The Positive Side of Mental Health:
Positive Life Events, Schemas, and Affect in Models of Youth Well-Being

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ABSTRACT

THE POSITIVE SIDE OF MENTAL HEALTH: POSITIVE LIFE EVENTS, SCHEMAS, AND AFFECT IN MODELS OF YOUTH WELL-BEING

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Integrating positive variables into traditional models of youth mental health is important for building a more complete understanding of the factors implicated in both the absence of psychopathology as well as the presence of well-being. This dissertation aimed to explore how positive life events (PLEs) and positive cognition impact youth well-being, using a 5-day daily diary study, in which youth reported on their daily PLEs. A longitudinal model was employed to evaluate the impact of PLEs on longer-term well-being. In Chapter 1, the diary entries were qualitatively analyzed to evaluate the types of events youth typically experience and the qualities in PLEs that appear to facilitate positive experience. Youth were observed to report events involving a variety of people, across diverse locations and contexts. Life events that involved connection, laughter, play, kindness, creativity, relaxation, achievement, or simple pleasures appeared to contribute most to youth positive experience. Youth appeared to derive positive experiences from the simple events in their daily lives, and were observed to engage in positive emotion regulation, and experience upward spirals and a reparative impact of their daily PLEs. In Chapter 2, qualitative analyses highlighted processes that may interfere with youth PLEs. Analyses indicated that youth often integrate negative reflections when reporting on their PLEs. In Chapter 3, quantitative analyses were conducted to evaluate the implications of youth PLEs for their state and trait emotional well-being. Multilevel modeling indicated that greater objective and subjective PLEs, higher positive emotion regulation, and lower negative reactions to PLEs, all predicted increased positive affect. Furthermore, lower positive reactions to PLEs and higher negative reactions to PLEs predicted increased negative affect. In Chapter 4, the longer-term implications of PLEs for youth emotional development were evaluated. The results indicated that over time, lower positive schemas interact with subjective PLE intensity to predict increased happiness and life satisfaction. Lower positive schemas also interacted with negative components of PLEs to predict decreased life satisfaction and increased depressive symptoms over time. Implications for models of youth well-being and prevention/intervention efforts are discussed.
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The Positive Side of Mental Health: Positive Life Events, Schemas, and Affect in Models of Youth Well-being

Introduction

Research on youth mental health is almost exclusively deficit-based and has yet to incorporate an understanding of positive factors into models of risk. Integrating an understanding of positive functioning into models of mental health is important, as mental health includes both the absence of psychopathology as well as the presences of positive markers of well-being (Keys, 2002, 2005, 2007). Furthermore, research suggests that positive factors not only serve as markers of positive emotional functioning, but may play an important role in creating increased adaptation over time, may protect youth from psychopathology, and in their absence may serve as early markers of vulnerability to mental health difficulties (Wood & Tarrier, 2010). Distinct processes are likely involved in daily positive experiences, with positive events associated with unique personality traits, and triggering unique cognitive and affective experiences (e.g., Zautra, Affleck, Tennen, Reich, & Davis, 2005). As such, the neglect of research on positive variables has resulted in little understanding of the processes at play involved in creating positive functioning and complete mental health in youth, that involves both the presence of positive and the absence of negative experience. The aim of this project was to develop a stronger understanding of the mechanisms at play that contribute to well-being in youth. Specifically, the aim was to integrate an understanding of positive variables into traditional models of mental health, by focusing on the impact of positive life experiences, cognition, and affect on positive emotional development in early adolescence.

Integrating Positive Variables into Models of Mental Health

Research on youth emotional functioning more frequently focuses on maladaptive rather than adaptive emotional development (Larson, 2000). While a large body of literature has
focused on understanding child psychopathology, much less research examines how children and adolescents grow to experience positive emotions, life satisfaction, and well-being. Consistently, prevention and intervention programs have often aimed to reduce aversive symptoms, rather than increase well-being or other positive aspects of life (Seligman, 2002a). This focus has remained despite recent evidence that lacking negative experience may only be enough to reduce aversive symptoms, and that positive experiences may be essential not only to experiencing positive emotions, but also to maintaining mental health in the face of life stressors (Fredrickson, 2001; Keyfitz, Lumley, Hennig, & Dozois, 2013; Wood & Tarrier, 2010).

There has been recent recognition in the mental health field that “as important as it is to reduce or eliminate problems among children and adolescents, it is just as important to help them thrive and form positive connections to the larger world” (Evans et al., 2005, p. 498). This recognition is part of a recent paradigm shift that attempts to move away from the traditional deficit based understanding of mental illness, and instead toward a view of mental health as “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (World Health Organization, 2006, p. 1). This perspective recognizes the importance of defining mental health as not only the absence of psychopathology but also as the presence of flourishing and other positive markers of well-being (e.g., strengths, positive characteristics, positive emotions; Keyes, 2002, 2005, 2007). While research indicates that approximately 80% of youth annually do not meet criteria for a mental health diagnosis, mental illness and mental health have been demonstrated to exist on two continua (Keyes, 2005). Thus, the absence of mental illness does not indicate that youth are mentally healthy (Keyes, 2002, 2005, 2007). In a sample of 12 to 18 year olds, only approximately 38% of youth were considered mentally healthy, experiencing high levels of positive functioning overall in their
lives (Keyes, 2006). This research highlights the importance of focusing on better understanding contributors to positive youth development, along with prevention and remediation of psychopathology, to support youth in developing complete mental health and well-being.

**Positive Youth Development**

Adolescence need not be viewed only as a time of “storm and stress” as this developmental period also provides opportunities for positive emotional development (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005). Still, research in youth clinical psychology has more frequently focused on maladaptive rather than adaptive processes involved in emotional development (Larson, 2000). While approximately 20% of youth have been found to experience clinically significant mental health difficulties, there is evidence that even those who do not qualify for clinical diagnoses may still experience deficits in their positive development. These deficits in positive development are thought to associate with feelings of dissatisfaction, boredom, disconnection, and disengagement from life experiences. In a study of 16,000 moments in the daily lives of youth, participants reported feeling bored in 27% of their experiences (Larson & Richards, 1991). Larson (2000) noted that the reports of these youth “communicate an ennui of being trapped in the present, waiting for someone to prove them that life is worth living” (p. 170). While many youth engage in their daily life experiences (e.g., doing schoolwork, listening to parents, spending time with peers), research suggests that many youth may also move through the motions of their daily lives, without a sense of deep engagement with their experiences. Larson emphasizes the importance of getting adolescents’ “fires lit,” to help them develop a sense of excitement, engagement, and agency in their life experiences.

Developing an understanding of factors that contribute to positive development is essential, as childhood development may impact the life course of the individual. As Seligman
and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) emphasized, “Much of the task of prevention in this new century will be to create a science of human strength whose mission will be to understand and learn how to foster these virtues in young people.” (p. 7). Aiding youth in building positive development may help to reduce the prevalence of boredom, apathy, and dissatisfaction with life, that may be currently impacting youth (Larson, 2000; Larson & Richards, 1991), and may instead serve to engage youth in their daily lives and provide them with a sense of meaning and purpose. Further building our knowledge of positive emotional development also has implications for early prevention of psychopathology, as positive characteristics often serve as early predictors of psychopathology, and may buffer against the impact of stressors and difficult life experiences (Wood & Tarrier, 2010).

Understanding factors that contribute to or detract from positive emotional functioning is particularly important in early adolescence, as this is a critical time for the onset of emotional difficulties. Considerable research indicates that the prevalence of mental health difficulties increases dramatically during this period (e.g., Costello, Mustillo, Erkanli, Keeler, & Angold, 2003; Hankin et al., 1998). Youth who present symptoms of early vulnerability to psychopathology may be at risk of their symptoms worsening over time, and early adolescent onset of psychopathology is often associated with a more severe trajectory of psychopathology (Abela & Hankin, 2008). Consistent with this point, adults who experience clinically significant mental health difficulties can often trace their symptom onset to adolescence (Kim-Cohen et al, 2003). From a developmental perspective, it is also during early adolescence that important aspects of identity or self-concept may begin to stabilize or consolidate (Swanson, Spencer, & Petersen, 1998), and once consolidated, these variables that serve as vulnerability factors for psychopathology may be less amenable to change (e.g., Young, 1990; Young, Klosko, &
Weishaar, 2003). Thus, research on the interplay of life events, cognitions and affect in adolescence is ideal for evaluating potential mechanisms at play that may have important proximal and distal influences on well-being.

**Importance of Understanding Positive Development**

**Subjective well-being and complete mental health.** In an effort to shift away from a deficit-based study of mental illness, positive psychology provides important conceptual frameworks for understanding human well-being. As noted by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) the focus of positive psychology is to shift from a focus on ameliorating pathology, and instead to building positive qualities implicated in human flourishing and thriving. To better understand factors that may aid youth in developing more complete mental health, it is important that in addition to examining vulnerability factors, we pay notice to positive aspects of development, such as “well-being, contentment, and satisfaction (in the past); hope and optimism (for the future); and flow and happiness (in the present)” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5). As well, these researchers emphasize the importance of focusing on complex aspects of human thriving, including love, courage, wisdom, interpersonal connection, perseverance, mindfulness, originality, and other qualities that make life rich and meaningful. Similarly, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) notes that experiencing subjective well-being “is not just one of the dimensions of life, it *is* life itself” (p. 192). While this research has begun to flourish in the last decade, the research frequently focuses on positive factors in isolation from negative factors (Pawelski, 2016a, 2016b). This too is problematic, as “positive characteristics should not be examined in isolation from the larger systems in which they are embedded” (Diener, 2003, p. 118). As such, it is important to focus on positive and negative factors in joint models, to develop a more comprehensive understanding of complete mental health in youth. To that end, the
current study aims to develop a better understanding of the factors that lead to or may interfere with youth well-being, examining positive and negative constructs within the same models.

**Positive factors as a process.** While positive functioning is an important proximal marker of well-being (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999) research indicates that it may also play an important role in impacting future health and well-being (Fredrickson 1998). Positive emotions (e.g., joy, love, contentment, happiness) have been found to play a role in creating adaptation in people’s lives, and may produce several tangible benefits. Specifically, positive emotions are often linked to more adaptive and beneficial patterns of thinking (e.g., open, creative, flexible, integrative, efficient; Estrada, Isen, & Young, 1997; Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987; Isen & Means, 1983; Isen, Rozmenzweig, & Young, 1991). Laboratory experiments have shown that induced positive emotions may broaden the scopes of attention and thinking (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005; Isen et al., 1987; Kahn & Isen, 1993) and may also facilitate attention to and processing of important, self-relevant information (Aspinwall, 1998, 2001; Reed & Aspinwall, 1998; Trope & Pomerantz, 1998). Positive emotionality has also been found to play an important role in self-regulation and coping (e.g., Aspinwall, 1998; Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002; Keltner & Bonanno, 1997). Fredrickson (1998) argues that positive states “broaden” a person’s thoughts and actions, and thus promote approach behaviours and engagement and exploration of the environment, which in turn build a person’s personal resources for successful coping. This hypothesis has been supported through research indicating that positive states create an “upward spiral” in which positive emotions and broadened thinking aid in finding positive meaning in situations, which in turn facilitates more positive coping and higher resilience (e.g., Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002).
Positive factors play a protective role. Positive variables have also been found to protect from vulnerability to psychopathology (Wood & Tarrier, 2010). Positive life experiences may protect against psychopathology by buffering individuals from the impact of negative life events (Lazarus, Kanner, & Folkman, 1980; Needles & Abramson, 1990). Positive cognition may protect individuals from vulnerability to psychopathology (e.g., Johnson, Gooding, Wood, & Tarrier, 2010; Johnson et al., 2010, Keyfitz et al., 2013), by filtering information and life experiences through a positive lens (Taylor & Brown, 1988, 1994) and possibly reducing the likelihood that stressful events are negatively interpreted (Johnson et al., 2010). Furthermore, research suggests that it is the presence of positive cognition, as opposed to the absence of negative cognition, that may be instrumental in creating resilience and protecting from vulnerability to psychopathology in youth samples (Keyfitz et al., 2013). Similarly, positive emotions are thought to aid in the building of personal resources that can be used to facilitate coping and resilience (Fredrickson, 2004).

Positive factors as early indicators of vulnerability to psychopathology. The absence of positive experience has also been found to predict psychopathology above and beyond negative experience, and thus may play an important role in early detection of vulnerability to psychopathology (Keyfitz et al., 2013; Wood & Tarrier, 2010), particularly within youth samples (Keyfitz et al., 2013). Several studies indicate that having low levels of positive experience can serve as an early indication of vulnerability to later mental health difficulties (e.g., Keyfitz et al., 2013; Wood & Joseph, 2010), and these positive factors are thought to be implicated in the etiology of psychopathology (Wood & Tarrier, 2010). Specifically, Wood and Joseph (2010) demonstrated that after controlling for negative predictors of depression, individuals who possessed low levels of well-being were 7 times more likely to develop depression 10 years later.
Similarly, in a study that examined early vulnerability to psychopathology in a community sample of youth, ages 9-14, low levels of positive self-schemas predicted depression and anxiety above and beyond negative schemas (Keyfitz et al., 2013). In this study, positive schemas served as a *stronger* predictor of depression than did negative schemas, indicating that low levels of positive cognition may play an even more important role than high levels of negative cognition in the early vulnerability to psychopathology in youth. These findings suggest that low positive experience may be an important early indicator of vulnerability to psychopathology, and may aid in the early detection of what has the potential to develop into more chronic mood-related psychopathology. Further research suggests that having low levels of well-being may create increased vulnerability to mental health difficulties (e.g., Furr & Funder, 1998; Lewinsohn, Redner, & Seeley, 1991). Thus, low positive experience may be a particularly important variable to investigate in youth samples, as it may serve as the earliest indicator of risk for psychopathology.

Given the important role of positive experience in youth development, the current project aimed to better understand how PLEs, cognition, and affect serve to contribute to youth experiences of well-being and protect from psychopathology, as well as how low levels of positive characteristics may act as early vulnerability factors to emotional difficulties.

**Understanding Subjective Well-Being**

There are many components of subjective well-being, including: “life satisfaction (global judgments of one’s life), satisfaction with important domains (e.g., work satisfaction), positive affect (experiencing many pleasant emotions and moods), and low levels of negative affect (experiencing few unpleasant emotions and moods;” Diener, 2000, p. 34). Diener (1984) suggests that there are also three necessary components of subjective well-being: a *subjective*
component experienced within the person, the presence of positive characteristics rather than just the absence of negative, and a global rather than a specific evaluation of one’s life. Furthermore, there are both state and trait components of subjective well-being (Diener et al., 1999). These components are theorized to be transactional in nature with trait components, such as personality characteristics impacting state-level well-being (i.e., daily affect reactions), and daily affective experience also impacting overall trait well-being.

**High positive and low negative affect.** Positive and negative affect are described as the two major components of emotion and mood (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). People’s affect or “on-line evaluations of the events that occur in their lives” are thought to be an important contributing component of subjective well-being (Diener et al., 1999; p. 277), with high positive affect (PA) and low negative affect (NA) considered markers of well-being (Diener, 2000). Both state and trait experiences of PA and NA have been found to be unique and important predictors of longer-term mental health outcomes (Merz & Roesch, 2011). PA has been negatively associated with mental health outcomes (e.g., Clark, Watson, & Mineka, 1994; Merz & Roesch, 2011) and high PA and low NA have predicted well-being outcomes (e.g., Brown & Marshall, 2001; Cheng & Furnham, 2003; Dua, 1993; Huang & Zhang, 2010; Juth, Smyth, & Santuzzi, 2008; Lorr & Wunderlich, 1988; Merz & Roesch, 2011; Richardson, Ratner, & Zumbol, 2009). The presence of PA is thought to serve as a process that leads to increased well-being over time (Fredrickson, 1998, 2004), whereas NA has been implicated in psychopathology (Clark & Watson, 1991a, 1991b; Clark et al., 1994; Watson & Clark, 1984).

**Happiness.** Happiness is a related construct that is also considered an important component of subjective well-being (Diener, 1984). Some researchers define happiness as involving high levels of PA and the absence of NA (Bradburn, 1969). These researchers measure
happiness by subtracting one’s total NA from PA experiences (Kozma & Stones, 1980). While some argue that the central component of happiness involves PA experiences, such as joy, others consider the experience of contentment as the most important component of happiness (Veenhoven, 1991). Furthermore, findings suggest that frequency, rather than intensity, of PA is the best indicator of happiness, as the majority of people considered happy experience mild-to-moderate PA, rather than intense PA, which has been found to be related to negative outcomes (Diener, Colvin, Pavot, Allman, 1991; Diener, Sandvik, & Pavot, 1991). Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999) take a different approach, and suggest that the strongest indicator of happiness is one’s subjective rating of one’s own happiness, as people intrinsically “know” when they are happy (p. 138). This subjective judgment is not thought to be the same as the sum of a person’s affective experiences, as some individuals may view themselves as happy despite having difficulties in their lives, and others may view themselves as unhappy, despite having felt PA in their recent experience. As such, Lyubomirsky and Lepper argue that happiness is best captured through subjective ratings of one’s own happiness. Happiness is viewed as both a trait that is relatively consistent, regardless of circumstance, and a state that changes as a result of environmental conditions (Csikszentmihalyi & Wong, 1991; Diener et al., 1991). State and trait measures of happiness are thought to be related, with momentary experiences impacting one’s overall trait happiness and vice versa. Some researchers consider both state and trait dimensions of happiness by measuring happiness at multiple time points and using the mean happiness score to represent a trait measure of happiness (Csikszentmihalyi & Wong, 1991).

**Life Satisfaction.** Life satisfaction is another important component of subjective well-being, defined as one’s subjective evaluation of his/her quality of life (Huebner, 2004). This construct is distinguished from happiness, as happiness focuses on one’s affect experience,
whereas life satisfaction is related to one’s cognitive evaluation of his/her life (Lewinsohn, Redner, & Seeley, 1991). There are both global and multidimensional models of life satisfaction (Huebner, 2004). Global models evaluate a person’s satisfaction with life overall (e.g., “I have a good life”) whereas multidimensional models evaluate a person’s satisfaction across life domains (e.g., friends, family, school, neighborhood; Huebner, 2004). While life satisfaction reports may be impacted by life experiences and affect (Huebner, 2004; Lucas & Donellan, 2007), life satisfaction is considered generally stable amongst youth (Dew, Huebner, & Laughlin, 2002; Gilman & Huebner, 1997; Huebner, 1991; Huebner, Funk, & Gilman, 2000), thus distinguished from more transient emotional experiences (Huebner, 2004). Although research demonstrates that life satisfaction is associated with high levels of PA and low levels of NA, these variables have been found to deviate over time, and represent two separate constructs (Diener, 1994).

Developing an understanding of the factors that contribute to well-being is an important step in beginning to develop a model of more complete mental health in youth. The aim of the current project is to integrate positive variables into traditional deficit-based diathesis-stress models of mental health, to better understand factors that contribute to or detract from youth emotional well-being (i.e., high PA and low NA, happiness, and life satisfaction).

**Building Positive Models of Mental Health**

Within a developmental psychopathology framework, diathesis-stress models have been informative in helping to understand mental health difficulties among youth (Hankin & Abela, 2005). While these models have typically been deficit based, focused on the role of negative life events, vulnerability factors, and negative mood outcomes, they provide useful frameworks for understanding how different aspects of youth experience may interact to contribute to youth emotional well-being. Central to diathesis-stress theory is the notion that individuals must
possess an underlying vulnerability factor, as well as a sufficient stressor to trigger psychopathology (e.g., Brown & Harris, 1989; Grant & McMahon, 2005; Meyer, Chrousos, & Gold, 2001; Monroe & Simons, 1991). One influential model that has been particularly informative in understanding vulnerability to youth psychopathology, is the cognitive diathesis-stress model (e.g., Abela & Hankin, 2008; Hankin & Abela, 2005; Lakdawalla, Hankin, & Mermelstein, 2007 for reviews). This model posits that the onset and maintenance of psychopathology results when youth possess an underlying cognitive vulnerability (i.e., negative cognitive schemas or a negative cognitive style) that is activated by negative life experiences (Abramson, Metalsky, & Alloy, 1989; Beck, 1967; Monroe & Simmons, 1991; Young, 1999; Young et al., 2003). For psychopathology to unfold one must possess the underlying vulnerability factor, such as negative cognitive schemas and also have experienced a sufficient stressor (e.g., relationship break-up) to activate the schema. These cognitive theories of psychopathology have been elaborated and refined through research, but their core assumptions have been researched extensively and are well supported in child and adolescent samples (e.g., Abela & Hankin, 2008; Hankin & Abela, 2005; Lakdawalla et al., 2007).

While research on the vulnerability-stress model has provided a strong understanding of the mechanisms involved in maladaptive development, research has rarely focused on the positive dimension of these models of mental health. The current project aims to integrate an understanding of positive factors into traditional deficit-based models of mental health by developing an understanding of how positive variables such as PLEs and positive cognitive factors, impact youth well-being. The aim is to evaluate factors that may be implicated in complex models of mental health, including vulnerability to mental health difficulties, protection from psychopathology, as well as fostering of well-being.
Positive Life Events

Studying positive life events (PLEs) is an important goal in moving towards a more complex and integrated model of mental health, as positive events “elicit, flesh out, and cultivate the positive elements of a person’s life—such as his or her assets, aspirations, hopes, and interest” (Davidson et al., 2001; Davidson, Shahar, Lawless, Sells, & Tondora, 2006, p. 151). The first aim of this project was to develop an understanding of the role of PLEs in youth well-being. While life events have been found to play an important role in emotional functioning (e.g., McCollough, Huebner, & Laughlin, 2000) and the development of psychopathology (e.g., Abela & D’Alessandro, 2002; Abela & Sarin, 2002; Goodyer, Kolvin, & Gatzanis, 1985; Lewinsohn, Joiner, & Rohde, 2001; Williamson et al., 1998), the majority of research on life events evaluates the role of negative rather than positive events in youth development. This is problematic, as “positive and negative transactions bring different mixes of states and traits to the table, and different mechanisms appear to underlie each” (Zautra, Affleck, Tennen, Reich, & Davis, 2005, p. 1532). Research indicates that distinct processes are involved in daily positive experiences, with PLEs linked to unique personality variables, and triggering distinct emotional processes and affective experiences. For example, there is evidence that positive events are related to PA, while negative events are primarily related to NA (Block & Zautra, 1981; Zautra & Reich, 1982; Zautra & Simons, 1979). This suggests that studying PLEs may be essential to moving towards a more integrated understanding of youth well-being.

The conceptualization of PLEs is distinct from negative events. Research on negative events often focuses on the frequency and nature of events people are exposed to (stress exposure), their reactivity to the events, and individual differences in coping effectiveness and coping choice in response to negative events (Bolger & Zuckerman, 1995). In contrast to
negative events, PLEs are often actively sought after and created, rather than being passively experienced (Reich & Zautra, 1981, 1984; Wright, Zautra, & Braver, 1985). Zatura et al. (2005) suggest that positive events should be characterized as being actively *engaged in and responded to* in order to acquire benefits. As well, these researchers suggest that people may have different *personal capacities* to sustain PA in response to events. Given the scant research on PLEs in youth populations, the first aim of the current project was to evaluate how youth engage in and respond to their positive experiences, and later evaluate whether particular characteristics are associated with the greater ability to sustain PA in response to positive events. A further aim was to examine the association of PLEs with proximal and distal aspects of well-being.

**What is the nature of positive events for youth?** In one of the more comprehensive, open-ended assessment of the types of life events youth experience, Compas, Davis, and Forsythe (1985) found that youth reported on a diverse array of major and daily events. The findings of this past research highlighted that extant measures of positive events were quite unrepresentative of the diversity of life events youth experienced. Measures developed since that time have focused on a variety of life event domains, including: family life, close friendships, peer relationships, extracurricular activities, school, achievement, and health, and appearance (e.g., Compas, Davis, Forsythe, & Wagner, 1987; Shahar, Henrich, Reiner, & Little, 2003b). While this research has contributed greatly to our understanding of PLEs in youth, given the complexity of youth daily positive experiences, there is still much to learn about the nature of PLEs that may contribute to youth positive functioning.

Past qualitative research within adult populations has provided a richer understanding of some of the elements of positive events that may contribute to emotional well-being. For example, Davidson and colleagues evaluated a series of narrative and phenomenological studies
on the role of PLEs on individuals struggling with mental illness, and concluded that positive events, such as play, pleasure, and connection with others, may provide several protective benefits (Davidson et al., 2006). In another study, life experiences that provided opportunity to connect with others and engage spontaneously in “seemingly trivial pleasures,” such as having lunch with a peer, giving something to someone, gardening, cooking, listening to music, enjoying nature, or animals etc., were found to contribute significantly to the individuals’ well-being (Davidson et al., 2001). These experiences were found to add richness to the participants’ lives, and were thought to help them recognize that life has meaning, value, and hold the potential to experience pleasure and satisfaction. The value of these positive experiences was demonstrated by one participant’s statement that prior to engaging in these activities “I was existing, but I wasn’t living” (p. 279). As such, an initial aim of the current project was to conduct a qualitative evaluation of the nature of PLEs experienced by youth. This qualitative approach was foundational to the overall project and was considered particularly valuable given the dearth of knowledge regarding the suspected, but generally not well-explored nuance and complexity of youth PLEs. The aim was to better understand the aspects of daily events that may facilitate positive experience for youth, and whether there are particular ways youth engage with their life experiences that influence well-being.

**Positive events and emotional functioning.** A body of research suggests that positive experience may play a role in increasing positive emotionality (e.g., Zautra et al., 2005) and decreasing emotional distress (e.g., Cohen & Hoberman, 1983; Cohen, McGowan, Fooskas, & Rose, 1984; Reich & Zautra, 1981). Research suggests that PLEs may have a protective impact either directly, through increasing one’s immediate PA and well-being (e.g., Kanner, Feldman, Weinberger, & Ford, 1987; Reich & Zautra, 1981; Shahar & Priel, 2002; Zautra et al., 2005) or
indirectly, by “buffering” an individual from the impact of stress (e.g., Cohen & Hoberman, 1983; Lazarus et al., 1980; Shahar & Priel, 2002). Stress-buffering models suggest that positive events ameliorate the distress created by negative life experiences (Cohen, Burt, & Bjork, 1987; Kanner et al., 1987; Reich & Zautra, 1981; Shahar & Priel, 2002). Positive events have been found to provide several protective benefits, such as providing respite from illness, hopefulness for the future, meaning and purpose in people’s lives, increased value and feelings of agency, opportunities for connection with others, and opportunities for people to learn about their own strengths, abilities, and resilience (Davidson et al., 2006). Research on a young adult population indicates that life satisfaction may fluctuate as a function of frequency of perceived or experienced PLEs (Lewinsohn et al., 1991). Positive and negative daily experiences, as well as positive major life events have also been related to life satisfaction outcomes in youth populations (Ash & Huebner, 2001; McCullough et al., 2000). Low life satisfaction has been linked to a higher frequency and reactivity to negative events and a lower ability to enjoy one’s life experiences. Furthermore, research suggests that the absence of PLEs may contribute to vulnerability to negative emotional outcomes, beyond the presence of negative life events (e.g., Kanner et al., 1987). Although there is evidence that PLEs are implicated in well-being, there is little extant literature about the mechanisms through which positive experience contributes to vulnerability or protection from emotional difficulties in youth. With this in mind, an aim of the current project was to build a more comprehensive understanding of how positive events may contribute to youth well-being.

