Evaluation of the psychological outcomes of a residential youth leadership program

Tim Edwards-Hart

(Doctor of Psychology)

2012

RMIT University
Evaluation of the psychological outcomes of a residential youth leadership program

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Psychology

Tim Edwards-Hart

BAppSci(Psych)(Hons)
GradDipBehavSc
GDipAdolHlthWelf

School of Health Sciences
College of Science, Engineering and Health
RMIT University
January 2012
Declaration of Authorship

I certify that, except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Tim Edwards-Hart

24 January, 2012
Acknowledgements

Like most people working on a project for an extended period, I have been helped by many people; too many to name here. I want to express my gratitude to all of them: my friends, family, colleagues, students, clients and teachers who have offered support in various forms during my studies. The following people have been especially important, and I want to publicly acknowledge their contributions.

I want to thank all the RYLarians and RYLA Supporters, both past and present, who contributed to the project. In addition to those actively participating in the research, countless others offered their support and best wishes, including some involved in RYLA from other districts, other nations, and other eras. I thank them all for their kindness and generosity and dedicate this thesis to them. Linda, in particular, deserves recognition for her encouragement and enthusiasm for the project: without her active support, it would not have been possible. Thanks also to my colleague Paul who, without hesitation, offered his support to the research. I am grateful to both Linda and Paul for their ongoing friendship and support.

Special thanks go to my two supervisors, Andrea and Ken. They provided support on a range of levels, especially during the difficult days of my illness. Throughout the entire process of the project, from conception to
write-up, they remained optimistic, encouraging and, best of all, demanding. Their detailed editorial feedback was invaluable in helping tighten both the prose and the arguments in the pages that follow. I will miss our regular supervision meetings and the challenge of attempting to meet their expectations.

Like most doctoral candidates I want to thank my parents. For years they have offered their love and support and have always encouraged a questioning mind. On a more pragmatic level, I acknowledge with gratitude that they both proofread this document to help correct typographical and grammatical errors; I claim full responsibility for all that remain.

Finally, and most importantly, I acknowledge and thank my wife, Abigail. Through all the challenges and difficulties of the last few years, her support for my studies was unwavering. She has enabled me to study and challenged me to think and act more broadly: this thesis is just part of the result.
# Table of Contents

Declaration of Authorship ................................................................. ii

Acknowledgements ............................................................................. iii

Table of Contents .................................................................................. v

Abstract ................................................................................................ 1

Chapter 1. A personal introduction ....................................................... 6

Chapter 2. Literature review & rationale .............................................. 11

  RYLA .................................................................................................. 11

  Youth .................................................................................................. 13

  Leadership ......................................................................................... 17

    Leadership theories ....................................................................... 18

    Leadership defined ......................................................................... 27

    Leadership development ............................................................... 29

  Youth Development ......................................................................... 31

  Research Questions .......................................................................... 33

Chapter 3. Methodology .................................................................... 34

Chapter 4. Study 1: Focus groups ....................................................... 40

  Method ............................................................................................. 41

    Participants ..................................................................................... 41

  Procedure ......................................................................................... 43

    Pilot Study ..................................................................................... 43

    Independent facilitator .................................................................. 45
Chapter 6. Study 3 - Quantitative survey ................................. 109

General Self-Efficacy ................................................................ 109
Meaning in life ........................................................................ 118
Openness to Experience ............................................................. 120
Other Variables of Interest ........................................................... 127
Method ...................................................................................... 128
Participants ............................................................................... 128
Materials ................................................................................... 129
  General self-efficacy. ................................................................. 129
  Meaning .................................................................................. 130
  Openness .............................................................................. 131
  Satisfaction with life. ............................................................... 132
Procedure ................................................................................... 133
Results ....................................................................................... 134
Discussion .................................................................................. 138

Chapter 7. Study 4: Focus group 3.............................................. 146

Method ...................................................................................... 149
Participants ............................................................................... 149
Procedure ................................................................................... 150
Results and Discussion ............................................................... 153
Before RYLA ............................................................................ 153
During RYLA ................................................................. 155
After RYLA ................................................................. 161

**Chapter 8. Integration of themes** ........................................ 176
Exploring the themes........................................................... 178
Limitations and suggestions for further research....................... 195
Conclusions ...................................................................... 199

**Glossary** ...................................................................... 201
Challenge by Choice............................................................ 201
Challenge Ropes Course....................................................... 202
Colour Group.................................................................... 202
Facilitators ....................................................................... 203
Individual Reflection Time .................................................. 203
Leadership Challenge ......................................................... 203
Leap of Faith .................................................................... 204
Rotary .............................................................................. 204
RYLA ............................................................................ 204
RYLArians ....................................................................... 204
Supporters ....................................................................... 204

**References** .................................................................... 206

**Appendices** ................................................................. 232
Appendix A: Plain Language Statement (Study 1)...................... 233
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form (Study 1)......................... 235
Appendix C: Focus group questionnaire (Study 1)..................... 236
Appendix D: Outline for Focus Groups 1 & 2 (Study 1) ....................... 237
Appendix E: Plain Language Statement (Study 3) ............................. 238
Appendix F: Summary of the Five Roles model used at RYLA ........... 240
Appendix G: Schedule for RYLA 2009 ............................................. 243
Appendix H: Plain Language Statement for Study 4 ......................... 250
Appendix I: Informed Consent Form (Study 4) ................................. 252
Appendix J: Outline for Focus Group 3 (Study 4) ............................. 253
Abstract

The Rotary Youth Leadership Award (RYLA) is a training program for young people run by Rotary worldwide. In Rotary District 9790, near Melbourne, Australia, RYLA is a 7-day conference for young adults aged 18-30. Anecdotal evidence from past participants describes it as a life-changing event. Yet, despite its 50-year history, little is known about what changes may occur, the theoretical explanations for those changes or their potential implications for leadership development and positive psychology. One key concern is whether RYLA does, in fact, develop leadership. While there are numerous leadership theories that could be considered, most can be described in terms of trait or behavioural theories. Hence, to effect leadership change, RYLA must change enduring personal characteristics (traits) or the functional behaviours used by participants. However, it is also possible that RYLA is a personal development program with no measurable effect on leadership. Since no comparable programs have been previously investigated, and RYLA is not based on an identifiable theory that can be tested, an exploratory mixed-methods research program was developed to identify the key changes for participants following RYLA. The research incorporated four studies using a fully mixed, sequential design with concurrent components.
To identify the key themes of change during RYLA, the first study invited recent RYLArions from District 9790 to participate in two focus groups. Eight participants (3 female) met to discuss their experiences before, during and after RYLA in discussions moderated by an independent facilitator. Subsequent thematic analysis of the transcripts identified the three constructs most likely to change as confidence (interpreted as General Self-Efficacy [GSE]), sense of meaning in life, and the personality factor of Openness to Experience.

For Study 2, a participant observation study, I attended the entire week of RYLA in District 9790 in December 2009. As observer-as-participant, my research role was disclosed to RYLArions by Rotary in advance, and was in addition to my existing role as a paid Facilitator to run adventure-based “Leadership Challenges” on specific days of the conference. Other activities throughout the week included lectures, group discussions, juggling, role-plays and project management tasks. I noted the high levels of support that developed between participants and their corresponding willingness engage with challenging experiences. “Challenge” was a common theme throughout the week. Content that appeared to be frequently referred to by RYLArions included using body posture to influence mood (consistent with embodied emotion theories. e.g., Niedenthal, 2007), along with awareness of the chatter of “the inner critic” (consistent with therapeutic approaches such as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. e.g., Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson,
1999). Practicing self-awareness and emotional regulation were integral to several sessions and, along with challenge and support, seemed key elements of the week.

