The Effects of writing about positive reminiscence on happiness with adolescents

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The Effects of Writing about Positive Reminiscence on Happiness with Adolescents

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Abstract

Much research has been done with adults in the field of positive psychology (e.g., Biswas-Diener, Diener, & Tamir, 2004; Lykken & Tellegen, 1996; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005), reminiscence (e.g., Cappeliez & O’Rourke, 2006; Parker, 1995; Unruh, 1989), and journal writing (e.g., Classen, Koopman, & Spiegel, 1993; Gerler, Hogan, & O’Rourke, 1990; Pennebaker, 1997). Previous findings reveal that reminiscing about positive memories enhances one’s happiness, well-being, life satisfaction, and self-continuity. The current study sought to expand this to adolescence. A group of 19 male and female ninth graders from a northeastern, suburban high school were assigned to a positive reminiscence or a daily hassles journal writing group. Analyses revealed significant effects on participants’ positive affect; journal writing in general and specifically writing only about positive memories both significantly increased participants’ ratings of perceived positive affect. However, no other significant effects were found on happiness or life satisfaction when writing about positive memories or daily hassles were compared. Limitations and suggestions for future research are discussed.
CHAPTER ONE

Certain activities can be practiced that may help an individual invoke past memories and allow one to re-experience the associated feelings in the present (Parker, 1995). The most simplistic form of this type of activity is termed reminiscence. At the other end of the continuum is life review, a more complex function that includes attempting to create a sense of order around one’s life (Unruh, 1989). As an individual organizes past events, congruency between one’s personal past and present self emerges.

Also on the reminiscence continuum are personal narratives: stories created by individuals in the hopes of providing an explanation for one’s behaviors (Baumeister & Newman, 1994). The sequencing of one’s story may be provisional. This temporary characteristic allows an individual the power to change or reinterpret past events for different situations. For example, an individual’s personal narrative may be altered from the one used to feel a sense of identity to another used to feel self-confident or to problem solve. Individuals construct new narratives and restructure old ones as they progress through life.

The act of reminiscing to promote positive self feelings has been tied to physical health and significantly linked with one’s well-being (Cappeliez & O’Rourke, 2006). Memories that increase one’s self-understanding and self-awareness are those that provide meaning and self-continuity, thus helping to increase an individual’s positive self feelings. Researchers have found evidence supporting certain personality characteristics that promote the positive effects of reminiscence, such as those persons who tend to be open and cognizant (Fry, 1991). In addition, one’s overall attitude towards life in general has been linked with an individual’s frequency of reminiscence (Cappeliez & O’Rourke, 2002).
In light of this abundance of research on the effects of reminiscence related activities, very little of it has been conducted examining the effects with adolescents. Some researchers still question the ability of an adolescent mind to use reminiscence to form a logical life story (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). In contrast, others assert that the adolescent time period is exactly when one’s life story emerges (Habermas & Bluck). These researchers believe that various cognitive abilities are developing throughout adolescence that are, in fact, sufficient to make possible autobiographical reasoning.

Moreover, supporting researchers have deliberately made it a point to acknowledge the main focus of adolescence: identity exploration (Gerler, Hogan, & O’Rourke, 1990). As youths are bombarded with choices and new situations, they often feel overwhelmed with confusion and pressure to make personally consistent decisions. An adolescent who is more self-aware is better able to develop his self-understanding and self-direction. The current study seeks to add to the literature surrounding adolescents’ abilities to reminisce by evaluating an intervention that promotes identity exploration through the process of reviewing one’s past events.

In another area of the field of psychology, there is growing excitement as empirically based practices utilizing reminiscence for increasing happiness are being explored in adults (Seligman, 2004). Intentional activities appear to account for up to 40% of one’s happiness (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). Specifically, reminiscence strategies are shown to increase adults’ happiness levels and well-being (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Meehan, Durlak, & Bryant, 1993). In light of these new findings, researchers have yet to fully explore the effects of intentional activities on adolescents’ happiness levels.

Therapeutic journals are one tool many researchers have identified as providing individuals with a limitless atmosphere for personal reflection and growth (Gerler et al., 1990;
Kelly & Mosher-Ashley, 2002; Unruh, 1989). Journals provide an individual with the means to externalize his fears and anxieties, and thus reduce his stress levels (Smyth, Stone, & Kaell, 1999). Some research about journal writing has been done with the adolescent age group as a means to reduce stress (Pennebaker, 1997; Smyth et al., 1999), but the field has yet to examine adolescent journal writing as a means to increase happiness.

The purpose of the present study is to add to the literature of reminiscence in adolescence. As journaling about positive memories appears to increase adults’ perceived levels of happiness and increase feelings of well-being, the same is hypothesized for adolescents. Therefore, the first hypothesis of the current study is that journal writing in general will have a positive effect on adolescents’ happiness, life satisfaction, and affect. The second hypothesis is that recording past memories that specifically reflect positive emotions in personal journals will raise adolescents’ frequencies of reported happiness, overall life satisfaction, and affect.

There are a few definitions that must be discussed to aid in the understanding of the current research. Many authors have described reminiscence and hence, there are many different descriptions of it. Here, a more simplistic view of reminiscence offered by Parker (1995) was used. She described reminiscence as the voluntary recall of a past event. The current study utilized the Subjective Happiness Scale developed by Lyubomirsky & Lepper (1999) to measure participants’ levels of happiness. Lyubomirsky and Lepper envisioned their scale to delve deeper into the psychological phenomenon of happiness; to go further than a summarized rating of whether the majority of a person’s recent events were pleasurable or unpleasant. In other words, a person who has experienced many of the positive characteristics of a happy American life, such as “...good health, a good marriage, raising children, having a satisfying career...” might not psychologically feel happy (Lyubomirsky & Lepper). Life satisfaction, as measured
here by Huebner’s (1994) Multidimensional Students’ Life Satisfaction Scale, is the subjective and qualitative appraisal of one’s life as a whole. Determining satisfaction of any sort requires complex, cognitive evaluation. Positive and negative affect, however, are the more simple emotive reactions; the frequencies with which one experiences emotions such as joy or sadness. Finally, journal writing here was described as a solitary process that takes place silently. Participants recorded personal thoughts in their own private journals that no one had access to.
CHAPTER TWO

The Effects of Writing about Positive Reminiscence on Happiness with Adolescents

The majority of research studying the effects of reminiscence has been carried out to the almost full exclusion of adolescents. This section will discuss and synthesize the current research conducted with adults, highlighting the benefits brought on by reminiscence and life review activities. Common definitions of reminiscence and its related activities will be clarified, while relevant theories of autobiographical reasoning, happiness, adolescent development, and journaling will be discussed. Additionally, the question of whether or not adolescents are capable of reminiscing in order to reap similar health benefits as adults will be discussed.

Reminiscence has many definitions and impressions among researchers in the field. Parker (1995) summarized reminiscence as a voluntary act in which one’s events from the past are mentally recalled. Reminiscing may be done with the intention of merely reliving the memory, known as informative reminiscence, or for the more effortful purpose of restructuring the event and making sense of its emotions, termed life review. These various forms of reminiscing require different levels of cognitive effort.

Other theorists have attempted to specifically define reminiscence as separate from the life review process. Following a social psychological view of reminiscence, Unruh (1989) described the act of reminiscing as a second order reinterpretation of detailed memories that have lost their everyday stability and continuity. These partial reconstructions are embedded in situations conjured up by present happenings. Simple memories transcend into reminiscence where they are tied together to construct situations surrounding people as dynamic elements. Under this social psychological theory, life review is seen as the next step, a third order reinterpretation.
Unruh (1989) viewed life review as revolving around an identity search and intense evaluation of one’s life. Here, a person is seeking personal explanations for events in his past. Individuals attempt to order personal memories into a logical and coherent sequence. Sequencing helps to clarify the reasons behind the decisions previously made, thus providing the individual with a personal identity that is congruent with his or her present thoughts and morals. In this life review process, many past identities are recalled and reviewed. As one decides to maintain certain identities, other personal roles may be cast off.