The association between PLEs and well-being is likely complex. For example, another body of literature suggests that PLEs have no impact on emotionality (e.g., Sarason, Sarason, Potter, & Antoni, 1985; Zautra & Reich, 1983) or that positive events can be associated with
adverse effects (e.g., Brown & McGill, 1989; Hirsch, Moos, & Reischl, 1985). Some research underscores the importance of individual differences related to PLEs and well-being with some individuals not prone or able to experience positive benefits of PLEs (e.g., Brown & McGill, 1989; Feldman, Joormann, & Johnson, 2008; Parrot, 1993; Shimizu & Pelham, 2004; Wood, Heimpel, & Michela, 2003). Those with particular personality characteristics (e.g., self-criticism, neediness, low self-concept) may be less likely to generate positive events (Brown & McGill, 1989; Shahar, Henrich, Blatt, Ryan, & Little, 2003a; Wood et al., 2003). For these individuals, positive experiences may be associated with negative functioning (e.g., Brown & McGill, 1989; Hirsch et al., 1985; Wood et al., 2003). Little research has been conducted on this topic, perhaps due to the expectation that individuals have the natural capacity to experience positive benefits from their life events, and that “good things” result in good outcomes; however, research indicates that to experience the beneficial effects of PLEs, one may need to engage in active processing of positive experiences (e.g., Larsen & Prizmic, 2004). This may, in part, be understood by cognitive processes that moderate relations between positive events and outcomes (e.g., Brown & McGill, 1989; Campbell, Chew, & Scratchley, 1991; Diener et al., 1991; Shimizu & Pelham, 2004). Life events are not automatically synonymous with stress, as stress can partly be considered a psychological process that is impacted by how one evaluates and copes with the events (Campbell et al., 1991). As such, the same event can result in different cognitive and affective responses for different individuals, depending on their particular characteristics (e.g., Brown & McGill, 1989; Campbell et al., 1991; Shimizu & Pelham, 2004). Thus, another aim of current study was to better understand whether there are individual differences in the way youth process and respond to their daily life experiences that either facilitate or disrupt the absorption of the positive benefits from their daily experiences.
Cognitive Response to PLEs: Positive Emotion Regulation and Dampening

Positive Emotion Regulation. One’s cognitive reaction to an event has been found to play an important role in determining the way the event impacts his or her emotional functioning (e.g., Campbell et al., 1991; Diener et al., 1991; Lazarus, DeLongis, & Folkman, 1985). There is evidence of the importance of actively engaging in positive strategies to maintain or enhance one’s positive experiences (e.g., Bryant, 2003; Feldman et al., 2008; Larsen & Prizmic, 2004; Min’er & Dejun, 2001; Wood et al., 2003). Lykken (1999, 2000) suggests that some individuals engage in “happy habits,” or strategies that aim to integrate pleasurable moments into people’s daily lives. In a review of emotion regulation literature, Nelis and colleagues have identified four positive emotion regulation strategies, including: savoring, capitalizing, behavioral display, and positive mental time travel (Nelis, Quoidbach, Hansenne, & Mikolajczak, 2011). These various strategies have been linked to increased well-being and may protect against vulnerability to mental health difficulties.

Savouring the present moment involves engaging in emotion regulation techniques to purposely focus one’s attention on the positive aspects of one’s current experiences (Bryant, 1989). Savouring has been associated with various measures of subjective well-being, including happiness, gratification, self-esteem, PA, and optimism, and negatively associated with measures of distress, including depression, hopelessness, neuroticism, guilt and anhedonia (Bryant, 2003).

A related construct that is associated with increased well-being is positive rumination, or “the tendency to respond to PA states with recurrent thoughts about positive self-qualities, PA experience, and one’s favorable life circumstances” (Feldman et al., 2008, p. 509). Positive rumination has been found to be associated with prolonged PA experiences (Larsen & Prizmic,
increased self-esteem and confidence when approaching new tasks (Martin & Tesser, 1996), and negatively associated with depression (Feldman et al., 2008).

Similarly, Nelis et al. (2011) suggest that mindfulness, or the tendency to purposely attend to the present moments in a nonjudgmental way (Kabat-Zinn, 1994), may also be another form of savouring. Research suggests that engaging in mindfulness strategies is linked to experiencing increased positive emotionality in the present (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Langer, 1989). Mindfulness predicts stronger self-regulation, lower levels of mood difficulties and stress, and increased well-being (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Kabat-Zinn et al., 1992; Kabat-Zinn, Lipworth, & Burney, 1985). Consistently, research suggests that engaging mindfully with one’s experiences may improve positive emotions in a way that “outpace[s] the hedonic treadmill” (Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008, p. 1045). The hedonic treadmill model suggests that while positive events have a brief impact on happiness, people quickly adapt to their experiences and the positive events have a decreasing positive emotional impact over time (Brickman & Campbell, 1971; Diener, et al., 2006). When individuals are able to engage mindfully with their experiences, they are thought to be able to sustain the benefits of their everyday positive experiences (Fredrickson et al., 2008). Research suggests that positive experiences are typically less thoroughly processed and salient than negative experiences (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Bohs, 2001), and as a result are less likely to be processed than negative events. Thus, by increasing in the moment awareness, a person may better be able to process momentary positive events that may otherwise be fleeting (Geschwind, Peeters, Drukker, van Os, & Wichers, 2011).

Another positive emotion regulation strategy suggested by Nelis et al. (2011) is capitalizing, or responding to one’s life experiences in a way that enhances their positive impact,
such as engaging in a verbal expression of the event or evaluating the meaning in a self-
enhancing way (Langston, 1994). Examples of capitalizing include “jumping for joy, bragging to
others, or taking people out to dinner to celebrate” (p. 1113). Langston found that expressive
displays, and perceiving oneself to have control over the positive event were linked to increased
positive benefits from PLEs. Research indicates that when one capitalizes on events by sharing
the events with friends, and by appraising the events as actively created by the self, positive
events increase daily PA and well-being above and beyond the impact of the event alone (Gable,
Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004; Langston 1994). Gable and Reis (2010) suggest that capitalization
may increase well-being, by having a broaden and build impact (Fredrickson, 2001), such that
sharing one’s positive experiences increases PA, and in turn facilitates the building of more
personal (e.g., increased self-esteem) and interpersonal resources (e.g., closeness, intimacy).
Capitalizing has been found to have inter and intrapersonal benefits, increasing the positive
impact of the event, making events more memorable, more personally significant and having
positive social implications (Gable & Maisel, 2009; Gable et al., 2004; Langston, 1994; Reis et
al., 2009). Research suggests that engaging in behavioral displays in response to events, or using
nonverbal behaviour to express positive emotions may also serve to increase the positive
emotions experienced by an individual (Adelmann & Zajonc, 1989; Finzi & Wasserman, 2006;
Strack, Martin, & Stepper, 1988).

Positive mental time travel, or the tendency for individuals “to mentally project
themselves backward in time to re-live, or forward to pre-live, events” in a positive way, is
another strategy used to regulate positive experience (Suddendorf & Corballis, 2007, p. 299).
Research suggests that engaging in positive mental time travel may boost happiness, and reduce
stress (Quoidbach, Wood & Hansenne, 2009) and is linked to higher self-efficacy (Eren, 2009).
Positive reminiscence about one’s positive past life experiences (Bryant, Smart, & King, 2005; Havighurst & Glasser, 1972; Lyubomirsky, Sousa, & Dickerhoof, 2006) and thinking positively about future events are both linked to subjective well-being (MacLeod & Conway, 2005). Consistently, Seligman (2002b) suggests that positive emotions may be increased by focusing on the positive experiences of the past, present, and the future. Similarly, research suggests that having gratitude for past experiences or finding the benefits of past experiences (Affleck & Tennen, 1996) can increased well-being (Bono & McCullough, 2006; Snyder & Lopez, 2006). Optimism has also been found to increase well-being and resilience, as optimists have been found to interpret experiences through a positive lens, and thus attend to the positive aspects of events (Seligman, 1991, 2011). Taken together, research indicates the importance of individuals engaging in positive emotion regulation strategies in order to positively experience their daily life experiences.

While positive emotion regulation has been found to contribute importantly to well-being outcomes, there has been a dearth of research on the use of positive emotion regulation in youth populations. Researchers suggest that there is a “strong theoretical argument” that techniques such as savouring may become an important process in adolescence, as adolescence is an important time for identity formation, and cognitive changes take place during this time that may enable youth to engage in more complex processing of their experiences (Bryant & Veroff, 2007). This suggests that positive emotion regulation may play an important role in youth well-being. An aim of the current study was to evaluate whether there are specific ways youth engage with their PLEs, that serve to positively impact their abilities to sustain positive responses to their daily life experiences.
**Dampening.** Not all individuals are motivated or able to maintain or savor good feelings (e.g., Feldman et al., 2008). Research indicates that some individuals may actually engage in strategies to “dampen” their positive moods by purposely reducing the strength or extent of their positive emotional experiences (Feldman et al., 2008). Researchers have proposed that these individuals may engage in dampening due to the discomfort that positive emotions may cause them (e.g., Mayer & Stevens, 1994; Parrott, 1993; Swann & Schroeder, 1995; Wood et al., 2003). Mayer and Stevens (1994) suggest that people may be more comfortable experiencing moods that are more typically experienced and thus, less likely to sustain moods that are incongruent with their typical mood state. Parrot (1993) suggests that there may be many reasons people inhibit good moods including the belief that one does not deserve the positive experience. Wood et al. (2003) suggest that individuals with low self-esteem may feel undeserving of positive experience. Similarly, Swann and Schroeder (1995) suggest that experiencing intense positive emotions such as joy and excitement may cause individuals with low self-concept to feel uncomfortable, while experiencing negative emotions or lower levels of positive emotions may be more comfortable for these individuals.

Consistently, findings suggest that positive events result in increased distress for some individuals (e.g., Brown & McGill, 1989; Campbell et al., 1991; Shimizu & Pelham, 2004). These researchers have found that one’s self-concept determines whether one will respond positively or negatively to life events, with individuals with low self-views more likely to experience aversive responses (e.g., Brown & McGill, 1989). These researchers interpreted the results within the identity and disruption model of stress, which posits that life events that cause people to redefine the self can cause disruptions to health, regardless of their valence. Thus, for individuals with low self-esteem, positive events may cause them to question their negative self-
views, and thus cause a disruption to their self-concept, in turn causing their health to suffer (e.g., Brown & McGill; Shimizu & Pelham, 2004). Consistently, Shimizu and Pelham (2004) suggested that this finding may be due to a preference for information that is consistent with self-concept. This past research provides evidence that one’s self-concept may impact the way life events are experienced, with individuals with low self-concept possibly having more difficulty positively experiencing their PLEs. As such, a further aim of this project was to better understand the particular personal characteristics that may distinguish abilities to positively experience and respond to PLEs among youth.

**Integrating PLEs and Positive Schemas into Diathesis-Stress Models**

While research suggests that there are particular characteristics associated with the capacity to sustain PA in response to positive events (e.g., Zautra et al., 2005), little is known about these characteristics for youth. Given the evidence of the importance of self-concept for distinguishing people’s tendencies to process PLEs (e.g., Brown & McGill, 1989; Shahar et al., 2003a; Wood et al., 2003) as well as evidence of the importance of self-schemas within cognitive models of psychopathology (Dozois & Beck, 2008), the current project evaluated how positive schemas and PLEs interact to predict proximal and distal youth well-being. Integrating positive cognitive schemas into the diathesis-stress models examined here may be an important contribution to better incorporating positive constructs into traditional models of mental health.

**Positive schemas.** Schemas are defined as a mental structure or framework regarding oneself and relationships with others, that involves both themes or patterns, that is thought to help organize and guide the interpretation of one’s experiences (Beck, 1967; Young, 1990, 1999; Young et al., 2003). Positive schemas, or positive core beliefs about self, including themes of optimism, worthiness, self-efficacy, success, and interpersonal trust, have been found to play an
even more important role than negative schemas in the development of well-being and vulnerability to psychopathology (Keyfitz et al., 2013; Lumley et al., 2012; Tomlinson, Lumley, Keyfitz, & Rawana, revised and resubmitted). Cross-sectional research with youth aged 9 to 14 in a community setting suggests that possessing higher levels of positive schemas may facilitate resilience in the face of life stressors, and that only positive, rather than negative schemas, are predictive of resilience (Keyfitz et al. 2013). Consistently, positive schemas have been found to contribute significantly more variance in life satisfaction and happiness, over and above negative schemas (i.e., up to an additional 38% of variance; Tomlinson et al., revised and resubmitted). Furthermore, research with youth samples recruited from community schools indicates that positive schemas may play an even more important role than negative schemas in the early diathesis to psychopathology (e.g., Keyfitz et al., 2013; McClain & Abramson, 1994; Prieto et al., 1992; Whitman & Leitenberg, 1990). This research suggests that among youth, low levels of positive schemas serve as a stronger predictor of vulnerability to depressive symptoms than high levels of negative schemas (Keyfitz et al., 2013). Given the cross-sectional evidence that positive schemas play an important role in that they associate with both well-being and vulnerability to depression in youth, evaluating how positive schemas interact with PLEs may be particularly key for understanding youth emotional development over time.

**PLEs and positive schemas.** While the majority of schema-life event research typically focuses on how negative events and schemas interact to produce outcomes of psychopathology, there is also evidence that the diathesis-stress theory may also apply to *positive* life events and *positive* schemas. Research supports the assumption that positive schemas may also lie dormant until activated by life stress and once activated may either serve as vulnerability factors or stress buffers depending on the underlying schema structure (e.g., Hilsman & Garber, 1995; Murray,
Woolgar, Cooper, & Hipwell, 2001; Shirk, Boegers, Eason, & Van Horn, 1998; Taylor & Ingram, 1999; Timbremont & Braet, 2004). Specifically, research has demonstrated that for individuals with strong positive schemas, negative stressors may trigger positive functioning, as the stressor will activate the positive schemas that in turn function as a stress-buffer. Individuals with weak positive schemas are not thought to have stress-buffering resources and, as a result, stress has been found to predict vulnerability and negative outcomes in these individuals.

Very few studies have evaluated the relation between PLEs and positive schema activation; however, extant literature suggests that positive experience may also play a role in triggering underlying positive cognition more broadly considered. Research demonstrates that positive states create an “upward spiral” in which positive emotions and broadened thinking aid in finding positive meaning in situations, which in turn facilitates more positive coping and higher resilience (e.g., Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson & Joiner 2002). By extension, for individuals with well-developed positive schemas, PLEs may trigger positive processing of events, while those with less well-developed positive schemas may not be able to receive the benefits of PLEs.

**Importance of life events and schemas within developmental models.** While life events change from day to day, one’s underlying schemas are thought to be relatively stable and enduring once developed (Beck, 1967, 1983; Friedmann, Lumley, & Lerman, 2015). Thus, once formed, one’s schemas may impact the interpretation of diverse life events in a manner consistent with the underlying schema. This interaction between life events and schemas may be particularly important for youth, as adolescence is a time for the stabilization and consolidation of aspects of identity and self-concept (Brinhaupt & Lipka, 2002; Swanson et al., 1998), and once consolidated, these constructs are theorized to persist over time (Beck, 1967) and may be less amenable to change (e.g., Hankin & Abela, 2005). Theory suggests that schemas develop
primarily as a result of one’s early life experiences but are also influenced by ongoing experiences (Young, 1999; Young et al., 2003). Thus, life experiences may play a role in both the development and the later expression of these cognitive vulnerability and protective factors. As the aspects of identity become more consolidated, youth exhibit more consistent reactions to situations across time (Rhodes & Ruble, 1984). This research emphasizes the importance of gaining a greater understanding of the positive processes at play during these formative years of self-development. To that end, another aim of the current project was to evaluate PLEs and positive schemas respective roles in complex models of well-being, including vulnerability to mental health difficulties, protection from psychopathology, and fostering of well-being.

**Mixed Methods Research Design**

In the current project, both qualitative and quantitative research designs were used in a complimentary fashion, to evaluate “overlapping but also different facets of a phenomenon, yielding an enriched, elaborated understanding of that phenomenon” (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989, p. 258). A Priority-Sequence Model was used to determine the priority of qualitative or quantitative research design and to determine the order of analysis (Morgan, 1998). Morgan (1998) states that preliminary use of qualitative studies to contribute to primarily quantitative research, is the most popular mixed methods design used in past research (e.g., Bauman & Adair, 1992; De Vries, Weijts, Dijkstra, & Kok, 1992). In general, many researchers are now advocating for the use of mixed qualitative and quantitative approaches to studying human behaviour (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Onwuegbuzie & Daniel, 2006; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, 2003a, 2003b). In this project, qualitative analyses were conducted initially, to contribute to the quantitative portion of the project. Specifically, qualitative methodology was used to first evaluate exploratory questions about the nature of youth PLEs, given the dearth of
research on youth PLEs to date. Qualitative analyses generated a stronger understanding of the types of PLEs youth may experience and ways youth engage with PLEs, and directed the coding of the data, in order to subsequently quantitatively analyze the relations among PLEs and other measures of youth emotional well-being. A mixed-methods approach was considered ideal towards the goal of gaining a more well-rounded understanding of the human experience.

**Current Project**

The overarching goal of the current project was to gain an understanding of how positive factors, including life events and positive cognition relate to youth well-being, with an aim of better understanding the mechanisms at play that contribute to or detract from youth well-being. This mixed-method study included a 5-day daily diary method that was qualitatively analyzed and later coded for the quantitative analyses. Furthermore, pre- and post- measures of well-being (i.e., happiness, life satisfaction, depression symptoms) were measured to evaluate proximal and distal processes in which PLEs might be implicated.

In Chapter 1, qualitative methodology was used to gain insight into the daily lived experiences of youth. The aim was to gain a sense of the types of events youth experience and the ways in which youth engage with and experience PLEs, including their emotional reactions and appraisals of the events.

Chapter 2 aimed to qualitatively evaluate whether there were ways youth engaged with their PLEs that served to detract from or dampen their daily experiences.

In Chapter 3, quantitative analyses were conducted to evaluate whether the ways youth engaged with their daily positive experiences impacted their daily and weekly emotional functioning. Multilevel modeling was used to evaluate how state and trait evaluations of life
experiences (i.e., between and within person differences) predicted one’s daily and more trait measures of emotional functioning.

Chapter 4 evaluated relations between PLEs, schemas, and well-being within a diathesis-stress framework. This chapter aimed to evaluate whether PLEs interact with positive schemas to predict well-being outcomes, including happiness, life satisfaction, and/or vulnerability to depression, over the course of the academic year.

Chapter 1: Overview

Introduction and Goals

Gaining insight into the ways in which youth experience and engage with the different events in their daily lives, including the types of positive events they experience, their emotional reactions, and their appraisals of the events, is an important step in beginning to understand the factors that contribute to or detract from youth well-being. Given the prevalence of deficits in positive emotional development among youth (Larson, 2000; Larson & Richards, 1991) and evidence that developing the ability to engage positively with life experiences may be central not only to well-being, but also to the prevention of psychopathology (Wood & Tarrier, 2010), it is important to develop a better understanding of the daily processes at play that may contribute to positive functioning for youth.

Research suggests that the ability of youth to cultivate positive benefits from their daily life experiences may have important implications for their mental health and well-being (e.g., Langston, 1994; Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013; Quoidbach, Beery, Hansenne, & Mikolajczak 2010; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2007). Furthermore, there may be important individual differences in the ways youth respond to the events, and in their personal capacities to sustain positive emotional benefits from their experiences (Zautra et al., 2005). While some individuals have
been found to engage in positive emotion regulation strategies that enable them to increase the positive benefits of their positive experiences (Bryant, 2003; Feldman et al., 2008; Larsen & Prizmic, 2004; Min’er & Dejun, 2001; Nelis et al., 2000; Wood, Heimpel, & Michela, 2003), others have been found to struggle to gain positive benefits from their experiences (e.g., Feldman et al., 2008; Mayer & Stevens, 1994; Parrott, 1993; Swann & Schroeder, 1995; Wood et al., 2003). Taken together, this research suggests that the ability for youth to experience positive benefits from their environments may be quite complex and multifaceted, carrying important implications for their mental health and development.

Evaluating the daily lived experiences of youth may provide important insight into the complex processes at play that contribute to youth emotional development. In particular, qualitative methodology may be well suited to provide insight into the nuance and complexity of youth experiences. Solomon and Stone (2002) commented on the intricate interplay of numerous factors that contribute to one’s emotional experience. These researchers suggested that to develop a comprehensive understanding of the human experience, we must not merely focus on “simple-minded” evaluations and quantifications of positive and negative experiences, but rather must attend to the complexity of the factors that interplay to contribute to emotions. Researchers suggest that various emotional experiences can be both qualitatively and quantitatively different from each other, and that even various emotions considered to be “positive” can be experienced quite differently by different individuals (Pawelski, 2016a, 2016b; Solomon & Stone, 2002). Given the subjective nature of different emotional experiences, and the recognition that various pleasures are quite distinct from one another, Solomon and Stone (2002) suggest they cannot be compared quantitatively, noting that “pleasure and pain are often far more complex, multi-dimensional, contextually determined, and qualitative” (p. 424).
Thus, the current study used qualitative methodology to gain a better understanding of youth positive functioning by evaluating the subtlety and nuances of the self-reported content of youth daily life experiences. Qualitative methodology was used to evaluate more exploratory questions about the nature of youth PLEs, to capture a picture of the diverse range of PLEs experienced by youth. This study also aimed to look at the lived experiences of youth, to develop a stronger understanding of how they talk about, experience, and respond to their daily PLEs. The first aim of the current study was to evaluate the kinds of positive events youth typically report experiencing in their lives. Next, this study sought to explore what may facilitate PLEs for youth, and whether there are aspects of events, or ways of processing the events that may contribute to youth positive daily experiences.

**Method**

To gain a more in-depth understanding of the daily PLEs of youth, participants were asked to complete a daily diary about the best thing that happened to them on a given day, over five consecutive days.

**Participants**

The participants in this study were 136 early adolescents (aged 8-13), in grades 4 to 8. The students were recruited from four elementary schools from the Wellington Catholic District School Board in Guelph, Ontario, via parent and adolescent information letters and consent packages. A total of 413 consent forms were distributed and a total of 139 participants consented to take part in the study (a 34% response rate). This study involved data that were part of a three-wave study of youth well-being. The diary portion of the study took place in between two other waves of data collection conducted to obtain pre- and post- measures of participants’ cognitive schemas, behaviours, personal strengths, mood, and well-being.
**Procedure**

The 5-day diary method was used to assess the youths’ daily experiences of PLEs. Data collection took place for approximately 25 minutes during each school day, for 5 consecutive days following the participants’ afternoon recess. Participants with parental consent were called down to the school library to complete the study in a group format. Each participant was assigned a folder containing five diary booklets, and each booklet had an assigned participant number and no other identifying information. Participants were asked to report on the “best event” they experienced in the past 24 hours, and then to explain in writing “What made it the best event?” “Where were you and what were you doing when it happened?” “Who were you with (if anybody)?” “What’s your relationship with that person? “What things happened before that led up to it?” “How did you respond/react to it?” “Why was it a good thing?” “Why was this the best thing you experienced in the last day” and “Has it happened to you before? If yes, how often?”

On the first day of the diary collection, the study was explained to youth and details were given about confidentiality as well as instructions on how to complete the diary tasks. Each day, research assistants provided participants with a booklet from their folder, and were asked to complete the diary privately in a comfortable spot in the room. When booklets were completed students submitted their forms into a locked storage container.

To gain a sense of the range of life experiences youth encountered, the initial analyses involved reading through the data to identify the common domains in which participants reported experiencing PLEs. The data were analyzed by the principal investigator as well as three undergraduate research assistants. Each researcher independently read through and evaluated the commonalities in the diary entries. The researchers then compared their findings to evaluate
consistencies in their analyses. Considerable variation was evident in the diary entries, in terms of the types of events, the locations of the events, and the people youth had experienced the positive event with. In the initial analysis, the research assistants read through each diary entry and evaluated the domain in which the event took place, the person the participant was with during the event, and the location of the event. The research assistants read through every diary entry to develop a comprehensive list for each domain. Each researcher conducted this analysis separately and the lists were subsequently compared for consistency. Categories were only included when they were consistently observed and agreed upon among the three researchers. See Chapter 3 for reliability and quantitative data on these themes.

The aim of the next analysis was to evaluate what creates positive experience for youth. This analysis involved reading through the diaries and identifying commonalities in the youth positive reports. The identified diary statements were then organized and categorized based on similarity, into different categories. As well, two research assistants were asked to go through the same process and, once their lists were compiled, the primary researcher and research assistants compared their lists. Categories were only included if they were agreed upon between the researchers.

Data Analysis

Given that the main interest of this study was to understand how youth talk about, experience and respond to PLEs, the initial analysis of the current study involved reading through the participants’ responses to gain a sense of whether there were any commonalities with regards to the types of events they reported, how they generally talked about their experiences, and the kinds of emotional reactions that arose from these experiences.
Context of Events

To gain a sense of the range of life experiences youth encounter, the initial analyses involved reading through the data to identify the common domains in which participants reported experiencing PLEs. While not an exhaustive list, some of the events most commonly reported by participants were in contexts related to: social interactions, physical activities, extra-curricular activities, artistic activities, faith related experiences, technology (e.g., playing video games, using the computer, talking on Skype), special events (e.g., trips, parties), eating food, commercialism (e.g., shopping, money, gifts, etc.), and attainment of goals. Furthermore, events took place in the presence of various people, with the most common categories including: family, peers, teachers, pets, alone, or with a romantic interest. Finally, participants reported on events in many different locations including: school, home, outdoors, within the community, and within places of faith.

What Makes Events Positive for Youth?

To develop an understanding of the aspects of events that create positive experience for youth, the next analysis involved reading through the data to identify commonalities in positive reports. This analysis involved reading through all answers to questions within the daily diaries (i.e., What things led up to it? How did you respond/react? Why was this a good thing? Why was this the best thing?). The researcher sought to identify salient commonalities and differences between participants’ positive reports, with the goal of gaining a stronger understanding of the aspects of events that create positive experiences for individuals. The positivity of youth reports was determined by identifying the positive contextual details, positive reflections, or positive emotional reactions youth reported on in their diaries. Several major themes were noted to be embedded within youth reports, that appeared to enhance or contribute to the positive nature of
the youth’s experiences, including: relationships with others, simple happiness (experiencing simple events in a positive way), laughter, play, creativity, kindness, relaxation, and intrinsic and extrinsic achievement. These themes will be further illustrated below using excerpts taken from the various questions answered in the daily diaries.

**Relationships.** For a large proportion of the daily diary reports, the life events reported on involved spending time with other individuals. Many of the participants reported finding positive meaning in events that involved spending time with their friends, family members, pets, romantic interests, and teachers. In particular, many of the youth reports involved spending time with peers. The following quotes illustrate positive daily diary reports that highlight the importance of relationships with peers in creating positive emotionality for youth.

The best thing that happened to me in the last 24 hours was that I talked to my closest friend about something important and that person cared. That's all I really want is for someone to honestly listen and to care about what I have to say. And she did and it made me very happy…. This was a good thing because she actually cared about what I had to tell her… It was the best thing because it’s something I've always wanted to have: a friend like her.

Hanging out with my besties. We were asking how our weekend was and what we did. It was a good chat… It was a good thing because I enjoy talking and hanging out with them… This was the best thing because I think my friends are very funny and I need people to make me laugh.

Socializing with my friends, during lunch and recess… I was having a lot of fun and enjoying time with my peers… It helped create better bonds between us.
Participants often reported spending time and socializing with their peers. Participants placed value on feeling connected, developing closeness and bonds with others, and having shared experiences. It appeared that these events were important for helping participants feel understood, listened to, and cared for. These participants often described that spending time with their friends allowed them to laugh, have fun, and experience happiness. As well, participants at times described that spending time with friends made tough things in the day better.

Similarly, participants also frequently reported on positive experiences that involved spending time with their family members. The following excerpts illustrate various aspects of this theme:

I went on a hike with my family. We went to go get Christmas pictures done and to get cutting to decorate our urns. We went around the river and my dad let me take pictures with his camera…All of us kept on cracking jokes and saying funny things making all of us laugh.

My mom said “I’m really proud of you” and that made me happy…I was with] my mom and sister. I love them very much. I felt warm and happy and proud of myself… I love it when my mom compliments me. It makes me feel special.

I watched a movie with my mom, dad and brother... I got to cuddle with my family… It was a good thing because I got to spend time with my family.

The best thing that happened to me in the last day was I put up Christmas decorations at my house with my family… I was happy because we get to do things together as a family… This is the best thing because I really enjoy this tradition and spending time with my family.
Many of the participants’ reports indicated that they place value on closeness, bonding, and experiencing unity with their parents, siblings, grandparents and other extended family. Participants often mentioned feelings of love, as well as a sense of comfort and fondness of the consistency and predictability of their experiences with family members. For example, they reported on positive experiences that involved engaging in family traditions and rituals, particularly surrounding the holiday season. Some reports indicated that youth may also gain a sense of pride, warmth, and physical comfort and closeness from family.

Youth also commonly reported on the value of the time spent with their pets. The following quotes illustrate responses related to spending time with pets:

The best thing that happened to me in the last 24 hours was snuggling with my cat… I woke up and there he was staring at me… Because it is nice to see someone waiting for you to wake up.

I got to spend time with my 9 ½ month old German Shepard dog… He was tons of fun… It was stress relieving and joyful… because, he was just a good thing to take my mind off bad/everything.

The dog kept making me laugh by chasing his tail.