Study 3 used a quantitative survey to measure change in the constructs identified in Study 1. Of the 26 RYLArians in 2009, 24 (13 female) participated in the study. Based on the results of Study 1, it was hypothesised that GSE (measured with the General Self-Efficacy Scale; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995), Meaning (Orientations to Happiness Scale; Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005), and Openness (Australian Personality Inventory; Murray et al., 2009) would all increase following RYLA. In exploratory analyses, other constructs were also assessed for change: pleasure and engagement; all five personality factors; and Satisfaction with Life (Satisfaction with Life Scale; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). Compared to baseline measures, there were significant increases at 4-month follow-up in GSE, $t(18) = -5.61, p < .001, d = -1.287$; Meaning, $t(18) = -3.10, p = .006, d = -0.711$; and Openness, $t(17) = -3.98, p = .001, d = -0.937$. All remaining variables, except Conscientiousness and Satisfaction With Life, showed significant change at follow-up. The significant effects all suggested positive life change and could not be explained by regression to the mean.

To check interpretation of results, Study 4 incorporated anonymous qualitative responses (provided by 19 of the 24 participants) on the survey used in Study 3 and a focus group consisting of eight RYLArians (three
female) from 2009. The data from Study 1 were included as a further step to check for common themes across years. When asked, participants strongly endorsed the constructs of GSE, meaning and openness. Thematic analysis indicated some support for decreased Neuroticism and increased Extraversion, as reported in Study 3, and the importance of support and challenge, as noted in Study 2. Participants emphasised the importance of not knowing the content of RYLA, or other participants, prior to the week.

The four exploratory studies indicate that the RYLArrians demonstrated clear increases in GSE, Meaning and Openness, with similar increases in Engagement, Pleasure, Extraversion and Agreeableness and a decrease in Neuroticism. The latter was illustrated by descriptions of enhanced emotional regulation. With previous research suggesting links between both Openness and emotional regulation and leadership, it appears that RYLA is an effective leadership education program. While further research is required to replicate and verify results, some initial theoretical implications are considered. Mechanisms for increasing GSE are suggested, and tentative links between changing GSE and personality variables are explored. Pillemer’s (2001) observation that landmark events in early adulthood form ongoing reference points to guide behaviour may help explain the continuing effect of RYLA and provides a lens for interpreting the importance of novelty and challenge throughout the week. From the perspective of cultivating learning environments (Little, 1975; Outhred &
Chester, 2010) it is possible that support and challenge represent the key aspects of effective change environments. To integrate the four studies, results were interpreted in light of Fredrickson’s (2001) broaden and build theory of positive emotions. Taken together, the results suggest RYLarians are happier, more open and more self-aware. RYLA, at least in Rotary District 9790, is a positive life-changing experience.
Chapter 1.

A personal introduction

I have been involved in providing adventure programming for over 20 years, the last 9 years while training to be a clinical psychologist. Prior to studying psychology, and even for a few years after I commenced my studies, this was my career. I trained in the USA and, after a brief stint as a youth worker, started my own adventure company. By the time I committed myself to becoming a psychologist, the company owned two challenge ropes courses and was providing portable programs that could be taken to clients’ preferred locations. In the 10 years I ran my company, I worked primarily with adolescents and young adults. Although I no longer have a financial interest in it, I still occasionally work for the company as a way of maintaining my skills and continuing to do work that I enjoy.

Throughout my time as a facilitator of adventure programs, the three most commonly requested outcomes were team-building, communication and leadership: so much so, that these three words became incorporated into my company’s logo. One of my clients with a leadership focus was a local Rotary District. For over 10 years, I have been involved in providing the adventure components for the Rotary Youth Leadership Award (RYLA) in Rotary District 9790. RYLA, in this District, is a 7-day leadership conference.
for young adults aged 18 to 30. In addition to adventure activities, it incorporates lectures, group discussion, role-plays and project management tasks. By all accounts, it is an intensive and exhausting week. Many of the participants I have known have also described it as “life changing”.

Anecdotal evidence, presented at Rotary meetings around the world, suggest that RYLA can lead to long-term, positive, change for the young people that attend. While gratifying to be involved in something with this type of reputation, as a psychologist I was left with some nagging questions: Is RYLA anything more than a fun week away? If it is “life changing”, what changes? Is it measurable? Is it lasting? Is it meaningful? That is, are programs like RYLA really worthwhile? If not, why are they still running? If so, are there implications for psychology, particularly positive psychology or the psychology of leadership? This thesis is my initial attempt to address some of these questions.

Before presenting the literature review, I want to give a brief explanation of my “voice” throughout this thesis. Given the focus of the research, and the level of my involvement over many years, I am aware that I may not always be considered an impartial observer. In acknowledgement of that, and to reflect the mixed model research approach I have used in the subsequent chapters, I have been careful in the way I write. In my psychology education over the past 9 years I was trained to use the impartial third person as it has been the predominant perspective in scientific writing,
including psychology. Hence I have used that voice in most of the chapters that follow. The literature review and each of the studies where I have not been directly involved in data collection are all written from the third person perspective, except, as recommended by the American Psychological Association (2010), where clarity of language suggests first person attribution. However in this chapter, and in Chapter 5 reporting an observation study (explained in greater detail below), I have written exclusively from the first person perspective. This, I believe, will help the reader hear my voice with a greater awareness of my implicit and explicit biases. Further, selective use of third and first person offers a clear demarcation between the relative objectivity of interpreting “data” and the personal experience of collecting it. It also, I hope, better conveys the nature of the experiences being described. Taken together, it is my intention that selecting the voice to match the information being conveyed will help the reader understand the intent behind the words and the level of my personal involvement in each stage of the research process.

So, to explain the direction of my investigations and the choices I have made, I would like to clarify the initial domains of interest: the effects of an intensive leadership development program on emerging adults. I say “intensive” because programs like RYLA are typically offered as short-term conferences or camps lasting from 2 to 7 days. I use the term “leadership” because RYLA uses this term and I focus on emerging adults because this is
the age that I have worked with most extensively in my career to date and also, as explained in the following chapter, there are unique developmental characteristics of this age. For me, this meant coming to terms with the vast amount of literature on leadership, narrowing my focus to the aspects of the leadership development and the psychology of leadership most likely to be relevant to RYLA. A review of the few previous studies looking at leadership development for emerging adults completes the literature review in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 outlines the methodological considerations that informed the study design while the following chapters describe each of the four studies.

Chapter 4 describes Study 1 involving the thematic analysis of two focus groups consisting of previous RYLA participants. In Study 2, discussed in Chapter 5, I report my experiences of attending a RYLA as an observer-as-participant and my subsequent reflections on the experience. Chapter 6 outlines Study 3: an exploratory quantitative study measuring change in the key themes identified in Study 1. The final study, consisting primarily of qualitative analysis of written survey items and a focus group conversation, is discussed in Chapter 7.

Chapter 8 discusses the results of those studies in light of the reviewed literature and seeks to integrate results within a positive psychology framework. In order to place this all in some historical context, I begin the
next chapter with a brief history of RYLA, starting with its origins in an antipodean royal visit in the 1950s.
Chapter 2.

Literature review & rationale

**RYLA**

The Rotary Youth Leadership Award (RYLA) has its origins in the Gundoo week youth festival, part of Queensland’s centenary celebrations in 1959 (Brown, 1999; Rotary District 9790, n.d.). The festival organisers decided to have a strong focus on youth since the young Princess Alexandra, then only 22, was attending (Rotary District 9790, n.d.). Every shire in Queensland was invited to send two delegates, aged between 17 and 25 (Allora and District Historical Society, n.d.) to Brisbane for the week long festival and over 300 young people attended (Brown, 1999). The local Rotary district was invited to coordinate accommodation and activities for the week and it seems that the organising committee were so impressed they decided that Rotary should continue with a similar program on an annual basis. The purpose was “to train youth (ages 14-30) in character, leadership, personal development and good citizenship” (Brown, 1999, p.48). The first RYLA was held in Brisbane, Queensland, in July 1961 (Rotary District 9790, n.d.).