The life review process is what O’Leary and Nieuwstraten (2001) were referring to when they discussed the potential benefits of recalling memories during Gestalt reminiscence group therapy. The authors recognized that reminiscing about past achievements, and thus maintaining those memories, may work to enhance self-esteem. On the other hand, life review allows the individual to uncover any unfinished business in his or her past where they may attempt to create some sort of closure. It is here that the sorting out and possible discarding of some memories, as noted by Unruh (1989) appears most relevant.

Bryant et al. (2005) conducted a study featuring two different methods of reminiscence about positive memories. The authors described the act of mentally recalling an event and evoking its images in one’s mind as cognitive reminiscence. Here, participants were instructed to focus on a specific positive memory while in a relaxed state. Recalling events in a relaxed and personal state has been stated to enhance remembrance (Kelly & Mosher-Ashley, 2002). All cognitive images associated with an event were to be imagined as the participant focused on the memory’s vivid details (Bryant et al.). The authors expressed the importance of mentally imagining the memory to deter participants from seeking physical aids, such as pictures and other personal mementos.
In contrast to the cognitive reminiscence condition, another experimental condition was created where pieces of memorabilia were utilized to enhance reminiscence (Bryant et al., 2005). Participants in this condition were instructed to focus on a physical memento, such as a picture or souvenir, which was associated with a specific positive memory. As in the cognitive imagery condition described, participants reflecting upon a memento were to allow images of the memory to flow through his or her mind. The instructions provided informed each participant to roam about the memory’s elements in a liberal manner.

The authors found that participants who employed a reminiscence strategy, through either cognitive imagery or memorabilia, reported feeling happy significantly more often than those in the control group (Bryant et al., 2005). The authors concluded that the vividness of recalled memories appeared to be the key to raising participants’ frequencies of happiness. Through reliving the images as close to their actual intensities as possible, participants were able to directly manipulate one’s own happiness.

**Functions of Reminiscence**

In an attempt to elaborate upon the specific functions of reminiscence, Bluck, Alea, Habermas, and Rubin (2005) created the Thinking About Life Experiences (TALE) questionnaire and uncovered four functions. Upon examination of a group of undergraduates’ answers on the TALE, researchers were able to identify the Directive, Self-continuity, Nurturing Relationships, and Developing Relationships functions of autobiographical memory.

The Directive function is the act of recalling past episodes in order to aid in one’s present life and behaviors, including solving problems (Bluck et al., 2005). The authors concluded that in order to direct one’s behaviors, a person also needed to be able to understand past events. This action is termed “autobiographical reasoning” (Habermas & Bluck, 2000), where an
individual strives to make sense of the past in order to keep fresh one’s self-views. Bluck et al.'s sample reported using the Directive function periodically when it was needed.

Another function identified was that of Self-continuity which concentrated on maintaining one’s personal stability (Bluck et al., 2005). Here, participants appeared curious about their own identities which included contrasting their present and past selves. This intimate assessment of personal past events that has the potential to help develop self-insight and self-growth was coined as “self reflection” by Staudinger (2001). The participants in Bluck et al.'s study viewed the Self-continuity function as very important in their own lives.

The following two functions found in the Bluck et al. (2005) study are derived from the theoretical Social function of autobiographical memory. First, the Nurturing Relationships function involves preserving the empathetic and bonding nature of one’s current relationships. This function arose as the most common sought after goal of reminiscing. On the other hand, a Developing Relationships function was also identified. Reminiscing with others and sharing stories serves to inform one about another’s life, thus fostering and forming new social bonds.

Baumeister and Newman (1994) went into greater detail about how life events are reordered and reinterpreted for one to find meaning and achieve personal stability in the present. The authors described four needs for meaning everyone has that drive the search for identity and meaning in life. In order to understand how the four meanings operate, the authors explained that people prefer to think about personal life experiences as if the events were part of a story that explains their behavior sequences. In other words, people construct narratives about their lives in a coherent, sequential manner that are sensitive to the present context and chronologically structured. Thus, narratives are provisional and used to fulfill one’s needs at that particular moment in time.
Under this framework, stories are seen as simple reconstructions of interrelated events and therefore are easier to create than an abstract summary of the complex principles and causal relations (Baumeister & Newman, 1994). Because stories allow for rich, comprehensive descriptions, narratives are able to better accommodate for and reinterpret the many inconsistencies observed in everyday life. More important, the authors argued that inconsistencies are not always merely ignored or forgotten. Whenever possible, a narrator will attempt to make inferences to fill in the gaps and account for any discrepancies in order to create a plausible story.

The first need for meaning is purposiveness (Baumeister & Newman, 1994). Individuals strive to find purpose in their lives by construing their past events in terms of being deliberate and causal happenings that led to a later experience. Next, an individual finds value and justification for his or her actions by interpreting one’s behaviors in a way that is congruent with personal moral standards. Thus, a person may find it necessary to adjust or shade his or her own events or include descriptions of personal intentions to make one’s story believable. The need for efficacy is sufficed by creating narratives that demonstrate the individual’s achievements, assertiveness, and ability to make an obvious difference in one’s environment. Lastly, one finds self-worth in stories that establish individual characteristics that are honorable and in stories that reveal how one is more advanced in some aspect than others.

Effects of Reminiscence

The majority of research that supports the wealth of benefits brought on by reminiscence have only examined the effects of reminiscence among older adults (e.g., Cappeliez & O’Rourke, 2006; Cappeliez, O’Rourke, & Chadhury, 2005; Fry, 1991). Such reminiscence research has linked multiple health benefits among the elderly with various kinds of reminiscing.
For example, Cappeliez and O'Rourke (2006) examined the effects of three different types of reminiscence functions among a group of 412 older adults. The three distinct reminiscence functions that were tested were positive self-functions, negative self-functions, and prosocial functions. In the end, only the positive and negative self-functions were confirmed as possessing a relationship with mental and physical health.

Positive self-functions were defined as recalled memories related to one’s identity, those used to prepare oneself for death, or for purposes of problem solving (Cappeliez & O'Rourke, 2006). These memories also facilitate the maintenance of self-understanding and self-awareness. The authors concluded that positive self-functions were directly and significantly tied to participants’ well-being in a positive manner. Furthermore, integrative reminiscence was cited as holding the most power among the positive self-functions. These included memories that provide meaning, promote self-continuity, and work together to facilitate an individual’s self-understanding.

In the other direction, negative self-functions were described as reminiscing for purposes of escaping the present, reflecting upon regrets, or attempting to maintain an emotional relationship with an estranged or deceased person (Cappeliez & O’Rourke, 2006). These forms of reminiscence are thought to commonly be associated with continual rumination upon negative life events. Negative self-functions were found to be directly and significantly related to participants’ lower feelings of well-being. Interestingly, memories used to reduce boredom showed the strongest influence on mental and physical health among those included under negative self-functions.

Certain personality factors among elderly persons have been found to hold predictive power over the frequency of reminiscence (Fry, 1991). Individuals possessing sentience and
openness are likely to reminiscence often. It is posited that these traits allow a person to experience more joy through reminiscing, thus making the individual more receptive towards the pleasantness of recalling past episodes.

There seems to be an agreement about the positive relationship between emotional lability and reminiscing frequency (Cappeliez & O’Rourke, 2002; Cully et al., 2001). Specifically, persons high in neuroticism appear to use reminiscence more often than those at the other end of this personality characteristic. These persons also use reminiscence for functionally different reasons, particularly identity searching and bitterness revival (Cappeliez & O’Rourke). It appears as though individuals who commonly experience emotional ups and downs and are prone to experiencing negative affects utilize reminiscence to seek personal meaning and to restore a sense of continuity. Although personal exploration has beneficial effects, these persons may tend to ruminate upon past experiences that were negative or left unresolved.

Extraverted individuals are also observed as reminiscing more often, utilizing its boredom reduction function (Cappeliez & O’Rourke, 2002). Because these older individuals are overtly pursuing a means to entertain themselves, the authors theorized that reminiscing is more complex than a simple passive activity. Reliving memories is seen as an active process that a person deliberately engages in.