Youth reported experiencing a sense of companionship, as well as physical, and emotional comfort from their pets. They described spending quality time with their dogs, cats, and rabbits: cuddling, playing, going for walks, and caring for them. They also reported experiencing love, warmth, happiness, amusement, playfulness, fun and laughter as a result of these daily experiences. In some of the diaries, youth appeared to gain a sense of relief, peacefulness, and calmness. In one case, the child reported that spending time with his pet took
his/her mind off the bad things in the day. The diary reports also appeared to indicate that spending time with pets also facilitated spending time with other individuals (e.g., going for walks and playing with friends/family).

**Simple happiness.** Many of the youth reports indicated that positive emotionality may be gained from paying attention to, and fully experiencing basic daily life events. The following reports demonstrate that participants at times had positive experiences when they were present for their more basic, simple moments in their days:

At last recess I played in the mud. It was so beautiful and squishy and sticky.

At the begging of the day…I went out the front door and the cold breeze hit my face awaking my senses and I saw the snow on the ground and I touched it, it was cold and soft and wonderful. It showed me that winter was coming and it was time for a new beginning… I thought It would be nice to feel the morning weather on my skin… it showed me a new beginning, a new start and new time…

The best thing that happened to me in the last day was watching outside change from snowy to rain to just wet…

I got to go on the roof and I could see the sky and everything around me it was very fascinating to me.

In these reports, youth appeared to be fully attentive to, immersed in, and enjoying their daily experiences. In some cases it appeared that youth were fully engaging with their senses, paying attention to sensations experienced through sight and touch. They appeared to be deeply experiencing and appreciating the simple elements of their daily lives, and observing and noticing the details of nature and the environments around them. The youth described gaining
many positive reactions, including feelings of happiness, wonder, excitement, and laughter. The events did not appear to be experienced as a means to an end, but rather the experiences appeared to be intrinsically rewarding. One participant described gaining a sense of reenergizing, experiencing feelings of renewal and new beginnings from his/her simple daily life experiences.

**Laughter.** Another common theme reported on in the diary entries was the value youth placed on life experiences that elicit laughter. The diaries indicated that many of the positive events for the youth created a sense of strong positive emotionality, which was often expressed in the form of laughter. This is illustrated in the following examples:

I was in the yard at school and I was playing with my friend and I kicked a ball and my shoe went over the fence! I was laughing so hard! It was sooo funny!...HA! HA!... I was laughing!... Because we both laughed and giggled… Because it was the funniest thing!

The best thing that happened to me in the last day was when at lunch recess me and a couple of my friends were telling jokes. I laughed so hard I almost lost my voice.

The best thing that happened to me in the last 24 hours was when X, X and I were in office and we started talking about mistakes that happened in office and we were having mini laugh attacks and it was so hilariously funny!... We were just doing our office duty and then broke out in hysteria!... I responded with laughter. A lot of laughter!!... It was the best thing because laughter is always the best thing.

These reports highlight that laughter is often present in these youths’ positive life experiences. The focus of the reports were not on the details of the events themselves, but rather on the experience of fun, happiness, and laughter. The participants often described experiencing a sense of automatic, uncontrollable, “hysterical” laughter in response to their reported events.
There was a playfulness and joking quality to many of the interactions. In these reports, youth appeared to be fully engaged in the present moment. Furthermore, the reports often indicated recognition of the importance of laughter in the participants’ daily lives. The youth appeared to place value on the opportunity to experience events that elicit laughter. For example, youth reported “laughter is always the best thing,” “I like to laugh,” and “I love to laugh!” These events often involved social interactions, and youth appeared to place value on relationships that enabled them to have fun and experience laughter. In the reports, youth also described an appreciation of other people’s laughter, and a desire to be around people who bring out their own laughter.

**Play.** Another related theme that youth reported on was the importance of engaging in activities that involve play. The following excerpts demonstrate the various types of play experiences these youth reported engaging in daily, and the positive reflections on these experiences:

Today at recess I played with my friends. One of them had a scarf and we made a human sling-shot. Two people would hold the ends and one would go in the middle and backup. Then the 2 people would yank the ends of the scarf and the person would go flying (metaphorically speaking)!... I was laughing and having fun....

The last day me and my friends were playing house and I asked where I sleep in the game and my friend said over there. But I said “This is my bathroom.” We all laughed sooo hard that I fell over!... We played a lot.

The best thing that happened to me in the last day is at last recess we had a snow ball/ spinning contest. What it is that people are having a spinning contest and random people
throw snow balls to people spinning… It was a good thing because it was really funny and fun…

In many of the daily diary reports made by youth, experiencing and engaging in play appeared to be central to their positive experiences. The participants reported on events that involved various types of play, including unstructured and spontaneous play (e.g., play fighting, story-telling, role playing), as well as more structured play activities (e.g., organized sports, organized games). Often structured play was an entry point into a more creative, explorative experience for the youth. The play often involved a sense of creative exploration, imagination, and spontaneity. While youth at times engaged in independent play, play often facilitated the opportunity to spend time with other individuals (e.g., friends, family). At times youth appeared to use their own resourcefulness to transform everyday aspects of daily life into something more creative, imaginative and exciting (e.g., creating a slip and slide out of snow, enjoying playing in mud, using scarf as sling shot). As well, play at times appeared to have a reparative impact for youth, making daily events more exciting, and enabling the youth to take their minds off of other daily experiences. One youth described his play as a “retreat… from everyday life,” while another reported that his play was doing something “out of the ordinary.” Play was often accompanied by a sense of lightness, “joking” and “goofing around.” Youth often described experiencing a sense of happiness, enjoyment, and laughter while engaging in play activities.

**Creativity.** Some of the daily diary reports also illustrated that creativity can also be an important aspect of the daily life experiences of youth. These events involved engaging in creative activities or engaging creatively with the environment around them. The different ways youth engaged creatively with their environment is illustrated in the following diaries:
The best thing that happened in 24 hours was, I made an Uber-epic character concept for my comic “ZOMpocalypss!”... It just “popped” into my head… I got exited and ran to grab a sheet of blank paper… I love to draw, and do so whenever I get the chance.

Me and my friends at dance made up a really funny dance… I was at dance class doing Jazz… [I responded] in a very positive goofy way… because we were all laughing and having fun… It was [the best thing] because they all liked me for who I am.

The best thing that happened to me today was that I got to work on my model of a senurial system. I got to paint a river and make little houses out of clay. I am also going to make little people in front of the house they’ll be so cute. Another thing is that I am going to make little crops of corn, made from yellow and green clay… I was so exited because the model was turning out quite well… This was a good thing because I love creating things and making models for school.

When asked about the best thing that happened to them that day, many of the youth reported on events that involved engaging in creative activities. The creative activities reported on were quite diverse, ranging from youth creating new ideas (e.g., “nobody has ever done that… before”), narratives, and artistic projects (drawings, songs, dances). These events often involved youth using their imagination to bring a novel idea into fruition. The diary reports suggested that the participants at times engaged in creative activities as a form of self-expression. The youth at times described being pleased with their products, and often feeling a sense of pride, uniqueness (e.g., feeling “special”), originality, and accomplishment. They also described experiencing enjoyment, satisfaction, and love for the activities. There was a performance element to many of the activities, with the participants often describing the desire to display to others their artistic creations, and pride in the feedback they received (e.g., being complimented).
They appeared to have diverse emotional reactions, including having fun, experiencing happiness, excitement, energy, calmness, laughter, and joy.

Relaxing. While not as prominent in the data, a small proportion of youth reports highlighted daily events that provided opportunities for relaxation and calmness. The following examples illustrate the value some youth place on events that elicit peacefulness and calmness:

The best thing that happened in the last day was relaxing with my dad watching a movie after dinner. This was my favourite part because normally I would have been running home from a sport and yesterday I was sick recovering from a cold so I was free… I was in my cozy basement after dinner… I reacted by relaxing and enjoying the movie…

Going to my guitar lessons. I find it fun and entertaining… I feel very calm because I have to pay attention to what she is saying so I can learn… It was good because I love to play… This was good because we were all having fun… I was having a bad day until that point.

Me and my 2 friends sat on my new couch for the first time. It was amazing how relaxed we felt. I felt happy and relaxed…. It was the best because it got me set for the day and it made me appreciate my friends.

These reports illustrate the importance that some youth place on events that involved relaxation, comfort, “cozy[ness],” quietness, and calmness. These events appeared to provide the youth with some rejuvenation from the events that took place in the week. The youth at times reported that these events helped them recover from difficult life experiences, as well as from being tired, and sick, and provided them with more energy for the day. The activities youth reported on often involved watching movies, playing video games, engaging in creative activities, reading, sleeping in, and being in the comfort of their own homes (e.g., in bed, on
comfortable couch). In these reports, the youth often expressed experiencing happiness, enjoyment, feelings of calmness and relaxation.

**Kindness.** Some of the daily diary reports highlighted the importance of youth experiencing acts of kindness. Some participants reported on events that involved initiating an act of kindness for others, while other participants reported on their own personal experience of receiving kindness. The following diary responses illustrate youth daily experiences that involve initiating kindness toward others:

The best thing that happened in the last day was volunteering at the food bank… It was the best thing because I was helping other people.

I stood up for a victim of bullying… I was surprised with my self… because I stopped a case of bullying… because bullying is bad and I stopped a case of it plus it is stop bullying month.

The best thing that happened to me in the last day was being picked to talk to classrooms in the school about the penny drive for Me to We…. It was a good thing because I got to talk to kids about how to help kids in need…. This was the best thing I experienced because the issue really means something to me.

These youth reports indicated that engaging in acts of kindness created a positive experience for some youth. In these diary entries, the participants described engaging in altruistic acts that involved helping other people (e.g., volunteer work, standing up for peers, helping people in need). These youth appeared to place value on and gain a sense of enjoyment, satisfaction, and positive self-regard, as a result of engaging in good deeds. They appeared to apply personal meaning to these events.
In other diary reports, the participants described the positive experiences they had as a result of receiving kindness from others:

The best thing that happened was my three little grade one friends made me Christmas cards. They were really sweet cards and they were very well decorated… This was a good thing because it shows that I am a good role model and it proves I am nice… This was the best thing because it was very nice and sweet of them to take the time to do that.

The best thing that happened to me in the last day was when I was on Facebook my friend posted on my wall that I am perfect the way I am, and that I should never change that… I was very happy and touched when she said that… This was a good thing because it boosted my self-confidence…. I was very happy to see that someone likes me for me.

I was complemented on my drawings that I worked hard on…. It was great I felt proud and happy that my hard work paid off … because it sort of tells me one of my strengths and it gives me a sense of accomplishment.

These diary reports indicated the value the participants placed on experiencing kindness from other people. Youth appeared to be very appreciative of experiences that involved receiving care, compliments, and appreciation from others. From these events, youth described a sense of gratitude, appreciation and feelings of being noticed and cared for by others. In some cases, the youth received kindness from individuals they had also provided care for. In these reports they described feeling validated, valued, appreciated, and proud of their own accomplishments. Receiving kindness also appeared to be validating and to make them feel good about themselves and their own actions. For example, one participant described feeling “happy… someone likes me for me,” and in another case the child explained that this event “shows that I am a good role
model and it proves I am nice.” When the youth received kindness from others, they frequently experienced feelings of happiness, and in one incident the youth reported that it had a positive impact on his/her mood for the rest of the day.

**Extrinsic and intrinsic achievement.** Many of the daily positive reports of youth also surrounded experiences related to personal achievement. In some cases the youth focused on extrinsic aspects of achievement, such as achieving rewards or compliments from others. In other cases, youth reported on intrinsic achievement, such as achieving personally meaningful goals, learning a new skill, or engaging in and enjoying a learning process. Experiencing extrinsic and intrinsic achievement did not appear to be mutually exclusive, and some individuals appeared to experience both intrinsic and extrinsic achievement at the same time. The following examples illustrate diary entries that appear to involve extrinsic achievement:

The best thing that happened to me was when I got my math test back and the mark was a 4+ and I was super happy and very proud. Even though I was a bit nervous about my mark…. I studied day and night 24/7 and worked really hard…. I was super happy and can't wait to show my parents and see their reaction… It is a good thing because to become a doctor and get into university your marks need to be high… This was the best because I was very proud of myself and want my marks to be high.

I scored six 3-pointers in basketball practice… I was being amazing… Like a Champion.

I beat my dad and his girlfriend in rummy… I said yay… I can brag.

Beating my friends in basketball… I was happy… because I love winning.

In these daily positive experiences youth appeared to gain a sense of satisfaction from extrinsic achievements, such as getting good grades, scoring goals, and winning. In these events,
youth placed value on having obtained external achievements, rather than on engaging in and enjoying the experience that led to the outcome (e.g., [this was a good thing] “because I love winning”). It appeared that the youth exerted efforts that were motivated by a desire to obtain specific external outcomes (e.g., playing hard to win, working hard to get a good mark, wanting to impress parents, getting high grades to become a doctor). The youth also at times placed value on the way their achievements served to buffer their self-image (e.g., “[I was] being amazing… Like a champion”). As well, they at times used these extrinsic achievements as an indication of their growth (e.g., I got a goal and won the game… I am getting better at the sport). In some cases, youth appeared to be relieved that the positive outcome meant escaping a negative outcome (e.g., fear of getting a bad grade). The youth often gained a sense of positive emotionality from these experiences, including feelings of pride, satisfaction, happiness, and excitement.

While not mutually exclusive, other diary entries appeared to be more intrinsically experienced by youth. The following diary reports illustrate events that appeared to also involve elements of intrinsic achievement:

The Best thing that happened to me in the last day was at school, last recess a supply teacher taught me and a couple of my friends Japanese. He taught us how to say I am cold. He also taught us what “Hi” means in Japanese. It means “yes”… I responded as “cool” and “that's cool that you can speak another language” I was happy I learned some new words… It was good to me because I was learning but having fun at the same time… It was the best thing that happened to be today because I experienced something new.

The best thing that happened to me in the last day is I finished my science essay. This is
the best thing in my day because I feel proud of my work and now it's out of the way. I feel I did the best work I could possibly do…. This is the best thing because I achieved my goals for my work.

I learned how to do a kick flip… I felt really exited... now I can do four tricks. (manual, nose manual, 360 shuvit, kick flip)… I like to learn new things.

In these daily diary reports, it seems that youth were immersed in their experiences and appeared to intrinsically enjoy the activities they were engaging in. The youth at times described having a sense of appreciation for the learning process and enjoyed the act of learning itself. They placed value on achieving or mastering a skill or creating something. While some of the youth reports were goal oriented, they overall appeared to experience a sense of internal satisfaction with their performance, regardless of external feedback. They at times appeared to experience a sense of self-efficacy (e.g., I did the best I could do), as well as pride in their efforts and performance. The youth described enjoying the activities, experiencing fun, and as a result experiencing feelings of happiness and excitement.

**Discussion**

The current study aimed to develop an understanding of PLEs that may play a role in youth emotional well-being. Specifically, the study aimed to evaluate the types of PLEs youth experience, and whether there were aspects of the PLEs, or ways youth engaged in their daily experiences that contributed to their daily positive experiences.

**Context of Events**

The diary reports were quite varied, with the participants reporting on positive events in diverse domains (e.g., social interactions, physical activities, school activities, use of technology, etc.), often shared with a variety of different people in the participants’ lives (e.g., peers, family,
teachers, romantic interest, pets) and within various contexts (school, home, outdoors, community, places of faith). Participants had wide-ranging emotional and cognitive reactions to their daily experiences and different reasoning for considering the events to be positive. It appeared that, overall, it may not only have been the contextual details of the events themselves that created positive thoughts and feelings for these youth, but also the way in which the youth created and cultivated their own daily positive experiences, that influenced the subjective positive emotionality they experienced. It appeared that youth who described a lot of positive elements in their daily experiences at times transformed typical and simple aspects of their daily lives into something more positive and meaningful. This is consistent with past research indicating that those who receive the greatest emotional benefit from positive experiences engage in active processing of their experiences by using techniques such as savouring, positive rumination, and capitalizing (Bryant, 2003; Feldman et al., 2008; Larsen & Prizmic, 2004; Min’er & Dejun, 2001; Nelis et al., 2000; Wood et al., 2003).

This study highlighted important daily experiences that some youth cultivate, that may play an important role in facilitating their daily positive emotional experiences. Specifically, the observed themes that appeared to facilitate youth positive emotionality included: building relationships with others, experiencing laughter, playfulness, creativity, kindness, relaxation, achieving both external and internal goals, and experiencing “simple happiness.”

**Positive Emotionality in Youth Daily Life**

**Relationships.** The prevalence of youth reports that involved spending time with friends, family, pets, and other individuals, underscores the potential importance of developing relationships for youth positive emotional functioning. Within the diaries it at times appeared that the details of the events themselves were less of a focal point than the experience of
connecting with others. It appeared that the opportunity to share an experience with another individual, and experience bonding, closeness, and care, is what was most central to the youth daily positive experiences. This observation is consistent with research that indicates that experiencing connection is “a fundamental human motivation” (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 407). It appeared that when events were shared with others, they added value, meaning, and enjoyment. Furthermore, the participants at times reported that spending time with friends had a reparative impact on their day. Consistently, research highlights the importance of experiencing connection, belongingness, and caring for increasing one’s well-being (Corsano, Majorano, & Champretavy, 2006; Resnick, Harris, Blum, &1993; Rigg and Bright, 1997). Social support in adolescence has been linked to subjective wellbeing, including happiness, gratification, and confidence (Meehan, Durlak, & Bryant, 1993). Furthermore, relationships have been found to facilitate growth by motivating individuals to act positively both within and outside of their relationships, by helping people develop a stronger self-concept, and facilitating the development of future relationships (Miller, 1988; Surrey, 1987, as cited by Rigg and Bright, 1997). Thus, developing relationships with others and spending time with others in daily life may play an important role in facilitating youth daily experiences of emotional well-being.

**Simple happiness.** Another observation was that many of the events reported on by the participants involved basic or simple daily life experiences. Many of the youth appeared to gain positive emotionality from being mindful of, paying attention to, and fully experiencing the simple aspects of their daily lives, such as paying attention to nature. This is consistent with O’Brien’s (2013a, 2013b) observation that youth are best able to gain happiness from their life experiences when they attend to the “uncomplicated” and natural components of their daily lives. O’Brien discusses the concept of “Uncomplicated Happiness” or “Natural Highs,” which she
defines as “positive emotions such as delight, wonder, joy, peacefulness, awe, contentment that arise naturally—usually from just paying attention to the world around us.” (para. 4). She provided examples of natural highs, including: “feeling the sun on your face, the smell of lilacs, the first snowfall, the sound of rain on a tin roof, the cold side of a pillow, a baby’s laughter…” (para. 4). Similarly, research suggests that individuals cope with difficult life experiences by finding positive value in the ordinary occurrences of their daily lives (Folkman, 1997). The ability to attend mindfully to everyday occurrences has also been found to have implications for increasing PA (Schroeters & Brandsma, 2010). The ability for youth to find positive value in their ordinary or even mundane daily life experiences may serve to facilitate youth experiences of more positive emotionality in their daily lives.

Play. Participants’ abilities to cultivate a sense of playfulness also appeared to be central to their reported daily positive experiences. Play appeared to help facilitate closeness with others and also facilitated youth creativity, explorations of their environments, and opportunities to use their imagination and act spontaneously. The youth described experiences in which they seemed to be very engaged in play, and they often described transforming everyday occurrences of their lives into something rich and exciting. Consistent with these observations, research suggests that play facilitates youth exploration of themselves and the world around them, and is important for childhood learning (Hurwitz, 2003). Play contributes to youth cognitive, physical, emotional and social development (Barnett, 1990; Hurwitz, 2003; Sherrod & Singer, 1989; Schwebel, Rosen, & Singer, 1999; Simons, McCluskey-Fawcett, & Papini, 1986). Hurwitz (2003) describes play as “the medium children use to take risks, to challenge themselves both physically and mentally, to create something new, to deal with fears, and to enjoy the moment as they construct new meanings” (p. 101). Imaginative play is thought to aid children in expressing PA and controlling
their NA (e.g., Tomkins, 1962, 1963), and is thought to facilitate exploration of the environment, and discovery of new ideas, activities and relationships (Fredrickson, 2004).

**Laughter.** The ability for youth to cultivate laughter from their everyday encounters appeared to be central to the youth reports of their positive life experiences. Youth described a recognition of the importance of laughter in their daily lives, and appeared to purposely pursue interactions that would facilitate humour, joking, fun and laughter. Youth repeatedly described a sense of pure, uncontrollable, hysterical laughter in their dairy reports. The ability to experience laughter appeared to provide a sense of richness and enjoyment of everyday life experiences. Research suggests that adaptive forms of humour may be an important every day process, a healer for physiological and emotional distress (e.g., Bennett & Lengacher, 2006a, 2006b, 2008, 2009; Dixon, 1980), and a buffer for the impact of stress (Kuiper & Martin, 1998). Purposely engaging in humorous behaviours may be an important coping mechanism for adolescents (Erickson & Feldstein, 2007). Consistent with the observations of the current study, humour has been found to increase enjoyment of PLEs (Martin, Kuiper, Olinger, & Dance, 1993). Individuals who experience more humor have been found to have higher self-esteem, higher positive cognitive appraisal following stressors, and higher PA following both positive and negative life experiences. A tendency to engage in adaptive forms of humor, such as laughing with others, telling stories and making jokes has also been linked with PA, high self-esteem and psychological well-being, as well as lower depression, and anxiety (Martin, Puhl-Doris, Larsen, Gray, & Weir, 2003). Research suggests that laughter may not just be a marker of well-being, but may also serve as a process that facilitates future well-being (e.g., Fredrickson, 2004). These findings suggest that engaging in experiences that facilitate laughter may be an age appropriate positive emotion regulation technique for youth.
Creativity. Experiences of creativity also appeared to be another important positive experience reported on by participants. The youth at times used their imagination to bring novel ideas into fruition, to create artistic projects and to develop narratives. They appeared to be deeply immersed in these experiences, describing a sense of deep enjoyment, satisfaction and love for the described activity. These events appeared to be related to experiences of fun, happiness, excitement, energy, calmness, laughter and joy. Research suggests that creativity may play an important role in youth development (Barron & Harrington, 1981; Guilford, 1968; Sternberg, 1988), and specifically may aid with emotional development and coping (e.g., Russ, 1998; Shaw & Runco, 1994). Creativity is thought to aid with processing of emotional information, create more openness to experiencing emotional states, aid with problem solving around emotions, and help individuals better integrate and modulate their affect (Russ, 1993, 1998). Creativity has also been associated with positive mood and well-being (Isen et al., 1987; Wright & Walton, 2003).

Research also suggests that savouring may play a role in creativity (Bryant & Veroff, 2007). Bryant and Veroff (2007) note that “the flow that is likely to occur for many people who are following creative urges may be in some ways similar to the flow people experience when they are swept away in savouring moments” (p. 188). These researchers suggest that when people savour their experiences, their positive emotions may “propel” them into a creative space. Researchers suggest that creativity involves a sense of playfulness, intrinsic motivation (Bryant & Vernoff, 2007), and flow, and creative experiences may create feelings of joy, fulfillment, and life satisfaction (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Thus, this previous research combined with observation of the current study suggests that for youth, engaging in creative activities may contribute to daily emotional well-being.
Kindness. In the current study it appeared that youth experienced a sense of positive emotionality for both engaging in acts of kindness and from receiving kindness from others. Being kind to others appeared to provide youth with enjoyment, satisfaction, and positive feelings about their own actions. Youth also described experiencing a sense of gratitude, appreciation, and feelings of being noticed and cared for as a result of receiving kindness from others. Consistently, research suggests that happy people may recognize more kindness in others and engage in more acts of kindness toward others (e.g., Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Otake, Shimai, Tanaka-Matsumi, Otsui, & Fredrickson, 2006). Engaging in altruism and being emotionally and behaviorally compassionate has been linked with well-being, happiness, and health (Post, 2005). As well, experiencing gratitude for the aid of others has been found to relate to increased optimism, life satisfaction, and lower NA (Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, 2008). Youth expressions of gratitude towards other people’s acts of kindness, is consistent with the concept of capitalizing on one’s positive experiences (Langston, 1994), as gratitude has been found to increase the PA frequently experienced in response to receiving kindness (Watkins, 2004). Otake et al. (2006) suggest that if people experience positive emotions and engage in kindness, this may build resources by improving their connections with others, in turn creating an upward spiral in which well-being is increased over time. As such, these researchers suggest that purposely “counting kindnesses” may be a useful strategy for increasing well-being. In the current study, it appeared that both engaging in acts of kindness towards others, and experiencing appreciation for the kindness received from others, may have impacted youth positive emotionality and daily positive experience.

Relaxation. While not as prominent in the data, some participants’ reports involved events that led to experiences of relaxation, comfort, peacefulness and calmness. These events
appeared to provide youth with some rejuvenation from the stressful life events that took place, and provided them with more energy for the day. This finding is consistent with research that suggests that engaging in restorative activities may serve as an important mechanism in coping with stress (Smith & Baum, 2003). Engaging in restorative activities, such as sleep, relaxation, and spending time in nature, has been found to lead to better physical and emotional health, as the activities reduce stress and improve coping abilities. Furthermore, researchers suggest that restorative activities provide opportunities to “replenish energies that support optimal behaviour and thought” (Smith & Baum, p. 432). In a study with adolescents aged 12 to 15 years old, Abbott-Chapman (2006) found that participants frequently described enjoying spending time in quiet places (e.g., home, natural environment), as these experiences provided opportunities for relaxation “peace,” “quiet,” and “calm.” These experiences provided youth with opportunities to withdraw, reflect on themselves and their experiences and take time away from the difficulties of their daily lives (Abbott-Chapman, 2006; Abbott-Chapman & Robertson, 2001). Thus, taking time for relaxation may also be important in facilitating youth well-being.

**Achievement.** Many of the daily diary reports involved experiences of personal achievement. Some of these reports involved extrinsic achievement, such as obtaining external goals. It appeared that these experiences served to create feelings of competence, and youth at times viewed their external achievements as indicators of their growth, describing feeling pride, satisfaction, happiness and excitement in response to their achievements. Other reports involved intrinsic achievement, in which the participants described enjoying the act of engaging in an experience itself. These events often involved achieving personally meaningful goals, learning new skills, or enjoying a learning process. The participants described deeply enjoying these activities, and experiencing fun, happiness and excitement. Research suggests that both intrinsic
and extrinsic achievement experiences may be important for increasing self-efficacy, feelings of competence, and increasing people’s interest in activities (e.g., Cameron, Pierce, Banko, & Gear, 2005; Pierce, Cameron, Banko, & So, 2003). While some research suggests that extrinsic rewards have the potential to take away from intrinsic enjoyment of tasks (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999), other research suggests that there are some types of extrinsic achievement that may have positive implications (Cameron et al., 2005; Pierce et al., 2003). Thus, both external and internal achievement have been found to impact motivation and may have important implications for youth positive daily experiences and emotional well-being.

**Commonalities Among Themes**

**Transforming basic life.** While each of the above described themes appeared to impact youth positive daily emotional functioning, the themes observed were not mutually exclusive and there were several commonalities shared among them. One important commonality was the observation that within youth reports of their PLEs, they had not necessarily experienced objectively positive experiences such as special life events, but rather appeared to engage with their experiences in a way that cultivated positive emotionality from their everyday life events. Many youth appeared to find meaning and richness in the simple moment-to-moment occurrences of their daily lives, and appeared to transform their basic life events into something positive.

The youth in this study may have been actively engaging in strategies to enhance their positive experiences, similar to processes described in positive emotion regulation literature (e.g., Bryant, 2003; Feldman et al., 2008; Larsen & Prizmic, 2004; Min’er & Dejun, 2001; Wood et al., 2003). Consistent with past research, it appeared that youth were describing experiences in which they engaged in “happy habits” (Lykken, 1999, 2000) or ways in which they enhanced the
pleasurable moments they experienced in their lives. Specifically, it appeared that youth often cultivated their own daily positive experiences by pursuing meaningful connections with others, by attending to the natural experiences around them, seeking out humor and laughter, engaging in play, creativity, and acts of kindness, finding calmness in the quieter moments, and through intrinsic and extrinsic enjoyment of their achievements.

