoughts specifically tailored to elicit feelings of compassion toward themselves. It is unclear how this difference would affect compassionate mind training and its effects. While it may be more poignant for youths to use positive memories because of the emotional connections to these memories, it is equally important to ensure that no lingering critical or judgmental thoughts are a part of these memories. Furthermore, it would be difficult to ensure that this line of thinking (i.e., recalling of memories) would not spark cognitive networks that might invoke thoughts of related negative events, such as memories of the same context of their memories that resulted in negative outcomes. This spark of a negative cognitive network is comparable to the negative thinking that is reactivated during bouts of rumination (Broderick, 2005).

Youths also identified certain relationships as being important in their feelings of positivity during times of pain or suffering because these significant others (including parents, peers, and partners) portrayed positivity and optimism while spending time with the youths. For example, most youths explained that spending time with their friends at the mall or by watching a movie led to greater feelings of positivity in their life. As this time with peers relates to distraction, which has been found to reduce negative affect (Nolen-Hoeksema, Morrow, & Fredrickson, 1993), if youths spend more of their time engaging in activities that refocuses their minds away from any negative events or feelings that are occurring in their lives at the time, it would help explain why these youths identify these relationships as eliciting positivity.

Lastly, youths explained that alone time helped in increasing happiness in their lives due to the freedom it allowed them to engage in activities they wished to engage in, such as taking walks, watching movies, consuming media, and art. The importance of personal freedom for
adolescents has been supported in the literature. For example, Smetana, Crean, and Campione-Barr (2005) found that youths who had more autonomy during adolescence led to greater levels of self-worth and lower levels of depression. Conversely, youths whose parents had more control over personal issues during their adolescence led to greater feelings of control and conflict. Thus, a healthy balance of personal freedom and parental involvement may be crucial in increasing youths’ happiness.

**Parent-Adolescent Conversations and Relationships**

The youths who spoke to their parents on a regular basis described a number of themes that provided further insight into the parent-adolescent relationships, especially as it related to cultural differences. Four themes emerged from the youths’ interviews: (a) feeling heard and understood by their mothers; (b) protecting mothers from their challenges; (c) barriers to conversations with parents; and (d) speaking to fathers for permission.

**Feeling heard and understood by their mothers.** Most of the youths stated that they spoke with their mothers about many topics nearly every day, but only a few of them described seeking their mothers’ advice or support when feeling emotional distress. The youths who did seek their mothers’ advice and support described feeling heard and understood, which may suggest a secure attachment (Crockett, Brown, Iturbide, Russell, & Wilkinson-Lee, 2009). Individuals with a secure attachment feel comfortable trusting others, expect warm responses from others, and are not fearful of displaying vulnerability (McElhaney et al., 2009). Therefore, these youths who often speak to their mothers during times of emotional distress may have a secure attachment, and as extension, may be able to openly experience and feel their emotions, whether positive or negative, an important component of self-compassion and mindfulness (Neff, 2008).
Conversely, there were some youths who were more concerned with their mothers’ feelings than their own, a sort of altruism that appeared in the youths who described a façade of strength to alleviate any worry in significant others. These youths were unlikely to be engaging in mindfulness because of this coping strategy as they are focused on quelling their feelings and emotions to protect others. According to Mongrain (1998), these different responses to the youths’ concealment of their feelings from their mothers may result in different self-schemas and different expectations in the youths on subsequent interactions with significant others. Therefore, this protection of the mothers’ feelings may be an important element to consider within the parent-adolescent relationship, particularly as it relates to differing cultural groups. In the present study, the only youths who described this worry were Filipino youths; only one African youth explained that she speaks with her mother when feeling down or distress, while the others did not want to or could not speak with their mothers. Therefore, this protective component may be more relevant for certain cultures than others. Additionally, it would be important to evaluate the parent-child relationships for those youths who feel the need to protect their mothers from their sadness versus those who do not feel this need.

In general, most youths spoke with their parents on a daily basis, but for those who did not, there were some barriers that the youths felt prevented them from speaking with their parents or there were previous experiences that dissuaded the youths from exploring additional conversations with their parents. Specifically, both African and Filipino youths described mismatched schedules as a major barrier in talking to their parents, especially regarding more emotionally charged topics. In addition to warm and cold responses, parental involvement has been found to be an important factor in children’s development of healthy emotional regulation and coping strategies (Melowitz et al., 1999). Specifically, Mendlowitz and colleagues found that
parental involvement improved their children’s well-being in comparison to parents who were not as involved. This finding is also important to consider as it relates to Mongrain’s (1998) focus on warm parents. It is unlikely that cold, but heavily involved parents would have the same impact on their youths’ mental health and emotional well-being, and, presumably, it would be difficult for youths to receive warm responses from their parents if they are rarely involved in their lives. This lack of parental involvement was seen in some of the present study’s youths’ discussions. Specifically, all the youths who stated that they do not speak to their fathers explained that they rarely see them due to their work schedules. Although a few of these youths did express a desire to want to open communications with their fathers, most were not interested. When asked why, some explained that their mothers were more understanding and that they simply preferred to talk to their mothers, while others identified their fathers as uncaring or as quick tempered (i.e., responding with anger). These last two responses that the youths described would be akin to cold parental responses, and so it is understandable why these youths did not speak to their fathers.