Although numbers were, from the organisers’ perspective, disappointing in the first two years, the program developed and soon spread to neighbouring Rotary districts, then nationwide and then to New Zealand (Rotary District
In 1972, it was adopted as an International Project by Rotary International and by 1998 was run in more than half the Rotary districts around the world (Brown, 1999).

Given how widespread RYLA has become, it is perhaps not surprising that the program itself has diversified. Although always a Rotary program, it can be run at a club, district or multi-district level (Rotary International, 2009). Participants must be between the ages of 14 and 30 (inclusive), with Rotary International recommending that each RYLA target “a focused age range and relative maturity level” (Rotary International, 2009, p. 3) such as 14-18 or 19-30 and the length of each RYLA is to be between 3 and 10 days. While there appear to be no specific guidelines on structure or content, Rotary International do provide a list of general topics recommended as a curriculum built around the three core areas of leadership, citizenship, and personal development. Yet again, there is no clear indication of exactly which elements might constitute each of these core areas, with Rotary International leaving plenty of room for interpretation at the local level.

According to the Rotary District 9790 website, RYLA was first run in that District in 1972 (Greenham, cited by Rotary District 9790, n.d.). In this district, RYLA is open to all young people aged 18-30 years. The current format, used with minor variation since 2001, is a 7-day residential seminar incorporating guest speakers, small group work, team projects and group problem-solving activities. Some of the comments from previous RYLarians
suggest that this week is a catalyst for significant personal change. A selection of testimonials from the Rotary District 9790 website (Rotary District 9790, n.d.) are presented below:

“The RYLA experience has instilled a belief or self-confidence in myself that I have never achieved before.”

“It was fantastic, a week that has motivated, enlightened and developed me in the fields of personal organisation, communication, teamwork and general management.”

“The seminar has allowed me to become a better team leader/player within my workplace by standing up for what I believe would work to make our centre a successful and well respected one.”

“My wife noticed a change in me (more relaxed) as soon as I arrived home. My performance, both business and personal, has improved dramatically through a range of skills that were both explained and demonstrated. The only thing that I am disappointed about is that no one advised or told me about RYLA 10 years ago.”

Youth

Since RYLA in Rotary District 9790 is offered to young adults between the ages of 18 and 30, it is worth considering the potential developmental implications for a youth leadership program targeting these adults. This age range is one of great of heterogeneity (Arnett, 2000) and could be considered
to incorporate adolescence, young adulthood and adulthood. Traditionally, adolescence was viewed as the transition period between puberty and adult independence (Dahl, 2004; Edwards-Hart & Chester, 2010) with adult independence associated with the formation of a secure personal and vocational identity, emancipation from care-givers and financial independence (Carr-Gregg & Shale, 2002; Nurmi, 2004). Historically, this transition was relatively brief (at least in western cultures, see Patel, Flisher, Hetrick, & McGorry, 2007, for a brief description of alternative conceptualisations of adolescence): puberty began in the mid-teens and adult independence was achieved by the late teens with secure employment and, typically, family responsibilities. This has changed markedly in recent decades. In many cultures now, not just the west, young people are continuing to study until well into their 20s and may not begin a family until their 30s. To illustrate this, in 2007 in Australia, the median age at first marriage for men and women was 29.6 and 27.7 respectively (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2010). Thirty years prior, in 1977, the equivalent median ages were 23.8 and 21.4 (ABS 2008).

One of the problems is with the word “youth” in the term “youth leadership”. Arnett noted that the word youth “has long been used to refer to a wide range of ages, from middle childhood... through the 30s” (2007, p.70). While some define youth as anyone aged 12-24 (e.g., Patel et al., 2007), this age range may incorporate students in late primary school right
through to early career professionals. While such a broad definition may have some utility when discussing the aetiology of mental illness (Kim-Cohen et al., 2003), it is of little benefit when discussing human development, especially since it incorporates some of the greatest biological, psychological and social changes to occur since birth (Susman & Rogol, 2004). Consistent with the research on youth development described earlier, Arnett (2000) noted that few studies of adolescents include participants over the age of 18 and most typically focus on high-school students. To address this, and to better account for demographic changes in recent decades, Arnett proposed the term emerging adulthood to refer to the late-teens through to the mid- to late-20s. While not without criticism (see, for example, Hendry & Kloep, 2007) Arnett’s term provides a useful framework for discussing this age. Clearly most, if not all, of the participants in RYLA would fit within this definition.

Arnett (2000) discussed the lack of research specific to young people between the ages of 18 and 30 and noted that this age was developmentally different to both adolescence and adulthood. While adolescence has been described as the transitional phase between childhood and adulthood (Larson & Wilson, 2004), or sometimes as the second decade of life (e.g., Lerner & Steinberg, 2004), it is more formally defined as commencing with puberty and ending with adult independence (e.g., Edwards-Hart & Chester, 2010). This definition, however, does not adequately address the enormous
heterogeneity from the late-teens to late-twenties. As Arnett (2000, 2007) explained, full adult responsibilities as represented by secure employment, long-term intimate relationships (such as marriage) and parenthood are typical of people in their thirties. In contrast, people in their late teens through mid- to late-twenties experience a time of exploration that is markedly different from the adulthood of the thirties, but simultaneously is marked by a level of autonomy largely unknown during the teen years. He argued that it thus makes sense to discuss this age as a separate developmental period, marked predominantly by identity exploration. Although Arnett (2007) openly acknowledged that his theory of emerging adulthood arose from his research on American young people, he also cited research from other industrial cultures suggesting similar patterns of instability during the twenties, settling to adult roles in the thirties.

While Arnett’s description of emerging adulthood as a distinct developmental period appears helpful, the application of his theory to youth leadership is untested. Youth leadership is often confounded with positive youth development (Kress, 2006) and much of the latter is focused on the adolescent years (e.g., Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003a). Further, the word “leadership” is used in many ways, so a clear understanding of the term is required in order to understand how it may apply to a youth leadership program for emerging adults.
Leadership

There appear to be countless ways of describing leadership. A web-search using Google for the term “leadership” returned about 515,000,000 results\(^1\), while narrowing the search to academic results using Google Scholar still returned about 1,420,000 results, even when excluding citations. Searching for books available on Amazon with “leadership” as a keyword returned 62,714 results and limiting the search to books with “leadership” in the title (ignoring all variations such as lead, leader or leaders) returned over 28,500 results. How to begin with such a vast topic?

It only takes a cursory examination of the results of any of the above searches to identify that business is a field with a keen interest in leadership. Bligh and Meindl (2005) conducted a thematic analysis of 257 top-selling business books, based on analysis of published book reviews, in an attempt to identify the dominant cultural norms of leadership. In the process they identified seven clusters of books, based around common themes or approaches to describing leadership. They described these clusters as (1) leading change, (2) leading scientifically, (3) learning from leadership in context, (4) leading through imagination, (5) insider accounts, (6) consultants on leadership, and (7) leading through religion. As can be seen by these short descriptions, most of these clusters are based on the way the book has been written, in effect, clustering based on the author’s voice.

\(^1\) searches conducted 14/9/2010
Perhaps due to the methodology of reviewing written book reviews, rather than reviewing the books themselves, there is little discussion by Bligh and Meindl on the content of these books. Hence, while they may reflect popular discourse, they provide little insight into the meaning of the term *leadership*. Even so, Bligh and Meindl’s analysis is indicative of the challenge in reviewing the leadership literature. It has become so vast that it is difficult, if not impossible, to provide a comprehensive overview. Hence a more selective, theory-based, approach will be used.