The youth reported experiencing positive emotionality following reports that appeared to involve paying attention to the basic everyday elements around them, such as playing in the “beautiful and squishy and sticky mud,” by watching the weather “change from snowy to rain to just wet” and from “spinning and falling” and watching “the world rushing before my eyes.” They also appeared to find humour in their daily experiences, by engaging in silly interactions, creating jokes with friends, and purposely thinking about and sharing stories that they found funny. They also appeared to cultivate their own sense of playfulness which involved transforming basic elements of everyday life into something more exciting, such as transforming a scarf into a “human sling-shot,” using the snow to create a game, and playing make-believe games such as house. It seemed that rather than passively experiencing their environments, youth appeared to actively engage in activities, in which they used their imagination to bring their own ideas into fruition. In these reports youth often described having an idea come into their mind (e.g., “it just popped into my head”), and pursuing the idea, (e.g., creating drawings, songs, dances, comics, role plays, etc.) in turn leading to positive emotional experiences. Some youth appeared to experience a sense of calmness and peacefulness from fully embracing the quieter or more solitary moments in life, such as having an opportunity to relax, sleep, sit down or read a book.
All of these examples illustrate the richness youth may be able to cultivate from actively engaging in the moment-to-moment unfolding of their daily lives. These findings are consistent with research that suggests that individuals find positive meaning in their daily life experiences through “the infusion of ordinary events with positive meaning” (Folkman, 1997, p. 1212). In an evaluation of the types of positive events that help individuals cope with difficult life experiences, researchers suggested that the majority of events were not major, but were ordinary events that took place in people’s typical daily lives. Half of the events observed were created by the participants, suggesting that the individuals actively created their own positive experiences. The other half of events happened naturally, demonstrating that these individuals were able to find positive value in the everyday occurrences of their lives. These examples are consistent with the notion that positive emotion is cultivated by actively engaging in strategies that aid in finding more positive benefits from everyday life experiences (Nelis et al., 2011).

Positive emotion regulation. While the nature of the diary task makes it difficult to comment on the specific nature of the emotion regulation strategies youth engaged in, it appeared that some of the behaviours youth reported on (e.g., in their purposeful seeking of connections, simple pleasures, play, creativity, laughter, kindness, and achievement, etc.), resembled the construct of positive emotion regulation. Within youth reports, it often appeared that they were engaging in events in a way that served to up-regulate their positive emotions. Youth at times reported on events in which they appeared to savour their positive experiences (e.g., Bryant, 1989), by purposely focusing their attention on positive aspects of their daily experiences. Similarly, many of the daily diary reports appeared to resemble the related construct of mindfulness (e.g., Kabat-Zinn, 2003), with youth fully experiencing the small details of the events, processing the experiences through all their senses, and appearing to pay “attention on
purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experiences moment by moment” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145). Furthermore, within some of the diary reports, youth reports also at times appeared to resemble the construct of capitalizing, with youth sharing their positive experiences with others, and evaluating the meaning of the events in a self-enhancing way (Langston, 1994). While past research has demonstrated the importance of positive emotion regulation for emotional well-being (e.g., Quoidbach et al., 2010), less is known to date about the ways youth engage in positive emotion regulation in their daily lives. The current study provides some insight into the ways youth engage with their daily positive experiences, in ways that have the potential to up-regulate their positive experiences.

Reparative impact. In many of the diary reports, youth also indicated that the PLEs they experienced helped them overcome the difficulties they had experienced that day. For example, some youth reported that the event “took my mind off things…” and it allowed him/her to “retreat…from everyday life.” Another participant noted that the event “showed me a new beginning, a new start and a new time.” Additionally, another youth described that engaging in creative activities “made my day happier and brighter!” These observations are consistent with research that suggests that positive experiences are “more than momentary good feelings” (Fredrickson et al., 2008, p. 1058) and continues to demonstrate that positive experiences may play a reparative or protective role and have the potential to serve as stress buffers from negative experiences (Cohen et al., 1987; Needles & Abramson, 1990; Reich & Zautra, 1981; Shahar & Priel, 2002).

Upward spiral of positive emotions. Many of the observed experiences appeared to create an “upward spiral” of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2004). It appeared that the experiences reported were not just markers of positive events, but the experiences also appeared
to increase the youths’ positive emotions. As well, consistent with Fredrickson’s broaden and
build theory of positive emotions, it appeared that many of the events may have helped youth
build further resources, contributing to the youths’ lives beyond the experiences themselves. For
example, observations here are consistent with research suggesting that building relationships
with others may facilitate growth by motivating individuals to act positively both within and
outside of their relationships, helping people develop a stronger sense of self, increasing self-
estee, and facilitating closeness in future relationships (Miller, 1988; Surrey, 1987, as cited by
Rigg and Bright, 1997). As well, results were consistent with research suggesting that play
experiences may build new resources (e.g., strong social bonds, problem solving, cognitive
development) which later serve to protect youth from stressors and in turn increase their well-
being (Fredrickson, 2004). Laughter has also been found to create an upward spiral of positive
emotions, and has been found to act as an important coping mechanism for adolescents (Erikson
& Feldstein, 2006), healing emotional difficulties (e.g., Bennett & Lengacher, 2009; Wooten,
1996) and buffering the impact of stress (Kuiper & Martin, 1998). Similarly, research suggests
that engaging in creative activities may aid with the development of strong problem solving
(Barron & Harrington, 1981; Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976; Guilford, 1968; Weisberg,
1988; Sternberg, 1988), emotional development and coping (e.g., Russ, 1998; Shaw & Runco,
1994). Engaging in acts of kindness has been found to build resources by improving youth
connections to others (Otake et al., 2006). Engaging in relaxing activities has been found to lead
to better physical and emotional health, reduce stress and improve coping skills (Smith & Baum,
2003). Finally, experiences of achievement, while gratifying in and of themselves, have been
found to serve to increase self-efficacy, feelings of competence and future interest in engaging in
activities (e.g., Cameron et al., 2005; Pierce et al., 2003). Taken together, past research indicates
that the experiences identified in the current study may serve not only to create positive emotionality in the moment, but may also aid with building further resources that facilitate increased well-being over time.

**Implications**

It is problematic that many youth currently experience deficits in their positive emotional functioning (Larson, 2000; Larson & Richards, 1991) as the ability to have positive experiences in one’s life is important not only for well-being but also for the prevention of psychopathology (Wood & Tarrier, 2010). As such, the current study provides important insights that have the potential to inform prevention and intervention efforts, by helping to build youth positive experiences. While further research is required to confirm the implications of these observations as they might relate to well-being outcomes, the current study sheds light on processes that might be implicated in youth positive experience. Once further elaborated and understood, efforts to help youth learn how to develop strategies to purposely integrate positive experiences into their daily lives, may aid with their positive emotional development. For example, better incorporating opportunities for youth to experience social interactions, play, creative activities, explorations of nature and the environment, acts of kindness, activities that are intrinsically enjoyable, etc. may help youth learn the skills to actively cultivate positive experiences in their daily lives. As well, targeting positive emotion regulation techniques such as mindfulness and savouring may also help youth integrate more positive experiences in their daily lives. While the current study provides promising insight into potential processes at play in youth well-being, further research is required to help delineate how mental health providers and educators can apply this knowledge towards work with youth.
Limitations

While the present study shed light on important processes that may contribute to youth well-being, there are several limitations that provide direction for further research. The current study involved analyzing daily diary entries for 136 youth over 5 days, resulting in a total of 651 daily diary entries. To obtain such a large sample, this required a written diary format. Given the written nature of the diary entries, the data was constrained, as youth at times put little detail into their written responses. Furthermore, the youths’ verbal reasoning skills may have impacted the way their reports were interpreted, with youth with stronger verbal skills appearing to experience more positive events in their daily lives due to their comparatively better ability to articulate their experiences. While some diary entries may have been compromised or constrained as a result of these limitations, the number of diary entries likely compensated for this limitation, still providing a large amount of rich data to be analyzed. Furthermore, the large data set was suitable to exploring the questions of interest in the current project, particularly given the exploratory nature of some aspects of the project, and the goal of understanding the diversity of youth PLEs. Still, future research exploring the nature of youth PLEs using interview format would be beneficial, as it would provide opportunity to gather even richer information and would provide opportunity for the exploration of youth PLEs through other qualitative frameworks (e.g., a narrative or phenomenological approach).

It must also be considered that the data were collected in Catholic schools, during December, which is a holiday season. This underscores the importance of considering that the types of events experienced and reported on by the youth may vary as a function of the time of the year, and as a result of the culture and religious backgrounds of youth. Still, this study highlighted the diversity of PLEs experienced even within this limited sample. Furthermore, the
themes observed in this analysis were consistent with past research (e.g., Compas et al., 1987; Shahar et al., 2003b), indicating that many of observations from this study are likely still relatable to other North American youth.

It must also be considered that identifying the good things that happened to an individual in the day may also be an intervention of sorts that may have implications for increasing positive mood (e.g., Mongrain, & Anselmo-Matthews, 2010; Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). Thus, it is important to consider that participation in the study may have impacted the responses or the experience of the participants. While this must be considered, there is currently little evidence that participation in diary studies changes participant responses (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003). Furthermore, there is evidence that a habituation process takes place over a few days, when individuals are reporting on their mood experiences (Gleason, Bolger, & Shroot, 2001). As such, it has been argued that diary studies that take place over time may actually control for reactivity more than other study designs.

The qualitative nature of the analyses makes it difficult to make conclusions about the implications of these observations for youth well-being, as they only represent a brief snapshot in the youths’ lives. As such, it is difficult to extract more meaningful conclusions about the implications of these observed life experiences for youth overall emotional functioning. These limitations will be accounted for in future chapters that quantitatively explore how some of the themes observed in this chapter relate to measures of youth emotional well-being.

**Conclusion**

The current analyses revealed several daily experiences that may play a role in youth positive functioning. The study highlighted that youth may experience a wide range of event
types, reactions, and reasons for considering events to be positive. Overall, it may not have been
the nature of the events alone that created positive experiences for the youth, but also the way
youth engaged with and cultivated positive reactions to their life experiences. The events
reported on in this study often seemed to involve paying attention to and transforming basic
experiences into something richer and more meaningful, and infusing “ordinary events with
positive meaning” (Folkman, 1997, p. 1212). Youth appeared to cultivate PLEs by seemingly
seeking to engage in relationships, laughter, play, creativity, kindness, relaxation, achievement,
and experiences of “simple happiness.” Some of the daily diary reports appeared to resemble the
construct of positive emotion regulation, with youth appearing to engage in ways to purposely
up-regulate their positive experiences (e.g., engaging in savouring, mindfulness, capitalization,
positive mental time travel). PLEs at times appeared to help youth overcome the difficulties they
had experienced that day, suggesting that positive events may play a reparative or protective role
and may have the potential to serve as stress buffers from negative experiences. Furthermore,
many of the observed experiences appeared to create an “upward spiral,” not only creating
positive emotionality in the moment, but also potentially aiding with building further resources
that facilitate increased well-being over time. While the limitations of the current research make
it difficult to comment on the implications of these behaviours for youth mental health, the
current observations combined with past research suggest that these processes may be important
for youth well-being. To make more definitive conclusions about the role of these experiences
for youth well-being, quantitatively evaluating relations between these experiences and youth
emotional development is an important area of further investigation.
Chapter 2: Overview

The purpose of study 2 was to evaluate processes that may interfere with youth positive experiences in their daily lives. While Chapter 1 provided insight into factors that may aid youth in experiencing and processing the PLEs in their lives, it was apparent that in some of the diary reports, youth integrated negative reflections within their “good things” diaries. Given that a large percentage of youth may experience deficits in their positive functioning, experiencing disenchantment, boredom, and disengagement from their life experiences (Larson, 2000; Larson & Richards, 1991), as well as evidence that some youth may struggle to process and experience the positive benefits of their positive life experiences (e.g., Bryant, 2003; Feldman et al., 2008; Quoidbach et al., 2010; Wood et al., 2003), the current study aimed to evaluate the ways in which youth engage with their experiences that may interfere with their positive functioning.

Research suggests that some individuals may not be able to gain positive benefits from their life experiences, and may even engage in strategies to dampen their positive experiences, purposely reducing the positive implications (e.g., Feldman et al., 2008; Mayer & Stevens, 1994; Parrot, 1993; Swann & Schroeder, 1995; Wood et al., 2003). Developing a better understanding of this phenomenon is important as dampening in response to PLEs has been found to be related to maladjustment and psychopathology (e.g., Bryant, 2003; Feldman et al., 2008; Min’er & Dejun, 2001; Wood et al., 2003).

Other researchers comment on the complexity of the human experience, suggesting that positive and negative experiences are often deeply intertwined (Solomon & Stone, 2002). These researchers have criticized the prominent tradition of dichotomizing emotions and experience into positive and negative categories, focusing on emotional polarity or opposites, with some states considered all “good” or all “bad.” They argue that it is problematic to make “simple-
minded” dichotomization as it detracts from developing a comprehensive understanding of human experience and obscures understanding of the factors that interplay to contribute to one’s complex emotional experience. They state, “We are not suggesting that emotion research can simply dispense with such distinctions, but we are suggesting that we should be much more attentive to the subtlety and complexity of the phenomena that so fascinate us all” (p. 433). By qualitatively evaluating how youth integrate both positive and negative reflections into their daily “good things” reports, the current study aimed to shed light on the potential complexity of the ways in which positive and negative experiences may be intertwined in youth daily life.

The aim of this study was to evaluate the nuance of youths’ daily experiences, while also evaluating whether there are any processes at play that interfere with youth processing of their positive experiences. Overall, the goal of this analysis was to gain a better understanding of factors that may contribute to some youth struggling to gain the benefits of their PLEs.

**Method**

See Chapter 1 for a detailed description of the qualitative methodology and details about participants.

**Procedure**

In this study, an analysis was conducted to better understand how youth integrated negative reflections into their daily diary reports. The primary researcher read through the diary entries and identified any cases in which youth integrated negative statements, reflections, thoughts, feelings or words into their diary entries. Next, the researcher read through the list and identified patterns in these negative reflections. See Chapter 1 for a description of the method used to find consensus regarding the presence of the observations in the data between various researchers.
Analyses

How do Youth Integrate Negative Responses into Diaries about PLEs?

Given the great variation in the ways youth reported on their PLEs, and the observation that many of the responses did integrate both positive and negative reflections, the analysis of this study involved selecting the responses that involved any negative elements within any part of their daily diary reports. For example, the diaries were evaluated to see whether they involved any negative reflections or reactions (e.g., negative thoughts and emotions). It was observed that many of the participants had “negative” reflections embedded in some of their daily diary reports. To better understand this phenomenon, the primary researcher and two undergraduate research assistants identified salient commonalities and differences between the participants’ negative reports. Five major themes emerged across all of the diary entries: a small number of the diaries included negative events and did not include any positive appraisals; some diary reports included bad experiences in which the youth found positive meaning; some diary reports involved reports about the best thing being the ending of something negative; other diary reports included reports on positive events with something negative inserted into the response; and lastly, some diaries involved youth engaging in negative reflections on their positive experiences. Each of these observations will be highlighted in more detail below.

**Asking about positive events elicits negative reports.** Within a small number of the diary entries, when the youth were asked about the best thing that happened to them that day, they reported on negative events they had experienced. The following quotes illustrate responses that did not seem to include any positive component:

The last day has been pretty sucky but the best thing I can think of would be nothing!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Today has been pretty terrible because nothing is going right. I'm
in a fight with almost all my friends, everyone seems to hate me, I keep getting kicked out/left out and sometimes I just feel like I'd be better off dead… it was at school and at home and it has been quite terrible… It was my so called friends who all seem to hate me except one who I was talking to today. Terrible… terrible things. Basically the same as what happened, which was terrible… I did nothing even though I should have to stop it. Maybe if I talked to my friends it would be fine. Well I talked to one friend- who doesn’t hate me... IT WASN’T GOOD AT ALL.

Nothing good happened to me, I have had a really bad day… [How did you respond?] Sad and a little mad.

Nothing… because I am tired because I had a hockey game at 9 pm in Toronto and got home at 11, and my baby brother kept crying so I couldn’t sleep and my friend is being annoying and mean… Nothing was fun. (drew sad face)

Given that this study asked participants to talk about the positive things that happened to them in the day, and given the open-ended response format, it is interesting to note that within these diaries youth reflected on the bad things that happened to them that day. These youth may have had difficulty accessing positive reflections on the day, or it is possible that stronger negative experiences outweighed their positive experiences in the day. These diary entries involved reports on negative experiences in various domains such as frustration with being mistreated by friends, annoyance with family, and also on a frustrating event involving extra-curricular activities. In some cases, daily experiences resulted in negative self-reflections (e.g., everyone hates me) and negative emotional reactions such as sadness, anger, and in one case the question resulted in the expression of suicidal ideation.
Finding positive meaning in a bad day. In some of the daily diary reports, the participants reported on negative events that happened to them in their days, but reflected on the positive meaning that came from the negative events.

Nothing because I was sick, in my bed. I was just watching TV in my bed being boring and lazy…I woke up with a terrible cold…. I was not happy that I had one but what made me happy is the people helping me.

We came two points short in our volleyball game… I was upset we lost but happy that it was only by two points… we came together as a team.

I had a bad day. It got better once I met up with my friend on the bus… I was lonely during the day, but I was with a good friend on the bus… I was not included in games…. I was very sad. I became happy once I was with my friend… Everything else made me sad but that one thing made me happy… I usually have a bad day, but my friend makes it better.

These diary entries focused on negative things that happened that day and the negative associated emotions, but also involved reflections on the positive experiences that resulted from the events. The negative events reported on included being sick, losing a game, and being left out of games with peers. One of these participants engaged in negative self-reflections, stating he/she was being boring and lazy. All of these participants reflected on their negative emotional reactions to these events, noting they were “not happy,” upset, sad, and/or lonely; however, each of these diaries also involved reports that the negative event was made better by the support of either a friend or his/her teammates, and the youth later reported feeling happy due to the support they received.
**Best thing is the ending of something negative.** Another theme observed within the diaries was the youth reports that the best thing that happened to them that day was the absence, completion, or ending of something negative. For example, within some of the diaries, the participants at times reported that the best thing that happened to them that day was the *absence* of something negative:

The best thing that happened in the last day was me and my sister not fighting cause we always fight… [I was] happy… It’s a good thing because it’s hard for me and my sister to get along.

I was happy that I didn't have any homework because I don't like having homework because then I don't have more time to do what I want and [now] I don't have to worry about finishing it.

The best thing that happened in the last 24 hours was I found out I did not have to go to 2 and 2 1/2 hours of choir practice… This is a good thing because I get to relax more.

Within these diary entries, the participants reported that the best thing that happened to them that day involved the absence of something they seemed to perceive as a negative alternative. Specifically, participants had varying responses, reporting the absence of a frequent negative behaviour (e.g., fighting), the absence of homework, not having to go to choir practice, and not having to play a disliked sports position. In a couple of responses, the participant reflected on the negative feelings that would be avoided by not having to do the activity, such as not having to worry or feel miserable. Furthermore, each of these participants reported that the absence of these events resulted in positive emotions, such as feeling happy, strong, delighted, and more relaxed.
Other diary entries included reports that the best thing that happened to the youth that day was completing something that was negative:

I got my media project done… It’d been a long process… I presented it this morning, and although I got a little nervous, as always, I was overjoyed to get it over with… I was nervous to present, but satisfied when I completed the presentation… I don’t really like doing oral presentations, so it was a good feeling for me to finish it. This project will be counted as a big part in media and oral, and I think I did pretty well. It was good to present it without any problems.

The best thing that has happened to me in the past 24 hrs is I finally finished 10 weeks of ultra boring swimming lessons that my mom made me take… I was very happy… this was a good thing, because it opens up Tuesday nights.

These participants reported that the best thing that happened to them that day was ending something they appeared to experience as negative, such as completing a tedious project or a disliked activity. These diaries involved reflections on the negative feelings the participants had towards the experiences, such as feeling nervous and bored. Furthermore, within these diaries, youth at times reported on positive feelings that came from finishing the activity, such as feeling overjoyed, satisfied, and very happy. These participants also reflected on the positive implications of the completion of the event.

In some diary entries, participants reported that the best thing that happened to them that day was being relieved of something that they were worried or scared about.

… my dog came back from the vet and I saw he was okay… I was happy he came home safe and everything was okay with him and he doesn’t have to go back… It’s a good
thing because I love my dog and he means every thing to me, and I wouldn't want to see anything happen to him. I would be upset.

The best thing that happened to me was when I got my cast off… I was scared.

My dog is all better from an elbow sprain that he got a week ago… [Why was this the best thing?] Because I love my dog and I don’t like to see him hurt.

These participants reported experiencing negative emotions, such as fear, worry, or being upset, and later as a result of the event, experiencing feelings of relief and positive emotions, such as happiness.

**Inserting something negative into positive reports.** Another theme that emerged from the diaries was that many of the entries involved reports of positive events that the participants had experienced that day, with negative comments inserted into the reports.

The best thing that happened today was when we were in gym. It was a lot of fun. We played volleyball. I'm not very good at it but it is still fun.

The greatest thing that happened to me yesterday was hanging out with my friend that I never see and sleeping over… It was my friend X and our relationship wasn’t the best cause we went to different schools.

The best thing that happened to me in the last day was playing basketball with a couple of my friends and none of us got mad or mistreated.

It appears that reporting on the best thing that happened to these participants also brought up negative reflections on the topic being discussed. At times recalling of positive events resulted in negative statements about one’s self, performance, or relationships. For example,
while each individual reported having a positive experience, their reports also elicited negative associated comments, such as not being good at something, losing a game, getting into a fight, and not having a strong relationship. A couple of these participants appear to report a mixture of emotions, such as: “I am not very good at it but it’s still fun;” “I was upset we lost but happy…” Other diaries involved reports of positive experiences despite the negative component of the experiences (e.g., having fun with a friend even though their relationship isn’t that good).

**Best of the worst.** Within some of the diary reports, the youths’ explanation of why the event was the “best thing,” was negative in nature. When asked the question “Why was this the best thing?” many participants expressed that it was because the day was overall negative or boring, or because it was the only positive thing in a bad day. The following examples illustrate reports that involved negative reflections on positive experiences:

This was the best thing because my day didn't go too well.

Nothing else to do/exciting to talk about.

This was the best thing because I was bored and not fascinated.

Everything else made me sad but that one thing made me happy.

In these reports it appeared that the youth are judging how positive the events are by comparison to the other events of the day. Some participants reported on events they felt were less bad than the rest of the day. As well, the participants at times indicated that the events were not overly positive but instead were the *most* positive in comparison to other boring things.
Discussion

The current study highlighted that some youth talk about, experience, and respond to their daily positive life experiences in complex ways. While some individuals only reported positive events, thoughts, and feelings in their daily diaries, a large proportion of the participants’ responses were less clear-cut and involved an integration of both positive and negative reflections. Five prominent ways in which youth integrated negative responses into their recollections of positive events were observed. Specifically, a very small proportion of participants wrote about negative events and did not include any positive reports; some reported on bad experiences but found positive meaning; some reported that the best thing was the ending of something negative; others reported on positive events yet also inserted something negative into their responses; and lastly, some individuals reported on the “best things” they could recall, while noting that the day was not overly positive.

Complexity of Human Experience

The findings of this study demonstrate the complexity of human experience and the difficulties with dichotomizing experiences into positive and negative categories. Consistent with Solomon and Stone’s (2002) observations of the complex interplay of good and bad experience, there appeared to be a multitude of components of the participants’ experiences that did not fit easily into the good-bad binary. Many diary reports involved the integration of negative reports into the diaries. As such, it is evident that positive and negative experiences can be highly intertwined and do not always exist in opposition to one another, on a simplistic continuum where the presence of one translates into the absence of the other. This finding is consistent with research evidence that positive and negative experiences can co-exist and be experienced at the same time (Larsen, McGraw, & Cacioppo, 2001; Trampe, Quoidbach, & Taquet, 2015). It is
possible that in some daily experiences, youths’ understanding of positive experiences might need to be contextualized by negative experience. In many instances, what appears to be negative may be a part of a multifaceted experience and a nuanced way of engaging with the complex emotional experiences of everyday life.

Research suggests that while healthy individuals would ideally experience a higher ratio of positive compared to negative experiences in a day (Trampe et al., 2015), some level of negative experience may also be important for well-being, as the overregulation or suppression of negative emotions may also have negative implications for emotional functioning (e.g., Chaplin & Cole, 2005; Gross & John, 2003; Gross & Levenson, 2002). This past research suggests that while the predominantly negative reports of youth in the daily diary study both within and across days may signal concern, the inclusion of some negative thoughts and feelings within overall positive reports, may be normative and healthy. Fredrickson and Losada (2005) suggest that positive emotionality needs to be “appropriate and genuine” for emotional well-being (p. 685). This suggests that inserting negative occurrences into their diary reports in some cases may be a healthy or genuine reflection of their daily experiences. For example, when a child is truly relieved to learn that his/her dog is okay, this reflection of the mixed positive-negative daily experience may be an accurate and healthy depiction of the youth’s most salient positive experience. Cole, Michel, and Teti (1994) suggest that a full range of emotions, including negative emotions are important to well-being. From this lens, it must be considered that youth integration of negative responses into their daily positive reports may be authentic, healthy, and accurate reflections of the complexity of their cognitive and emotional experiences within the day.
**Difficulties Experiencing Positive Events**

Given the variability in the ways youth inserted negative reflections into their diaries, it is likely that the different responses have different emotional implications, with some being normative and adaptive reflections of daily experiences, and others possibly indicating more maladaptive ways some youth may process their daily experiences. In some cases, the youth’s negative reflections on their PLEs may highlight difficulties experiencing or communicating the positive experiences of their daily lives. While the negative reports were quite varied, with youth likely possessing different underlying reasons for integrating negative aspects into their diaries, the observation of the frequency of negative reflections may be consistent with research that indicates that some youth do struggle to experience the benefits of their PLEs (e.g., Brown & McGill, 1989; Campbell et al., 1991; Shimizu & Pelham, 2004; Wood et al., 2003). Research suggests that some individuals may integrate negative thoughts and feelings into their positive experiences due to feeling they do not deserve the positive experiences (e.g., Parrott, 1993), or due to their preference for information that is congruent with their self-concept or typical mood state (e.g., Brown & McGill, 1989; Campbell et al., 1991; Mayer & Stevens, 1994; Shimizu & Pelham, 2004; Swann & Schroeder, 1995; Wood et al., 2003). It is possible that within some of the diary entries, the negative reports may be a reflection of a participant’s difficulty processing the positive elements of his/her daily experience.

The observation that youth at times experience negative reactions to positive events may be consistent with research indicating the high prevalence of youth dissatisfaction, boredom, disconnection, and disengagement from their life experiences (Larson, 2000). For example, within the diary reports, when youth reported on events that indicated the “best of the worst,” their reports often did indicate feelings of boredom and disengagement from their daily lives.
(e.g., “I was bored;” “nothing exciting to talk about;” “my day didn’t go well;” “everything else [in the day] made me sad;” “everything else was boring;” “because my life is really…boring”). These reports may reflect youth deficits in processing daily positive experiences, or alternatively may represent the normative experience of a genuinely uneventful day.

The daily diary reports that were purely negative in nature appeared to be more clearly reflective of youth experiences of distress, and possible difficulties processing or reporting on positive events. The following entry was illustrative of this phenomenon: “Today has been pretty terrible because nothing is going right. I'm in a fight with almost all my friends, everyone seems to hate me, I keep getting kicked out/left out and sometimes I just feel like I'd be better off dead…” Reports that were purely negative and that involved a higher degree of negative emotionality may be clearer reflection of some youths’ difficulties experiencing PLEs; however, these reports were less frequent, not reflective of typical diary reports, and some of these reports may still represent some of the genuinely negative life experiences healthy youth likely experience on occasion.

The implications of other diary reports that integrate a mixture of good and bad responses are more difficult to interpret. For example, the observation that some of the positive events elicited negative inserted thoughts (e.g., “I’m not very good at it;” “our relationship wasn’t the best;” “I’m boring;” “I screwed up;” “I thought I would get a bad mark”), may reflect the negative feelings youth posses about themselves or their relationships and signal vulnerability, or alternatively, may be reflective of a normative way of processing one’s positive experiences. While it is difficult to make conclusions about the implications of these daily reports for youth emotional well-being, it appears likely that some of these reports reflect normative experiences
of youth, while others may signal that some youth are having difficulties processing and positively experiencing the positive elements of their daily lives.