The majority of the youths’ discussions with their fathers were instigated in order to ask for permission to attend social outings or gatherings. Although the African youths did not identify this topic as a common conversation, most of the Filipino youths explained that this was the only reason that they spoke with their fathers. Regarding the African youths, only one youth explained that she speaks to her father; she identified sports and school as the two topics that she discussed with her father. Otherwise, the remaining youths did not speak to their parents. Research on fathers’ parental involvement has found that they can indeed have an impactful role on their children’s development, such as by protecting their children from psychological maladjustment and distress (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003). Therefore, it is important to
acknowledge that the lack of communication between these youths and their fathers, irrespective of cultural background, may have an influence on their psychological well-being. Moreover, there appears to be a difference in parental involvement across these two cultural groups. Although the Filipino fathers tended to speak to their adolescent children on seemingly neutral topics, such as television and the news, many did speak to their children for general updates in their lives, including academics. Conversely, the majority of the African fathers did not ask and the youths felt that they did not care. It is important to explore why this difference may exist and, if so, how parental involvement can be fostered in these groups. For Filipino fathers, it would be helpful to examine why their discussions were limited to neutral contexts and rarely included emotionally distressing conversations.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

Although the present study extends the literature on self-compassion, self-criticism, and parent-adolescent relationships in some ways, there are limitations that need to be taken into consideration. Limitations include: (a) small sample size and recruitment; (b) social desirability bias; and (c) the impact of the interviewer’s cultural background on participants.

Regarding sample size, the youths who were recruited mainly resided in two areas: the Filipino youths lived in in the Greater Toronto Area, including Scarborough and Mississauga, while the African youths all resided in the Wellington County, including Guelph. This difference in city of residence has several implications, such as a limited ability to generalize the results of the current study to other Filipino and African youths who are living in other parts of Canada. Moreover, there is an imbalance in the sample. Of the 10 youths who were interviewed, nine identified as female and one identified as male. Not only does this imbalance skew the results and its implications toward females, but considering the small sample size, it makes it more
challenging to make direct comparisons between these youths to other youths of similar cultural background. Furthermore, the recruitment process may have influenced the youths who participated. By using word of mouth and snowballing, the youths who were recruited were likely to be more similar than youths who would have been recruited through other means since those who participated knew each other in some way (e.g., part of the same peer group, belonged to the same family, attended the same church). Similarities might have included similar environments in which they were raised, similar interests, and similar views on the questions that were asked during the interviews, which may have skewed their responses to be more similar than youths who were not connected prior to the interviews. Thus, the results of the current study are not generalizable to Filipino or African youths and their communities. For future studies, larger, balanced sample sizes should be included (e.g., equal number of males and females from each cultural group), as well as ensuring that the youths represent the different regions of Canada. Additionally, randomized recruitment methods should be used in future studies to aid in balancing the samples.

Considering that the interviews were conducted in person, youths may have felt compelled to present themselves in more favourable ways, particularly for questions about happiness, feeling down, and their parents. Although the youths were invited to be as open and honest as possible during the interview, which the interviewer attempted to bolster by developing a positive rapport with each youth, biases may have still been present. Therefore, it is important for future studies that implement semi-structured interviews to acknowledge the presence of the interviewer within the context of the interview and how his or her questions and statements may influence the participants’ responses (Potter & Hepburn, 2005).
Lastly, the author, who identifies as a Filipino-Canadian man, may have influenced the interviews and responses, especially considering that the majority of the participants were young females. The impact of the author may have been more present on questions revolving around romantic relationships and associated emotions. Additionally, the age of the author may have also impacted the youths’ responses as there have been challenges in the past regarding age differences in interviews, particularly with adults interviewing adolescents (Bassett, Beagan, Ristovski-Slijepevic, & Chapman, 2008). In order to minimize these differences as well as their potential effects on the interviews, future studies should involve more than one interviewer, such as by matching gender or cultural group to participants.

The present study’s findings build on our current understandings of self-compassion, self-criticism, parent-adolescent relationships, and Filipino and African culture. Future studies should further explore the various ideas that were gleaned from the results. For self-compassion, research should investigate the differences in self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness, and how each of these elements are developed in different individuals. Additionally, it may be important for future studies to examine how different levels of these three composites may influence individuals’ overall levels of self-compassion and how to increase each component in therapy settings. Moreover, differences in the clients who receive self-compassion based training may also influence how they are affected by the training, and so it is important to acknowledge these differences as well. These effects should involve interventions that were not explicitly discussed in this study, such as arts-based activities.

Regarding self-criticism, it would be important for future studies to explore possible links to rumination (both subtypes), mental health challenges (e.g., depression, anxiety, and shame), and the existing interventions that are used to decrease self-criticism. If rumination and its
subtypes are cognitive processes that undergird the development of self-criticism, future interventions should include addressing rumination, brooding, and self-reflection. Additionally, future studies should examine the potential effect of social media on the development of self-criticism considering the widespread usage of these forms of communication in this age range. Youths may engage in social comparison and self-evaluation more often than youths who do not utilize social media due to the immediacy of these websites, and so this avenue may be worth exploring within the context of self-criticism and Canadian youths.

The present study also illuminated differences in parent-adolescent relationships between the two cultures. It is important for future studies to further examine the differences in these relationships, particularly with regard to gendered differences (i.e., mothers to sons and fathers to daughters). While the current study mainly focused on daughters’ relationships with their parents, there may be additional nuances that were not discovered in this study due to sample size and imbalanced representation of the genders.