**Leadership theories**

There are many ways of conceptualising and theorising leadership. In their review of the leadership literature, Avolio, Walumbwa and Weber (2009) discuss many of these theoretical approaches including authentic leadership, cognitive leadership, new-genre leadership, complexity leadership, distributed leadership, leader-member exchange, followership and leadership, servant leadership, spiritual leadership, cross-cultural leadership and e-leadership. While some of these approaches may be complementary (e.g., authentic leadership could be consistent with distributed leadership) others appear to be incompatible (e.g., leader-member exchange requires leaders and followers, while distributed leadership does not).
While there are many other approaches to leadership, most can be encapsulated within just a few key theoretical approaches. Brungardt (1996) summarises the range of disparate efforts to explain leadership, stating, “Nearly all theories can be classified into five general approaches: trait, behavioural, situational, power-influence, and transformational” (p.82).

Each of these is briefly explained below, beginning with transformational leadership.

Yukl (1999) explains that transformational leadership occurs when:

…followers feel trust, admiration, loyalty, and respect toward the leader, and they are motivated to do more than they originally expected to do. The underlying influence process is described in terms of motivating followers by making them more aware of the importance of task outcomes and inducing them to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the organisation. (p. 286)

Such approaches to leadership assume a charismatic leader as a focus point in transforming an organisation. Hence these transformational (or charismatic) theories appear to have limited relevance to a week-long youth training conference; the young people who attend RYLA need not be considered leaders within their workplaces in order to attend, indeed many are still students. While transformational leadership could perhaps provide a lens for understanding some of the behaviour during the conference, it is difficult to generalise from the week since participants originate from, and
return to, multiple organisations. Without clear evidence of charismatic leadership outside the conference, and how it differs after attending the conference, there needs to be another explanation for the changes these young people experience.

Power-influence theories specifically describe leadership in terms of authority over others. Yet, as noted by MacNeil (2006), young people rarely have such authority. For an open program such as RYLA, where anyone within Rotary’s geographical and age constraints is welcome to attend, it is hard to see much in this model that could be directly relevant. Perhaps the work of Fielding and Hogg (1997), which suggests authority can sometimes be attributed to prototypical group members through their social attractiveness or charisma, could explain some of the group dynamics observed during the 7-day seminar, but it remains difficult to see the relevance beyond the week unless other changes occur.

Situational approaches, such as the contingency models proposed by Fiedler (1972) or Vroom and Jago (see, for example, 2007), seem more promising candidates for a week-long development conference. Indeed, Vroom (2003) describes the use of his model as the basis of specific management training that can be done in a workshop setting. The premise of these contingency models is that they explicitly state that the situation affects leadership style and outcome as much as, or more than, leader traits. Vroom and Jago (2007) go so far as to describe their model as prescriptive.
That is, it provides a rule-based decision tree to assist managers in choosing how much to involve their subordinate staff in decision-making; ranging from autocratic, through consultative to delegation. Referencing work by Vroom and Yetton (1973, cited by Vroom & Jago, 2007), they comment, “it makes more sense to talk of autocratic versus participative situations than autocratic versus participative leaders” (p. 21). The Vroom and Jago model appears to be a clearly defined, highly focused, tool for helping with a specific type of management decision making. Therein lies the problem: It is so specific that its use for interpreting training outside of its well-defined boundaries is limited. But there are more general concerns with contingency approaches.

The first is that the model itself reinforces trait-based theories. Vroom and Jago (2007) say of their research, “[it] has given new life to the trait concept by defining it in terms of consistency in behaviour in a class of situations” (p. 22). If the general approach managers use when undertaking leadership tasks changes, then this, if persistent, represents a trait change. In essence, this lends weight to the importance of traits in understanding leadership, albeit in the context of a given situation. Another, perhaps less obvious possibility, is that in order for the training in a specific contingency model to have some measurable effect, it must result in a change in what managers do. That is, they must behave differently which then lends support
to behavioural theories. Hence, any effect of a leadership training program must be grounded in changes to behaviours, traits or both.

Finally, a problem contingency theories share with both the transformational and power-influence models is that they are based on an executive model. They appear, at least as generally presented, to be grounded in hierarchical or authority structures. Even Fielder’s (1972) example, of a volunteer group formed to resolve a school bussing dispute, still focused exclusively on the formal role of the chairman. The models don’t seem to allow for informal leadership: leadership that occurs outside of, or counter to, authority relationships. In questioning the value of leadership research, Schriesheim (2003) says, “I cannot shake the nagging feeling that much of what we do as leadership researchers is not particularly relevant for the real-world development of managers in work organisations” (p. 181).

Implicit in statements like Schriesheim’s is that leadership outside management is either non-existent or has not been considered worth researching. Perhaps this is unintentional, but the effect is to reduce the scope of leadership theories to management and authority structures. In his review of qualitative research on leadership, Bryman (2004) noted that there was an emphasis on formally designated leaders and Locke (2003) observed that many theories of leadership are really “theories of supervision” (p. 29) or are too narrow or too esoteric to be of use. Locke then defined leadership
as “the process of inducing others to pursue a common goal” (p. 29). This is consistent with other definitions of leadership. For example, MacNeil (2006) defined leadership as a process of positive influence within relationships; Vroom and Jago (2007) described leadership as a process of motivating collaborative effort “to accomplish great things” (p. 18), while Zaccaro (2007) described leadership as influencing others towards collective effort.

If leadership is influencing others towards achieving a common purpose, then surely this is possible whenever more than one person meet. Is it naïve to expect that the exercise of leadership within management scenarios may in fact be a tiny subset of all leadership situations? Perhaps the focus on authority, hierarchy and formal roles presented in much leadership research reflects a masculine approach to leadership (see, for example, Sinclair, 2009). This could explain why alternative ways of influencing others are not discussed in such depth. Or perhaps it is simply that much of the funding for such research comes from the corporate sector (Schriesheim, 2003) which, in turn, has a focus on hierarchy and authority within its management structures. Since formal leadership roles appear to be integral to transformational, power-influence and, to a lesser extent, situational approaches and that the latter can be reduced to trait and behavioural descriptions, these two remaining approaches described by Brungardt (1996) will be explored in more detail.
Zaccaro (2007) provided an overview of the history of trait-based perspectives of leadership and outlines current directions. He noted that, in the early twentieth century, leadership traits were seen as heritable and immutable. Based on the work of Galton (1869, cited by Zaccaro, 2007), leaders were literally considered to be born, not made. However, traits not only refer to innate qualities, but also describe any characteristic that is enduring. Zaccaro defines leader traits as “coherent and integrated patterns of personal characteristics... that foster consistent leadership effectiveness across a variety of group and organisational situations” (p. 7). This, from Zaccaro’s perspective, is indicative of modern trends in trait-based theories of leadership in three ways. First, it emphasises that it is the integration of multiple personal attributes that distinguishes leadership, rather than independent contributions of a few. Second, leadership traits result in leader effectiveness and third, this effectiveness is stable across multiple situations. In his analysis, Zaccaro noted that trait-based theories described in this way can accommodate situational differences and cites research that suggests cognitive flexibility, adaptability and tolerance for ambiguity are key traits that promote behavioural flexibility across situational variability.

Zaccaro (2007; see Zaccaro, Kemp, & Bader, 2004, for more detail) presents a model linking leader traits (distal attributes) to leader performance (leadership criteria), via skills and knowledge (proximal attributes). Based on this model, Zaccaro suggests that traits will be
“relatively immune” (p.13) to leadership development interventions. Hence he proposes that organisations engaged in leadership development might base recruitment on traits, then focus their interventions on specific skills and expertise. Phrased differently, Zaccaro suggests basing selection on traits, and focusing training on behavioural interventions.