**Implications**

Given the complexity and nuances of how youth experience their daily life events, it is difficult to conclude with confidence what the implications are for the tendency of individuals to report negative thoughts, feelings, and events when asked to report on the best thing that happened to them that day. It is unclear to what extent integrating negative thoughts into responses serves to dampen the participants’ response to events or reflect deficits in positive functioning. It is possible that for some of these youth, the negative-positive contrast is necessary for them to contextualize their experiences. Furthermore, integrating negative and positive thoughts may be normative, reflecting the complexity of youth daily experience. It is also possible that youth who experience events as all good are over-simplifying their experiences and not properly reflecting the multifaceted nature of their experiences more generally. While concrete conclusions are beyond the scope of the current investigation, it may be beneficial to examine whether youth who experience events as all good are over-simplifying their experiences and not properly reflecting the multifaceted nature of life experiences more generally. Furthermore, it may be beneficial to evaluate whether negative reflections are a normative and a realistic demonstration of the youth’s daily experiences, or whether these negative components reflect a deficit in positive functioning and a potential vulnerability factor. These questions may be better answered in future research using interview methodologies to talk to youth about their PLEs. Furthermore, the implications of many of the current observations may better be examined through quantitative research investigating relations between youth reports of daily PLEs and well-being outcomes.
Chapter 3: Overview

The aim of study 3 was to quantitatively evaluate how adolescents’ daily positive life events (PLEs) impact their emotional functioning. Given that little research has been conducted on youth PLEs to date, the first aim was to get a better sense of the types of events youth experience. Furthermore, given the unique processes involved in daily positive experiences (Zautra et al., 2005), the aim was to better understand how different state and trait experiences of youth PLEs impact their daily emotional functioning. Multilevel-modeling was used to evaluate both between and within person relationships, evaluating youth typical tendencies when engaging with their life experiences, the variability in their reactions to life events from day-to-day, and how general and daily tendencies associate with their daily and overall positive affect (PA) and negative affect (NA) within a week. The aim was to develop a “dynamic and more integrative approach that brings investigators much closer in real time to observing people’s lives as they unfold” (Zautra et al., p. 5). Understanding the daily mechanisms at play that may impact one’s mood likely also has implications for longer-term well-being (Diener et al., 1999). While a large body of research has supported the importance of both state and trait PA and NA for longer term emotional functioning (e.g., Merz & Roesch, 2011), the majority of research has been conducted on adult populations and focuses on negative rather than positive emotions. Evaluating the daily mechanisms that impact emotional functioning is particularly important during adolescence, as it is a time when youth are experiencing important developmental changes that have implications for the trajectory of their later mental health and well-being (Gilbert, 2012).

Implications of Positive and Negative Mood for Adolescent Mental Health

While past research with youth populations has provided strong evidence of the
importance of NA in the development and course of psychopathology (Neumann, Lier, Frijns, Meeus, & Koot, 2011; Silk, Steinberg, & Morris, 2003), little research has focused on understanding the role of PA in adolescent emotional development (Gilbert, 2012). Furthermore, little is known about the daily processes at play that impact youth emotional functioning. Developing an understanding of the day-to-day experiences that impact youth emotions is important, as adolescence may be a time of fluctuations of daily moods and extreme positive and negative emotional experiences (Larson & Lampman-Petraitis, 1989; Larson & Richards, 1994; Silk et al., 2009). Furthermore, during adolescence, youth may experience elevated NA (Henker, Whalen, Jamner, & Delfino, 2002; Larson & Lampman-Petraitis, 1989), and lower PA (Larson & Lampman-Petraitis, 1989; Larson, Moneta, Richards, & Wilson, 2002). Understanding the mechanisms that impact daily emotional experience may have important implications, particularly given the importance of this stage of development for longer term emotional functioning.

Developing an understanding of positive emotional development is particularly important, as many adolescents experience deficits in their positive functioning (Larson, 2000; Larson & Richards, 1991). Research suggests that some individuals have difficulties processing the positive experiences in their lives (Feldman et al., 2008; Quoidback et al., 2010; Wood et al., 2003), and youth in particular have been found to display a high prevalence of dissatisfaction, boredom, disconnection and disengagement from their life experiences (Larson, 2000; Larson & Richardson, 1991). This is problematic, as possessing the ability to experience positive emotions is theorized to be an important adaptive process that is implicated in mental health and well-being (Fredrickson, 1998, 2004). Furthermore, the absence of positive experience has been found to be one of the greatest predictors of distress, signaling early vulnerability to
psychopathology (Wood & Tarrier, 2010), and has been found to act as an important risk factor in the early development of disorder, particularly within youth samples (Keyfitz et al., 2013). Research suggests that positive characteristics may buffer against the impact of stressors and difficult life experiences, and in their absence may put individuals at greater risk of psychopathology (Wood & Tarrier, 2010). Difficulties savouring and modulating positive emotions, and tendencies to “blunt” positive experiences, may be implicated in vulnerability to mental health difficulties within adolescent populations (Gilbert, 2012). Despite this evidence, little is know about the daily processes at play that may contribute to or interfere with adolescent positive emotional functioning.

**Objective PLEs versus Individual Differences in Processing**

This study focused on youths’ tendencies to engage with their PLEs, as observed in Chapters 1 and 2, to quantitatively evaluate whether their daily experiences have implications for their emotional functioning. The first question of interest was whether it was positive events themselves, or the way youth engaged with and processed their experiences that was prospectively associated with positive emotional benefits. Past research from the adult literature and the qualitative observations from this project suggest that it is not only the nature of the PLEs themselves that create positive experience, but also the way that individuals actively engage with or create their own daily experiences that serves to positively impact emotional functioning (e.g., Bryant & Veroff, 2007; Gable et al., 2004; Langston, 1994; Lykken, 1999, 2000; Min’er & Dejun, 2001). The qualitative portion of this project suggested that some youth may engage in positive emotion regulation, or ways of actively engaging in the PLEs, possibly to maintain or enhance their positive experiences. As well, some youth appeared to focus on negative elements of the events, possibly dampening the impact of the events.
Consistent with past research (e.g., Brown & Ryan, 2003; Bryant, 2003; Bryant & Veroff, 2007; Gable et al., 2004), within the qualitative observations it appeared that some youth engaged in “happy habits” (Lykken, 1999, 2000) or ways of engaging in their life experiences that appeared to increase the positive benefits of their life events. This is consistent with research within adult populations, suggesting that engaging in positive emotion regulation strategies, such as savoring (Bryant, 2003), capitalizing (Gable et al., 2004; Langston, 1994), mindfulness (Brown & Ryan, 2003), and positive mental time travel (Quoidbach et al., 2009) increases well-being. In Chapter 1, it was observed that youth may at times engage with their seemingly benign life events in ways that transformed everyday experiences into something more meaningful. In Chapter 2, it was also observed that some youth had negative reactions to their PLEs, possibly demonstrating difficulties absorbing the positive benefits of their daily experiences. Consistently, research within adult populations indicates that some individuals engage in dampening strategies to reduce the positive emotional reactions to their daily experiences (e.g., Feldman et al., 2008; Min’er & Dejun, 2001; Parrott, 1993; Wood et al., 2003). While there is some evidence that savouring and dampening impact well-being within youth populations (e.g., Chadwick, 2012; Gentzler, Morey, Palmer, & Yi, 2012; Katz, Shortt, Allen et al., 2013; Meehan et al., 1993), this area of research has been largely neglected. As such, the current study sought to evaluate whether the youths’ ways of engaging in their life events (e.g., positive emotion regulation and negative reactions), had implications for their daily or general emotional functioning throughout the week. The aim was to evaluate both daily and overall weekly experiences of PLEs, to evaluate whether daily fluctuations in reactions to life events impacted daily fluctuations in affect, and also whether general reactions to events across the week, had implications for the participants’ trait mood experience.
Positive Experiences as a Protective Factor

The current study also aimed to evaluate whether aspects of youth PLEs have a protective emotional impact throughout the day or week. Within the qualitative chapters, it was noted that for some youth, PLEs seemed to have a reparative impact, appearing to help them overcome their difficulties from day-to-day. This was consistent with research suggesting that positive events can play a protective role, by having a stress-buffering impact or by increasing one’s coping resources (e.g., Cohen et al., 1987; Cohen & Hoberman, 1983; Kanner et al., 1987; Lazarus et al., 1980; Needles & Abramson, 1990; Shahar & Priel, 2002). As well, consistent with Fredrickson’s (2004) broaden and build theory of positive emotions, it also appeared that events experienced by youth may have created an “upward spiral” in which the positive experiences increased the youths’ positive emotions. Research on adult populations suggests that experiences of PA may impact both the content and structure of thought (Schwarz & Clore, 2007), with PA leading to more positive processing, a broadening in thinking and the building of more coping resources over time (Fredrickson, 1998, 2004). The current study sought to evaluate whether the ways youth engage with their PLEs have a protective emotional impact, by increasing PA and decreasing NA, both daily and throughout the week.

Positive Experiences and Vulnerability

Past research also suggests that when individuals display difficulties processing their positive experiences, this may signal vulnerability to mental health difficulties. While little research on this topic has been conducted with youth samples, findings within university samples indicate that some people tend to engage in their life events in ways to purposely suppress or dampen the positive implications of their experiences (e.g., Feldman et al., 2008; Gross & John, 2003; Gross & Levenson, 1997). Gross and John (2003) found that suppression of positive and
negative emotions resulted in less positive and more negative emotions, and decreased well-being over time, including higher depressive symptoms, and lower life satisfaction, well-being, optimism and self-esteem. In another study, dampening (i.e., attending to imperfections and potential negative repercussions of positive situations), predicted lower levels of life satisfaction (Quoidbach et al., 2010). Furthermore, an experimental study with university undergraduates indicated that purposely suppressing emotional reactions predicted less subjective positive emotional reactions to positive stimuli (Gross & Levinson, 1997).

Research within adolescent populations indicates that deficits in positive emotions are also implicated in youth psychopathology (e.g., Forbes, Williamson, Ryan, & Dahl, 2004; Joiner, Catanzaro, & Laurent, 1996; Sheeber, Allen, Leve, Davis, Shortt, & Katz, 2009; Suveg, Hoffman, Zeman, & Thomassin, 2009); however, little is known about the processes that contribute to or detract from youth daily positive emotional functioning. While research on adult populations highlights the important role of dampening of positive emotions, little research has explored the impact of dampening in youth populations. As such, this study sought to evaluate whether the observed dampening tendency of youth reports was associated with decreased PA and increased NA. As well, the aim was to evaluate whether negative reactions to PLEs were associated with affective responses that mirror stress reactions. Research suggests that negative events result in a narrowing of one’s attention and affect experience, and preferentially processing negative rather than positive stimuli (i.e., increased NA and decreased PA; Zautra et al., 2005). If youth daily PLEs result in negative responses, this may indicate that for some youth, PLEs may trigger emotional vulnerability rather than stress-buffering or protective benefits. For these youth, they may not only be missing opportunities to gain positive benefits from their positive experiences, but instead they may experience distress in response to the
positive events. These findings may help provide insight into factors that contribute to youth deficits in their positive functioning as well as insight into ways positive events can also play a role in vulnerability to mental health difficulties.

**Hypotheses**

Given the little research to date conducted on youth PLEs, several descriptive analyses were first conducted to evaluate the frequency of the types of positive events individuals experience, the people youth were with when experiencing events, the settings in which the events were experienced, and the ways youth engaged with their life experiences. As well, the aim was to evaluate the components of positive events that may serve as both protective and vulnerability factors in contributing to youth overall emotional functioning.

The variables of interest in the current study included: *Objective PLE Intensity* (i.e., ratings of the level of positivity of the PLEs made by external observers, attempting to control for participant subjective interpretation of events); *Subjective PLE Intensity* (i.e., participant subjective appraisal of the positivity of the life events made through self-reports); *Positive Emotion Regulation* (PER; i.e., measures of whether youth engaged in at least one PER strategy, including savouring, mindfulness, capitalizing, and positive mental time travel); *Negative Components* (i.e., whether the diary reports involved the negative themes observed in Chapter 2); and *Negativity Ratings* (i.e., a rating made by external observers noting the extent to which the youth daily report involved negative elements, including negative circumstances, contextual details, reflections, or reactions).

**Objective PLE Intensity vs. individual differences in processing.** It was hypothesized that it is not just the objective nature of the events youth experience (i.e., high Objective PLE Intensity) that predicts positive emotional benefits, but also the way youth process and actively
engage with their PLEs (i.e., high Subjective PLE Intensity, PER, low Negative Components and Reactions), that impacts their daily and weekly emotional functioning.

**Positive experience as a protective factor.** Several ways youth engaged with their PLEs were hypothesized to serve as protective factors. On days when youth reported higher Objective PLE Intensity, Subjective PLE Intensity, and PER, and fewer Negative Components and lower Negativity Ratings (Level 1), youth were hypothesized to experience higher PA and lower NA. This same trend was hypothesized to impact trait affect (i.e., youth average affect across the week; Level 2). Youth who had a higher general tendency throughout the week to report higher Subjective PLE Intensity, who engaged in higher PER, and lower Negative Components and Negativity Ratings, were hypothesized to have a greater tendency to experience higher levels of PA and lower NA overall. See Figure 1 to illustrate the hypothesized relations for the multilevel models tested predicting PA.

**Positive experience and vulnerability.** The ways youth engaged with their daily life experiences were also hypothesized to signal vulnerability to emotional difficulties. On days when youth reported lower Subjective PLE Intensity and PER, higher Negative Components in their PLEs, and higher Negativity Rating to their PLEs, they were hypothesized to experience lower levels of PA and higher daily NA (Level 1). The same trend was also hypothesized to be present for one’s average tendencies of engaging in life events throughout the week, with youth who tend to engage in overall less Objective and Subjective PLE Intensity and PER, and more negative reflections on their positive events experiencing overall more NA and less PA in the week (Level 2). See Figure 2 to illustrate the hypothesized relations for the multilevel models tested predicting NA.
Figure 1

_Hypothesized Relations between State and Trait PLE Variables in Predicting PA_
Figure 2

_Hypothesized Relations between State and Trait PLE Variables in Predicting NA_
Method

Participants

Participants were 139 adolescent girls \((n= 64)\), boys \((n= 71)\), and unknown \((n=4)\), ages 8 to 13 \((M=11.20, \ SD= 1.21)\), in grades 4 to 8. Participants were 61% Caucasian \((n= 85)\), and the other 39% of participants \((n=78)\) were from ethnically diverse backgrounds including Asian, African American, Hispanic/Latino, First Nations, and “Other.” The students were recruited from three elementary schools in the Wellington Catholic District School Board in Guelph, Ontario.

Measures

**Daily Diary Form.** A 5-day diary method was used to assess the daily occurrence of PLEs. Participants were asked to report the “best event” they experienced that day, and explain “what made it the best event?” As well, participants were asked other contextual details about the events, such as who they were with, what happened before the event, and why this was the “best” event, to provide context for coding the data.

**Subjective PLE Intensity.** To obtain a subjective measure of youth’s daily PLEs, the daily diary study required participants to self-report on a 10-point Likert scale, how positively they experienced the reported on PLE. The scale ranged from 1 (not positive) to 10 (very positive). Researchers suggest that subjective ratings of one’s experiences may be the most accurate indicators of well-being given that people intrinsically “know” when they are happy (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999).

Contextual based coding of the adolescents’ reports was also conducted to minimize concerns regarding the measurement of life events in a subjective manner, confounded by participant cognitive processing. In collaboration with the primary researcher, nine
undergraduate research assistants were involved in coding the diary data. Prior to coding for each
theme reported below, raters were provided with a list of anchoring events to help determine the
appropriate rankings. The anchoring items were established by surveying the diary entries and
creating a list of various sample entries that represented the scoring category of interest. Two
research assistants read through the anchoring items and also surveyed the entire diary form to
ensure the anchoring items accurately captured the category. Once the anchors were established,
the coders went through a training period to ensure they were accurately coding the data and that
they were able to demonstrate a high degree of reliability. The training period took place using a
random section of the diary data, which was re-coded for inclusion in this data set following the
training period and a time delay. For all themes that were coded, each of the diary entries were
coded by two independent raters. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion between the
primary investigator and the two raters.

*Characteristics of events.* In the initial coding, positive events were coded into: the
context of the events, people involved in the events, and the location of the events (See pg. 34 for
a full list of themes). Binary code was used for the coding to indicate the presence or absence of
the various themes. While the coding of the domains of the events was modeled after Hankin et
al. (2007), who categorized events as interpersonal and achievement oriented, a more
comprehensive evaluation of the domains in which events were experienced was developed here.
Qualitative evaluations revealed that the most common domains of the events involved: social
interactions, physical activities, extra-curricular activities, artistic activities, faith related
experiences, technology (e.g., playing video games, using the computer, talking on skype),
special events (e.g., trips, parties), eating food, commercialism (e.g., shopping, money, gifts,
etc.), and attainment of goals. Thus, each event was coded for the presence or absence of each of
the domains. The diaries were also coded for the people the participants were with during the event, including: family, peers, teachers, pets, alone, and romantic interest. Finally, events were coded for their locations, including: school, home, outdoors, community, and places of faith.

Positive components of life events. The data were also coded for the positive themes observed within the qualitative analysis of this study including: relationships, simple happiness, laughter, play, creativity, kindness, relaxation, intrinsic achievement, extrinsic achievement, and special event. The coders were provided with detailed description of each category (as described in Chapter 1), as well as a list of examples for each theme. After a training period to ensure reliability, the coders determined the presence or absence of each of these themes using binary code, and the different themes were not mutually exclusive. In the initial coding, prior to resolving discrepancies between coders, the Cohen’s kappa ranged from moderate to excellent, indicating initial adequate inter-rater reliability (kindness, $k = .50$; intrinsic achievement, $k = .60$; extrinsic achievement, $k = .68$; special event, $k = .73$; connection, $k = .78$; creativity, $k = .80$; play, $k = .82$; uncomplicated happiness, $k = .83$; relaxation, $k = .88$; laughter, $k = .92$). Of note, these reliability estimates again capture the agreement prior to involvement of a third observer to resolve any disagreements. Still, variables with lower initial inter-rater reliability should be interpreted with greater caution.

Objective PLE Intensity. This coding was adapted from the well-regarded contextual threat method for assessing life events (Adrian & Hammen, 1993; Brown & Harris, 1978). In particular, the approach was modeled after Hankin, Mermelstein, and Roesch’s (2007) study on daily life stressors amongst adolescent boys and girls, with the procedures modified to evaluate positive rather than negative events (Hankin et al., 2007). Consistent with their outlined procedure, raters first evaluated whether the event had some positive content. Next the raters
coded the positivity of the event on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from minimally positive to extremely positive, using a list of criteria and anchoring items (e.g., $1 = \text{“The best thing that happened to me was getting out of the house after 48 hours;”}$ $2 = \text{“The best thing that happened to me was my math test was easy;”}$ $3 = \text{“my cousin came to visit me, and we played a game;”}$ $4 = \text{“I won my first hockey game with my team and I scored a goal”}$. The raters determined a score by evaluating both the event’s circumstances and the context, and they were instructed not to take into account the youth’s reactions or feelings about the event. For example, if the youth wrote “I ate lunch with people” and reported that it was a positive event because, “I never eat lunch with people” then the context would lead to coding the event as a more strongly positive experience than if the person wrote “It was the only good thing that day.” The initial inter-rater reliability was assessed using a two-way mixed, consistency, average-measures ICC. In the initial coding, prior to resolving discrepancies, the ICC was in the excellent range, $ICC = .88$, indicating that the coders had a high degree of initial agreement before resolving discrepancies with a third coder.

**Negativity Rating.** Using a similar method to code for Objective PLE Intensity, the data were coded for the extent to which the PLE reports involved any negative elements. Raters first evaluated whether the event involved any negative components. If the diary reports were observed to include negativity, raters then evaluated the extent to which negativity was integrated into the diary report, on a 4-point scale ranging from minimally negative to strongly negative. Diary entries that did not include any negativity were coded 0. The raters determined a score by evaluating both the event’s circumstances and the context. For this coding category, the negative reactions or feelings about the event were considered in the coding. The youth’s reactions were important in the coding of this variable, as the participants’ subjective response to the event was of interest (i.e., the aim was not to evaluate objectively negative events, but rather
negative responses or interpretations of events). The raters determined a score by evaluating both the event’s circumstances and the contextual details of the events. Examples of coding include: 1= “We finished an assignment, and I was happy with the result… sometimes, there are days when it’s not a nice project;” 2= “my mom picked me up from school…it was good because I didn’t have to walk home with my dad… [and] because I never go home with my mom.” 3= “I got to sit on my friend’s new couch…[it was the best thing because] my life is really, really, really boring and that was the first time I saw a couch like that… I’ve never been asked to see my friend’s new couch;” and 4= “Nothing good happened today. I have had a really bad day.” In the initial coding, prior to resolving discrepancies, the inter-rater reliability was in the excellent range, ICC = .92, indicating that the coders had a high degree of agreement. The ICC was assessed using a two-way mixed, consistency, average-measures ICC.

**Negative Components.** The data were also coded for the negative themes observed within the qualitative study including: fully negative reports, negative reports with positive meaning, ending of negative experiences, positive events with negative insertions, and negative reflections on positive experiences. Again the coders were provided with a detailed description of each category (see Chapter 2), as well as a list of examples for each theme to use as anchors for their coding. After a training period to ensure reliability, the coders determined the presence or absence of each of these themes using binary code. In the initial coding, prior to resolving discrepancies between coders, the Cohen’s kappa ranged from moderate to excellent (finding positive in a bad day, $k = .52$; absence of something implied to be negative, $k = .59$; completed something negative, $k = .58$; relief of something anticipated to be negative, $k = .58$; positive experience with negative association, $k = .58$; comparatively better than negative, $k = .64$; completely negative, $k = 1$). While these themes were generally in the moderate range prior to
resolving discrepancies, the numbers reported on in this study were computed following resolving discrepancies, and the individual themes were only used for descriptive purposes. Still, the themes with lower reliability should be interpreted with greater caution. Importantly, for a more conservative measure of this variable, the Negative Components variable used in this study involved tallying the total number of insertions observed across the various themes. The inter-rater reliability for total Negative Insertions was assessed using a two-way mixed, consistency, average-measures ICC, and was in the excellent range, indicating that it was adequate for use in the hypothesis testing in the current study \( (ICC = .87, p<.001) \).

**Positive Emotion Regulation.** The data were coded for several PER themes, including: savouring, mindfulness, capitalizing, and positive mental time travel. Again, the coders were provided with a detailed description of each category (as described in Chapter 1), as well as a list of examples for each theme. After a training period to ensure reliability, the coders again determined the presence or absence of each theme using binary code. The codings were not mutually exclusive. The initial percentage of agreement for these themes ranged from 85 to 98%, prior to resolving discrepancies with a third coder. The Cohen’s kappa ranged from fair to moderate \( (k = .41 \) for mindfulness; \( k = .39 \) for savouring; \( k = .66 \) for positive mental time travel; \( k = .24 \) for capitalizing). Importantly, the final codings reported on in this study accounted for the discrepancies in inter-rater reliability, by resolving the discrepancy through conversations with the primary investigator and the two coders. While the frequency of these themes were analyzed for descriptive purposes, the PER variable used in this study for hypothesis testing involved collapsing across the various themes, in order to reduce error associated with coding for specific categories of PER. For a more conservative measure of this variable, a binary variable was used in which the diary entries were coded for the presence or absence of any PER technique across
the various themes.

*Positive and Negative Affect Schedule—Child Form* (PANAS-C; Laurent et al., 1999). The PANAS-c is a 30-item self-report scale that evaluates experience of PA and NA in youth. The scale is an adaptation of the traditional PANAS scale developed for adult populations (Watson et al., 1988). The scale required youth to rate the frequency of their experience of 15 positive and 15 negative mood related adjectives in the past 24 hours, on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (very slightly or not at all) to 5 (extremely). A composite score was computed separately for NA and PA scales. The scale evidences a psychometrically sound factor structure, high reliability, internal consistency, and adequate convergent and discriminant validity (Crook, Beaver, & Bell, 1998; Hughes & Kendall, 2009; Laurent, Potter, & Catanzaro, 1994; Laurent et al., 1999). Support has also been found for the use of PANAS scales with youth populations, including sound factor structure and good internal consistency (Huebner & Dew, 1995; Melvin & Molly, 2000). Past research has also demonstrated the utility of using the PANAS scales for both trait and state measurement, with evidence that the scale has sound factor structure at both state and trait levels (Merz & Roesch, 2011), and support for the importance of considering PA and NA at both state and trait levels of analysis. Some researchers suggests that a good way to capture both state and trait affect is to measure it at multiple time points (state) and use the average of those measures to represent trait affect (e.g., Diener & Emmons, 1984; Merz & Roesch, 2011). In the current study, the PANAS-c demonstrated good internal consistency for both PA ($\alpha = .84$) and NA ($\alpha = .90$).

**Procedure**

The current study was a component of a three-wave data collection that took place over one academic year. The participants were recruited from schools within the Wellington Catholic
School Board via parent and adolescent information letters and consent packages. Consent packages were mailed to all eligible families of youth in grades 4-8 in participating schools. The participants were also required to provide assent to participate in the study. This 5-day diary study took place in between two waves of data collection with the participants’ schools. The diary data collection involved the completion of thePLEs diary, as well as a measure evaluating the participants’ daily PA and NA. While the daily diary study took place over the 5 consecutive days of a school week (Monday-Friday), in order to account for missing data, one additional data collection date was provided on the Monday of the following week (“day 6”), for youth who had missed a diary day.

Results

Characteristics of PLEs

Several analyses were conducted to gain more information about the PLEs experienced by youth. Means and standard deviations for the daily diary measures are reported in Table 1. A full list of the percentages of: types of events, people events were experienced with, and locations of events are presented in Table 2.

The results of these analyses indicated that events most frequently reported on involved social interactions (45%), followed by physical activity (25%), games (17%), technology (14%), personal achievement (13%), extra curricular activities (11%), food (10%), as well as other events experienced less than 10% of the time. The people events were most frequently reported with included peers (54%), followed by family (29%), in solitary (14%), as well as with teachers, pets, romantic interests, and others, which were reported less than 10% of the time. These events were most frequently experienced in schools (41%), followed by at home (30%), in the community (20%), outdoors (15%), and less frequently in other locations, and religious centers.
Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics for Daily Diary Predictor and Outcome Variables by Day*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Day 1</th>
<th>Day 2</th>
<th>Day 3</th>
<th>Day 4</th>
<th>Day 5</th>
<th>Day 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>M</em></td>
<td><em>SD</em></td>
<td><em>M</em></td>
<td><em>SD</em></td>
<td><em>M</em></td>
<td><em>SD</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Affect</td>
<td>54.00</td>
<td>11.28</td>
<td>52.23</td>
<td>13.24</td>
<td>50.07</td>
<td>14.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Affect</td>
<td>20.39</td>
<td>6.63</td>
<td>20.70</td>
<td>8.28</td>
<td>19.41</td>
<td>66.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective PLE Intensity</td>
<td>8.40</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>8.40</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>8.36</td>
<td>2.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective PLE Intensity</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Emotion Regulation</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negativity Ratings</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Components</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

*Characteristics of Positive Life Events*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLE Characteristics</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Locations</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>32.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoors</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Centre</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>People</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers</td>
<td>54.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solitary</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pets</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romantic Interest</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Context</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Interactions</td>
<td>44.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Activity</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Games</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Achievement</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extracurricular Activity</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Events</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercialism</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humour</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Positive Components of Life Events

The positive features most frequently involved in the life events included: connection (29%), play (27%), intrinsic achievement (14%) and extrinsic achievement (10%), and special events, followed by laughter, relaxation, kindness, and creativity, which were reported on less than 10% of the time. A more detailed list is reported in Table 3.

In an evaluation of the PER techniques observed within the daily diary study, it appeared that PER was present in 34% of the daily diaries. It was observed that 18% of events involved mindfulness (e.g., “I went out the front door and the cold breeze hit my face awaking my senses and I saw the snow on the ground and I touched it, it was cold and soft and wonderful”), 9% involved savoring or positive rumination (e.g., “I slept for 2 hours in my warm, comfy bed”) while fewer events appearing to involve capitalizing (e.g., “Today I received a quiz that I did well on. My friends were supportive of me, and I congratulated them as well”) or positive mental time travel (e.g., “Today I wrote in my book about [my camp] with my friends who’s going there with me”.

Negative Components of Life Events

Percentage of engagement in negative reflections on events are presented in Table 4. Of the events reported on, 38% involved at least one Negative Component, with many diary reports involving a negative insertion (18%), events that were comparatively better than negative outcomes (16%), or events that involved a relief of the negative (8%). Less than 1% of events reported on were explicitly negative in nature.