**Conclusion and Implications**

Despite the links self-compassion and self-criticism appeared to have, very few studies examined these two constructs together, especially in the parent-adolescent relationship context. The literature that did examine these constructs, however, only included adult participants from clinical samples. Considering the impact self-compassion may have in everyday life, it is important to investigate the ways in which self-compassion manifested in individuals’ lives. Specifically, youths whose lives often involve self-evaluation across multiple contexts, may benefit the most from self-compassion and its tenets, particularly as it may relate to aspects of self-criticism. Thus, this exploratory study combined these concepts and examined the ways in
which Canadian adolescents viewed, conceptualized, and understood self-criticism and self-compassion in their everyday lives.

Given the findings of the present study on these constructs, there are a number of implications that have been gleaned through the exploration of Canadian youths’ experiences. More specifically, there are some techniques (e.g., arts-based activities) that are connected to self-compassion and mindfulness that may be useful for individuals in their everyday lives, which could be taught in academic settings to combine the various concerns and challenges that youths face. Additionally, the disconnect between some youths and their parents raises concerns regarding parental involvement, particularly from both Filipino and African fathers. Thus, self-compassion and self-criticism interventions should involve parents in the programs and involve emotion regulation strategies and techniques in order to develop underlying skills that are crucial to fostering levels of self-compassion and decreasing levels of self-criticism. Considering many of the African youths described contentious relationships with their mothers, it is important to include both parents in these programs as well.

In conclusion, various elements of self-criticism and self-compassion were unveiled through conversations with the African- and Filipino-Canadian youths. These youths shared their perceptions of self-criticism and self-compassion in their everyday lives, which demonstrated ties to related topics including rumination, arts-based and mindfulness-based activities, and the importance of parental involvement. This exploratory study will further advance the field and the perceptions of self-criticism and self-compassion in non-clinical populations, as well as psychological constructs to consider within the therapeutic and parent-child contexts.
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Appendix A: Flyer

My World, My Life

*Canadian High School youths (ages 14-19) are needed to talk about themselves, their lives, and experiences!*

Your participation in this research project would include filling out a short questionnaire and doing an interview at your house or via Skype. This will take up to one hour.

For your time, you will receive $10 cash.

Research is always voluntary!

To find out more about the study and your eligibility please contact: Kevin de Leon at 416-317-1322 or kdeleon@uoguelph.ca
Appendix B: Consent Form 18+

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

PROJECT TITLE: My World, My Life

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Kevin de Leon, graduate student, from the Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition at the University of Guelph. This project is a part of his academic program and has been funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Kevin. Email: kdeleon@uoguelph.ca or his advisor, Dr. Susan Chuang at schuang@uoguelph.ca or 519-824-4120, ext. 58389. You can also write to Dr. Chuang at: Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition, Macdonald Institute, University of Guelph, Guelph, ON N1G 2W1.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This project focuses on Canadian youths and their personal experiences, views, and ideas about themselves and their lives. We are also looking at their relationships with their parents (mothers and fathers) and how their culture may or may not influence their perspectives on life. Your participation will provide greater understanding into the experiences and values of youths in Canada.

PROCEDURES

You are eligible to participate if you are: (1) attending high school full-time; (2) between the ages of 14 and 19, and (3) living in a two-parent (mother and father) family. If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

Questionnaire: We will first mail out a packet of questionnaires which will be filled out before the scheduled interview. The questionnaires, which will take about 15 minutes to complete, will focus on your background information (such as your age, gender, grade) as well as your family’s (such as parents’ education level, citizen status, date of immigration). Kevin will give you a call to arrange for a time to interview at your house, with at least one adult in the home, or via Skype.
Interview: On the interview day, Kevin will come to your home or video call you via Skype to conduct an interview with you. The interview will be audiotaped and then transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy of your responses. This will take approximately one hour of your time. The questions will include your descriptions of yourself, what you think your parents’ views of you are, how you handle tough times, and things that you do and do not like about yourself.

This study is expected to take up to one hour.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The risks to you of participating in this study are minimal such as the time spent participating in the study. The questions that you will be asked are minimally intrusive. However, some questions may cause emotional discomfort given the nature of reflecting on the self, ‘tough times,’ and how the self is seen by others and by your parents. Therefore, depending on your emotional state at the time of the interview, you may experience some emotional distress. If this happens, you can take a break at any time. If you no longer wish to continue, you have the right to withdraw from the study, without penalty, at any time.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

The benefit of this research is to develop a better understanding of the experiences and perspectives youths in Canada have. Little is known about how Canadian youths handle tough times and view themselves in both positive and negative ways.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

For your time, you (the participant) will receive $10 in cash. If only the background questionnaire is completed with no interview, you will receive $5 in cash. For those who select the Skype interview, the $10 will be sent to you via e-mail transfer. All that is needed for this method of delivery is an e-mail address. We do not collect any banking information.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of any identifying information that is obtained in connection with this study. Only my faculty advisor, research assistant, and I will know your identity. You will be assigned an identification number which will increase the likelihood of your confidentiality. However, confidentiality will be broken if there is a suspicion of unlawful acts; we have the legal obligation to report any information to authorities to protect your health, life, or safety. This obligation extends to reporting acts of harm to the self or others, and child abuse. Confidentiality may also be broken if a court subpoena is presented. For those who opt to have the interview via Skype, complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed due to the
online nature of this method. Skype collects communication data including times, dates, numbers, and usernames. Microsoft’s Privacy Statement for Skype can be found here: https://privacy.microsoft.com/en-us/privacystatement/.

A graduate student will aid in transcribing the interviews. Therefore, he/she will have access to the audio recordings of the interview. However, all the data related to the questionnaires, audio recordings, and interview transcripts will be stored on an encrypted computer, in addition to your contact information. Any hard copies of the questionnaires, consent forms, and transcripts will be placed in a locked filing cabinet in a secured room. These data will be with the faculty advisor for auditing purposes. She will keep them for 7 years after the study’s completion. Your name will not appear anywhere and no one will know about your specific answers except my advisor, research assistant, or myself. Your parents will not have access to your data. All findings will be reported as a group, and not individually.