Besides personality characteristics, Cappeliez and O’Rourke (2002) studied life attitudes and found these to predict reminiscence frequencies. Individuals who create goals and live in a manner that is in line with their past, present, and future selves are said to be high in purpose. Coherence describes those persons who are at peace with their personal identities and who view their existence in an ordered and reasoned manner. Life control refers to the extent to which an individual sees oneself as being proficient in managing one’s own life. Death acceptance is the
ability to regard death in a calm manner and understand that it is a natural occurrence in life. Existential vacuum refers to persons who lack personal meaning in life and experience boredom and apathy. A goal seeking attitude is defined as possessing the craving to live life to its fullest through new experiences and challenges.

Together as a group, the aforementioned life attitudes significantly predicted higher frequencies of reminiscence (Cappeliez & O’Rourke, 2002). This correlation was found to be stronger than that of personality characteristics. Specifically, elderly individuals who scored high in goal seeking attitudes frequently reminisced in a general manner. Those who scored low in goal seeking appeared to reminisce most often for purposes of boredom reduction, death preparation, and bitterness revival. Elderly persons said to be living in an existential vacuum were found to reminisce most often in concern for death preparation.

Using these significant personality factors and life attitudes, Cappeliez and O’Rourke (2002) concluded that elderly persons who reminisce more frequently are those who resort to memories to deal with everyday life. Frequent reminiscers appear to seek out memories, rather than new experiences, to deal with feelings of boredom and concerns about death and past conflicts.

Adolescence

In contrast to the array of reminiscence findings among older adults the field has only recently begun examining the reminiscence patterns and functions among adolescents. First and foremost is the question of whether young adolescents are capable of constructing personal life stories that are not merely locally coherent, but are globally coherent and in line with the youth’s self-concept (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). Habermas and Bluck contend that adolescence marks the advent of the life story. Various social cognitive abilities arise in late childhood that make
autobiographical reasoning possible. Abilities such as temporal sequencing, cultural concepts of biography, causal coherence, and thematic coherence all continuously develop throughout this age period.

Temporal sequencing is the act of ordering past events in a chronological manner (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). This tool helps to create the basic coherence needed when structuring one’s life story. Around the young age of eight, a child’s conventional calendar knowledge drastically matures so that he is capable of utilizing it to temporally order his life events (Friedman, Gardner, & Zubin, 1995). Temporal sequencing is practiced and refined throughout the mid-adolescent years and thus jumpstarts a youth’s ability to create his life story.

Another cognitive tool that emerges in late childhood is known as a cultural concept of biography (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). This tool relies upon learning the life phases and age-appropriate transitions that are significant in one’s culture. Such childhood transitions may include one’s birth, the birth of siblings, school transitions, and geographical relocations (Rosenthal, 1995). With the maturation of this cognitive tool, adolescents are capable of ordering life events into a stereotypical sequence that tends not to deviate from cultural norms (Strube, Gehringer, Ernst, & Knill, 1985 as cited in Habermas & Bluck).

The following two cognitive tools build upon temporal sequencing and the cultural concept of biography and thus are more advanced (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). Unlike the former tools, the latter only begin to emerge once adolescence is reached. Causal and thematic coherence together make it possible for adolescents to create an interpreted life narrative.

Causal coherence allows one to provide explanations for behaviors and actions taken in past events (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). This tool goes beyond linking events simply based upon time and makes possible an explanatory version of the life narrative. As youth age through
adolescence they greatly improve their ability to link situational and dispositional attributions so as to better explain behaviors using personality characteristics (Blanchard-Fields & Norris, 1994).

Lastly, thematic coherence refers to a person’s ability to relate one’s life story in a way that reveals an overarching theme (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). This cognitive tool requires active interpretation in order to recognize the building theme. Once a theme is constructed, a person is able to tie in events from various points in their life that play into the theme. In line with thematic coherence is the adolescent’s ability to understand that interpretations may and can change depending upon present situations.

As discussed, young children are certainly able to recall past events and retell the specific facts of a given memory (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). Once a child is able to attach personal meaning to past events and is capable of creating a coherent history, it is thought that he or she is then capable of connecting personal self-views across multiple contexts to construct clear depictions of personal qualities (Welch-Ross, Fasig, & Farrar, 1999). However, it is not until adolescence that children become able to organize memories into a coherent life story (Habermas & Bluck). Developmentally, adolescents are much more capable of temporally sequencing the events of their past, by either means of chronological time or content association and themes. Acknowledging the lack of brevity in children’s lives and the fact that they do not possess the wealth of autobiographical memories as do adults, Habermas and Bluck maintain that adolescence is a time when youth are motivated to construct life narratives because of the psycho-social demands brought on by this specific age period.

Accordingly, young adolescents are at the forefront of identity exploration (Gerler et al., 1990). Achieving a sense of self is the most important goal throughout adolescence. Youth are
constantly faced with new experiences that seem to only challenge their ideas of self and their beliefs from childhood. This time is marked by the exiting of childhood and intense growth in all areas, those of psychological, emotional, social, and physical. At every turn, adolescents transition into the search for self direction by choosing whether to heed authority or to challenge the directives placed upon them.

For obvious reasons, this continuous decision making brings about much confusion as to an adolescent’s personal identity and understanding. To help mollify such a puzzling time period and help youth better understand themselves, Gerler et al. (1990) concluded that school counselors must strive to provide students with a myriad of planned activities that foster self exploration. Research completed by McLean and Pratt (2006) sought to shed light on the meaning making practices of adolescents. The researchers were able to provide direct evidence that adolescents need a variety of activities in order to better develop their identities and help make meaning out of their lives.

McLean and Pratt (2006) analyzed surveys of 896 adolescents from 16 high schools in Canada. The majority of participants were Caucasian students (88%), in eleventh grade (mean age = 17.4), and of middle class (94%). Questionnaires were completed in students’ classrooms that measured a variety of topics. Follow-up questionnaires were conducted two and four years later with those participants who could be located. The four year follow-up also included an opportunity for participants to write a turning point story of a significant life transition or change that reflected their growing understanding of themselves. Of the topics surveyed, the Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (OM-EIS) (Adams, Shea, & Fitch, 1979) measured identity status (i.e., diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement), the Life Orientation Test (LOT) (Scheier & Carver, 1985) assessed dispositional optimism (i.e., how much individuals assume to
experience positive life outcomes), and the Loyola Generativity Scale (LGS) (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992) measured generative concern (i.e., “Others would say that I have made important contributions to society.”).

Results of this study confirmed that meaning-making opportunities are brought about through an array of various event types (McLean & Pratt, 2006). Meaning-making was more notably missing from narratives of participants who were low in identity development than it was present in the stories of emerging adults at higher levels of identity development. Thus, it appears that young adults who either have not explored their own lives or have not committed to personally significant morals and values tend not to create meaning out of their experiences. At the other end, those young adults who have spent time reflecting upon their past experiences and used them to form their present identities seemed to create more meaning out of their lives, as reflected in the study’s turning point narratives. Meaning-making was even associated with lengthier turning point stories participants had written. Researchers took this to suggest that participants who wrote more elaborative narratives may be more in tune with meaning-making.

Wildschut et al. (2006) set out to investigate nostalgia in young adults. The authors investigated the content, triggers, and functions of nostalgia through a series of seven studies. The first study, Study 1, examined the content of nostalgic essays written as autobiographical narratives. These essays were published in the periodical Nostalgia between the years of 1998 and 1999. Although the authors’ ages were not provided, this study helps give insight into what makes up a nostalgic narrative. Furthermore, Study 2 attempted to replicate these findings using a group of undergraduate students. This population consisted of a more restricted age range than in Study 1, and its participants were asked to specifically focus on the emotions brought forth
while recalling their nostalgic event. Focusing on one’s feelings allowed the researchers to investigate more deeply the affective nature of nostalgia.