Multilevel Modeling

Multilevel modeling analyses were conducted to evaluate how state and trait evaluations of life experiences (i.e., Objective PLE Intensity, Subjective PLE Intensity, Negativity Rating,
Table 3

*Positive Components of Positive Life Events*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Components</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Features</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic Achievement</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extrinsic Achievement</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Event</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laughter</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindness</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxation</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncomplicated Positivity</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive Emotion Regulation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Emotion Regulation (&gt;1)</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savouring</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Mental Time Travel</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capitalizing</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4

*Negative Components of Positive Life Events*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negativity Components</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative Insertions</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (&gt; 1)</td>
<td>37.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Insertion</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better than Negative</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relief of Negative</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absence of Negative</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing Negative</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive in a Bad Day</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicitly Negative</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative Reactions</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0—No negativity</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1— Minimal Negativity</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2—</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3—</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 — Strongly Negative</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Negative Components) predicted youth affect. Level 1 data (daily diary, state measures) were nested within persons. Level 2 variables (trait measures) were obtained by aggregating the participants’ scores on the daily measure, over the 5-day diary study, to create scores that represent the person’s average daily life experiences. Level one variables were centered around the group mean, level 2 variables were centered around the grand mean, and outcome variables were uncentered (Crist & Sibley, 2012; Enders & Tofghi, 2007).

First, an unconditional model (null model) was run to estimate the between and within subject variance of the DV. The results indicated that there was statistically significant within-person variance in each DV. For PA, 70% of the variance was between subjects and 30% of variance was within subjects, and for NA, 48% of the variance was between subject, and 52% was within subjects. This indicated the appropriateness of multilevel modeling for evaluating these outcome variables.

A null model was also calculated for each predictor variable to determine whether there was sufficient within- and between- person variance to justify the use of these variables at both the daily and aggregate levels. The null model again provided estimates of the within and between person variance of each of the variables of interest. As can be seen in Table 5, there was significant within- and between- subjects variance for each variable of interest. The finding that each variable contains significant between person variance provided justification for using the daily variables as trait level aggregates (Level 2 variables).

The significance of the random error coefficients were evaluated for each model assessed in this study, and given that they were found to be non-significant, the random error terms were dropped and more constrained, fixed coefficients were used for the analyses (Nezlek, 2007).
Table 5

Evaluating Within- and Between-Person Variance in Outcome and Predictor Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Within-person variance ($\sigma^2$)</th>
<th>Between-person variance ($\tau_{00}$)</th>
<th>Percent of within-person variance</th>
<th>Percent of between-person variance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcome Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Affect</td>
<td>.25***</td>
<td>.58***</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Affect</td>
<td>.15***</td>
<td>.14***</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Predictor Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective PLE Intensity</td>
<td>2.84***</td>
<td>1.76***</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective PLE Intensity</td>
<td>.70***</td>
<td>.07*</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Emotion Regulation</td>
<td>.17***</td>
<td>.04***</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negativity Rating</td>
<td>1.06***</td>
<td>1.15**</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Components</td>
<td>.53***</td>
<td>.07**</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Percent of within-person variance was as computed as: $\sigma^2/(\sigma^2+\tau_{00})$;  
*p<.05, **p<.01, *** p<.001
**Impact of daily life experience on affect.** Two multilevel analyses were conducted to examine the implications for how youth engage with their daily experiences for their daily and average PA and NA. The first hypothesis of interest was that in addition to the objective nature of the events youth experience, the way youth actively engage with and process their PLEs have implications for their daily mood. Secondly, these analysis were conducted to evaluate whether daily and trait experiences of Objective PLE Intensity, Subjective PLE Intensity, PER, Negativity Ratings, and Negativity Components, would predict daily and trait PA and NA.

**Positive affect.** As predicted, higher levels of within person (Level 1) Objective PLE Intensity, \( b = .14, \ SE = .03, \ t = 5.51, p < .001 \), Subjective PLE Intensity, \( b = .04, \ SE = .01, \ t = 3.16, p < .01 \), PER, \( b = .10, \ SE = .05, \ t = 2.10, p < .05 \), and Total Negative Components\(^1\), \( b = .13, \ SE = .05, \ t = 2.61, p < .01 \), were significant positive predictors of daily PA, while Negativity Ratings, \( b = -.19, \ SE=.04, \ t=-5.28, p<.01 \), acted as a significant negative predictor of daily PA. At the between person level (Level 2), one’s trait Objective PLE Intensity, \( b=.55, \ SE=.15, \ t=3.67, p<.001 \), and Subjective PLE Intensity, \( b=.09, \ SE=.04, \ t=2.28, p<.05 \), also positively predicted trait PA. Thus, on a daily basis when youth subjectively experienced higher levels of PLEs, or experienced events that had objectively positive elements, engaged in PER, or reported on lower Negativity Ratings, they experienced increased levels of PA. While overall Negative Components also positively predicted PA, when the themes were looked at separately, they were either negatively or unrelated to PA. Youth with a stronger tendency to experience objective and subjective PLEs overall, displayed more PA throughout the week. See table 6 for the final model.

\(^1\) To understand the positive relationship between Negative Components and PA, a multilevel model was conducted for each of the Negative Components themes in predicting PA. The themes: explicitly negative, positive in a bad day, and negative insertions were all significantly negatively related to PA, while the other themes were not significant predictors of PA.
Table 6

Multilevel Model Predicting State and Trait Positive Affect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor Variable</th>
<th>b (Standard Error)</th>
<th>t (df)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>3.42 (.06)</td>
<td>54.74 (121)**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Within-person**

Subjective PLE Intensity          | .04 (.01)          | 3.16 (430)** |
Objective PLE Intensity           | .14 (.03)          | 5.51 (433)** |
Positive Emotion Regulation       | .10 (.05)          | 2.10 (432)*  |
Negativity Ratings                | -.19 (.04)         | -5.28 (432)**|
Negative Components               | .13 (.05)          | 2.61 (430)** |

**Between-person**

Subjective PLE Intensity          | .09 (.04)          | 2.28 (129)*  |
Objective PLE Intensity           | .55 (.15)          | 3.67 (124)** |
Positive Emotion Regulation       | .22 (.22)          | .97 (125)    |
Negativity Ratings                | -.38 (.26)         | -1.47 (124)  |
Negative Components               | .58 (.36)          | 1.64 (127)   |

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001
**Negative affect.** At the within-person level (Level 1), daily Subjective PLE Intensity, \( b = .02, SE = .01, t = -2.45, p < .05 \), and Total Negative Components\(^2\), \( b = .08, SE = .04, t = -2.15, p < .05 \), negatively predicted daily NA, while Negativity Ratings, \( b = .10, SE = .03, t = 3.50, p .001 \), positively predicted daily NA. Daily Objective PLE Intensity and PER were not significant predictors of NA. At the between person level (Level 2), a person’s trait Negativity Ratings for their life events was approaching significance, \( b = .28, SE = .14, t = 1.95, p = .053 \), as a positive predictor of NA. Given that the \( p \)-value was .053, this indicated that the probability of the data given the null is true, is .053, suggesting that the null hypothesis is unlikely. Trait Negative Components and PER were not significant predictors of NA. Table 7 presents the results for this final model.

**Discussion**

The aim of the current study was to evaluate the ways youth may engage with and experience their PLEs, and the potential implications of PLEs for their daily and weekly emotional functioning. The results of this study provide important insight into youth daily experiences that may impact positive and negative mood, and that may serve as vulnerability or protective factors in youth emotional development.

**PLE Event Types**

**Positive life event content.** The results of this analysis provided unique information about the types of PLEs youth may experience and the ways they may engage with their life events. There was considerable diversity in diary entries, with youth reporting on events within a variety of contexts, with diverse people, and involving various themes. These data suggest

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\(^2\) To understand the negative relationship between Negative Components and NA a multilevel model was conducted for each theme in predicting NA. The themes: explicitly negative, positive in a bad day, and relief of negative anticipation all positively predicted NA, while the other themes were not significant predictors of NA.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor Variable</th>
<th>b (Standard Error)</th>
<th>t (df)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>1.32 (.03)</td>
<td>37.79(127)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Within-person</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective PLE Intensity</td>
<td>-.02 (.01)</td>
<td>-2.25 (435)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective PLE Intensity</td>
<td>-.02 (.02)</td>
<td>-1.13 (438)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Emotion Regulation</td>
<td>-.03 (.04)</td>
<td>-.75 (437)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negativity Ratings</td>
<td>.10 (.03)</td>
<td>3.50 (437)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Components</td>
<td>-.08 (.04)</td>
<td>-2.15 (434)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Between-person</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective PLE Intensity</td>
<td>-.01 (.02)</td>
<td>-.61 (138)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective PLE Intensity</td>
<td>-.14 (.08)</td>
<td>-1.68 (131)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Emotion Regulation</td>
<td>.23 (.13)</td>
<td>1.80 (132)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negativity Ratings</td>
<td>.28 (.14)</td>
<td>1.95 (132)*a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Components</td>
<td>-.36 (.20)</td>
<td>-1.81 (136)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p <.001,  a. Note: p=.053
prominent individual differences in the types of events considered positive by youth. The majority of the events reported on by the youth were experienced in the location of: school (41%), with a smaller proportion of events also experienced in the home environment (30%), in the community (20%) and outdoors (15%). These findings are not surprising given the proportion of time these youth spend at school versus in the home environment during the school week. These findings also indicated that a large proportion of events these youth experienced as positive were in the context of interpersonal interactions (45%). Many activities also involved physical activity (25%), playing games (17%), technology (14%), achievement (13%) and extracurricular activities (11%). The people most frequently involved in the PLEs were peers (54%), the next most frequent reports involved family (29%), and some reports involved youth being alone (14%). The domains observed to be important in these PLE dairy reports are consistent with past measures of PLEs, that evaluate domains such as close friendships, peer relationships, family life, extracurricular activities, school, achievement, and health and appearance (Shahar et al., 2003b); however, this study provided a more nuanced picture of the multiple domains in which events may occur and demonstrated that the domains of PLEs may extend beyond the ones measured in past studies.

Positive components of life events. The aspects of events found to contribute to youth positive experiences most frequently had to do with connection (29%) and play (27%). Other themes that also had to do with connection with others were also highlighted including laughter (9%) and experiences of kindness (4%). These findings are consistent with research that emphasizes the importance of connection with others for adolescent well-being (Corsano et al., 2006; Meehan et al., 1993; Resnick et al., 1993), and continues to support the evidence that social support may play an important role in enhancing youths’ abilities to cultivate positive
emotionality from their life experiences (Meehan et al., 1993). Furthermore, these findings are consistent with research on the importance of play for youth cognitive, social and emotional development (e.g., Barnett, 1990). Intrinsic (14%) and extrinsic (10%) achievement also made up a significant portion of the PLEs. Intrinsic motivation may be important in increasing youth active engagement in their lives (e.g., Deci et al., 1999) and research suggests that while extrinsic achievement can at times have negative effects, it can also serve to increase intrinsic motivation (e.g., Cameron et al., 2005; Pierce et al., 2003). Only 10% of the diaries involved reporting on a special event, indicating that the majority of events reported on involved everyday life occurrences.

**Positive Emotion Regulation.** Approximately 34% of the PLEs involved at least one form of positive emotion regulation (PER) strategy, with mindfulness (18%) and savouring (9%) most frequently identified, and positive mental time travel (6%) and capitalizing (1%) less frequently identified in this sample. While these techniques are not mutually exclusive, this study provides the first depiction of the relative use of each of these different strategies within a youth sample. Given that research suggests that different strategies may contribute uniquely to different aspects of well-being (Quoidbach et al., 2010), helping youth build on the use of each of these PER techniques may be important to increasing youth well-being.

**Negative Components.** A high percentage of the responses to PLEs also involved at least a minimal Negativity Rating (37%). Consistently, 38% of youth reports also involved Negative Components, as observed within the qualitative portion of this study. This high percentage of negative aspects related to PLEs suggests that positive events may elicit a mixture of positive and negative reactions. This observation is consistent with past research that suggests that positive events involve both a positive valence component as well as a life event component,
with the life event component often overlapping with negative events and possibly associated with distress (Shahar & Priel, 2002). Thus, these results continue to support the finding that positive events “include both elements of risk and resilience” (p. 660), and emphasize the importance of not only considering the role of PLEs contributing to positive functioning, but also signaling or contributing to potential distress.

**Objective PLE versus Individual Differences in Processing**

The next question of interest was whether it was events themselves or the ways youth process their daily events that associate with youth emotional functioning. Consistent with hypotheses, the findings from this study indicated that it was not just the objectively positive nature of the events themselves (i.e., Objective PLE Intensity), but it was also the ways youth processed and engaged in their life events (i.e., Subjective PLE Intensity, PER) that appeared to have implications for youth emotional functioning, predicting increased PA. This is consistent with research that suggests that PLEs are often actively created by people (Reich & Zautra, 1981, 1984), and that individuals may need to learn how to actively cultivate their own positive experiences (Folkman, 1997, p. 1212). Consistent with past research, current results suggest that benefits from PLEs may not only be gained passively, but may also be impacted by psychological variables such as the way individuals perceive the events (Lazarus et al., 1985), and whether youth engage in PER strategies to cultivate richer and more positive experiences from their moment-to-moment lives (e.g., Brown & Ryan, 2003; Gable et al., 2004; Jose, Lim, & Bryant, 2012; Langston, 2004; Quoidbach et al., 2010). Furthermore, these findings provide continued evidence that youth at times struggle to process the positive benefits of their life events (e.g., Feldman et al., 2008), demonstrating that some youth may gain from learning active strategies to process and benefit from PLEs.
Positive Experiences as a Protective Factor

The way youth engaged with their PLEs may have a protective function, with results demonstrating higher Objective PLE Intensity, Subjective PLE Intensity, and PER, and lower negative responses to PLEs (i.e., Negativity Ratings and specific Negative Components) predicting increased positive mood and decreased negative mood from day to day. Youth who experienced more objectively positive events, and who reported subjectively higher positive experiences overall, also had overall higher positive mood throughout the week. Given that high PA and low NA are considered markers of well-being (Diener, 2000; Diener et al., 1999), these findings provide evidence of the daily processes at play that may impact youth well-being. This study contributed to the research literature on PLEs by evaluating how several components of PLEs may uniquely and differentially contribute to both positive and/or negative outcomes, helping to shed more light on the conflicting results of past research (e.g., Cohen et al., 1984; Cohen & Hoberman, 1983; Reich & Zautra, 1981; Sarason et al., 2002; Zautra & Reich, 1983b).

Objective PLE Intensity. The findings of this study continue to support the evidence that PLEs can have a protective impact, potentially by increasing PA (e.g., Block & Zautra, 1981; Reich & Zautra, 1981a,b; Shahar & Priel, 2002; Zautra et al., 2005). Consistent with past research demonstrating the direct benefits of PLEs on emotional functioning (e.g., Reich & Zautra, 1981; Shahar & Priel, 2002), results indicated that the objectively positive elements of events themselves served to directly positively impact youth daily and average positive emotional functioning. This suggests that when youth experience PLEs deemed to be objectively positive, this was associated with a benefit to youth daily and weekly well-being. These findings are also consistent with research suggesting that individuals who are happier may report more PLEs not only because of their interpretations of their experiences, but also because they may
actually have more positive experiences than less happy people (Seidlitz & Diener, 1993).

Interestingly, the objectively positive elements of events were only found to predict PA, and did not predict state or trait NA, indicating that objectively positive elements of events may be most relevant for PA.

**Subjective PLE Intensity.** Youths’ subjective evaluations of their PLEs (Subjective PLE Intensity), also served a protective function from day to day by predicting both increased daily and average positive mood, as well as decreased negative mood. Youth subjective appraisal of PLEs may also have implications for both increasing well-being and decreasing daily distress. This finding is consistent with past research that suggests that one’s subjective evaluation of his/her own experience is an important predictor of well-being (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999; Zautra et al., 2005), as well as evidence that individuals who are happier may be more likely to interpret events in positive ways (Seidlitz & Diener, 1993). Zautra et al. (2005) suggest that considering a person’s subjective appraisal of a positive event is particularly important, as the positive valence of an event may be dependent upon the person and his/her personality, and may be influenced by “cognitive-affective responses” to experiences (p. 11). The finding that one’s subjective appraisal of PLEs predicted both positive and negative mood, may be explained by the possibility that one’s cognitive-affective appraisal of events may involve both positive and negative elements. Thus, these subjective reflections on events may reflect both the positive and more stressful elements elicited by the events (e.g., Shahar & Priel, 2002). Taken together, these findings continue to provide evidence that positive events may have a positive impact on well-being not only directly through the nature of the event itself, but also through the way a person subjectively processes or perceives his/her experiences (Lazarus et al., 1985).
**Positive Emotion Regulation.** Youth daily engagement in PER strategies was also found to serve as a protective factor, predicting increases in daily PA. This is consistent with research suggesting that engaging in PER, such as savouring, can serve as an important mechanism for gaining positive benefits from one’s positive experiences (e.g., Jose, Lim, & Bryant, 2012). Furthermore, these findings continue to support the importance of youth playing an active role in creating and managing their own positive emotions and happiness (e.g., Bryant & Veroff, 2007; Lykken, 1999). Various PER strategies including savouring (e.g., Bryant & Veroff, 2007; Jose et al., 2012) mindfulness (e.g., Brown & Ryan, 2003), capitalizing (e.g., Gable et al., 2004; Langston, 2004) and positive mental time travel (e.g., Quoidbach et al., 2009), have been found to serve self-regulatory functions that can increase the benefits of daily experiences and improve well-being. Past research also suggests that engagement in PER techniques may facilitate increased positive emotional benefits above and beyond the impact of the positive events themselves (e.g., Gable et al., 2004; Langston, 2004). The current study consistently indicated that in addition to the objectively positive nature of events, youth engagement in PER also contributed to their daily positive mood.

Interestingly, youth average engagement in PER throughout the week did not predict overall PA or NA. It is possible that PER may have a positive impact on daily affect in response to particular types of events, but that overall engagement in higher PER across events may not have the same impact or may work through mediating mechanisms not assessed here. Consistently, past research indicates that various types of regulation strategies may differentially impact different aspects of well-being (Quoidbach et al., 2010), supporting the idea that different strategies may severe different functions and situational needs. Therefore, PER techniques may have the most positive benefits when engaged in, in response to particular types of events. Still,
the finding that PER did not impact trait affect is inconsistent with past research that indicates that PER has implications for one’s trait happiness and well-being (e.g., Jose et al., 2012; Quoidback et al., 2015). The null results may be explained by the findings that there was much higher variability in PER within youth (83%) than between youth (17%), indicating that within this sample, youth may engage in similar overall levels of PER across the week. The larger within than between subject variance in PER may also be due to the way PER was measured in this study. Researchers suggest that there are both state and trait components of PER (Bryant & Veroff, 2007), with PER responses not only reflecting a reaction to situations but also personality traits that impact the way people respond to a variety of positive experiences.

Interestingly, only 34% of the events reported on in this study involved a PER strategy as conceptualized in this analysis, with mindfulness and savouring as the most frequently used strategies, and positive mental time travel and capitalizing rarely present within the diaries. The finding that PER strategies predict increased positive emotional benefits from day to day, combined with the finding of the low frequency of use of PER across the sample, emphasize the potential importance for emotional functioning that teaching youth PER techniques might provide. Furthermore, given the previous evidence of the importance of using a variety of PER strategies across different settings, it may be important to teach youth a variety of different types of PER strategies to draw upon when engaging in a broad range of situations (Quoidback et al., 2010). While this is an area for continued research, some research on mindfulness suggests that these techniques can be cultivated through practice (e.g., Brown & Ryan, 2003), and thus this may be an important and beneficial target to help promote youth well-being.
Implications for Well-Being

While the current study only evaluated a snapshot in the lives of youth, research suggests that the processes that impact day-to-day youth emotional functioning may have important implications for overall emotional functioning (Merz & Roesch, 2011; Polk, Cohen, Doyle, Skoner, & Kirschbaum, 2005). Both state and trait experiences of PA and NA have been found to be unique and important predictors of longer term mental health outcomes (Merz & Roesch, 2011), and state measures of PA and NA have been found to predict unique variance in outcomes, over the impact of trait affect alone (Merz & Roesch, 2011; Polk et al., 2005). In fact, Merz and Roesch’s (2011) study indicated that state but not trait PA was negatively associated with both anxiety and depression. Thus, the current results suggest that the various ways youth engage with and process their daily PLEs may impact daily and average mood, and emphasizes the potential importance of these daily experiences for youth overall well-being. While the longer term mechanisms through which these state experiences impact emotional development is an important area for further research, past research suggests that daily positive experiences may impact overall well-being by triggering an “upward spiral” of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 1998, 2004). When individuals experience positive emotions, they may also experience a broadening in thinking, resulting in increased approach behaviours, and in turn developing increased resources for coping. Thus, when youth experience PLEs and this triggers associated PA, this may lead to an accumulation of increased positive experiences over time, with potential to improve overall well-being.

Daily positive experiences may also serve a protective function, not only by increasing daily PA, but also by decreasing daily experiences of negative mood. Youth daily subjective positive experiences were associated with decreases in negative mood on those days. This
finding is consistent with research evidence that positive events may play a protective role by reducing distress (Cohen et al., 1984; Reich & Zautra, 1981; Shahar & Priel, 2002). While the stress-buffering hypothesis was not directly evaluated here, findings are consistent with research indicating that positive events may help reduce the impact of stressors (Cohen et al., 1984; Shahar & Priel, 2002). Given the research evidence that state NA is predictive of outcomes of depression and anxiety (Merz & Roesch, 2011), the current results suggest that experiencing increased Subjective PLE Intensity from day to day has the potential to play a role in reducing vulnerability to mental health difficulties.

**Positive Experiences and Vulnerability**

The results of this study also indicate that ways youth engage with their PLEs may signal deficits in positive functioning and may serve to underlie eventual associated vulnerability to mental health difficulties. The positive association between Subjective PLE Intensity and state and trait positive mood suggests that in the absence of positive experience, youth may not receive the same emotional benefits from their daily experiences. Furthermore, when youth were observed by coders to have greater negative reactions to PLEs (Negativity Ratings), this predicted increased negative mood and decreased positive mood from day to day, and, at a trend level, increased negative mood overall. Consistently, some of the negative themes (i.e., Negative Components) observed in the qualitative study also predicted increased NA and decreased PA from day to day. Together, these findings suggest that some of the negative reflections observed in the diary entries may signal vulnerability and may reflect difficulties experiencing PLEs in positive ways. This finding is consistent with evidence that some youth may purposely reduce or dampen the positive implications of their experiences (e.g., Brown & McGill, 1989; Feldman et al., 2008; Min’er & Dejun, 2001; Quoidback et al., 2010; Wood et al., 2003). By processing
positive events in negative ways, youth are not only missing opportunities to gain positive emotional benefits from their daily experiences, but also appear to be reacting to the events in a way that mirrors a response to negative life events or a stress response (i.e., experiencing increased NA; Larson & Ham, 1993; Watson, 1988). Thus, taken together, these findings continue to support the evidence that some youth may have difficulties processing the positive experiences in their lives and find elements of positive experiences distressing (Feldman et al., 2008; Quoidback et al., 2010; Shahar & Priel, 2002; Wood et al., 2003).

The findings of this study suggest that having low intensity PLEs or having a tendency to negatively react to PLEs may be implicated in vulnerability to later mental health difficulties, as low PA and high NA are predictors of psychopathology (e.g., Clark & Watson, 1991; Clark et al., 1994; Joiner & Lonigan, 2000; Watson, Clark, & Carey, 1988, Watson, Clark, & Weber, 1995). In addition to the evidence of the importance of trait affect for predicting mental health outcomes, Merz and Roesch (2011) demonstrated that state fluctuations in negative and positive mood, are also unique and important predictors of both depression and anxiety beyond the information gained from looking a trait affect alone. While evaluating the mechanisms through which these state and trait experiences predict longer term emotional functioning is an area for further research, past research suggests that experiences of NA may lead to negative processing and a narrowing of attention (e.g., Burke, Heuer, & Reisberg, 1992; Chajut & Algom, 2003; Wells & Matthews, 1994) to negative or threatening stimuli (Zautra et al., 2005). Thus, when youth experience negative reactions to PLEs and this is associated with NA, this may narrow focus to negative elements of events, and lead to an accumulation of increased negative processing and more negative emotional experiences over time. Future research investigating
these mechanisms over a longer time period may provide insight into how trait and state experiences interact over development to predict longer-term emotional functioning.

The findings from the current study indicated that a high percentage of events involved the Negative Component types that were predictive of negative emotional functioning (29%), and that approximately 37% of the diary entries involved at least a mild element of negativity. Given the evidence that these negative aspects of PLEs have negative implications for daily and possibly overall mood, this study provides preliminary evidence that these responses to PLEs may be a part of a process that signals vulnerability. These findings are concerning as research suggest that negative reactions to positive events are associated with outcomes of maladjustment and psychopathology (Bryant, 2003; Feldman et al., 2008; Min’er & Dejun, 2001; Wood et al., 2003). Furthermore, the observation of the high prevalence of negative aspects of PLEs is consistent with research that suggests that a large percentage of youth experience deficits in their positive functioning (Larson, 2000; Larson & Richards, 1991), and underscores the importance of not only helping adolescents learn to experience and process PLEs, but also the importance of helping some youth learn to cope with elements of positive events that may trigger negative emotional reactions.

**Positive and Negative Experience on Different Dimensions**

While the various ways youth engage with their life experiences were found to have implications for both PA and NA, there appears to be some evidence that overall positive variables have a stronger impact on positive mood, and negative variables have a stronger impact on negative mood. This is consistent with past research suggesting that different mechanisms are involved in positive and negative experiences (Zautra et al., 2005). Given that this study involved measures of PLEs, it makes sense that the various measures of PLEs were better
predictors of positive than negative functioning. The findings demonstrated that within the day, having both high levels of positive daily experience (Objective PLE Intensity, Subjective PLE Intensity, PER), as well as low levels of negative daily experience (Negativity Ratings, specific Negative Components), predicted higher positive moods on that day. Conversely, greater negative responses to PLEs (Negativity Ratings, selective Negative Insertions) positively predicted NA, and Subjective PLE Intensity was the only positive variable that predicted decreased NA. Interestingly, on a trait level, only positive variables (i.e., Objective PLE Intensity, Subjective PLE Intensity) predicted overall positive mood, and there was some evidence that only Negative Reactions impacted negative overall mood. While both positive and negative responses to daily PLEs appear to have implications for daily fluctuations of both positive and negative mood from day to day, over time the daily mechanisms at play may still serve to have more important implications for overall mood within their respective domains (i.e., positive overall impacting positive and negative overall impacting negative). The continued evidence that different mechanisms are involved in positive and negative experience (e.g., Zautra et al., 2005), emphasizes the importance of focusing attention on both cultivating the presence of positive experience as well as focusing on regulation of the negative responses to PLEs as related to youth well-being.

**Limitations**

Interpretation of these results must be tempered with the following limitations. The current study involved self-report measures of daily events and positive mood. Thus, the findings may be confounded by the youth’s social desirability bias or difficulties accurately reporting on their internal experience. The current study attempted to control for these concerns by coding the data for various themes, including coding for the Objective PLE Intensity of the events, PER,
and negative response to events, in addition to considering the youth’s subjective ratings of events. Still, it is important to consider that the daily diary study required the youth to write about their daily positive experiences. Given the writing demands of these tasks, some youth reports may appear more positive or negative depending on the expressive skills of the individual. Thus, one’s cognitive abilities or the way they process and talk about their PLEs may serve as a confounding variable of which we have no knowledge about. Future studies provided in interview format, or that involve more structured measures of daily events, as well as indications of youth IQ or written expression ability, would help to further control for this issue.

There were also limitations to the measurement of the PLE variables, including positive emotion regulation and negative response to PLEs, as these ratings were made through coding of the daily diaries. While youth negative reactions to PLEs appear to mirror the process of dampening, due to the way the variable was measured it is unclear whether these negative responses are examples of dampening, or a result of the youth genuinely experiencing negative events on those days. A strength of this study is the breadth of the themes it attempted to delineate, but this required a lot of coding of constructs that are not well understood. Given that many of these themes were exploratory in nature, there are likely coding errors and results need be interpreted with caution. Future research would benefit from more explicitly measuring youth daily responses to PLEs, by incorporating validated measures of dampening and PER, and by broadening to include measures of negative life events in conjunction with PLE measures.

Given the short timeline of the study, it was difficult to evaluate the implications of these daily experiences for youth longer-term development. Nonetheless, the multilevel modeling technique shed light on the daily mechanisms at play that may have important implications for longer-term emotional functioning. By gaining insight into how different aspects of well-being
change over time as a function of different events changing over time, this continued to contribute to a “dynamic and more integrative approach that brings investigators much closer in real time to observing people’s lives as they unfold” (Zautra et al., 2005, p. 4). Future research evaluating these daily mechanisms over an even longer time period may provide further insight into how states and traits are related and possibly how they interact with each other over time, to impact longer-term development.