For publications, your identity will be kept private. Code numbers will be assigned to each participant’s interview and pseudonyms will be used for names and geographic locations. Selected anonymous quotations from written transcripts may also be included in the results section of the final research report. For example, a 14-year old boy stated, “…”.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may exercise the option of removing your data from the study. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise that warrant doing so.

If you would like to have your data removed from the study, you can send a request to Kevin de Leon up to two weeks following your participation. Your data will be subsequently permanently erased. Upon completion of the study, you may also contact Kevin de Leon if you wish to receive the results of the study.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. This project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board for compliance with federal guidelines for research involving human participants. If you or your child have any questions regarding his/her rights and welfare as a research participant in this study (REB #16FE016), please contact: Director, Research Ethics; University of Guelph; reb@uoguelph.ca; 519-824-4120 ext. 56606. You do not waive any legal rights by agreeing to take part in this study.
SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I have read the information provided for the study *My World, My Life* described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

____________________________  ______________________________  __________________
Participant’s Name               Participant’s Signature          Date

____________________________  ______________________________
Researcher’s Signature           Date

Would you be willing to be contacted in case follow-up questions arise?

□ Yes  □ No

I HAVE RECEIVED $5 OR $10 CASH FOR MY PARTICIPATION.

____________________________  ______________________________  __________________
Participant’s Name               Participant’s Signature          Date
Appendix C: Parent Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

PROJECT TITLE: My World, My Life

Your child is being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Kevin de Leon, graduate student, from the Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition at the University of Guelph. This project is a part of his academic program and has been funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Kevin. Email: kdeleon@uoguelph.ca or his advisor, Dr. Susan Chuang at schuang@uoguelph.ca or 519-824-4120, ext. 58389. You can also write to Dr. Chuang at: Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition, Macdonald Institute, University of Guelph, Guelph, ON N1G 2W1.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This project focuses on Canadian youths and their personal experiences, views, and ideas about themselves and their lives. We are also looking at their relationships with their parents (mothers and fathers) and how their culture may or may not influence their perspectives on life. Your child’s participation will provide greater understanding into the experiences and values of youths in Canada.

PROCEDURES

Your child is eligible to participate if he/she is: (1) attending high school full-time; (2) between the ages of 14 and 19, and (3) living in a two-parent (mother and father) family. If your child volunteers to participate in this study, we would ask him/her to do the following things:

Questionnaire: We will first mail out a packet of questionnaires which will be filled out before the scheduled interview. The questionnaires, which will take about 15 minutes to complete, will focus on your child’s background information (such as his/her age, gender, grade) as well as your family’s (such as parents’ education level, citizen status, date of immigration). Kevin will give you and your child a call to arrange for a time to interview at your house, with at least one adult in the home, or via Skype.
**Interview:** On the interview day, Kevin will come to your home or video call you via Skype to conduct an interview with your child. The interview will be audiotaped and then transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy of your child’s responses. This will take up to one hour of your child’s time. The questions will include your child’s descriptions of him/herself, what he/she think your views of him/her are, how he/she handle tough times, and things that he/she does and does not like about him/herself. This study is expected to take up to one hour.

**POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

The risks to your child of participating in this study are minimal such as the time spent participating in the study. The questions that your child will be asked are minimally intrusive. However, some questions may cause emotional discomfort given the nature of reflecting on the self, ‘tough times,’ and how the self is seen by others and by parents. Therefore, depending on your child’s emotional state at the time of the interview, he/she may experience some emotional distress. If this happens, your child can take a break at any time. If your child no longer wishes to continue, he/she has the right to withdraw from the study, without penalty, at any time. We will also be providing a list of counselling resources to all participants.

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

The benefit of this research is to develop a better understanding of the experiences and perspectives youths in Canada have. Little is known about how Canadian youths handle tough times and view themselves in both positive and negative ways.

**PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

For your child’s time, he/she will receive $10 in cash. If only the background questionnaire is completed with no interview, he/she will receive $5 in cash. For those who select the Skype interview, the $10 will be sent to you via e-mail transfer. All that is needed for this method of delivery is an e-mail address. We do not collect any banking information.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of any identifying information that is obtained in connection with this study. Only my faculty advisor, research assistant, and I will know your child's identity. Your child will be assigned an identification number which will increase the likelihood of his/her confidentiality. However, confidentiality will be broken if there is a suspicion of unlawful acts; we have the legal obligation to report any information to authorities to protect your child’s health, life, or safety. This obligation extends to reporting acts of harm to the self or others, and child abuse. Confidentiality may also be broken if a court subpoena is presented. For those who opt to have the interview via Skype, complete confidentiality cannot be
guaranteed due to the online nature of this method. Skype collects communication data including times, dates, numbers, and usernames. Microsoft’s Privacy Statement for Skype can be found here: https://privacy.microsoft.com/en-us/privacystatement/.

A graduate student will aid in transcribing the interviews. Therefore, he/she will have access to the audio recordings of the interview. However, all the data related to the questionnaires, audio recordings, and interview transcripts will be stored on an encrypted computer, in addition to your child and family’s contact information. Any hard copies of the questionnaires, consent forms, and transcripts will be placed in a locked filing cabinet in a secured room. These data will be with the faculty advisor for auditing purposes. She will keep them for 7 years after the study’s completion. Your child’s name will not appear anywhere and no one will know about his/her specific answers except my advisor, research assistant, or myself. You will not have access to your child’s interview data. All findings will be reported as a group, and not individually.