Initial results of Studies 1 and 2 showed that the content of participants’ memories most often involved the self, individuals close to them, and significant life events. Moreover, the majority of memories portrayed positive experiences. When negative emotions or experiences were recalled, they were most often done so in a manner that Wildschut et al. termed as a “redemption sequence.” The authors found that young adults tended to follow up their negative memories with a positive event, thus creating an overall optimistic personal story. In fact, a study conducted by Bird and Reese (2006) revealed that a mother’s explanation for her young child of the negative emotions present in their discussions of everyday events was positively correlated with the child’s self-concept consistency. The authors specifically pointed out that greater self-concept consistencies were brought about through the resolution of negative emotions in social contacts.

In contrast, contamination sequences, where one progresses from positive to negative memories, were understandably less frequent (Wildschut et al., 2006). Contamination sequences were found to be negatively correlated with psychological well-being. Redemption sequences in an individual’s life narrative have been shown to be positively correlated with well-being (McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001).

Perhaps these sequences were what Parker (1995) was referring to when she explained that reminiscence works to function as a way of ordering one’s life events. Under the theory of continuity, Parker held that when individuals are ordering their life event, they are attempting to explain their events and personal reactions. This was termed “personal ordering” (Parker), which serves to aid an individual’s feelings of personal stability and connections, similar to that
of life review. Continuity theory posits that this ordering maintains one’s personal identity. It makes sense for individuals to order their life narratives in a progression from unpleasant experiences to happy endings. In fact, Wildschut et al. (2006) reported that redemption sequences were significantly more popular in young adult’s nostalgic writings than memory sequences ending on a negative note.

In Study 3 of Wildschut et al.’s (2006) series, undergraduate students read a story portraying either a negative, neutral, or positive event; this served as the mood manipulation. Participants recorded their affective reaction to their particular story in three to five keywords and then filled out measures of positive and negative affect, and of nostalgia. Results showed that, among these young adults, negative affect was the most common trigger of nostalgia, followed by sensory input (e.g., smells and music) and social interaction (e.g., sharing stories). In response to negative affect, participants referred to either a general negative mood (e.g., sad, depressed) or a specific negative emotional state (e.g., lonely, scared). Young adults experiencing any sort of negative affect tended to report that they missed certain components of their past lives more so than those experiencing a neutral or positive affective state. This finding led researchers to suggest that nostalgia surrounding one’s social past was directly increased by negative affect. Accordingly, negative affect was thought to be counteracted by nostalgic thinking in young adults.

To distinguish the functions of reminiscence in young adults, Wildschut et al. (2006) asked participants to identify perceived functions of nostalgia and rank each as to its desirability in Study 2. Overall, results showed young adults value nostalgia and perceive it to bring about positive affect, strengthen social bonds, and enhance self-regard. The follow-up Study 3 confirmed that reminiscence of young adults truly serves the three aforementioned categorical
functions the most. Specifically, the number of desirable features of nostalgia recorded by participants in Study 2 outweighed those of undesirable features. Researchers also noted the young adults viewed desirable features as holding more effect, or importance, that the undesirable ones. Because the number of listed desirable and undesirable features of nostalgia was positively correlated, the researches concluded that these young adults fully understand that reminiscence is not a solely hedonic act.

**Happiness**

A sort of revolution has taken hold in the past few decades in the scientific study of happiness (Biswas-Diener, Diener, & Tamir, 2004). What has traditionally been the realm of philosophers and theologians is now under the direct measurement and analysis of today’s researchers. Current studies have uncovered social and biological factors that add to an individual’s happiness. Furthermore, specialized scales have been created to measure perceived happiness, not just one’s overall well-being.

Through this new investigation and radical thinking, researchers have been able to validate theories of happiness and demystify previous assumptions (Biswas-Diener et al., 2004). For example, it was found that elderly persons are not any less happy than their younger counterparts. In fact, recent studies suggest that older persons are happier and experience higher life satisfaction and lower negative affect than do younger people (Charles, Reynolds, & Gatz, 2001; Roberts & Chapman, 2000; Sheldon & Kasser, 2001). These findings are in line with the socioemotional selectivity theory proposed by Carstensen (1995). This theory suggests the reason why older individuals tend to be happier is because they have mastered the art of structuring their lives and forming more enjoyable goals that effectively bring about positive affect. Another assumption was clarified by Myers and Diener (1995) who showed similar
ratings of happiness among people of various races and between the sexes. These authors also pointed out four traits that happy people seem to share: self-esteem (Diener & Diener, 1995), a sense of personal control (Larson, 1989), optimism (Dember & Brooks, 1989), and extraversion (Diener, Sandvik, Pavot, & Fujita, 1992).

Contemporary researchers have been able to uncover evidence that shows the majority of people in Western nations rate themselves as being happy, not just merely content (Biswas-Diener et al., 2004; Diener & Diener, 1996). Moreover, the old notion that money buys happiness has been somewhat revised. Although populations in high income nations do rate themselves as happier than do those in low income nations, research has shown that observed increases in happiness are minimal once a person's basic needs have been met.

As far as the effects of life events on happiness, researchers set out to examine the relevance of past events on an individual's present feelings of well-being in a two-year longitudinal study (Suh, Diener, & Fujita, 1996). Specifically, the role of time was studied to consider if past events lose their influential power as their memory becomes older. Data for Time 1 was collected from 222 collegiate upperclassman enrolled in a subjective well-being course. The follow-up data was collected during Time 2, two years later, and 155 participants were located to complete the measures. During each time interval, participants completed the NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI) (Costa & McCrae, 1992) and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). Participants also completed a life events checklist of 88 items during Time 1 on which they marked which life events had taken place during the past 4 years. At Time 2, this checklist was increased to 100 items and participants indicated how long ago the event happened during the previous 4 years.
Suh et al. (1996) found that life events within the past three to four months correlated significantly stronger with feelings of well-being than did events up to four years ago. In other words, the impact of events appears to last for only up to four months. After this relatively short time period, the authors proposed an individual adapts to his external life events, allowing his well-being to return to its baseline level. Furthermore, upon examining the results from the NEO-PI during Time 1 and 2, the authors concluded that participants’ personalities were rather stable over the 2 year time period. Thus, Suh et al. suggested that external life events predict subjective well-being much more accurately than one’s personality.

The overriding theory in happiness research is that of the hedonic treadmill model proposed by Brickman and Campbell in 1971 (Diener, Lucas, & Scollon, 2006). This model claims no person can maintain a relatively high level of happiness for an extended period of time. That is, after an emotionally significant event takes place, whether negative or positive, individuals eventually return to their neutral set points.

More recent research attempts to improve such theories of adaptive well-being. Diener and Diener (1996) were able to show that individual set points are not set at neutral, but rather, most people are set at positive points. This finding is consistent with self-reports (Biswas-Diener et al., 2004; Diener & Diener, 1996) and seems to be true in even such diverse cultures as the Amish, African Maasai, and Greenlandic Inughuit. A study using the World Values Survey with these cultures found that 80% of the respondents reported feeling quite happy most of the time (Biswas-Diener, Vitterso, & Diener, 2005). The authors pointed out that frequent feelings of happiness did not mean the informants experienced ecstatic happiness all the time, but that it further supports the thought of hedonic baselines being set on the positive side.
Although researchers to this day still suggest that happiness levels, or genetically set points of well-being, are stable over one’s lifetime (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996; Tellegen et al., 1988; Headey & Wearing, 1989), excitement is developing around ways to increase one’s happiness. In line with techniques employed by therapists to diminish misery, Seligman (2004) pointed out the presence of empirically supported practices that improve positive emotions. Noting the observation that life circumstances do play a role in an individual’s happiness, albeit small (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999), some researchers are suggesting that changing one’s activities offers benefits greater than those brought on by altering one’s life circumstances (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). For example, a behavioral change that stands to boost one’s well-being is exercising routinely (Ransford & Palisi, 1996). Committing oneself to adopting positive psychological “virtues” such as gratitude, hope, or forgiveness appears to be a cognitive change that increases well-being (Fordyce, 1983). Finally, a volitional change may be practicing goal setting with goals that are self-concordant and following through to their attainment (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999; Sheldon & Kasser, 1998). On the other hand, circumstantial changes seem to be more susceptible to hedonic adaptation due to their constant nature (Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, & Diener, 2003). Because we often cannot change such circumstantial factors as age, gender, and ethnicity, the research surrounding changing one’s life activities is promising.