Conclusions

The results of this study emphasize the potential importance of the ways youth engage with their PLEs for their daily and average emotional well-being. The results suggest that youth may benefit from learning to actively engage in and cultivate their own daily positive experiences, by creating increased opportunities to experience positive events, learning to positively process their experiences, and by engaging in PER of their life experiences. The ability of youth to engage with PLEs in these ways may serve as a protective factor and may play a role in facilitating youth emotional well-being. Furthermore, the results suggest that when youth have negative reactions to PLEs, this may have negative implications for their mood and may serve as a vulnerability factor for increased emotional difficulties.

The use of daily diary and multilevel methodology in the current study contributed uniquely to the research literature by providing insight into both within-person processes and individual differences that may be at play in youths’ daily lives, that impact their emotional functioning. These findings begin to shed light on the daily mechanisms that likely undergird emotional functioning, having the potential to contribute to longer-term well-being. Furthermore, these findings highlight the importance of positive experience for youth emotional functioning, and contribute to developing a more well-rounded understanding of the factors that facilitate
youth mental health and well-being. The findings emphasize the potential importance of a focus on helping youth learn to actively create their own positive experiences, while also placing a focus on helping youth understand and cope with the negative elements of their positive experiences. The continued evidence that positive events are associated with both elements of “risk and resilience” (Shahar & Priel, 2002 p. 660), suggests that it is essential that further research continue to illuminate the mechanisms through which PLEs may serve as both vulnerability and protective factors in youth emotional development.

Chapter 4: Overview

While Chapter 3 shed light on how youth PLEs may relate to youth daily and weekly emotional functioning, the current study sought to broaden current diathesis-stress models and evaluate potential implications of how youth experience their PLEs, for their longer-term well-being. Within a diathesis-stress model, life events provide the daily conditions that interact with other personality variables to elicit one’s emotional experience (e.g., See Abela & Hankin, 2008 for review). Cognitive models of psychopathology posit that individuals develop symptoms of psychopathology following life stress in the form of negative life events, which then trigger underlying negative cognitive content (e.g., Beck, 1967; Young, 1999). While these models have been important for understanding vulnerability to psychopathology, they are almost exclusively deficit-based, focusing on negative life events, negative schemas and symptoms of psychopathology, and have yet to incorporate positive variables. This is despite evidence that PLEs and schemas are important predictors of youth well-being, and that their absence may be an important early indicator of vulnerable to psychopathology (e.g., See Chapter 3; Keyfitz et al., 2013; Lumley et al., 2012; McClain & Abramson, 1994; Prieto et al., 1992; Tomlinson et al., revised and resubmitted; Whitman & Leitenberg, 1990). To develop a stronger understanding of
the factors that influence youth well-being, the aim of this study was to evaluate how youth PLEs interact with positive schemas to predict youth life satisfaction, happiness, and depressive symptoms, in a prospective longitudinal design over the academic year.

**Positive Life Events**

PLEs are distinct from negative events, and research suggests that different mechanisms are involved in positive and negative experience (Zautra et al., 2005). Positive events are conceptualized as being desired and engaged in, involving an active component, and requiring responsiveness or an attempt to sustain a positive response to the event (Zautra et al., p. 3). Research suggests that one’s evaluation of an event as positive or “stressful” may not be inherent in the event, but instead may be a result of how a person appraises and copes with the event (Lazarus et al., 1985; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Past research (e.g., Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999; Zautra et al., 2005) and the findings described in Chapter 3 suggest that subjective evaluation of experience, regardless of the “objective” nature of the PLE, has implications for emotional functioning. Furthermore, past research (e.g., Feldman et al., 2008; Shimizu & Pelham, 2004; Wood et al., 2003) as well as the findings from Chapters 2 and 3 suggest that individuals may at times dampen or have negative reactions to PLEs, and this is related to increased distress, rather than positive benefits. The current study examines how both positive reactions to PLEs (Subjective PLE Intensity) and negative reactions to PLEs (Negativity Ratings) interact with positive schemas to relate prospectively to markers of well-being over time.

**PLEs and Positive Schemas**

While scant research evaluates the relation between PLEs and positive schemas, extant literature suggests that positive experiences more generally may interact with one’s cognitions,
more broadly conceived, to predict emotional functioning. Research suggests that positive experiences create an “upward spiral” in which positive emotions and broadened thinking aid in finding positive meaning in situations, which in turn facilitates more positive coping and higher resilience (e.g., Fredrickson, 1998; Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson & Joiner 2002). This research suggests that positive experiences may activate positive cognitive processes that facilitate well-being. Other research suggests that one’s self-concept may moderate the relation between PLEs and outcomes, such that positive events increase well-being for individuals with high self-concept and decrease various components of well-being for individuals with low self-concept (e.g., Brown & McGill, 1989; Campbell et al., 1991; Shimizu & Pelham, 2004). Zaura et al. (2005) proposed that a person’s ability to sustain positive benefits from one’s daily life events may depend on whether individuals can integrate the experiences into their schemas.

Consistent with these findings, in the current study, it was hypothesized that individuals with higher positive schemas (i.e., positive mental representations of one’s self that guides the processing of one’s experiences) would be more likely to gain benefits from their PLEs, associating with improved well-being over time. When youth have higher positive schemas, PLEs may activate underlying positive processes (i.e., positive cognition, affect), resulting in greater positive emotional benefit. For example, when youth with higher vs. lower positive schemas experience a PLE, such as getting a good grade on a test, they may be better able to integrate the event into their self-concept, thinking, “I studied hard and am smart, and that’s why I did well.” This may facilitate in building PA associated with this success. Conversely, youth with lower positive schemas were hypothesized to not be able to gain the same benefit from PLEs. For these individuals, it was hypothesized that PLEs would be less potent in terms of activating positive cognition or affective experiences, and as a result may not result in positive
emotional benefit. For example, if such a youth received a good grade on a test, he or she may be less likely to internalize the experience, and may instead rationalize it in a way that discounts the positive experience. For example, he/she might think “it was an easy test” or “it was just luck,” and in turn may be less likely to experience an associated positive mood. By contrast, negative reactions to PLEs (Negativity Ratings) may not have negative emotional implications for youth with higher positive schemas, due to these individuals stress-buffering resources. For individuals with lower positive schemas, negative reactions to PLE were hypothesized to be linked to decreased well-being over time. In this fashion, the repeated experiences of engaging in PLEs in these ways over time were hypothesized to have cumulative implications for overall well-being.

**Hypotheses**

The current study aimed to evaluate relations between PLEs and schemas in a longitudinal model of youth well-being. How youth experience their PLEs in the context of their positive schemas was hypothesized to impact their well-being over time. Consistent with the research literature regarding negative life events, it was hypothesized that higher positive schemas would protect from depression and facilitate well-being, by enabling youth to internalize the impact of PLEs and by buffering from any negative aspects of PLEs. By contrast, youth with lower positive schemas were hypothesized not to benefit from their PLEs, as PLEs were thought to be less likely to activate a positive schema system and related PA, associating with decreased well-being five months following the diary study. Furthermore, youth with lower positive schemas were not thought to have the stress buffering resources to cope with the negative components of PLEs, and thus were hypothesized to experience greater vulnerability to depression and less well-being over time. See Figure 3 and 4 for an illustration of the hypothesized relations between these variables.
Figure 3

*Hypothesized Relations between Positive Schemas, Subjective PLE Intensity, and Well-Being Outcomes*

A)

```
Positive Schemas
  ↓
Subjective PLE Intensity
  ↓
Happiness
```

B)

```
Positive Schemas
  ↓
Subjective PLE Intensity
  ↓
Life Satisfaction
```

C)

```
Positive Schemas
  ↓
Subjective PLE Intensity
  ↓
Depression Symptoms
```
Figure 4

Hypothesized Relations between Positive Schemas, Negativity Ratings, and Well-Being Outcomes

A) Positive Schemas
   \[ \text{Negativity Rating} \rightarrow \text{Happiness} \]

B) Positive Schemas
   \[ \text{Negativity Rating} \rightarrow \text{Life Satisfaction} \]

C) Positive Schemas
   \[ \text{Negativity Rating} \rightarrow \text{Depression Symptoms} \]
1. Positive schemas were hypothesized to interact with Subjective PLE Intensity to predict well-being outcomes.
   a. The interaction between higher levels of positive schemas and Subjective PLE Intensity was hypothesized to relate to increased life satisfaction and happiness and decreased depressive symptoms over time.
   b. The interaction between lower levels of positive schemas and Subjective PLE Intensity was hypothesized to be unrelated to life satisfaction, happiness and depressive symptoms over time.

2. Positive schemas were also hypothesized to interact with Negativity Ratings of PLEs to predict well-being outcomes.
   a. For individuals with lower positive schemas, Negativity Ratings were hypothesized to predict decreased well-being and increased vulnerability to depression over time.
   b. For individuals with higher positive schemas, their schemas were hypothesized to buffer from the negative impact of negative parts of PLEs.

Method

Diary Measures

Subjective PLE Intensity. The participants’ Subjective PLE Intensity rating was measured by computing their average PLE rating over the 5-day, daily diary study. A more detailed description of the Subjective PLE Intensity measure can be found in Chapter 3. On each day of the diary study, the youth self-reported on how positive the event they described in their diary was, on a scale from 1 (Not Positive) to 10 (Very Positive). This subjective measure was of interest in the current study due to past research that suggests that one’s subjective experience of
his/her life events is one of the most important predictors of well-being (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999; Zautra et al., 2005) as well as evidence from Chapter 3 that the Subjective PLE Intensity variable was a predictor of both PA and NA. The youth’s average score across diary entries was considered their Subjective PLE Intensity score.

**Negativity Rating.** The participants’ Negativity Rating score was also measured by averaging Negativity Ratings across the 5 days of the diary study. Daily Negativity Rating coding was described in Chapter 3. Each diary entry was coded on a scale from 1 to 4, with 1 indicating minimal negativity and 3 indicating strong negativity in diary reports. Diary entries not including any negativity were coded 0, in order to distinguish between diary entries that had minimal elements and no negativity elements. Aggregating across the week provided a measure of the youth’s overall tendency to integrate negative elements into their PLE reports.

**Measures of Youth Well-being**

**Brief Multidimensional Students’ Life Satisfaction Scale (BMSLSS; Seligson, Huebner, & Valois, 2003).** The BMSLSS is a 6-item self-report questionnaire of global life satisfaction in children. Each of the 6 items represents a domain of life satisfaction including family, school, friends, self, living environment, and overall. For example, items include: “I would describe my satisfaction with my family life as,” and “I would describe my satisfaction with my school experience as,” etc. Response options include: *terrible, unhappy, mostly dissatisfied, mixed, mostly satisfied, pleased, and delighted.* A total life satisfaction score was obtained by summing the items. Two studies have demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, criterion-validity, discriminant validity, and construct validity in an adolescent sample (Seligson, Huebner, & Valois, 2003). In the current study, the BMSLSS demonstrated good internal consistency (T1 $\alpha = .89$, T2 $\alpha = .87$).
**Subjective Happiness Scale** (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). The Subjective Happiness Scale is a 4-item self-report questionnaire of ones’ personal experience of happiness. Participants were asked questions regarding their perceived happiness on a 7-point Likert scale. Items include statements such as “In general I consider myself…. Compared to my peers, I consider myself.” The anchors ranged from 1 (*Not a very happy person*), to 7 (*A very happy person*). A composite score for global subjective happiness is obtained by averaging the 4 item responses. The scale demonstrates high internal consistency, reliability, convergent and discriminant validity, in high school, college, and adult samples (Lyubomirsky & Lepper). In the current study, the SHS demonstrated adequate internal consistency (T1 $\alpha = .69$, T2 $\alpha = .77$).

**Children’s Depression Inventory** (CDI; Kovacs, 1981). The CDI is a 27-item, 3-point Likert self-report questionnaire used to assess children’s behavioural, affective and cognitive symptoms of depression. Children were shown statements related to their moods and asked to pick out sentences that best describe them (e.g. “I’m sad once in a while; I am sad many times; I am sad all the time”). This measure has high internal-consistency and test-retest reliability, as well as strong convergent and predictive validity (Carey, Faulstich, Gresham, Ruggiero, & Enyart, 1987; Saylor, Finch, Spirito, & Bennett, 1984; Smucker, Craighead, Craighead, & Green, 1986). In the current study, the SHS demonstrated high internal consistency (T1 $\alpha = .90$).

**Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, Emotional Symptoms Subscale** (SDQ, Goodman, 1997, 2000, 2001). The SDQ is a brief measure of prosocial behavior and psychopathology in youth ages 3-16. The current study utilized the emotional symptoms scale, a measure of youth emotional functioning, administered as a self-report measure. The emotional symptoms subscale consists of 5 items, on a 3-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*Not True*), to 3 (*Certainly True*). Items include statements such as “I am often unhappy, depressed or tearful;”
and “I get a lot of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness.” The overall SDQ evidences a psychometrically sound 5-factor structure, including emotional, conduct, hyperactivity-inattention, peer, and prosocial evaluations. The SDQ demonstrates satisfactory internal consistency, cross-informant correlations, and retest stability over time (Goodman, 2001; Muris, Meesters, & van den Berg, 2003). The emotional symptoms scale has been found to be highly correlated with internalizing symptoms ($r = .74$) anxiety (between $.58$ and $.85$) and depression scales (CDI, $r = .67$; Muris et al., 2003). Individuals with SDQ scores above the 90th percentile have also been found to have a significant probability of a diagnosable mental health difficulty (Goodman, 2001). The emotional symptoms scale demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = .75$) and concurrent validity with respect to T2 CDI scores ($r = .66$).

**Schema Measure**

**Positive Schema Questionnaire** (PSQ; Keyfitz et al., 2013). This 20-item, 6-point Likert self-report questionnaire is a measure of positive core schema themes in children. Participants rate how much they agree with statements such as: “I look at the bright side of things;” and “I believe in myself.” Schema domains assessed include: Worthiness, Self-Efficacy, Optimism, Success, and Trust. An overall PSQ score is calculated by summing all the items. Higher scores on the scale indicated higher positive schemas. The scale demonstrates a psychometrically sound factor structure, high internal consistency and strong discriminant validity (Keyfitz et al.). In the current study, the PSQ demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = .94$).

**Procedure**

The current study involved a three-wave data collection that took place over one academic year. The participants were recruited from schools in the Wellington Catholic School Board via parent and adolescent information letters and consent packages. Consent packages
were mailed to all eligible families of youth in grades 4-8 in these schools. Youth were also required to provide assent to participate in the study. The first wave of the data collection took place in the late fall of the academic year, and the diary data was conducted within a month of the initial data collection ($M = 16, R = 7-24$ days). Finally, the third wave of the data collection took place approximately 6 months after the initial data collection ($M = 185, R = 175-194$ days).

The first and third wave of the data collection occurred in groups at the schools using a mobile laboratory of netbook computers. During data collection, participants completed trait measures of well-being including: happiness, life satisfaction, depression, and schemas. The second wave of the data collection involved implementing the 5-day diary study in the participants’ schools. This data collection involved the completion of the PLEs daily diary. A more detailed description of the PLE methodology can be found in Chapters 1 and 3.

**Results**

**Descriptive Characteristics**

Descriptive statistics and inter-correlations of all study variables are presented in Table 8 and 9. The effects of age, sex, and ethnicity in relation to each of the predictor and outcome variables included in this study were examined. Age and ethnicity were not significantly related to any of the measures ($ps > .05$). A significant gender difference was found in the time 1 SDQ, $t(119) = 2.15, p < .05$, with females ($M = 3.73, SD = 2.50$) displaying significantly higher emotional symptoms than males ($M = 2.76, SD = 2.41$). No other significant gender differences were found ($ps > .05$). Given the significant relation between gender and Time 1 (T1) SDQ, gender was controlled for in models including the SDQ.

**Positive Life Events and Positive Schemas: Diathesis-Stress Model**

To evaluate the hypothesis that positive schemas would moderate the relation between
Table 8

Descriptive Statistics, Means, and Standard Deviations

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<td>$n=71$</td>
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### Table 9

*Correlations for PLE, Schemas, and Well-Being Outcome Variable*

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<th>4</th>
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<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
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<td>.44***</td>
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<td>-.54***</td>
<td>-.85***</td>
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PLEs and youth emotional functioning, several hierarchical multiple linear regression analyses were conducted according to the steps outline by Keith (2006). These regressions were conducted to evaluate whether positive schemas interact with Subjective PLE Intensity to predict: Time 2 (T2) Happiness, T2 Life Satisfaction, and T2 Depressive symptoms following a 6-month period. Prior to these analyses, all predictor variables were centered (Aiken & West, 1991). Significant interactions were plotted using procedures outlined by Dawson (2014) and using an online resource (www.jeremydawson.com/slopes.htm). High and low values were measured as 1 SD above and below the mean. In each model, T1 of the dependent variable was controlled for in order to evaluate whether the variables of interest accounted for changes in the outcome variables over time (i.e., between T1 and T2). Specifically, T1 Happiness scores were controlled for when predicting T2 Happiness, and T1 Life Satisfaction scores were controlled for when predicting T2 Life Satisfaction. Given that there was no T1 measure of depression, the SDQ Emotional Symptoms subscale was used to control for depression at T1. Research suggests that the SDQ is a strong predictor of depressive symptoms (Goodman et al., 2000) and the current study as well as past research has indicated that the SDQ Emotional Symptom scale is highly correlated with the CDI ($r = .67$ and $.66$ respectively; Muris et al., 2003).

**Positive schemas X Subjective PLE Intensity.** Three hierarchical regressions were conducted to evaluate the hypothesis that positive schemas would interact with Subjective PLE Intensity to predict increased happiness and life satisfaction, and lower depressive symptoms.

**Happiness.** The first analysis evaluated whether positive schemas interacted with Subjective PLE Intensity to predict T2 Happiness (Table 10). In the first step of the analysis, T1 Happiness was entered into the regression as a control, and significantly predicted T2 Happiness scores, $R^2 = .19$, $F(1, 103) = 23.81, p < .001$. In this step, the addition of Subjective PLE
### Table 10

Hierarchical Regressions: Interaction between Positive Schemas and PLE Intensity

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<th>Predictor Variable</th>
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<td>.438</td>
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Intensity and positive schemas did not result in a significant change in variance accounted for in T2 Happiness, $\Delta R^2 = .01$, $\Delta F(2, 101= .80, p = .45)$. In the third step of the analysis, the addition of the product term of positive schemas X Subjective PLE Intensity accounted for a significant increase in variance accounted for in T2 Happiness, $\Delta R^2 = .05$, $\Delta F(1,100)= 6.19, p < .05$. The overall model was also significant, $R^2 = .25, F(4, 100) = 8.20, p < .001$, with T1 Happiness and the product term emerging as significant positive predictors of Happiness at T2. The interaction is displayed in Figure 5a. When youth reported lower levels of positive schemas, the positive relationship between youth subjective ratings of their PLEs and T2 Happiness was approaching significance, $t(104) = 1.96, p = .053$. For youth who reported higher levels of positive schemas, there was no significant relationship between PLEs and T2 Happiness, $t(104) = -1.31, p = .19$. This final model explained 25% of variance in Happiness variation over the 6-month period.

**Life Satisfaction.** The next analysis evaluated whether positive schemas interacted with Subjective PLE Intensity to predict T2 Life Satisfaction (Table 10). T1 Life Satisfaction was entered into the first step of the regression as a control, and was found to significantly predict T2 Life Satisfaction, $R^2 = .26, F(1, 104) = 36.52, p < .001$. The addition of Subjective PLE Intensity and positive schemas in the second step of the regression equation resulted in a significant increase in the variance explained in T2 Life Satisfaction, $\Delta R^2 = .05, \Delta F(2,102) = 3.28, p < .05$. The addition of the product term of positive schemas X Subjective PLE Intensity, in the third step, accounted for a significant increase in variance accounted for in T2 Life Satisfaction, $\Delta R^2 = .06, \Delta F(1, 101) = 8.86, p < .01$. The overall model was also significant, $R^2 = .36, F(4, 101) = 14.25, p < .001$, with T1 Life Satisfaction and Subjective PLE Intensity emerging as positive predictors and the interaction as a significant negative predictor of T2 Life Satisfaction.
Figure 5

*Positive Schemas X PLE Intensity Predicting Well-Being Outcomes*

a. *Interaction between Positive Schemas and Subjective PLE Intensity to Predict Happiness*

b. *Interaction between Positive Schemas and Subjective PLE Intensity to Predict Life Satisfaction*
The interaction is displayed in Figure 5b. Consistent with the findings for T2 Happiness, when youth reported lower levels of positive schemas, there was a significant positive relationship between youth subjective ratings of their PLEs and T2 Life Satisfaction, $t(105)=5.78, p < .001$; however, for youth who reported higher levels of positive schemas, there was no significant relation between PLEs and T2 Life Satisfaction, $t(105) = -.60, p = .549$. This final model explained 36% of variance in Life Satisfaction.

**Depression symptoms.** The next analysis evaluated whether positive schemas interacted with Subjective PLE Intensity to predict T2 Depressive symptoms (Table 10). In the first step of the regression, T1 SDQ Emotional Symptoms and gender were entered as controls, and the SDQ significantly predicted T2 Depressive symptoms while gender did not account for significant variance, $R^2 = .28, F(2, 96) = 18.90, p < .001$. In the second step, the addition of Subjective PLE Intensity and positive schemas accounted for a significant increase in explained variance in T2 Depression, $\Delta R^2 = .11, \Delta F(2,94) = 8.25, p < .01$. In the third step of the analysis, the addition of the product term of positive schemas X Subjective PLE Intensity did not account for a significant increase in variance in T2 Depressive symptoms, $\Delta R^2 = .00, \Delta F(1, 93) = .61, p = .44$; however, the overall model was significant, $R^2 = .39, F(5, 93) = 12.07, p < .001$, with T1 SDQ Emotional Symptoms positively and positive schemas negatively predicting T2 Depressive symptoms. This final model explained 39% of variance in Depression symptoms.

**Positive Schemas X Negativity Ratings.** Three hierarchical regressions were conducted to evaluate whether Negativity Ratings would interact with positive schemas to predict well-being outcomes. It was hypothesized that for individuals with lower positive schemas, Negativity Rating would predict decreased happiness and life satisfaction and increased depressive symptoms over time.
Happiness. The first analysis evaluated whether positive schemas interacted with Negativity Ratings to predict T2 Happiness (Table 11). In the first step of the analysis, T1 Happiness significantly predicted T2 Happiness scores, \( R^2 = .19, F(1, 104) = 24.42, p < .001 \). In the second step, the addition of positive schemas and Negativity Ratings did not result in a significant change in variance in T2 Happiness, \( \Delta R^2 = .02, \Delta F(2, 102) = 1.42, p = .25 \). In the third step of the analysis, the addition of the product term of positive schemas X Negativity Ratings did not account for a significant increase in variance in T2 Happiness, \( \Delta R^2 = .01, \Delta F(1,101) = 1.52, p = .22 \); however, the overall model was significant, \( R^2 = .22, F(4, 101) = 7.28, p < .001 \), with T1 Happiness emerging as a significant positive predictor of T2 Happiness. This final model accounted for 22\% of variance in T2 Happiness scores.

Life Satisfaction. The next analysis evaluated whether positive schemas interacted with Negativity Ratings to predict T2 Life Satisfaction (Table 11). In the first step of the analysis, T1 Life Satisfaction significantly predicted T2 Life Satisfaction scores, \( R^2 = .26, F(1, 105) = 36.45, p < .001 \). In the second step, the addition of positive schemas and Negativity Ratings did not result in a significant increase in variance explained in T2 Life Satisfaction, \( \Delta R^2 = .01, \Delta F(2,103) = .95, p = .39 \). In the third step of the analysis, the addition of the product term of positive schemas X Negativity Ratings accounted for a significant increase in variance in T2 Life Satisfaction, \( \Delta R^2 = .08, \Delta F(1, 102) = 12.76, p < .01 \). The overall model was also significant, \( R^2 = .35, F(4, 102) = 13.87, p < .001 \), with T1 Life Satisfaction and the interaction emerging as significant positive predictors of T2 Life Satisfaction.

The interaction is displayed in Figure 6a. When youth reported lower levels of positive schemas, there was a significant negative relationship between youth Negativity Ratings and T2 Life Satisfaction, \( t(106) = -3.24, p < .01 \); however, for youth who reported higher levels of
Table 11

**Hierarchical Regressions: Interaction between Positive Schemas and Negativity Ratings**

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<tr>
<th>Outcome Variable</th>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Predictor Variable</th>
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<th>$SE_b$</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>Sig. ($p$)</th>
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Figure 6

Positive Schemas X PLE Intensity Predicting Well-Being Outcomes

a. Interaction between Positive Schemas and Negative Reaction to predict Life Satisfaction

![Life Satisfaction Graph](image1)

b. Interaction between Positive Schemas and Negative Reaction to predict Depression

![Depression Graph](image2)
positive schemas, there was no significant relation between Negativity Ratings and T2 Life Satisfaction, $t(106) = .75, p = .46$. This final model explained 35% of variance in Life Satisfaction.

**Depression symptoms.** The next analysis evaluated whether positive schemas interacted with Subjective PLE Intensity to predict T2 Depressive symptoms (Table 11). In the first step of the regression, T1 SDQ Emotional Symptoms and gender were entered as controls, and the SDQ significantly predicted T2 Depressive symptoms while gender did not account for significant variance, $R^2 = .28, F(2, 97) = 18.58, p < .001$. In the second step, the addition of positive schemas and Negativity Ratings accounted for a significant increase in variance in T2 Depressive symptoms, $\Delta R^2 = .10, \Delta F(2, 95) = 7.21, p = < .01$. In the third step of the analysis, the addition of the product term of positive schemas X Negativity Ratings also accounted for a significant increase in variance in T2 Depressive symptoms, $\Delta R^2 = .04, \Delta F(1, 94) = 6.12, p < .05$. The overall model was also significant, $R^2 = .41, F(5, 94)= 13.10, p < .001$, with T1 SDQ Emotional Symptoms (positively) and positive schemas and the interaction term (negatively) predicting T2 Depressive symptoms.

The interaction is displayed in Figure 6b. When youth reported lower levels of positive schemas, there was a significant positive relationship between youth Negativity Ratings and T2 Depression, $t(99) = 2.58, p = .01$; however, for youth who reported higher levels of positive schemas, there was no significant relationship between Negativity Ratings and T2 Depression, $t(99) = -1.15, p = .25$. This final model explained 41% of variance in T2 Depressive symptoms.

**Discussion**

The aim of this study was to integrate positive variables into traditional models of mental health, to gain a stronger understanding of psychological factors that may associate with youth
well-being over time. The findings of this study suggest that PLEs and positive schemas interact in different ways to predict emotional well-being in youth. The findings highlight that positive schemas and PLEs both have the potential to contribute to youth emotional well-being, and that their absence, or the presence of more negative components of PLEs may contribute to early vulnerability to mental health difficulties in the form of depressive symptoms. These findings suggest that individuals with higher positive schemas may more consistently experience greater well-being, while individuals with lower positive schemas may experience increased or decreased well-being over time, depending on their daily life experiences.

**PLE X Positive Schemas: Predicting Increased Well-Being**

The results of this study indicated that positive schemas interact with Subjective PLE Intensity to associate with longer-term well-being among youth. Contrary to hypotheses, the interaction between lower positive schemas and PLEs (rather than higher positive schemas) was most strongly associated with well-being outcomes. Higher positive schemas were found to consistently associate with higher levels of life satisfaction and happiness, regardless of life events. Conversely, for youth with lower positive schemas, their happiness (approaching significance) and life satisfaction appeared to be more positively influenced by their positive life experiences. Interestingly, in the absence of positive experiences individuals with lower positive schemas appeared to experience lower well-being outcomes, but in presence of greater Subjective PLE Intensity they appeared to experience similar levels of happiness, and possibly higher levels of life satisfaction compared to youth with higher positive schemas. It is possible that when youth have higher positive schemas, they may more consistently interpret their life experiences in a positive way, such that their happiness and feelings of satisfaction in life are not as dependent on circumstance. Conversely, for individuals with lower positive schemas,
emotional well-being may be more susceptible to be influenced by life events. Alternatively, given that measures of PLEs were based on subjective ratings of youth’s life experiences, it is possible that this measure was confounded by cognitive processing (Lazarus et al., 1985), particularly for individuals with higher positive schemas whose interpretation of their daily events may have been more consistently impacted by their underlying schemas (e.g., Young et al., 2003). Thus, schemas may not have accounted for additional variance in well-being outcomes beyond the PLEs, because the ratings of PLEs may have already reflected the youth’s strong positive schemas. It should also be considered that given that this study was conducted in a community sample, the majority of youth experienced relatively high positive schemas. Thus, individuals with “lower” positive schemas may still have relatively high positive schemas that are being activated by the PLEs.