For publications, your child’s identity will be kept private. Code numbers will be assigned to each participant’s interview and pseudonyms will be used for names and geographic locations. Selected anonymous quotations from written transcripts may also be included in the results section of the final research report. For example, a 14-year old boy stated, “…”.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your child can choose whether to be in this study or not. If he/she volunteers to be in this study, he/she may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. Even if you consent to your child’s participation, he/she may still choose whether to participate or not. Your child may exercise the option of removing his/her data from the study. Your child may also refuse to answer any questions he/she does not want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw your child from this research if circumstances arise that warrant doing so. As the parent of the child, you are consenting to your child being interviewed without a(n) parent/adult being present in the room during the interview.

If your child would like to have his/her data removed from the study, he/she can send a request to Kevin de Leon up to two weeks following their participation. Their data will be subsequently permanently erased. Upon completion of the study, your child may contact Kevin de Leon if he/she wishes to receive the results of the study.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Your child may withdraw his/her consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You and your child are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of his/her participation in this research study. This project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board for compliance with federal guidelines for research involving human participants.
If you or your child have any questions regarding his/her rights and welfare as a research participant in this study (REB #16FE016), please contact: Director, Research Ethics; University of Guelph; reb@uoguelph.ca; 519-824-4120 ext. 56606. You do not waive any legal rights by agreeing to take part in this study.

**SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT/PARENT**

I have read the information provided for the study *My World, My Life* described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to let my child participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant’s Name</th>
<th>Participant’s Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent Name</td>
<td>Parent Signature</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher’s Signature</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D: Youth Assent Form

YOUTH ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

PROJECT TITLE: My World, My Life

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Kevin de Leon, graduate student, from the Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition at the University of Guelph. This project is a part of his academic program and has been funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Kevin. Email: kdeleon@uoguelph.ca or his advisor, Dr. Susan Chuang at schuang@uoguelph.ca or 519-824-4120, ext. 58389. You can also write to Dr. Chuang at: Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition, Macdonald Institute, University of Guelph, Guelph, ON N1G 2W1.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This project focuses on Canadian youths and their personal experiences, views, and ideas about themselves and their lives. We are also looking at their relationships with their parents (mothers and fathers) and how their culture may or may not influence their perspectives on life. Your participation will provide greater understanding into the experiences and values of youths in Canada.

PROCEDURES

You are eligible to participate if you are: (1) attending high school full-time; (2) are between the ages of 14 and 19, and (3) living in a two-parent (mother and father) family. If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

Questionnaire: We will first mail out a packet of questionnaires which will be filled out before the scheduled interview. The questionnaires, which will take about 15 minutes to complete, will focus on your background information (such as your age, gender, grade) as well as your family’s (such as parents’ education level, citizen status, date of immigration). Kevin will give you a call to arrange for a time to interview at your house, with at least one adult in the home, or via Skype.

Interview: On the interview day, Kevin will come to your home or video call you via Skype to conduct an interview with you. The interview will be audiotaped and then transcribed verbatim.
to ensure accuracy of your responses. This will take approximately one hour of your time. The questions will include your descriptions of yourself, what you think your parents’ views of you are, how you handle tough times, and things that you do and do not like about yourself.

This study is expected to take up to one hour.

**POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

The risks to you of participating in this study are minimal such as the time spent participating in the study. The questions that you will be asked are minimally intrusive. However, some questions may cause emotional discomfort given the nature of reflecting on the self, ‘tough times,’ and how the self is seen by others and by your parents. Therefore, depending on your emotional state at the time of the interview, you may experience some emotional distress. If this happens, you can take a break at any time. If you no longer wish to continue, you have the right to withdraw from the study, without penalty, at any time.

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

The benefit of this research is to develop a better understanding of the experiences and perspectives youths in Canada have. Little is known about how Canadian youths handle tough times and view themselves in both positive and negative ways.

**PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

For your time, you (the participant) will receive $10 in cash. If only the background questionnaire is completed with no interview, you will receive $5 in cash. For those who select the Skype interview, the $10 will be sent to you via e-mail transfer. All that is needed for this method of delivery is an e-mail address. We do not collect any banking information.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of any identifying information that is obtained in connection with this study. Only my faculty advisor, research assistant, and I will know your identity. You will be assigned an identification number which will increase the likelihood of your confidentiality. However, confidentiality will be broken if there is a suspicion of unlawful acts; we have the legal obligation to report any information to authorities to protect your health, life, or safety. This obligation extends to reporting acts of harm to the self or others, and child abuse. Confidentiality may also be broken if a court subpoena is presented. For those who opt to have the interview via Skype, complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed due to the online nature of this method. Skype collects communication data including times, dates, numbers, and
 CANADIAN YOUTHS’ PERSPECTIVES

Usernames. Microsoft’s Privacy Statement for Skype can be found here: https://privacy.microsoft.com/en-us/privacystatement/.

A graduate student will aid in transcribing the interviews. Therefore, he/she will have access to the audio recordings of the interview. However, all the data related to the questionnaires, audio recordings, and interview transcripts will be stored on an encrypted computer, in addition to your contact information. Any hard copies of the questionnaires, consent forms, and transcripts will be placed in a locked filing cabinet in a secured room. These data will be with the faculty advisor for auditing purposes. She will keep them for 7 years after the study’s completion. Your name will not appear anywhere and no one will know about your specific answers except my advisor, research assistant, or myself. Your parents will not have access to your data. All findings will be reported as a group, and not individually.