In a synthesis of the well-being literature, Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) proposed that one’s daily activities account for up to 40% of our happiness levels. Proposed intentional activities include those that are behavioral, such as acting kind towards others, cognitive, such as finding the positive in an event, and volitional, such as striving for important personal goals. The authors emphasize that the episodic nature of intentional activities is the key to their enduring effects on happiness. An activity does not happen all day long, every day, as do circumstances.
Instead, a person spends a limited amount of time engaging in a particular activity only to stop and begin another. Thus, transient activities are able to maintain a novel quality that should help to protect against hedonic adaptation.

It is important to note, however, that happiness researchers are not proposing that one should actively pursue constant feelings of happiness or well-being (Biswas-Diener et al., 2004; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Rather, researchers are suggesting that an individual must find the most favorable time to actively pursue subjective well-being. One has to be cognizant of the refractory period between a happiness-boosting activity, that is, the amount of time that needs to elapse before one can enjoy the full happiness potential of that activity again. Thus, theorists conclude with the idea that happiness is not the destination; it is more of a process in which one moves through in life (Biswas-Diener et al.).

Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) further suggest that the cognitive practice of savoring can directly prevent adaptation. Savoring the moment represents a bottom-up influence on well-being, where happiness is the sum of reliving multiple positive events (Diener, 1984). Savoring is the process of finding joy in an event and generating that joy after the event has passed (Bryant, 2003). Merely experiencing positive affect during the event does not constitute an individual’s savoring capacity. One must figure out how to manipulate and intensify the resultant positive emotions after the fact with the hopes of prolonging the enjoyment in the present. Meditating on an event brings back to life the original elements that created the happiness boost and allows an individual to relive the event. Thus, savoring helps to keep an individual from taking an event’s features for granted, preventing hedonic adaptation (Lyubomirsky et al.).
Meehan et al. (1993) set out to see if this relationship between savoring and happiness is present in adolescents. The authors surveyed 82 high school students in 4 different psychology courses at a Midwest suburban high school. Students completed abbreviated measures of the Social Support Questionnaire (Sarason, Levine, Basham, & Sarason, 1983) and a subjective mental health scale by Bryant and Veroff (1984) each within one class period. Results showed that students’ perceived savoring abilities were significantly and positively correlated with their well-being (Meehan et al.), a finding that is consistent with the literature on adults (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005).

*Journaling*

Jungian psychologists hold that people possess sources of wisdom within themselves (Gerler et al., 1990, p. 7). These ways of "knowing" are predominantly accessible through means of unconscious processes. Many researchers argue that journal writing is a way of accessing one’s inner wisdom. Accordingly, recording one’s thoughts on paper provides an invaluable medium for personal growth. “The journal becomes an arena – a crucible – wherein new learning encounters sources of meaning deep within each individual, and new life meaning is created” (p. 7).

Unruh (1989) acknowledged the utility of personal diaries in reminiscence research and their flexibility in studies of this field. Importantly, Unruh pointed out the difference between the strictly personal “intimate journals” one may keep and the diaries used in reminiscence studies. The diaries used in reminiscence research are different in that they stand to inform researchers and serve as observational tools of an individual’s thinking.

Recording one’s thoughts and feelings in a journal has no boundaries or rules to abide by (Kelly & Mosher-Ashley, 2002). The activity has a wealth of powerful and promising benefits
representing very little risk, making journal writing a wonderful investment at any age. Journal writing has also been linked to greater feelings of well-being and life satisfaction in older adults (Everard, 1999). Some researchers go as far as to point out that remaining active is not the key element to well-being among the elderly (Hughes, Kooy, & Kanevsky, 1997). These theorists elaborate upon the enjoyment found in an activity, that is, the desirability, satisfaction, and sense of belonging fostered by remaining active. This research directly relates to studies that have identified beneficial consequences of savoring (e.g., Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Diener, 1984; Bryant, 2003; Meehan et al., 1993).

Pennebaker (1997) has identified a range of benefits brought on by journaling for 20 minutes, three to five times a week. Specifically, he noted that those who wrote in journals had significantly less doctor visits due to more effective immune systems. Moreover, journaling has been found to aid in stress reduction. Recording one’s fears and anxieties may serve to ameliorate perceived problems, allowing the writer to feel less daunted by past or present circumstances. The writing process helps to prevent the overproduction of cortisol, a known stress hormone, by boosting adrenal gland functioning (Smyth et al., 1999).

Much research has documented the positive effects brought on by writing about traumatic events (e.g., Classen, Koopman, & Spiegel, 1993; Pennebaker, 1993; Pennebaker & Sussman, 1988). To further pursue this research, Marlo and Wagner (1999) sought to investigate the effects of writing about a difference valence, that of positive events. This study was conducted using 156 undergraduate students between the ages of 19-21 who were randomly assigned to one of three experimental groups: Positive Feelings, Negative Feelings, and Control. Experimental sessions were held two times a week, for two consecutive weeks. All participants attended the same four sessions that lasted for 30-60 minutes; they received packets with directions specific to
which group they were assigned and the same standardized self-reporting measures of physical and psychological health, psychological symptoms, and anxiety. Each group was provided a topic to write about for each session and participants were to write for 20 minutes without concerns of grammar, composition, or spelling. The topics, however, differed across groups. The Positive Feelings Group wrote about times or events in their lives that were happy, positive, beautiful, etc. Those in the Negative Feelings Group wrote about past times or events that were negative, traumatic, stressful, etc. Finally, the Control Group was provided with neutral topics of which they were to relay only factual information and avoid any opinions or feelings.

Results from Marlo and Wagner’s (1999) study showed that writing about any topic (i.e., positive, negative, neutral) significantly and positively affected participants’ psychological health. Moreover, those in the Positive Feelings Group experienced the biggest changes in psychological health, an increase that was significantly greater than that of the Negative Feelings Group. Participants who wrote of positive times or events also experienced significantly improved moods by the final writing session. This study showed that, contrary to the authors’ expectations, participants who experienced the greatest boosts in psychological health were those who had lower levels of distress on pretest measures. Previous research has shown that meaningful changes in psychological health are brought about through disclosing traumatic events, not positive ones. In terms of physical sensations experienced after writing, results revealed that writing about emotionally charged events, whether positive or negative, brought forth significant physiological arousal as compared to the Control Group. The authors suggest the physiologically arousing effect of writing about positive events may be able to enhance one’s health, but state that further research is needed in this area.
Study Rationale

This study was designed to combine the findings of the reminiscence, happiness, and journaling literatures within the less studied context of adolescence. The purpose of the present study was to examine the effects of journal writing on happiness, life satisfaction, and affect as a valuable and cost-efficient intervention for psychologists and counselors working with adolescents. The first hypothesis of this study is that writing one’s thoughts in a personal journal will increase psychological functioning, as measured by reports of happiness, life satisfaction, and affect.

Positive reminiscence may be a possible strategy for further increasing youth happiness. Journaling about positive memories for adults is a volitional activity that can lead to increased feelings of well-being by possibly raising their well-being set point, or baseline. Furthermore, thinking about and writing down one’s thoughts about positive events may aid youth in better developing their self-concepts and organizing their life stories. The second hypothesis of this study is that journaling about positive, personal memories (using reminiscence) will increase adolescents’ frequencies of reported happiness, overall life satisfaction, and affect.