Behavioural approaches were popular in the 1950s and 1960s (Friedrich, 2010), as typified by Fleishman’s (1953a, 1953b) two dimensions of Consideration and Initiating Structure. The former describes the extent of consideration a leader gives to followers’ feelings and the latter describes the extent a leader focuses on goal attainment. Developing from Fleishman’s approach, and similar work at the University of Michigan (Friedrich, 2010), other more complicated models were published such as Blake and Mouton’s (1978) managerial grid. In common to these approaches is a strong focus on management and the relationships between managers and their subordinates. According to Friedrich, behavioural approaches to studying leadership can be summarised by two broad categories: task-focused and relationship-focused behaviours. This approach is grounded in the work of Blake and Mouton (1978). In short, Blake and Mouton present a grid of behavioural styles, with the vertical axis representing a focus on relationships (“concern for people”, p.10) and the horizontal axis a focus on tasks (“concern for production”, p. 9).
In contrast to this emphasis on management and organisational structure, Gardner (1988; 1986/2005) moved the focus from management to leadership (Fairholm & Fairholm, 2009) while retaining a behavioural focus. Gardner listed nine tasks of leadership: (1) envisioning goals, (2) affirming values, (3) motivating, (4) managing, (5) achieving a workable level of unity, (6) explaining, (7) serving as a symbol, (8) representing the group externally, and (9) renewing. While these tasks may have a behavioural focus, the utility of that focus is questionable. Gardner described in some detail the activities associated with each task, yet the range of behaviours they incorporate is extensive. For example, within the task of envisioning goals he mentioned numerous actions including asserting a vision, defining a unifying goal, extensive research, problem-solving, consultation, and balancing long- and short-term goals. Presumably the specific behaviours required for each of those actions will vary according to context and are not mentioned by Gardner.

In 1979, Davis and Luthans discussed such lack of clarity in behavioural approaches to leadership theory, noting “that an unlimited array of behaviours” (p. 238) may be relevant. They argued for a form of functional behaviour analysis within leadership contexts and outlined a model of behavioural interactions between leaders and followers. By focusing on the antecedents (A) of behaviour (B) and the reinforcing effects of the consequences (C), their A-B-C contingency model removed the need to
identify and operationalise every possible leadership behaviour. While their approach was grounded in operant conditioning theory, they included within their model cognitions, social learning theory and self-control processes (1979, 1980). Hence they were not limited to observable behaviours, as traditional behavioural methodologies required, but still retained a focus on the function of behaviours: a hallmark of behavioural theory.

**Leadership defined**

What, then, do all these different approaches to leadership have in common? One of the problems with many of the articles on leadership is the term “leadership” itself is often not defined. For example, Avolio et al. (2009) describe their concept of *authentic leadership* in terms of self-awareness, self-regulation and personal development without actually defining leadership itself. With few exceptions, there appears to be an assumption in the literature that there are leaders and there are followers and that these roles are both known and fixed. Not much seems to have changed since Scheidlinger said:

> In sum, there appears to be no all-encompassing concept of leadership... even though the phenomenon of leadership lies at the very core of human existence and touches our daily lives. We have, at best, numerous partial portrayals, conceptualizations and research...
findings, including this over-view, all aimed at ascertaining the dimensions of leadership. (1980, p. 16)

The issue is that most of the leadership literature doesn’t define leadership. When it is defined, leadership is usually described in terms of influencing others towards a common goal. Within this broad definition, most of the literature then focuses on management (what managers do, or should do). That is, it defines leadership in terms of influence relationships, then describes it (or at least applies the definition) in terms of formal authority, usually over workplace subordinates. This may account for the recurring attention given to charismatic leadership and the almost exclusive focus on leadership in an organisational setting with fixed, formal, roles. Many authors have noted the lack of formal influence available to “youth”. But the problems with the focus on formal influence and structure go beyond bypassing the leadership efforts of young people. What about informal influence? What about the leadership that occurs within, and between, groups regardless of status and delegated roles? Very little, if any, of the leadership literature appears to address informal leadership, or leadership outside of organisational structures. Given that RYLA is, by definition, for young people, and that it occurs outside of their regular work or study environment, then a broader and more encompassing approach to leadership is warranted to account for their lack of formal leadership opportunities. The question of how much influence is required to be considered leadership is
left unexamined. If leadership is influencing others towards a collective outcome, then everything that achieves that is a form of leadership.

To cater for this, Friedrich’s (2010) basic definition of leadership will be used: influencing other people towards a common goal. Friedrich (2010) described three different types of leadership definitions: person-focused, role-focused, and process-focused. Friedrich described the first as trait-based, the second as behavioural and the third as context-based (similar to the contingency approach described above) then incorporated all three within her broader definition. This is consistent with the emphasis on influence noted above (i.e., MacNeil, 2006; Vroom & Jago, 2007; Zaccaro, 2007). Although this encompasses most of the broad theories discussed so far, it leaves unanswered the core question about what a youth leadership development program might actually develop. There are so many conceptualisations of leadership, of influencing others towards a goal, it is difficult to identify what a leadership program may develop.

**Leadership development**

Brungardt (1996) distinguishes between the concepts *leadership development, leadership education* and *leadership training*. He notes that, although the three are often used interchangeably, they refer to distinct concepts. Leadership development is the all-encompassing term that can apply to anything across the life-span that enhances leadership. Brungardt
notes it represents continuous learning throughout life, where knowledge and skills build up over time. Leadership education is a subset of leadership development and refers to interventions intended to enhance leadership ability. Typically leadership education is formal and structured and so includes college leadership courses and professional seminars. The final of the three, leadership training, represents a subset of education and refers to activities designed to help participants learn specific skills for a specific context, such as a workplace. Using these definitions RYLA can be considered a leadership education program - a targeted intervention designed to enhance leadership ability across a range of contexts. But the question, “What changes?” still remains.

The type of change observed could depend on the model of leadership one begins with. For example, if leadership is skills-based, then one would expect to measure a change in behaviours; specifically an improvement in the particular skills that a given training program targets. Similarly, a trait-based model might expect to measure change in personality or other enduring personal attributes. Returning to the curriculum guidelines of Rotary International, RYLA is intended to address the three core areas of leadership, citizenship, and personal development (Rotary International, 2009), none of which provide clear guidance as to potential targets of change in Leadership Education. Indeed it is conceivable that RYLA does not actually change participants’ leadership skills, but impacts on other areas.
Youth Development

Most of the discussion so far has centred on theories of leadership and the potential areas of focus of a leadership development program. However, it is possible that RYLA, or any other leadership program for that matter, leads to changes in other areas and is hence more of a personal development program. There is a growing body of literature on youth development, which appears to incorporate discussion of youth leadership type programs. Some of the discussion around positive youth development is theoretically linked to positive psychology (e.g., Benson, Mannes, Pittman, & Ferber, 2004) but most seems to be primarily focused on the reduction of negative behaviours (see Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003a) rather than being grounded in theory. Yet despite the focus on reducing negative behaviours, very little of this research has measured outcomes. With no apparent theoretical basis, and minimal focus on outcomes, it is unclear what changes youth development programs may elicit. As Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003a) note, "The methods and outcomes researchers commonly use to evaluate programs are often inadequate for understanding if and why a program positively impacts youth" (p. 95). To date, almost all of the research has focused on younger adolescents primarily aged 14-17 (e.g., Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003b). One exception to this, was a study investigating a 6-week wilderness program in Greenland for 16-20 year olds (Stott & Hall, 2003). This study was one of the few to measure change within participants.
The Greenland wilderness project (Stott & Hall, 2003) involved 70 young participants, aged 16-20, split into small groups of 10-12 that remained isolated for most of the 6-week duration of the program. Unfortunately, this program did not use any established research instruments with all questionnaire items developed by the researchers. Further, descriptive statistics were not reported and no comparison data were available for the measure the authors constructed. Hence it is difficult to draw conclusions beyond that there was a significant change in participant responses to some survey items. However, despite this limitation, the indications from those items where change was reported are promising. Given the discussion above, it is interesting to note that participants reported significant changes in emotional regulation (Control my emotions, Avoid depression, Avoid loneliness), self-efficacy (Demonstrate confidence, Achieve goals, Solve problems efficiently, Cope with constant cold, Enjoy isolation, Manage time efficiently, Maintain physical fitness) and social skills (Motivate others, Organise others, Lead through consultation with others). No research has yet been found that discusses similar changes within participants of short-term (seven days or less) programs or for young adult (including those aged over 20) participants.
Research Questions