For publications, your identity will be kept private. Code numbers will be assigned to each participant’s interview and pseudonyms will be used for names and geographic locations. Selected anonymous quotations from written transcripts may also be included in the results section of the final research report. For example, a 14-year old boy stated, “…”.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. Even if your parent(s) consent to your participation, you may still choose whether to participate or not. You may exercise the option of removing your data from the study. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise that warrant doing so.

If you would like to have your data removed from the study, you can send a request to Kevin de Leon up to two weeks following your participation. Your data will be subsequently permanently erased. Upon completion of the study, you may also contact Kevin de Leon if you wish to receive the results of the study.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

This project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board for compliance with federal guidelines for research involving human participants. If you have any questions regarding his/her rights and welfare as a research participant in this study (REB #16FE016), please contact:
Director, Research Ethics; University of Guelph; reb@uoguelph.ca; 519-824-4120 ext. 56606. You do not waive any legal rights by agreeing to take part in this study.

**SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT/PARENT**

I have read the information provided for the study *My World, My Life* described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant’s Name</th>
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<th>Parent Name</th>
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<th>Researcher’s Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
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Would you be willing to be contacted in case follow-up questions arise?

☐ Yes  ☐ No

**I HAVE RECEIVED $5 OR $10 CASH FOR MY PARTICIPATION.**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant’s Name</th>
<th>Participant’s Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
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Appendix E: Background Questionnaire

Background Information Summary

Listed below are a number of questions about you, your family, and your past experiences. Please answer the questions as best you can. There are no right or wrong answers.

All of the information is CONFIDENTIAL and will only be used for the purposes of this study. Each person will be assigned an identification number and all data will be used according to the identification number. Results will be reported in group form only.

ID: __________

Your first name: ___________________________ YOUR AGE: ___ YEARS ___ MONTHS

Gender (circle one): Female Male Other

What grade are you in now? □ 9 □ 10 □ 11 □ 12 □ 12+

City: ___________________________

Postal code (first three characters only): ___________________

Cell phone number: ___________________________ Email: ______________________

1) What pseudonym would you like us to use when discussing our findings?

______________________________

2) Would you be willing to be contacted in case follow-up questions arise?

□ Yes □ No If YES, contact Kevin de Leon. E-mail: kdeleon@uoguelph.ca

3) Would you like to receive a copy of the write-up once the research is completed?

□ Yes □ No If YES, contact Kevin de Leon. E-mail: kdeleon@uoguelph.ca
Background Information Summary

1. For your current household, please list each person who lives with you on a regular basis, and provide the following information:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initials (first letter of first and last name)</th>
<th>Relationship to you</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Education *see scale below</th>
<th>Employment *see scale below</th>
<th>If employed, job title</th>
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* Educational Scale
1) Less than 7th grade
2) 7th, 8th, or 9th grade
3) Some high school
4) High school graduate or GED (indicate which one)
5) Some college (at least 1 year completed); or completed a specialized training
6) Standard college or university (BA, BSc, etc.)
7) Graduate profession degree (MA, MS, Ph.D, MD, JD etc.)
8) Don’t know
9) Not applicable

* Employment scale
a) Working full-time
b) Working part-time
c) Not working and looking for work
d) Disabled and not looking for work
e) Not working and not looking for work
f) Retired
g) Full-time student
h) Part-time student
i) Don’t know
j) Not applicable

2. Do your parents rent or own their home?
- □ Rental apartment
- □ Rental condo
- □ Owned condo
- □ Rental house
- □ Owned house
- □ Don’t know
Background Information Summary

3. Are your parents…
   □ Married □ Common-law □ Separated □ Divorced
   □ Re-married □ Other: __________

4. Place of Birth: Mother: City: __________________ Country: __________________
   Father: City: __________________ Country: __________________
   You: City: __________________ Country: __________________
   Sibling(s): City: __________________ Country: __________________
   City: __________________ Country: __________________
   City: __________________ Country: __________________
   City: __________________ Country: __________________
   City: __________________ Country: __________________

5. Do your parents live in Canada full-time?
   **Mother:** □ Yes □ No                      **Father:** □ Yes □ No
   If no, explain: ____________________________ If no, explain: ____________________________

I understand that participation in research takes time and effort. I appreciate your invaluable contribution to this project.

**Thank you!**
Good morning/afternoon/evening,

I’d like to first thank you for taking the time to sit down and talk with me. I invite you to be as open and honest as possible with your answers. If at any time you feel uncomfortable during the interview, we can either take a break for as long as you need. You also have the option of skipping any questions that you don’t feel comfortable answering or stopping the interview and there will be no negative consequences. Are there any questions/concerns before we begin?