The Current Research

The current research examines the effects of writing about positive memories with adolescents. Nineteen adolescents will be randomly assigned to one of two experimental groups. The first group will be asked to write about positive memories they have, and the second group will be asked to write about daily hassles in their life. The journal intervention will take place over eight sessions with each lasting 10 to 15 minutes. It is predicted that journal writing, regardless of the topic, will enhance psychological functioning. Moreover, it is hypothesized
that participants who write about positive memories will increase their frequencies of reported happiness more so than those who write about daily hassles.
CHAPTER THREE

Method

Participants

The participants consisted of 19 (10 female, 9 male) students who attended a ninth grade suburban high school in Western New York. The school enrolls approximately 600 students. Forty-seven percent (47%) of the participants were fourteen years old and fifty-three percent (53%) were fifteen years old. The students were primarily Caucasian and came from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

Instruments

Multidimensional Students’ Life Satisfaction Scale

To obtain students’ opinions of their perceived life satisfaction the Multidimensional Students’ Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS; Huebner, 1994) was used (See Appendix A). The 40-item MSLSS was created to tap into student’s lives in the areas of Family, Friends, School, Self, and Living Environment. These five domains are measured on a six point Likert Scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 6 = Strongly Agree). Gilman, Huebner, and Laughlin (2000) support the use of the MSLSS with high school students. The hierarchical characteristic of this multidimensional scale was authenticated through the researchers’ confirmatory factor analysis.

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule

The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) was used to obtain the participants’ perceptions of their mood (See Appendix B). The two dimensions of Positive (PA) and Negative Affect (NA) are measured by 10 items each in which participants respond using a five point Likert Scale (1 = Very Slightly or Not at All, 5 =
Extremely. Crawford and Henry (2004) found the PANAS to possess high reliability for both PA and NA and adequate construct validity in a large adult sample.

Subjective Happiness Scale

The Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS; Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999) is a measure used to assess participants’ global happiness in a subjective fashion separate from one’s satisfaction with his or her life (See Appendix C). The four items of this scale are rated on a seven point Likert Scale (1 = Not a Very Happy Person; Less Happy; Not at All, 7 = A Very Happy Person; More Happy; A Great Deal). Lyubomirsky and Lepper found the items of the Subjective Happiness Scale to have good to excellent internal consistency. The scale was also found to have stability over time and was significantly correlated with other happiness and well-being measures that have been published.

Procedures

Participation was opened to all students in the school who had a study hall on Fridays. Participants were recruited through an announcement included in a school publication/email sent home to parents. The primary investigator also announced the study in all study halls occurring on Fridays and read the following passage:

“Hi, my name is Ali Senter and I am a graduate student at RIT. I will be conducting research here at school about journal writing and I need participants to help me. If you want to participate, I will need you to meet with me for eight sessions over the next two months, approximately fifteen to thirty minutes each time during your study hall. I will also need you to fill out short questionnaires throughout the study. There will be a party when we are done. All of you who are interested may come up here and receive your permission slips. Does anyone have any questions?”

Students who were interested in participating were then asked to sign assent forms and to bring a consent form home for their guardian to sign (See Appendices D, E, and F). Students were informed that they would not be able to participate until their consent form had been
returned to the primary investigator or school psychologist. A deadline of two weeks was set to promote quick returns. Of the 45 students who heard the message in study hall, 39 (86%) took the forms and 19 (48%) of them were returned. Participants were assigned to the experimental groups according to which study hall they attended so that all students in a participating study hall would be in the same group. This was done to reduce any confusion over the journal writing topic by only reading the happiness directions or the hassles directions. Due to the size differences between the study halls, the happiness group (n = 13) ended up with more participants than the hassles group (n = 6). To help ensure confidentiality, each participant was assigned an identification number. Participants recorded their respective identification number at the top of each completed questionnaire. At each of the groups’ first meeting, students completed the pre-test measures, the demographics and personality questionnaire, MSLSS, PANAS, and SHS, and began their journal entries. Participants met with their respective group for eight consecutive Fridays (that school was in session) to write in their journals for ten to fifteen minutes. At the third, fifth, and seventh sessions participants completed the SHS after writing in their journals. At the final session participants completed the post-test measures, the MSLSS, PANAS, and SHS. This final session was a brunch party.

The following instructions were read to the happiness group at the first session:

"There are many events or experiences in our pasts that make us feel happy when we remember them now. Something that makes you happy is something that brings you pleasure or joy. Think back in time about an event that makes you feel happy and write about the memory for at least ten minutes. The memory must be from when you were in seventh grade or earlier. Describe the memory as you are remembering it and include as many details as you can think of. Be as vivid as you can about the memory in your journal entry. Do not worry about grammar or spelling, no one will be reading your journals, they are only yours. 'Any questions? You may begin."
The following instructions were read to the happiness group at each subsequent session:

"Write about a memory that makes you feel happy. It should bring you pleasure or joy. The memory should be from seventh grade or earlier, and it may be one that you have already written about. Describe the memory as you are remembering it and include as many details as you can think of. Be as vivid as you can about the memory in your journal entry. Write about the memory for at least ten minutes. Do not worry about grammar or spelling, no one will be reading your journals, they are only yours. Any questions? You may begin."

The following instructions were read to the hassles group at the first session:

"There are many things, people, or experiences in our lives that might irritate or bother us. Think back in time about something that has bothered you recently in your life and write about it for at least ten minutes. Do not worry about grammar or spelling, no one will be reading your journals, they are only yours. Any questions? You may begin."
CHAPTER FOUR

Results

To answer the first research question, Does journal writing have an effect on adolescents’ frequencies of reported happiness, overall life satisfaction, and affect, a series of dependent t-tests was conducted using journal writing in general as the independent variable. The first test used happiness as the dependent variable. Results revealed that journaling did not have a significant effect on participants’ reported frequencies of happiness \( t(1,19) = -0.29, p = 0.78 \) when pre and post test scores of happiness were compared. The dependent t-test was conducted again, this time using life satisfaction as the dependent variable. This test showed that journaling did not have a significant effect on participants’ perceived levels of life satisfaction \( t(1,19) = 1.80, p = 0.09 \) when pre and post test scores of life satisfaction were compared. The third dependent t-test was run with positive affect as the dependent variable. Results revealed significant findings; journal writing in general significantly increased participants’ ratings of positive affect \( t(1,18) = -1.8, p = 0.04 \) when pre and post measures of positive affect were compared. Finally, a dependent t-test was conducted using negative affect as the dependent variable. This test showed that journaling did not have a significant effect on participants’ ratings of negative affect \( t(1, 19) = 0.18, p = 0.86 \) when pre and post test scores of negative affect were compared.

The second research question concerned the differences between writing about positive memories versus writing about daily hassles on happiness, life satisfaction, and affect. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was run for each domain to compare the effects of writing about positive memories and daily hassles. No significant differences were found on happiness, life satisfaction, or affect between participants who wrote about positive memories and those who wrote about daily hassles. Next, only those participants of the positive memories group were
analyzed. Again, a series of dependent t-tests were conducted, this time with journaling specifically about positive memories used as the independent variable. The first test used happiness as the dependent variable. Results showed that writing about positive memories did not have a significant effect on participants’ reported frequencies of happiness \( t(1,13) = 1.12, p = .30 \) when comparing pre and post measures of happiness. A second test was run using life satisfaction as the dependent variable. This test revealed that writing about positive memories did not have a significant effect on participants’ perceived life satisfaction \( t(1,13) = .103, p = .34 \) when comparing pre and post test scores of life satisfaction. The dependent t-test was run again, this time using positive affect as the dependent variable. Results here revealed significant effects; writing about positive memories significantly increased participants’ reports of positive affect \( t(1,12) = -1.98, p = .04 \) when pre and post test scores of positive affect. Finally, a dependent t-test was conducting using negative affect as the dependent variable. This test showed that writing about positive memories did not have an effect on participants’ reports of negative affect \( t(1,13) = -.30, p = .78 \) when comparing pre and post test scores of negative affect.