With no prior research in the age group of RYLA in District 9790, and no underlying theory apparent from the curriculum, to guide the current research, two key questions arise. The first is, what changes occurred for the young people attending RYLA? The second is, to what extent are those changes measurable? These then, are the core research questions for this thesis. Other questions, such as which theory, or theories, may account for the changes, or even whether leadership traits or behaviours are amongst these changes, are secondary. Hence, the focus of this research will be on addressing these two primary questions. These two research questions guided the consideration of the methodology of the research.
Chapter 3.

Methodology

In Chapter 2, the core research question identified was, “What changes occur for the young people attending RYLA?” This question provided a guide for developing the methodology of the research. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) have advocated for the importance of the research question in determining the design of a research project. Within the philosophical tradition of pragmatism, they argued, “What is most fundamental is the research question—research methods should follow research questions in a way that offers the best chance to obtain useful answers” (pp. 17-18). If RYLA had been grounded in a particular leadership theory, then measures based in that theory would perhaps provide a meaningful framework. However, as discussed above, RYLA began simply as a youth training project following from a government sponsored youth event (Brown, 1999); there was no underlying theory, or even a specific outcome, to measure against. While RYLA, according to its name, is a leadership award it is unclear whether there are any observable effects on leadership traits or behaviours. If there are some changes in leadership following RYLA, the nature of these changes is unknown. There is very little prior research into nonspecific leadership programs such as RYLA, so it is difficult to predict the likely
domains of change. Thus to select a test, or range of tests, to measure change through participation in RYLA was premature as there was no prior literature to guide such a choice. Hence a purely quantitative approach to data collection and analysis was not appropriate. In such situations, mixed methods research is likely to provide superior results in response to the research questions (Onwuegbuzie, Johnson, & Collins, 2009).

In their theoretical review of mixed methods research, Greene, Caracelli and Graham (1989; see also Andrew & Halcomb, 2006; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009) noted five purposes for combining qualitative and quantitative methods in research: namely triangulation, complementarity, development, expansion and initiation. **Triangulation** describes the search for convergence and corroboration of results between methods while **complementarity** refers to the elaboration and illustration of related data between methods. **Development** uses the results of one method to inform a subsequent use of the other. **Expansion** describes using different methods to research different aspects of the phenomenon being examined. Finally, with **initiation**, whether planned or emergent, both the similarities and differences between the methods are analysed to develop insights into the potential paradoxes these may represent.

There are many approaches to terminology for studies incorporating both qualitative and quantitative research. Terms include mixed methods, mixed models, mixed analysis, mixed research, multiple methods or
integrative research with some authors distinguishing levels of meaning between the terms and others using the terms interchangeably (for examples of different terminology, see Cameron, 2009; Hanson, Creswell, Clark, Petska, & Creswell, 2005; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009; Moran-Ellis et al., 2006; Salehi & Golafshani, 2010).

Throughout this thesis, the phrase “mixed methods” is used for consistency. Beyond the diverse terminology, there are also a range of typologies describing the different ways mixed methods can be implemented (see, for example, Cameron, 2009; Hanson et al., 2005; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009; Teddlie & Yu, 2007).

In common to many of these approaches is reference to relative emphasis and timing. That is, how much emphasis in a mixed methods research project is given to qualitative and quantitative techniques relative to each other, and whether these techniques are carried out sequentially or concurrently. Morse (1991, as cited by Hanson et al., 2005) developed a notation system to indicate emphasis of techniques through use of capitals and the timing of techniques through use of either arrows to indicate sequential use or the plus sign to indicate concurrent use. Thus a design represented by QUAN \rightarrow \text{qual} would be a primarily quantitative study with a smaller follow-up qualitative one. A study represented by QUAL + QUAN would collate both types of data concurrently and give equal emphasis to both. Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2009) add a third dimension of the level of
mixing, defining research as either partially or fully mixed. In their conceptualisation, partially mixed studies conduct and complete the qualitative and quantitative components independently of each other before beginning interpretation. In contrast, a fully mixed study combines both techniques within or across research components.

Using the terminology of Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2009), the research design of the current project was a fully mixed, sequential, model with concurrent components. It can be considered *fully mixed* because both qualitative and quantitative approaches contribute to the design, data, analysis and inferences of the project (Leech & Onwuegbuzie). Using the nomenclature described above, the structure of the project could be outlined as follows, (1) QUAL --> (2) qual --> (3) QUANT/qual --> (4) QUAL/quant where the numbers in parentheses represent each study within the project. Study 1 used a fully qualitative design to conduct a thematic analysis of focus group data. Emphasis was on identifying the key areas of change discussed by the participants for subsequent measurement in Study 3. Study 3 featured a quantitative design with some additional qualitative data collection. As a form of triangulation for Study 1, a standard hypothesis-testing model was used to test for within-subject change across time using a pre-test/post-test design. As an example of Greene et al.’s (1989) notion of development, the constructs identified from the Study 1 focus groups were intended to inform the selection of the measures used for Study 3. Thus,
finding significant change using these measures would act as verification of
the inferences drawn in Study 1, while a lack of significant change would
provide data for further analysis (a possible example of Greene et al.’s
initiation as discussed above). As the overall research project was
exploratory, Study 3 also included additional measures of related constructs
to test for associated areas of change possibly not identified in Study 1,
along with opportunity for participants to contribute qualitative responses
about their experiences.

For the purpose of expansion, Study 2 was an independent participant
observation qualitative study intended to provide the opportunity to witness
and participate in the content and process of RYLA. It was anticipated that
the language used by participants in Studies 1 and 4 (see below), and also in
their written comments in Study 3, would be specific to RYLA. It was hoped
that sharing in the experiences that shaped that language would contribute
to an improved understanding of both the explicit and implicit meaning of
the content. Further, by observing the behaviour across the week of RYLA, it
was hoped that some links to relevant theory would be made in subsequent
analysis of the data obtained from the other three studies.

The final design and focus of the qualitative Study 4 was decided
following the previous three studies. The key function of this last study was
intended to be either complementarity or initiation as required. That is,
illustration and clarification of the previous studies where they are in
agreement, or explanation and interpretation where results differ. For example, if the quantitative results from Study 3 did not support the interpretations made in Study 1, then the final study would focus on developing alternative explanations for the observed results. If, instead, the findings of Studies 1 and 3 were congruent, then it would focus on developing a more nuanced understanding of the results.
Chapter 4.