1. How would you describe yourself?
2. What are some positive things about yourself? Why?
3. Do you ever feel disappointed with yourself?
   • What sorts of things make you feel disappointed about yourself? (Each response will have follow up questions):
     • Why does that make you feel disappointed?
     • When was the last time you felt disappointed about that? Can you tell me more about that situation?
     • How did you handle [those] situations?
     • Do you still think about [those] situations or situations like it?
     • How do you handle those thoughts?
4. What sorts of things do you think disappoint your parents?
   • Why?
   • How much do those things bother you?
5. Let’s talk about when you’re feeling down. What sorts of things do you think about?
   • Can you tell me what you think are your top 2 most significant things that make you feel down?
6. Do you ever talk to your parents when you’re feeling down? (If yes…)
   • Both parents? For each parent mentioned:
     • What sorts of things do you talk about with him/her?
     • How do you feel after talking to him/her?
     • How do you think s/he feel?
7. Do you talk to your parents about other things?
   • How often? (Ask for detail: e.g., every day, every weekend, etc.)
   • What sorts of things do you talk about?
   • How do you feel after your talk(s)?
8. Do you think that others feel the same way as you?
   • Why or why not?
   • What makes you think [that]?
9. Have others ever come to you when they’re feeling down or disappointed? If so, who were the most recent (last 2)?
   • What sorts of things do you say to him/her?
   • How do you feel when s/he comes to you?
10. When you’re feeling down, are you able to think of positive things?
    • What sorts of things do you think about?
    • How do you remind yourself about those positive things?
11. When you fail at something or make a mistake on something that’s important to you, what sorts of things, feelings, or emotions do you feel?
    • Do you ever feel consumed or focus entirely on these things/feelings/emotions? Can you please describe it for me?
12. Are there things about yourself that you don’t like?
    • How often do you think about them?
    • How accepting or tolerant are you of your weaknesses, flaws, or mistakes?
13. Has your mom/dad talked to you about [this]?
    • How often?
    • How does it make you feel?
14. How happy do you think others are?
15. Do you feel just as happy, less happy, or more happy?
    • Why or why not?
    • Generally speaking, how happy are you?
    • What sorts of things make you feel happy?
16. What are some things that you would NOT change about yourself? What are some of your favourite things about yourself?
17. How would your parents describe you?
18. If you could give advice to someone your age, what would it be?
19. What advice would you give to parents of youths your age?
Appendix G: Research Assistant Confidentiality Form

RA Confidentiality Form

I, __________ (print name), understand that all the information pertaining to this study and its participants are confidential. I will not disclose any information to anyone outside of the research team of the My World, My Life study.

I understand that I will only be working on electronic copies of the transcripts during data analysis.

RA name ___________________________ RA Signature ___________________________ Date ________________

Researcher’s Signature ___________________________ Date ________________
Appendix H: Counselling Resources

### Peel Region (Brampton & Mississauga)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crisis Services</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peel Children’s Centre (if under 18)</td>
<td>416-410-8615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis Line Peel (if over 18)</td>
<td>905-278-9036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis Support Peel Mobile Team</td>
<td>905-278-9036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kids Help Phone</td>
<td>1-800-668-6868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credit Valley Hospital</td>
<td>905-813-4141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distress Centre Peel</td>
<td>905-278-7208 (M)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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<tr>
<th>Support Services</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nexus Youth Centre</td>
<td>905-566-1883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associated Youth Services of Peel</td>
<td>905-850-5222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Space Coalition of Peel</td>
<td>905-363-6131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-help Resource Centre</td>
<td>416-487-4355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety Empowered</td>
<td>905-451-2123 (B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression &amp; You (CMHA/Peel)</td>
<td>905-451-2121 (B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erin Mills Youth Centre</td>
<td>905-820-3577 (M)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Counselling Services</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rapport Youth and Family Services (12-20 years)</td>
<td>905-455-4100 (B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangerine Walk-In Counselling</td>
<td>905-795-3530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peel Children’s Centre</td>
<td>905-795-3500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Services for Children and Youth</td>
<td>905-451-4655</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic Family Services of Peel Dufferin</td>
<td>905-450-1608 (B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>905-897-1644 (M)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family Services of Peel</td>
<td>905-453-5775</td>
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### Toronto

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crisis Services</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Warm Line</td>
<td>416-960-WARM (9276)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerstein Centre</td>
<td>416-929-5200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distress Centres of Toronto</td>
<td>416-408-HELP (4357)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support Services</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children’s Mental Health of Ontario</td>
<td>416-921-2109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Development Institute</td>
<td>416-603-1827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Massey Centre for Women</td>
<td>416-425-6348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouthLink</td>
<td>416-703-3361</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counselling Services</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Health Centre</td>
<td>416-586-0211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventure Place</td>
<td>416-744-7650 ext. 228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Toronto Youth Services</td>
<td>416-924-2100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Centre for Addiction &amp; Mental Health – Child, Youth, and Family Program</td>
<td>416-535-8501</td>
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<tr>
<td>Delisle Youth Services</td>
<td>416-482-0081</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hincks-Dellcrest Centre</td>
<td>416-924-1164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humewood House</td>
<td>416-651-5657 ext. 240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integra Program of CDI</td>
<td>416-486-8055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothercraft</td>
<td>416-364-7373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oolagen</td>
<td>416-395-0660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turning Point Youth Services</td>
<td>416-925-9250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorktown Child &amp; Family Centre</td>
<td>416-394-2424</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Scarborough**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crisis Services</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Scarborough Hospital</td>
<td>416-438-2911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youthdale</td>
<td>416-363-9990</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support Services</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YouthLink</td>
<td>416-967-1773</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counselling Services</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aisling Discoveries Child and Family Centre</td>
<td>416-321-5464 ext. 233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Metro Youth Services</td>
<td>416-438-3697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosalie Hall</td>
<td>416-438-6880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s Up Walk-in Clinic</td>
<td>416-438-3697 ext. 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1