The findings of this study are consistent with the Broaden and Build Theory of Positive Emotions, suggesting that positive experiences may indeed create an “upward spiral” in which positive experience facilitates increased well-being over time (Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson, 1998; Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002). It is possible that individuals with higher positive schemas more consistently experience upward spirals associated with many of their daily experiences, while individuals with lower positive schemas may require more discrete or higher intensity positive events to elicit this upward positive emotional experience. Following from the theory, for individuals with lower positive schemas, if PLEs activate increased PA, this has the potential to lead to more broadened cognition, and more active engagement in the environment, leading to increased PLEs, and thus increased well-being over time. As stated by Fredrickson (2004), “joy sparks the urge to play, interest sparks the urge to explore, contentment sparks the urge to savour and integrate…” Thus, it is possible that PLEs predict increased well-being over time. While
future research is needed to understand the specific mechanisms involved in positive emotional development over time, the findings of this study suggest that subjectively experiencing PLEs may serve as an important factor contributing to the development of positive emotional functioning, particularly in youth who have lower positive schemas.

While the current study’s findings are inconsistent with past research suggesting that PLEs were associated with well-being only for individuals with high positive self-concept and decreased well-being for those with low self-concept (e.g., Brown & McGill, 1989; Campbell et al., 1991; Shimizu & Pelham, 2004), the past research was conducted in older samples (i.e. grades 7-11 and undergraduate samples), and thus may not have captured the experience of youth in their early adolescence. It is also possible that the relation between life events, self-concept and well-being outcomes are different in younger populations due to aspects of self-concept being in earlier stages of development (Hankin, 2008; Hankin & Abela, 2005), and thus possibly more amenable to influence by the environment (Young et al., 2003). Alternatively, the differences in findings may be explained by differences of measurement of PLEs, with the different studies tapping into different aspects of positive experience. These past studies did not typically consider that positive events can overlap with negative events, and thus also have stressful components (e.g., Shahar & Priel, 2002). Perhaps by looking at both positive and negative components of PLEs separately, this study was able to more clearly evaluate the implications of the positive elements of PLEs for youth well-being. Furthermore, while this study evaluated the impact of relatively lower levels of positive self-concept on youth well-being, other studies appeared to capture negative aspects of self-concept. It is possible that different aspects of self-concept have different implications for the ways youth react to PLEs.
Negativity Ratings X Positive Schemas: Predicting Decreased Well-Being

This study also indicated that positive schemas interacted with Negativity Ratings of PLEs to predict decreased life satisfaction and increased depression symptoms in youth. Again, the results of this study indicated that for individuals with higher positive schemas, emotional well-being was not significantly impacted by the negativity of PLEs. By contrast, individuals with lower positive schemas appeared to have relatively comparable emotional functioning to individuals with higher positive schemas, in the absence of the negativity of PLEs. Conversely, when these individuals experienced higher Negativity Ratings of PLEs this predicted decreases in their life satisfaction and increased depression. The findings of this study are consistent with hypotheses and past research suggesting that life stress may activate one’s cognitive structures, such that high positive schemas serve as stress-buffers, protecting from the negative implications of stress (Murray et al., 2001; Robinson, Garber, & Hilsman, 1995; Taylor & Ingram, 1999; Timbremont & Braet, 2004). Thus, individuals with higher positive schemas may be more able to sustain positive cognitions and associated mood despite experiencing higher Negativity Ratings of PLEs. Individuals with lower positive schemas may not possess the same stress-buffering resources (e.g., Murray at al., 2001; Robinson et al., 1995; Taylor & Ingram, 1999) and thus, the negative aspects of positive events may trigger decreased positive processing of one’s experiences or less positive thoughts about oneself (e.g., Murray et al., 2001; Taylor & Ingram, 1999). Thus, it may be that when an individual with lower positive schemas experiences higher Negativity Rating of their PLEs, this has the potential to interfere with his/her ability to gain positive benefits from the positive components of his/her life events.

The finding that lower positive schemas interacted with Negativity Rating of PLEs to predict decreased life satisfaction and increased vulnerability to depression over the 6-month
period, is consistent with past research that has demonstrated that low positive schemas are implicated in depression vulnerability in youth (e.g., Jaenicke et al., 1987; Prieto, Cole, & Tageson, 1992; Shirk et al., 1998; Whitman & Leitenberg, 1990; Keyfitz et al., 2013), and that stress triggers underlying schemas, leading to depression vulnerability (see Abela & Hankin, 2008; Hankin & Abela, 2005 for reviews). The findings of this study also suggest that it may not only be negative events that trigger underlying schemas, but that negative reactions to positive events can also trigger cognitive vulnerability.

While the Broaden and Build theory provides a framework for understanding positive processes (Fredrickson, 2004), and other theories focus on “downward spirals” of negative emotion, providing models for negative life experience and vulnerability to depression (e.g., Beck 1979; Peterson & Seligman 1984), researchers have not yet articulated the processes at play that may interfere with positive emotional development. Applying the logic from these past theories, it possible that a “downward spiral” of positive emotions may also exist. For individuals with low positive schemas, negative components of positive experience have the potential to lead to decreases in positive thinking, less approach behaviours and less engagement in PLEs from day to day. This may in turn decrease their ability to positively process positive experiences, predicting decreased well-being and contributing to depression vulnerability over time. Further testing of this theory may be an important area for future research.

Overall, these findings emphasize that difficulties experiencing PLEs in one’s day-to-day life may not only be associated with decreased well-being, but may also be implicated in early vulnerability to depression. These results suggest that the evidence in Chapter 3, as well as in past research (e.g., Larson, 2000; Larson & Richard, 1991) that when youth experience deficits in their positive functioning (i.e., lower positive schemas, lower positive events, or higher
negative reactions to positive events), this may signal concern regarding these youths’ potential vulnerability to mental health difficulties over time. This evidence suggests that deficits in positive functioning may serve as a factor in predicting decreased life satisfaction and early vulnerability to depression.

**Positive Models of Mental Health**

**Differential susceptibility and strongest link models.** While the results of this study suggests that the diathesis-stress model may be applicable when predicting vulnerability to mental health difficulties (i.e., decreased well-being or increased depression symptoms), other models may better help capture the dynamics between positive schemas and life events in predicting well-being outcomes. Frameworks, such as the differential susceptibility (Belsky & Pluess, 2009; Ellis, Boyce, Belsky, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & van IJzendoorn, 2011) or biological sensitivity to context (Boyce & Ellis, 2005) frameworks may help explain the finding that higher Subjective PLE Intensity predicted increased happiness and life satisfaction only for individuals with low positive schemas. These theories suggest that individuals may have particular characteristics that make them more susceptible to environmental influences, such that they are more likely to be both positively and negatively influenced by environmental conditions in ways that impact their development (Belsky & Pluess, 2009; Boyce & Ellis, 2005; Ellis et al., 2011). This perspective builds on the diathesis-stress framework by not only focusing on the vulnerability, but by also focusing on the positive dimension of experience, and helping to explain factors that make individuals more likely to experience well-being (Belsky & Pluess, 2009). Ellis et al. (2011) explain that within a developmental perspective, this adaptability is protective in that it enables children to respond to the unique environmental needs, such as responding more effectively to environmental threats and gaining more benefits from enriched
environments. Boyce and Ellis (2005) use the analogy of dandelions and orchids, suggesting that some individuals resemble dandelions in that they can do well no matter what their environment, while other individuals are more likened to orchids, in that they are more susceptible to their environments, having both greater vulnerability (e.g., to disorder), but also greater protection and thriving in positive environments (e.g., experiencing greater well-being). The results of this study suggest that low positive schemas may be a characteristic that makes people more susceptible to both positive and negative environmental influences.

Within cognitive theory, another framework for understanding the outcome that only low valence schemas were implicated in well-being outcomes, is the “weakest link” hypothesis. This theory suggests that when an individual possesses multiple vulnerability factors, the individual’s greatest vulnerability will be the strongest indicator of risk for depression (Abela & Sarin, 2002; Abela & Scheffler, 2007). Expanding this theory to a positive framework, the results of this study suggest that it may be the strongest protective factor for each individual that is the most predictive of his or her well-being over time. Thus, the results suggest that a person’s strongest link, may also serve as the best predictor of youth well-being. For example, this study suggests that when individuals possess higher positive schemas, they may experience higher levels of well-being overall. For these individuals, their positive schemas may function as the strongest link implicated in their well-being. Conversely, when individuals have lower positive schemas, but experience higher PLEs, their well-being outcomes are similar to individuals with higher positive schemas. Thus, for these individuals the PLEs serve as the strongest link, contributing to their positive emotional development. This theory suggests that helping to build on at least one area of strength in youths’ lives may have the potential to facilitate well-being. For example, in the case of youth who have lower positive schemas, helping them learn to better perceive and
absorb PLEs may be an important way to increase well-being. Alternatively, by building on positive schemas youth may become less susceptible to the influence of PLEs.

**Developmental model.** This study was conducted with a youth population, during a theorized developmental stage of importance for schema development and stabilization (e.g., Hankin, 2008; Hankin & Abela, 2005). While the current study only measured life events within a short time period, the interaction between life events, personality variables, and emotional outcomes is most likely dynamic over time (e.g., Bolger & Zuckerman, 1995; Zautra et al., 2005). Schemas are thought to begin to develop in childhood or adolescence as a direct reflection of the environment, and individuals are later thought to “perpetuate” their schemas and interpret life events through the lens of their schemas (p. Young, 2003, p. 8). This suggests a bi-directional relation between life experiences and cognition, with life events impacting schema development, and later one’s schemas impacting the way he/she engages with, creates and interprets his/her own life experiences. Past research on adolescent populations provides evidence that stressful life events can impact the development of cognitive vulnerability (e.g., Bruce, Cole, Dallaire, Jacquez, Pineda, & LeGrange, 2006; Garber & Flynn, 2001; Hankin, 2008). Thus, it is possible that the variables observed in this study are still in development, and that the interactions between PLEs and positive schemas have the potential to actually impact youth schema development over time.

**Implications**

The findings of this study emphasize the importance of continuing to integrate positive variables into models of mental health, to continue building a stronger understanding of the factors that contribute to a balanced perspective of youth development. Building on models of balanced or complete mental health may provide insight into factors that have the potential to
protect from psychopathology, reduce current deficits in positive functioning (e.g., Larson, 2000; Larson & Richards, 1991) and help facilitate the development of happiness and life satisfaction among youth.

The results of this study suggest that a purposeful focus on helping youth learn to actively pursue and regulate PLEs, and helping youth cope with any negative aspects of these events, may help facilitate well-being. Consistent with past research (e.g., Keyfitz et al., 2012, Tomlison et al., revised and resubmitted), the current study suggests that focusing on building positive experience may not only contribute to youth happiness and life satisfaction, but may also protect youth from vulnerability to depression. Youth who struggle to benefit from their PLEs, or who have negative reactions to PLEs, may be displaying signs of early vulnerability to emotional difficulties, particularly when aspects of their self-concept are less positive and potentially more influenced by environmental factors than those less vulnerable. Helping to remediate these early deficits in positive functioning may be important in setting youth on optimized pathways to well-being, and may play an important role in early prevention of more severe mental health difficulties later in development.

While the results of this study were conducted within community samples, the findings may provide some insight into areas of potential focus in a therapeutic context. The findings emphasize that for youth vulnerable to experiencing depression, it may not only be important to focus on remediating vulnerability factors and negative symptoms (e.g., negative life events, schemas, and mood), but to concurrently focus on building positive life experiences, schemas, and associated mood. Given that positive and negative experience likely exist on two separate continua (e.g., Clark et al., 1994; Diener, Larsen, Levine, & Emmons, 1985; MacLeod, Byrne, & Valentine, 1996; MacLeod & Moore, 2000; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), remediating
symptoms of pathology may only reduce distress, and thus may be essential that interventions also incorporate a purposeful focus on building positive experience and outcomes of well-being among youth.

**Limitations**

There are several limitations to the current study that require note. While the current results provide insight into how life events and schemas may interact to predict longer term mood outcomes, further research is needed to provide stronger evidence of the mechanisms at play that contribute to the changes in youth emotional development over time. The current study measured PLE Intensity and Negative Reactions to PLE’s by aggregating across youth daily diary reports in a 5-day period. By collapsing across the various diary days this did not allow for evaluation of within person variability in daily diary responses over time. Furthermore, while this study was longitudinal in nature, the data collection only took place over a 6-month period and thus may not have been a long enough time period to measure substantial developmental changes. Future research using multilevel evaluations of life events, mood, and affect over several time points, may clarify the dynamic relationship between these variables over a longer period of time.

Evaluations of life events, schemas and well-being outcomes were all self-report. While the measures used possess strong reliability and validity, scores on these measures may be impacted by mood or social desirability bias. Furthermore, some youth may have lacked the ability to accurately identify and report on their internal states. Similarly, in measures of daily events, the subjective evaluation of PLEs may be confounded by cognitive processing. Thus, it is difficult to make conclusions about the temporal relations between life events, schemas, and mood. Although researchers have commented on the limitation of self-report measures (e.g.,
Atkinson, Zibin, & Chuang, 1997) other research suggests that youth may be the best reporters of their own emotional experiences (Edelbrock, Costello, Dulcan, Conover, & Kalas, 1986; Saylor, Finch, Baskin, Furey, & Kelly, 1984). Past researchers suggest that subjective evaluation of experiences is an important indicator of subjective well-being, as people intrinsically “know” how to evaluate their own experiences (Diener, 1994; Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). Future research that incorporates clinical interviews, observation measures, parent reports, or other indirect measures of youth life events and emotional functioning would be beneficial to further strengthen the understanding of relations between life events, schemas, and well-being outcomes.

The current study involved T1 and T2 measures of happiness and life satisfaction, allowing for the statistical controlling of variance in well-being outcomes explained by T1 well-being. Thus, this statistical method allowed for commentary on the changes in variance in well-being outcomes over the 6-month period. While T1 measures of emotional difficulties were measured, there was no T1 measure of depressive symptoms, and thus the SDQ Emotion Symptoms subscale was used to control for depression at T1. Therefore, some of the change in observed variance in depression between T1 and T2 may have been due to the difference in measurement of depressive symptoms. Research suggests that the SDQ is a strong predictor of depressive symptoms (Goodman et al., 2000) and the current study as well as past research has indicated that the SDQ emotion symptom scale is highly correlated with the CDI (r= .67 and .66 respectively; Muris et al., 2003). Still, future longitudinal research that includes both pre- and post- measures of depressive symptoms would provide a stronger methodological design.

Evaluations of well-being outcomes in this community sample was beneficial in providing an understanding of the factors that impact youth positive emotional development within the general population; however, the majority of the participants in this study only
experienced sub-clinical levels of depression symptoms, and thus the same findings may not hold for youth with more severe symptoms. Still, the current findings are informative as they shed light on the factors that may be involved in the early vulnerability to depression in youth. Research suggests that sub-clinical levels of depression are strong predictors of later developing clinical symptoms (e.g., Harrington, Fudge, Rutter, Pickles, & Hill, 1990). Thus, these findings provide important insight into potential factors at play in the early development of vulnerability to mood difficulties.

**General Discussion**

This project helps contribute to the growing literature that is framing adolescence as a time of potential positive emotional development (e.g., Larson, 2000; Lerner et al., 2005). The aim was to embrace a balanced approach in which both factors that contribute to youth positive experience and well-being, as well as factors that may detract from youth positive development were jointly considered. Findings provide evidence that youth PLEs and positive schemas have implications for youth weekly and longer-term emotional well-being, and provide continued evidence that PLEs can possess both elements of risk and resilience (Shahar & Priel, 2002). Taken together, results indicated that the ability to positively experience PLEs predicted greater well-being, while difficulties experiencing PLEs signaled potential vulnerability to lower well-being and increased depressive symptoms in youth.

**Summary of Findings**

The findings of this study provided evidence that the unique ways that adolescents experience their daily PLEs has potential implications for the development of well-being among youth. Qualitative observations in this project provided some useful insight into the ways youth may engage in “happy habits,” appearing to create richness and positive experiences in their
everyday lives. In general, it was observed that youth who were able to appreciate the simple moment-to-moment occurrences of their daily lives (e.g., appreciating the “beautiful and squishy and sticky mud,” “spinning and falling” or “watching the weather change from snowy to rain to just wet”), who transformed their basic daily experiences into something positive and meaningful, appeared to report more positive reactions to their daily life experiences. These daily events often involved seeking out connection, opportunities for laughter, play, kindness, creativity, engaging in activities involving intrinsic and extrinsic achievement, finding a sense of calmness and peacefulness from embracing the quieter or more solitary moments in life, or paying attention to the simple pleasures of everyday life. Quantitative findings indicated that greater experiences of objectively positive events, more positive processing of PLEs, and greater engagement in positive emotion regulation of PLEs, did predict increased well-being from day to day. Furthermore, the results indicated that over time, for individuals with lower positive schemas, PLEs predicted increased happiness and life satisfaction. Both qualitative and quantitative findings of this study suggest that PLEs may both increase positive mood as well as have a reparative impact, associated with decreased negative mood. As expressed by youth in the study, the PLEs reported on at times took the participants “mind off things,” allowed them to “retreat… from everyday life,” and made their days “happier and brighter.”

Within the qualitative portion of this study, it was also observed that many of the PLEs involved integrating reports of negative thoughts and feelings into the youths’ recollections of positive events. Quantitative analysis of these themes indicated that only some of the negative reflections contained within PLE diary entries were predictive of increased distress, potentially signaling vulnerability, while other negative reflections were not predictive of emotional functioning. Positive and negative experiences are likely complex and intertwined, and some
ways of integrating good and bad reactions to events is likely normative. Research suggests that youth may need to experience an appropriate amount and type of negativity, and that positive emotions need to be “appropriate and genuine” for emotional well-being (e.g., Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). Negative reactions to PLEs may at times genuinely reflect the youth’s daily experiences. Research suggests that the full range of emotions, including negative emotions, may be important for well-being (Cole et al., 1994). Thus, in considering the implications of this study, it is important to emphasize that while some negative ways of processing positive events may signal concern, at other times the expression of negative thoughts and feelings may be balanced and appropriate, and may also be important for contributing to youth well-being.

This study also provided evidence that some youth may engage with their PLEs in ways that do interfere with their ability to positively experience their life events, and that may contribute to decreased well-being. Some of the observations of Negative Components in the qualitative study did predict increased distress. As well, it was found that higher Negativity Ratings to PLEs predicted increased NA and decreased PA from day-to-day. This provided some evidence that negative reactions to PLEs may at times mimic a stress response. Furthermore, negative reactions to PLEs were found to predict decreased well-being and increased vulnerability to depression over time, particularly when youth did not possess high positive schemas that may buffer the impact of the stressors. The findings of this study suggest that when youth experience negative reactions to PLEs they may not only lose opportunity to positively benefit, but instead may experience distress in response to positive events. This provides evidence that it may be important to help youth learn to process and cope with more stressful or negative associated elements of PLEs.
Implications for Youth Development

While further research is required to better understand the mechanisms through which daily PLEs impact longer-term well-being among youth, the current study provides some direction for studying the processes that may be at play over time. Youth reactions to PLEs may vary depending on their schemas, and schema development may also be impacted by daily life experiences. Thus, the findings that PLEs do impact daily and more trait-like emotional reactions, combined with the findings that schemas interact with PLEs to predict longer term well-being, suggests a transactional developmental process that may unfold over time.

The findings of this study indicated that daily PLEs associated with increased PA and decreased NA. Research suggests that when youth experience PLEs and this triggers associated PA, this may lead to an accumulation of increased positive experiences over time, with potential to improve overall well-being (Fredrickson, 1998, 2004). Thus, PLEs may lead to increased positive experiences and affect over time (i.e., an “upward spiral”). Conversely, the findings of this study suggest that negative reactions to positive events resulted in decreased PA and increased NA. Again, evidence suggests that NA experiences may lead to negative processing (e.g., Burke et al., 1992; Chajut & Algom, 2003; Wells & Matthews, 1994; Zautra et al., 2005). Thus, experiencing negative reactions to PLEs may lead to a lost opportunity and an accumulation of increased negative processing of potentially positive experiences over time (i.e., a “downward spiral”).

Interestingly, youth that already presented with higher positive schemas, more consistently experienced well-being, and this was not dependent on PLEs. Conversely, youth with lower positive schemas were influenced in either positive or negative directions, depending on whether they had positive or negative reactions to their PLEs. Specifically, youth with lower
positive schemas who experienced greater subjective PLEs, experienced increased happiness and life satisfaction over time. Conversely, when youth with lower positive schemas experienced more negative reactions to PLE’s, this predicted lower life satisfaction and higher depressive symptoms over time. One possible interpretation of this finding is that with a less well-developed positive self-schema system, exposure to PLEs provides an external boost that is lacking internally. While the mechanisms through which these changes take place are speculative, further research that tests these theories may be helpful in better understanding the processes implicated in emotional development in youth over time.

**Positive Models of Mental Health**

The findings of this study continue to provide evidence that distinct processes are involved in negative and positive experience (Zautra et al., 2005). Taken together, the findings of Chapter 3 suggest that overall, positive variables may have more implications for positive mood, while negative variables may have greater implications for negative mood. Furthermore, the findings from Chapter 4 indicated that traditional deficit-based diathesis-stress models may not effectively capture the dynamics between positive schemas and PLEs in predicting well-being outcomes. Results suggest the importance of extending these frameworks to also account for positive experience. For example, other models, such as the differential susceptibility or biological sensitivity to context frameworks may build on the diathesis-stress frameworks by not only focusing on vulnerability, but by also focusing on positive dimensions of experience and factors that may be implicated in well-being.

Furthermore, taken together the results from this project suggest that traditional deficit-based mental health models would benefit from a more balanced approach, better accounting for positive dimensions of youth experience. For example, the results of this study suggest that in
addition to the “weakest-link” hypothesis, the “strongest-link” hypothesis may also apply for youth protective factors. As well, the evidence suggests that in addition to youth experiences of “upward spirals of positive emotions,” it may be the case that when youth experience deficits in positive functioning, they may also be at risk of experiencing “downward spirals” of positive experience. Future research ought to continue to integrate a complex understanding of both positive and negative factors implicated in youth well-being.

While clinical interventions typically focus on remediation of negative symptoms and psychopathology, the current study provides support for the potential importance of also focusing on building youth PLEs, positive schemas, and associated well-being. Given the evidence of the current deficits in youth positive functioning (Larson, 2000; Larson & Richards, 1991), it may be important to develop both clinical and community interventions focused on helping youth learn how to cultivate and actively create PLEs and associated positive cognitions and emotions, while also learning to remove obstacles or cope with more stressful components of PLEs. Research suggests that the ability to draw on a variety of positive emotion regulation strategies in diverse situations, may be associated with greatest well-being outcomes (Quoidbach et al., 2010). Thus, it may be beneficial to promote the learning of various techniques, including savouring, positive rumination, mindfulness, positive mental time travel, positive reminiscence, capitalization, behavioural displays, practicing of gratitude, and engaging optimistically with their life experiences (e.g. Bono & McCullough, 2006; Bryant, 2003; Bryant, Smart, & King, 2005; Gable et al., 2004; Langston, 2004; Meehan et al., 1993; Lyubomirsky et al., 2006; Quoidbach et al., 2009; Seligman, 1991, 2011; Shapiro, Astin, Bishop, & Cordova, 2005). The findings of this study suggest that youth may at times be able to cultivate their own PLEs by actively seeking opportunities for connection, play, laughter, kindness, creativity, achievement,
relaxation, and appreciation of basic and simple pleasures of everyday experiences. The current findings as well as past research suggests that the ability to engage in these techniques may increase positive emotionality in the present, reduce emotional distress, and in turn may facilitate increased well-being and less vulnerability to mental health difficulties over time (e.g., Brown & Ryan, 2003; Kabat-Zinn et al., 1985; Kabat-Zinn et al., 1992; Langer, 1989). By engaging in positive emotion regulation, youth may be able to “outpace[s] the hedonic treadmill” (Fredrickson et al., 2008, p. 1045) and find positive meaning in their moment-to-moment lives, thus helping them sustain the positive benefits of their everyday positive experiences over time (Fredrickson et al.). Furthermore, this study suggests that individuals are as strong as their “strongest link.” Thus, helping youth build on at least one area of strength may facilitate well-being and protect them from vulnerability to mental health difficulties.

**Future Directions**

Future research could benefit from further exploring the mechanisms through which PLEs, schemas, and mood interact to produce longer term youth emotional functioning. Research considering both positive and negative factors jointly in models of risk may contribute greatly to the understanding of the vulnerability and protective factors implicated in youth psychopathology and well-being. Further development of the field of positive clinical psychology is important, with research exploring both positive and negative factors in joint models, as both dimensions of experience are mutually important, deeply intertwined, and may interact with one another to impact functioning. Overall, it is important that research continues to integrate positive variables into models of mental health, to continue developing an understanding of the factors that not only reduce vulnerability to psychopathology, but that also contribute to positive affect experiences, happiness, life satisfaction, and overall well-being.
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Appendix A

Good Things Diary

What was the best thing that happened to you in the last day? Tell us as much about what happened as you can.

Where were you and what were you doing when it happened?

Who were you with (if anybody)? What’s your relationship with that person?

What things happened before that led up to it?

How did you respond/react to it?
Why was this a good thing?

Why was this the best thing you experienced in the last day?

Has it happened to you before?
   If yes, how often?

Please circle how positive it was on a scale from 1 to 10?

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

Not Positive    Very Positive
Appendix B

Positive Schema Questionnaire

Instructions: Please read the following statements. To the right of each you will find six numbers, ranging from "1" (Completely untrue of me) on the left to "6" (Describes me perfectly) on the right. Choose the number which best indicates how much you believe each statement is true for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completely untrue of me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Describes me perfectly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>I believe in myself</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I feel I can depend on people to keep my secrets</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>I believe things will turn out well</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I feel comfortable depending on other people</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>I have the ability to be successful</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>I can deal well with difficult situations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>I know how to find something good in every situation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>I think I have many good qualities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>I trust other people</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>I can adapt to new situations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>I usually see the positive side of things</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>If I try hard I can usually do well</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>I can respond well to challenges</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>I value many things about myself</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>I do well when I try my best</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>When things are bad I can still think of something good</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>I value myself</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>I feel comfortable telling people important things about myself</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>If I try I will succeed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>I can deal with tough things</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Appendix C
Subjective Happiness Scale

For each of the following statements and/or questions, please circle the point on the scale that you feel is most appropriate in describing you.

1. In general, I consider myself:

<table>
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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not a very happy person</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A very happy person</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Compared to most of my peers, I consider myself:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less happy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>More happy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Some people are generally very happy. They enjoy life regardless of what is going on, getting the most out of everything. To what extent does this characterization describe you?

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<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A great deal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Some people are generally not very happy. Although they are not depressed, they never seem as happy as they might be. To what extent does this characterization describe you?

<table>
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<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A great deal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D

Brief Multidimensional Students’ Life Satisfaction Scale

These six questions ask about your satisfaction with different areas of your life. Circle the best answer for each.

1. I would describe my satisfaction with my family life as:
   a) Terrible
   b) Unhappy
   c) Mostly dissatisfied
   d) Mixed (about equally satisfied and dissatisfied)
   e) Mostly satisfied
   f) Pleased
   g) Delighted

2. I would describe my satisfaction with my friendships as:
   a) Terrible
   b) Unhappy
   c) Mostly dissatisfied
   d) Mixed (about equally satisfied and dissatisfied)
   e) Mostly satisfied
   f) Pleased
   g) Delighted

3. I would describe my satisfaction with my school experience as
   a) Terrible
   b) Unhappy
   c) Mostly dissatisfied
   d) Mixed (about equally satisfied and dissatisfied)
   e) Mostly satisfied
   f) Pleased
   g) Delighted

4. I would describe my satisfaction with myself as:
   a) Terrible
   b) Unhappy
   c) Mostly dissatisfied
   d) Mixed (about equally satisfied and dissatisfied)
   e) Mostly satisfied
   f) Pleased
   g) Delighted

5. I would describe my satisfaction with where I live as:
   a) Terrible
   b) Unhappy
   c) Mostly dissatisfied
   d) Mixed (about equally satisfied and dissatisfied)
   e) Mostly satisfied
   f) Pleased
   g) Delighted

6. I would describe my satisfaction with my overall life as:
   a) Terrible
   b) Unhappy
   c) Mostly dissatisfied
   d) Mixed (about equally satisfied and dissatisfied)
   e) Mostly satisfied
   f) Pleased
   g) Delighted