The Multidimensional Students’ Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS) (Huebner, 1994) consists of five domains. Each was examined separately to see if journal writing in general or only writing about positive memories had an effect on any one domain of life satisfaction. Journal writing in general did not have a significant effect on the pre and post Family domain \( t(1,19) = .31, p = .76 \), nor did writing about positive memories \( t(1,19) = -.25, p = .81 \). The second domain was Friends and no significant effect was found for either journal writing in general \( t(1,19) = 1.4, p = .18 \) or writing about positive memories \( t(1,13) = 1.12, p = .29 \) when pre and post scores were compared. Environment was the third domain analyzed. Journal writing in general had a significant but negative effect on pre and post scores of the Environment domain.
\( t(1, 19) = 2.18, p = .04 \), whereas no significant effect was found for writing about positive memories \( t(1, 13) = 1.63, p = .13 \). The fourth domain examined was Self. No significant effect was found for the pre and post scores of either journal writing \( t(1, 19) = 1.76, p = .20 \) or writing about positive memories \( t(1, 13) = 1.70, p = .12 \). The final domain was that of School. Again, no significant effect was found for the pre and post scores of either journal writing \( t(1, 19) = .64, p = .53 \) or writing about positive memories \( t(1, 13) = -.73, p = .48 \).

A series of analysis of variances (ANOVA) were conducted to examine any differences between the two genders. No significant differences were found in students’ pre and post reports of perceived happiness \( f(1, 19) = .00, p = .20 \), life satisfaction \( f(1, 19) = .13, p = .72 \), positive affect \( f(1, 19) = .08, p = .78 \), or negative affect \( t(1, 19) = .03, p = .86 \) across gender.
CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

This study set out to examine the possible effects of journal writing, and more specifically, writing about positive memories, on happiness within the realm of adolescence. This study extends the current, limited knowledge about the influence of reminiscence among adolescents. Results from this study revealed that journal writing significantly increased adolescents' ratings of positive affect. Significant increases in positive affect were also demonstrated by those students who only wrote about positive memories. The adolescent participants reported experiencing substantially higher rates of positive emotions after the journal writing intervention of this study than they perceived prior to the intervention.

These results are consistent with reminiscence research done with older populations. Reminiscence has been linked with increases in positive affect across multiple studies (e.g., Bryant, Morgan, & Perloff, 1986; Bryant et al., 2005). Such research has unveiled a hierarchy of reminiscence strategies where cognitive imagery creates the greatest increases in positive affect, over behavioral re-enactment and memorabilia. The current study revealed that recording one’s memories on paper is a successful strategy for youths to intensify their cognitive imagery and thus, increase their positive affect.

On the other hand, and contrary to other research conducted with adults, results from the current study revealed that journal writing in general did not have any significant effects on happiness or overall life satisfaction in the youths studied. Furthermore, those participants who wrote specifically about positive memories did not experience any significant effects in happiness or life satisfaction. A simple explanation of why the journal writing only had an effect on positive affect and not happiness or life satisfaction refers to the measures used. It is possible
that the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS), Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS), and Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS) do not correlate with each other for this young age group. Finally, gender did not present any significant differences in regards to happiness, life satisfaction, or affect.

Initial results from this study, those referring to the effects of journal writing in general on happiness and life satisfaction are not consistent with the research done with adults. Journal writing is believed to a free and unbound realm that opens the door to accessing one's personal wisdom with very little associated risk (Kelly & Mosher-Ashley, 2002). Everard (1999) showed that older adults' feelings of greater well-being and life satisfaction are linked with journaling. Moreover, Pennebaker (1997) found that frequent journal writing is tied to improved physical health and reduced stress.

The current study sought to capitalize upon the extensive research revolving around adults' autobiographical reasoning and life stories. It also attempted to encourage the adolescent's new-found motivation to begin constructing his life narrative (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). Habermas and Bluck contend that adolescence is the exact time period where the psychosocial demands of life are brought to the forefront and are combated by the search for an identity.

The adolescents in the current study were given the opportunity to document parts of their lives inside a journal. One drawback, however, was that journal sessions were only held once a week. Previous studies that have produced significant results in more areas than just positive affect required participants to journal (Pennebaker, 1997) or reminisce (Bryant et al., 2005) several times per week. It appears as though an intervention holding multiple sessions during a week is more effective than one where sessions are spaced out over a longer period of time, as was done in the current study.
As previously discussed, participants assigned to the positive reminiscence group demonstrated significant increases in their ratings of positive affect after the journal intervention. However, students in this group did not show meaningful increases in their happiness or life satisfaction; a finding that is inconsistent with adult research. Bryant et al.’s (2005) two part study using college students revealed that employing a strategy to aid in reminiscence raised participants’ reported feelings of happiness on the SHS. The reminiscence strategy used in the current study by adolescents was journaling, but results from the SHS revealed no significant effect on happiness.

Adolescents in the present study completed the SHS periodically throughout the study’s duration. They were asked to rate their happiness levels and compare it to the levels of happiness they perceived their peers to be at. Although the authors of the SHS were able demonstrate excellent psychometric properties in a range of different ages including high school students, they did suggest that the SHS is not equivalent to other happiness measures (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). Perhaps a different happiness measure with more items would have been more effective with such a young sample.

O’Leary and Nieuwstraten (2001) were able to show that reminiscing about past achievements, which are inherently positive memories, enhanced participants’ levels of self-esteem. This follows along with the various functions of reminiscence, those of creating purposiveness, value and justification, efficacy, and self-worth (Baumeister & Newman, 1994). Individuals reminisce about past events not just to relive the associated feelings, but also to reorganize their life stories to better fit their present identities. The current study played off these reminiscence functions by asking adolescents to write about positive, personal memories.
In other words, the youth would be invoking memories where they possibly felt happy, confident, or successful, among any other positive feelings.

A possible explanation for this lack of significant findings on happiness and life satisfaction may be provided by research done by Strack, Schwarz, and Gschneidinger (1985). These authors suggest that if a recalled memory does not invoke any affect in the present time, an individual is likely to use that event as more of a comparison for the present, instead of as a means to elicit any associated positive feelings. Thus, an individual may utilize a positive memory to evaluate one’s level of happiness in the present and actually experience negative emotions if their present satisfaction is not up to par with that of the memory. It is possible the adolescents in the current study did not reminisce about past events that were emotionally charged and thus, were not able to re-experience those emotions.

The current study also taps into the reminiscence research revolving around savoring. While writing in their journals about positive memories, the adolescents were inherently manipulating the associated feelings of the given event (Bryant, 2003). The directives stressed the importance of recalling an event that brought the individual joy, in hopes that the adolescent would be able to regenerate that feeling in the present time. Lyubomirsky (2005) holds that savoring an event and its associated feelings prevents an individual from taking that experience for granted; thus, hedonic adaptation is thwarted.

The current study sought to tap into adolescents’ abilities to savor their memories and recreate the associated feelings. Lyubomirsky (2005) holds that savoring helps one from taking past experiences for granted and thus, prevents hedonic adaptation. However, some researchers were able to show that an individual’s feelings of well-being were more drastically impacted by events that took place no more than four months ago (Suh et al., 1996). Adolescents in the
current study who wrote about positive memories were instructed to recall events from seventh grade or earlier. Thus, their memories were from a time period far more than four months in the past. Maybe instructing the adolescents to write about recent memories from the current school year would have resulted more significant findings regarding happiness and life satisfaction.

Limitations and Future Directions

The present study has several important limitations that must be discussed in order to aid in future reminiscence research done with adolescents. First and foremost is the time interval of this intervention. Although a total of seven sessions were held, not all participants were present at every meeting. Some adolescents were only able to make three entries in their journals due to scheduling conflicts. Perhaps these participants did not experience enough periods of reminiscence and journal writing to impact their reported feelings of happiness.

Another drawback of this study is that journal sessions were only held once a week. The majority of studies reviewed (e.g., Bryant, et al., 2005; Marlo & Wagner, 1999; Pennebaker, 1997) had participants write two to fives times in a week. Adolescents lead very busy lives in and out of school. Many conversations of class assignments and extracurricular activities were observed by the participants in the present study. Perhaps multiple journal sessions per week are needed for this age period, since adolescents seem to have so much on their minds. Writing more frequently of positive memories may help keep the associated feelings salient in the day to day live of adolescents between journal sessions.