*Coding System for Descriptions of Self*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Possessing an optimistic, hopeful, happy, or friendly outlook.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambitious</td>
<td>A focus on achievement with regard to one’s life outcome(s), such as in school and career.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>A mental fortitude associated with maintain one’s poise and portraying an ideal self during times of distress or conflict.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good work ethic</td>
<td>Efforts toward accomplishments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artistic</td>
<td>Expressing one’s self through visual arts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humourous</td>
<td>Engaging in amusing discussion and conversation, often through jokes and laughter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lazy</td>
<td>Unable to achieve or do something due to a lack of energy or a general unwillingness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassion</td>
<td>Demonstrating kindness, caring, lovingness, or accepting to others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic/cultural/religious traits</td>
<td>African-Canadian; Christian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2
*Coding System for the Attributes, Traits, or Characteristics That are Not Liked in the Self*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overthinker</td>
<td>Heavily focused, consumed, or immersed in one’s thoughts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical appearance</td>
<td>The way in which one looks, including body shape, type, and composition (e.g., weight, height, ethnicity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laziness/procrastination</td>
<td>Difficulty finding energy to engage in actions that one wants to engage in, including prolonging attempts to engage in desired activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning capability</td>
<td>Concern over one’s ability to learn to the same extent as others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passivity</td>
<td>Inability to stand up for oneself, especially during social interactions such as conflict or during confusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness to others</td>
<td>Feeling too accepting or open to others, often resulting in feelings of being taken advantage of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

*Coding System for Triggers/Contexts/Reasons for Feeling Down*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not reaching dreams /</td>
<td>Not attaining or accomplishing goals set for self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>barriers to success</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td>Lacking financial stability or funds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disappointing parents</td>
<td>Engaging in a behaviour that triggers one’s parent or parents to feel unhappy or displeasure with him or her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laziness</td>
<td>Not completing tasks or activities due to lack of effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family issues/conflicts</td>
<td>Arguing with or disagreeing with one’s family member(s) causing conflict or strife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship issues/conflicts</td>
<td>Arguing with or disagreeing with one’s family member(s) causing conflict or strife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worthlessness</td>
<td>Viewing one’s self as having no value or not living up to one’s expectations of him/herself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecurity</td>
<td>Feeling unconfident about oneself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lying</td>
<td>Telling an untruth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades/school</td>
<td>Grades or general academic performance does not meet youth’s and/or parent’s criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homesick</td>
<td>Feelings of longing or melancholy due to being away from one’s home country, friends, and/or family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4

*Coding System for the Content of Youths’ Positive Thinking*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgement of temporary distress</td>
<td>Viewing one’s pain, distress, or negative feelings as being temporary rather than permanent circumstances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive memories/events</td>
<td>Recalling past memories or thinking about upcoming events, whether connected or disconnected to one’s current situation, that sparks positive thinking or happiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shift to objective/positive view of situation</td>
<td>Actively changing one’s perspective of his/her current circumstances to a balanced or objective view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignorance/avoidance/distraction</td>
<td>Engaging in behaviour or thoughts that are counter to one’s current feelings of distress or negativity in order to avoid or distract oneself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Looking to one’s religion or faith and focusing on something “bigger” than oneself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepting one’s lack of control</td>
<td>Acknowledging a lack of control in negative events and being accepting (e.g., “everything happens for a reason”).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gratefulness</td>
<td>Shifting one’s focus to feelings of gratitude and/or one’s fortune</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-talk</td>
<td>Internal thoughts and speech, directing one’s self to positive aspects of the self (e.g., complimenting one’s physical appearance)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5

*Coding System for Contexts/Triggers of Happiness*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with significant others</td>
<td>Spending time with significant others and or acknowledging the significance of relationships to others, including family, friends, and romantic partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alone time</td>
<td>Spending time on activities by oneself, including listening to music, playing video games, watching movies and television, reading books, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going out</td>
<td>Engaging in excursions or activities with others, including shopping, going to a movie theatre or restaurant, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades/school</td>
<td>One’s academic achievements, including grades.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise/physical activity</td>
<td>Engaging in physical activity, including cardiovascular exercise or weight training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6

*Coding System for Parent-Child Conversation Topics with Mothers When Feeling Down*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loneliness</td>
<td>Feeling isolated or excluded from others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family issues/conflicts</td>
<td>Arguments with or disagreeing with one’s family member(s) causing conflict or strife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship issues/conflicts</td>
<td>Arguments with or disagreeing with one’s friend(s) causing conflict or strife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner issues/conflicts</td>
<td>Arguments with or disagreeing with one’s partner causing conflict or strife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School/grades</td>
<td>Grades or general academic performance does not meet youth’s and/or parent’s criteria</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7

*Coding System for General Parent-Child Conversation Topics with Mothers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other family members</td>
<td>Discussions on one’s family member(s), including members’ conversations with youths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Everything”</td>
<td>Discussion on various topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School/grades</td>
<td>Discussions on the youth’s progress, involvement, or current events at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television/media/news</td>
<td>Discussions on television programs, current events, pop culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General update</td>
<td>Discussions on the youth’s current life, including progress in school, conversations with friends, classmates, and teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships (romantic, platonic)</td>
<td>Discussions on youth’s relationships with significant others, including romantic and platonic relationships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8

*Coding System for Parent-Child Conversation Topics with the Father when Feeling Down*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School/grades</td>
<td>Grades or general academic performance does not meet youth’s and/or parent’s criteria</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9

*Coding System for General Parent-Child Conversation Topics with Fathers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Permission</td>
<td>Requesting consent from the parent, typically to socialize with friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School/grades</td>
<td>Discussions regarding the youth’s progress, involvement, or current events at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television/media/news</td>
<td>Discussions including television programs, current events, pop culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General update</td>
<td>Discussions regarding the youth’s current life, including progress in school, conversations with friends, classmates, and teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>