Study 1: Focus groups

The previous chapter presented a rationale for using a mixed methods approach to the current project. Integral to that rationale is the key research question of what changes occur for RYLArions. It was established in Chapter 2 that RYLA is not grounded in a particular leadership theory and a review of the leadership literature was unable to identify a leadership model that could predict likely changes for the RYLArions. Further, literature specific to youth leadership cannot suggest which benefits might result, nor explain how those benefits may occur (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003a). As discussed above, there is the possibility that RYLA does, in fact, have no direct impact on leadership but instead targets other aspects of functioning. In short, there is no consensus on the benefits, or even the potential benefits, of attending RYLA and hence no existing guidance on a way forward. Hence a key rationale for the current study was discovering the main areas of agreement between participants when discussing the changes that occur during and following RYLA. The accuracy of this interpretation of consensus, and its generalizability to a subsequent RYLA, could then be tested in the subsequent studies.
Focus groups are an appropriate way of learning about the level of consensus on a topic and for generating data in the exploratory stage of a research project (Morgan & Krueger, 1993). Assuming that change does occur at RYLA, and given the stability of the program since 2001, it was reasonable to expect that there would be common themes amongst different participants and across different years. Using focus groups consisting of previous RYLarians, the aim of the current study was to use to identify common themes of change for subsequent investigation and hypothesis testing.

**Method**

**Participants**

As is it was desirable for participants to not only have had an experience of RYLA, but for that experience to be similar to what was planned for 2009, participants in the two focus groups were selected using purposive sampling (Redmond & Curtis, 2009; Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Invitations were sent to all RYLarians and Supporters who attended RYLA in Rotary District 9790 between 2003 and 2008 inclusive, as these were considered the years to be most similar to the RYLA planned for 2009. The District, on my behalf, emailed these invitations with a request to circulate them to other RYLarians. Since the list was maintained by Rotary, the total number of initial recipients is unknown. At least some of those who received
the invitation then forwarded it to friends or republished it using social media such as Facebook.

Respondents were sent a Plain Language Statement (see Appendix A) including a summary of the research project outlining the key aims of the focus groups, a brief description of the process involved, an assurance of confidentiality, a summary of their rights as participants, a copy of the consent form (Appendix B) and the contact details for both myself and the University Ethics committee. Based on the concept of segmentation (Morgan, 1996), separate focus groups for RYLarians and Supporters were initially planned. However, given that almost all of the eligible Supporters had also been participants within the designated time-frame, and the difficulty many respondents had in travelling to Melbourne for the suggested sessions, the proposed separation of Supporters and RYLarians was deemed redundant.

The eight participants in the focus groups had each attended RYLA within Rotary District 9790. Three participants attended the first focus group: Mark, Brian and Eric.² Mark attended as a participant in the mid-2000’s and had volunteered as a RYLA Supporter in subsequent years³. Brian and Eric had attended in 2007 and 2008 respectively. Two female RYLarians had intended to participate in the discussion but withdrew at late notice.

---

² All names are pseudonyms.
³ Specific years attended withheld to avoid revealing identifying information.
Given the short notice, the decision was made to continue with only three participants so as not to inconvenience them. The second focus group had five participants: Thomas, Kevin, Elizabeth, Sarah and Laura. The first four each attended RYLA between 2005 and 2007, while Laura attended in 2001\(^4\). Thomas and Sarah had each been RYLA supporters\(^5\). There was one further participant who had planned to attend, but could not make it on the night. Only two of the participants (Sarah and Elizabeth) had attended as RYLArions in the same year.

**Procedure**

**Pilot Study.**

Following approval from the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee, and prior to the first focus group, I ran a pilot session. The purpose of the pilot session was to test the interview structure and the audio recording devices and also to train the independent facilitator in the interview process. Participants of the pilot study were four Rotarians with extensive experience presenting at, administering and supporting multiple RYLA’s within Rotary District 9790 between the years 2000 and 2008. Two of these participants had also attended RYLA as participants in the District, one in 1992 and the other in 2001. All the participants of the pilot focus group knew me from my

---

4 Laura was originally accepted due to a misunderstanding regarding the year she attended. However, after reviewing the schedule of RYLA that year and discussing with the RYLA Director in the District, I decided that the 2001 RYLA program was sufficiently similar to subsequent years.

5 Specific years attended withheld to avoid revealing identifying information.
previous work with RYLA. Given the aims of the pilot study, this was not considered problematic and the conversation was neither transcribed nor used for analysis.

The pilot session trialled an interview structure based on the simple chronology of before, during and after RYLA (see below for more detail) with this structure front-loaded for participants through the use of a written questionnaire (explained below, or refer to Appendix C) completed on arrival. Immediately following the session, participants commented on their experience of the discussion. The use of the written questionnaire prior to the interview was well received and acted as a prompt for participants during the interview itself. The structure of the interview worked well, with the main sections of before, during, and after RYLA providing both a logical sequence of topics as well as a framework for more in-depth discussion in the latter stages of the interview. Feedback from the participants was positive and they indicated they enjoyed the opportunity to discuss RYLA. The facilitator said she found the pilot session helpful in giving her a basic understanding of the nature of RYLA and the terminology used by participants. After evaluating the pilot session, the only significant change made prior to the two research focus groups was to supply food (pizza) on arrival.
**Independent facilitator.**

Since I had been involved professionally with RYLA for all but one of the RYLA conferences within the designated range of years, it was expected that I would be known to most of the participants. To minimise the potential for my involvement to influence their contributions, and to maximise objectivity during the interviews, an independent facilitator was hired to conduct the two focus groups. This facilitator had no prior knowledge of RYLA and no relationship with Rotary. At the time of the focus groups she was in the process of gaining registration as a psychologist.

**Focus group structure.**

Each focus group followed the same procedure (see Appendix D). Participants were greeted on arrival and issued with name tags. All were asked to review and sign the consent form (although emailed to them, none had signed it prior to arrival) and then complete the brief questionnaire (see Appendix C) as a preview to the discussion. Apart from two items recording the years they attended RYLA as a participant and as a Supporter, and an optional item to record their name (although all participants volunteered their name, pseudonyms have been used), there were three open-ended items. (1) Before RYLA: Why did you choose to participate in RYLA? What were your expectations? (2) During RYLA: What were your impressions of RYLA during the week? What do you remember as being important at the
time? (3) After RYLA: What were your impressions of RYLA after it finished? What do you think changed within you as a result of attending RYLA?

As participants finished completing their consent forms and questionnaire, pizza was served and an opportunity provided for participants to socialise. Many of the participants knew each other and all of them knew me. The facilitator used this time to familiarise herself with the participants and learn their names. After giving a formal welcome and introduction, I left the room for the duration of the focus group discussion which was led by the paid facilitator. Acknowledging the importance of providing the opportunity for participants to reflect on the interview and add additional information (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis, 2007), time was allocated at the end of each focus group for participants to add any additional comments or information that they felt was important and had not been discussed. At the completion of each focus group I returned to the room to thank participants and answer questions.

The focus group itself followed the same structure as the questionnaire, including discussion of their impressions of RYLA prior to, during and after attending. The key questions in each of these areas respectively were “Why go?”, “What do you remember as important during RYLA?” and “What has changed since RYLA?”. Participants were then asked to identify and agree, as a group, on the top five most significant changes that occurred since RYLA and subsequently to rank them in order of significance. The intention of this
structure was twofold. By asking participants to agree on the most significant changes, it was hoped that they would prompt each other to identify, or at least describe, the key changes for them after participating in RYLA. It was further intended that, while seeking agreement on both the content and order of their list, the discussion would illustrate the level of their agreement and prompt a rationale for each potential item. Both groups also volunteered the notes they wrote together when trying to reach consensus. The first group wrote their list of most significant changes on a piece of paper during their discussion and gave it to me at the end of the session. The second group used a whiteboard and then, also of their own volition, copied their notes from the whiteboard and asked the facilitator to give them to me to aid interpretation of their discussion.