Finally, adolescents are in the process of developing the cognitive tools needed to reminisce for purposes of creating life stories and enhancing well-being and self-continuity. One must be aware that adolescents are merely practicing how to use their memories to help them explore their personalities and identities, and that this strategy may not yet be effective.
Although research with college-aged students and adults show significant health effects from journaling, the adolescents of the current study may not yet be used to such complex thinking needed to produce similar effects. It would be informative for future research to look into the proficiency levels of the required cognitive tools in adolescents.
References


Appendix A

Please indicate what thoughts you have had about your life in the past several weeks. Think about how you spend each day and night and then think about how your life has been during most of this time. Circle the number (from 1 to 6) next to each statement that indicates the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.

Circle 1 if you STONGLY DISAGREE with the sentence
Circle 2 if you MODERATELY DISAGREE with the sentence
Circle 3 if you MILDLY DISAGREE with the sentence
Circle 4 if you MILDLY AGREE with the sentence
Circle 5 if you MODERATELY AGREE with the sentence
Circle 6 if you STRONGLY AGREE with the sentence

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<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. My friends are nice to me</td>
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<td>2. I am fun to be around</td>
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<td>3. I feel bad at school</td>
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<td>4. I have a bad time with my friends</td>
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<td>5. There are lots of things I can do well</td>
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<td>6. I learn a lot at school</td>
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<td>7. I like spending time with my parents</td>
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<td>8. My family is better than most</td>
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<td>9. There are many things about school I don't like</td>
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<td>10. I think I am good looking</td>
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<td>11. My friends are great</td>
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<td>12. My friends will help me if I need it</td>
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<td>13. I wish I didn't have to go to school</td>
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<td>14. I like myself</td>
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<td>15. There are lots of fun things to do where I live</td>
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<td>16. My friends treat me well</td>
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<td>17. Most people like me</td>
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<td>18. I enjoy being at home with my family</td>
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<td>19. My family gets along well together</td>
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<td>20. I look forward to going to school</td>
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<td>21. My parents treat me fairly</td>
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<td>22. I like being in school</td>
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<td>23. My friends are mean to me</td>
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<td>24. I wish I had different friends</td>
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<td>25. School is interesting</td>
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<td>26. I enjoy school activities</td>
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<td>27. I wish I lived in a different house</td>
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<td>28. Members of my family talk nicely to one another</td>
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<td>29. I have a lot of fun with my friends</td>
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<td>30. My parents and I do fun things together</td>
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<td>31. I like my neighborhood</td>
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<td>32. I wish I lived somewhere else</td>
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<td>33. I am a nice person</td>
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<td>34. This town is filled with mean people</td>
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<td>35. I like to try new things</td>
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<td>36. My family's house is nice</td>
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<td>37. I like my neighbors</td>
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<td>38. I have enough friends</td>
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<td>39. I wish there were different people in my neighborhood</td>
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<td>40. I like where I live</td>
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Below are a number of words that describe different feelings and emotions. Read each item and then mark the appropriate response in the space next to that word. Indicate to what extent you have felt this way during the past several weeks. Write the appropriate number on the line next to the word.

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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>very slightly</td>
<td>a little</td>
<td>Moderately</td>
<td>quite a bit</td>
<td>extremely</td>
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<td></td>
<td>or not at all</td>
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_____ interested  
_____ distressed  
_____ excited  
_____ upset  
_____ strong  
_____ guilty  
_____ scared  
_____ hostile  
_____ enthusiastic  
_____ proud  

_____ irritable  
_____ alert  
_____ ashamed  
_____ inspired  
_____ nervous  
_____ determined  
_____ attentive  
_____ jittery  
_____ active  
_____ afraid  

ID #: ____________
Appendix C

ID #: __________________

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 at this present moment.

1. In general, I consider myself:

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7
   not a very happy person

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

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7
   less happy more happy

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?

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7
   not at all a great deal

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?

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7
   not at all a great deal
Appendix D

Dear Student,

I am doing a research study about journal writing with adolescents. A research study is a way to learn more about people. If you decide that you want to be part of this study, you will be asked to meet with me eight times, for approximately 15 to 30 minutes. During the sessions you will be writing in journals about various topics. You will be also asked to fill out a few short forms about feelings. You will not be missing any school for this study as it will be conducted during your study hall. Nobody will read your journals, and they will be kept in a locked cabinet to ensure confidentiality. At the end of the sessions, if you would like, you can take your journals.

There are very few risks associated with this study. Some people may feel irritable or find it stressful to write about life events, if you do, you can either contact myself or the school psychologist.

Not everyone who takes part in this study will benefit. A benefit means that something good happens to you. I think that some of you will benefit from writing in your journals about events or people in your lives.

When I am finished with this study I will write a report about what was learned. This report will not include your name or that you were in the study.

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to be. If you decide to stop after the study begins that’s okay too. There is no penalty for stopping. Your parent knows about this study also.

Thank you for your participation,

Alison M. Senter

If you decide you want to be in this study, please sign your name.

I, ______________________________________, want to be in this research study.

(Print your name here)

(Sign your name here) (Date)
INFORMED PARENTAL CONSENT FORM INFORMATION

Your son/daughter is interested in participating in a writing intervention study. He/she will be filling out two short forms, at the beginning and end. One measures life satisfaction and the other measures present mood. At every other session your child will complete a quick form that measures happiness. Your child will be asked to meet with the researcher for eight sessions, for approximately 15 to 30 minutes per session.

RISKS
There are very few risks associated with this study. Potential psychological risks are minimal. Participants who are asked to write about daily hassles may show irritable moods and have short term stress immediately following the session. However, research has shown that writing about any type of event could lead to improved psychological health.

INCENTIVE
A brunch party will be given at the end of session 8.

BENEFITS
The results of this study will help the experimenter gain experience and knowledge of a new type of inexpensive, easy counseling intervention to use with adolescents. Also, for the participants, writing about positive events can lead to improved psychological health and a focus on one's strengths. In addition, writing about any type of event (positive or negative) can have a positive impact on psychological health.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Your son/daughter’s name will not be associated with his/her data. The only form that will have your child’s name on it will be the assent form which the researcher will hold on to. Only group differences will be looked at, not individual responses.

CONTACT
If you have any questions, you can contact Alison Senter or through the school psychologist, Dave Thomas

PARTICIPATION
Your child’s participation in this study is strictly voluntary. He/she may withdraw from this study anytime without penalty and without loss of benefits for which he/she is entitled. If your child does withdraw from this study before the all the data is collected his/her data will be destroyed. It will not be included in the results.

CONSENT
I have read and understand this information stated above. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to allow my son/daughter to participate in this study.

Child’s Name: ____________________________

Parent/Guardian’s signature: ____________________________ Date ________________

Investigator’s signature: ____________________________ Date ________________
Appendix F

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Alison Senter and I am a graduate student at Rochester Institute of Technology. I am studying school psychology and conducting a graduate thesis as part of my Master’s Degree. My research is being conducted under the guidance of a professor at RIT, Jennifer Lukomski, Ph.D. The purpose of my thesis is to assess the impact of journal writing about positive events on adolescents.

Research, in an abundant number of studies, has shown that writing about positive memories can have a positive effect on growth. Much of the research has been done on traumatic experiences and with young adults. It is my intention to see if the same positive effects can be done with adolescents writing about positive memories in their lives. A positive mood is one of many strengths that can lead to a more satisfied life.

Your child has expressed interest in participating in this study. It requires them to meet with me for eight sessions, approximately 15 to 30 minutes each session. Two groups of participants will be writing about different topics; one group will be writing about events or people in their lives that make them happy, and the other group will be writing about daily hassles. Research has shown that writing about any topic (positive or negative) can have a positive impact on psychological health.

The study will occur during their study hall, so they will not be missing any instructional class time. Procedures have been put in place so that if the student is feeling at all uncomfortable with the writing tasks, they will be referred to the school psychologist, teacher, counselor or principal if they desire. A student simply has to tell their teacher, myself, or the school psychologist about their discomfort and appropriate procedures to relieve his/her discomfort will be put into place.

Attached is an informed consent form for you to sign that shows that you agree to allow your child to participate in this study.

Please feel free to contact me via email if you have any questions about this study. You may also contact me through the school psychologist, Dave Thomas

Thank you,

Alison M. Senter

______________________________
Child’s Name

______________________________
Your Signature