**Analysis.**

The audio from both groups was recorded and professionally transcribed and the questionnaire responses were typed. The notes volunteered by each group were referred to if the audio was unclear or to correct transcription errors. Within the pragmatic paradigm (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009) discussed in Chapter 3, the method used to identify the key themes of change discussed by the focus groups’ participants was thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Consistent with the process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), an inductive approach was used to identify common threads within and between the two focus groups. Choice of themes
was shaped by the underlying questions of “What changes occurred?” and “What did participants perceive as important?” Attention was paid to the prevalence and consistency of related items as well as the emphasis given them by participants during the discussions and in their written comments. The facilitator noted that participants constantly referred to their questionnaires throughout the discussions with the purpose of discussing each of the points they had written. As such, the data within the questionnaires were treated the same way as the verbal data during analysis.

Initially, the questionnaire responses were read and the audio recordings were first listened to from start to finish, then again with the transcripts to ensure they were accurate with corrections made as required. The names within the transcripts were changed to pseudonyms to protect confidentiality. After that, the transcripts were reread with initial handwritten notes made of the themes and main ideas identified. Particular emphasis was initially given to the discussions from each focus group on selecting their themes of change before refocusing on the remainder of each transcript. These ideas were entered as initial codes into NVIVO and further, more detailed, coding was conducted on subsequent read-throughs. Where meaning was unclear from the transcript, the original recordings were referred to and further corrections and annotations to the transcript made. Given the research questions, effort was subsequently focused on matching these codes to a few key themes of change rather than identifying and
labelling all themes of change. Once these key themes were identified and named, key-word searches of the entire transcripts, along with detailed reviews of the coded data within each theme, were used to check for consistency within, and overlap between, these themes. This process also involved looking for examples of contradictory stories as well as reviewing all the data not assigned to any of the themes identified to date.

**Results and Discussion**

The first observation was the general positivity, enthusiasm and good humour expressed by all the participants in both focus groups. There was a lot of laughter in the recordings and the facilitator commented on the smiling and positive approach. Near the end of the second focus group, she said of discussion “...this was like a 90 minute promotion for [RYLA].” It seemed that these were happy people with no dissenting voices. There were three key themes identified from the focus group transcripts and written questionnaires: an increase in self-confidence, a sense of purpose or meaning and a greater openness to experience.

**Confidence as General Self-efficacy**

The clearest theme to emerge from the focus groups, as it was repeatedly stated in both of them, was a reported increase in self-confidence. Before the discussion even started, their written statements ranged from the simple, “I have become more self-confident” (Mark) to the
more global, “I realised I was an OK person - major self-esteem and
confidence boost and transformation of self-limiting beliefs” (Laura). The
latter comment about self-limiting beliefs is indicative of the broader
opinion expressed in the groups. Elizabeth illustrated this when describing a
key moment during her RYLA experience, “Boundaries, recognising where
your boundaries were. ...it was interesting for me to see that my boundaries
weren’t necessarily where I thought they were.”

There appeared to be a real sense of having learnt something useful, as
Thomas wrote in his questionnaire, “I felt empowered with the knowledge
that I had gained, [I was] more confident in life.” Associated with this was a
belief that they could use this knowledge to achieve more than they could
prior to RYLA. Sarah illustrated this when she wrote, “From RYLA I learnt
that even though I do have boundaries, it is possible to push or even step
over those boundaries and that they’re not always located where I thought
they were”.

The participants indicated that the level of change in their confidence
was great and in more than just specific, concrete skills. Although
individuals occasionally mentioned distinct areas of improved efficacy, such
as public speaking or overcoming shyness, comments throughout the
discussions referred to a general sense of increased confidence and
empowerment. As Eric said, “…the fact that I could do that, I could go on the
challenge course, ...the high ropes course, [is] just something I would never
do and I felt empowered to challenge myself and do things that I never would have done before and that is still happening today, like I am doing stuff that I wouldn’t have done outright”. A similar sentiment was voiced by Laura in the second focus group, “I felt I walked away feeling empowered, that I do have more ability... to make change for myself and my surrounds.” When asked to rank the five most significant changes at the end of their discussions, both groups nominated self-confidence first and both reached consensus within seconds.

It is hard to overstate the significance of confidence, as discussed within the focus groups. They said it was an important factor both during RYLA and, especially, afterwards. For example, Laura recounted an experience she had on the high ropes course\(^6\) during RYLA where experiencing confidence, believing in her own ability, led to her successfully achieving her goal on an activity. She explained that, when the impact of her confidence on her performance was noted by one of the facilitators, she then watched others doing the same task. She said, “I started to watch other people and you could see when people were confident that they were going to do it or when they had self doubt. And I just remember that because it helped me in other areas of my life... Yeah it’s really powerful stuff, it really stood out for me.” The fact that this confidence transferred to other areas

\(^6\) For a brief explanation of ropes courses, and an indication of the type of activities included during the RYLA ropes course, see the report of Day 6 (Saturday) in Chapter 5.
was key. Eric said it helped him socially, “being confident to go out there and talk to people” while Elizabeth said, “I think it’s made me a lot more comfortable and confident in myself. ...I don’t get stressed about situations that I would have found stressful before. ...I don’t worry about things, I know things will work out. I will find a way.”

As an illustration of how central increased confidence was to the discussants, when ranking their list of most significant changes Mark said, “...my real problem with this list is that they all relate to confidence.” Participant comments, both spoken and written, about confidence suggested that it was related to their self-belief that they could successfully do things. Hence, their confidence can be interpreted as an increase in perceived general self-efficacy. Albert Bandura (1997, 2010) describes perceived self-efficacy as the belief that one has the ability to influence one’s environment. More simply, it is the belief that one can do what one wants to do (Maddux, 2009). While Bandura has noted that self-efficacy is typically domain specific, others have claimed that it can be also be generalised across situations and contexts. This general self-efficacy refers to the broader sense of being able to competently deal with novel situations and to cope with difficulties (Schwarzer, Boehmer, Luszczynska, Mohamed, & Knoll, 2005). Although Bandura (1997) differentiates self-efficacy from confidence, noting that one can be confident of failure as well as success, in the focus group
discussions confidence was always spoken of in terms of an increased belief in ability. This is illustrated in an exchange from the second focus group.

Elizabeth: Probably just thinking about like the practical things, like the eye contact and the hand shake we were talking about before, I think it’s made me a lot more comfortable and confident in myself. Like I was saying... before, I’ve just taken on a new position at work and I think pre-RYLA I probably would have been quite nervous and worried about it. Whereas now – I was never a very stressed person anyway but not much bothers me anymore. I think my coping mechanisms are quite up there so I just, yeah like I don’t get stressed about situations that I would have found stressful before. Like I, you know, I don’t worry about things, I know things will work out. I will find a way. And yeah, so probably...

Facilitator: So you’ve improved your coping.

Elizabeth: I think so and yeah, like my own confidence in my own abilities. Like I can do this role, I’m perfect for it and it’s going to work. Yeah.

This is consistent with Bandura’s definition of self-efficacy as “...belief in one’s power to produce levels of attainment” (Bandura, 1997, p.382). Hence, unless otherwise noted, the terms “confidence” and “self-efficacy”
will be used interchangeably to reflect both the language used by participants and the construct that language is interpreted to represent.

As a further illustration of the importance of confidence and self-belief, Laura’s comment above about watching the impact of other people’s confidence on their performance was within a longer narrative about the broader implications of the relationship between beliefs and actions. She began by saying,

...Tim made the links really clear between the physical challenge stuff and what was going on inside your head, or inside your body I suppose, and how that kind of helped you be able to achieve what you were trying to achieve. And then how that linked to self-belief and then how that linked to other areas of your life and that kind of extrapolation.

Along a similar line, Chris wrote, “I felt empowered with the knowledge that I had gained, more confident in life”. One of the participants,7 reflecting on their ongoing recovery from a depressive episode experienced subsequent to RYLA said, “...it’s good looking back now and realising what’s actually kept with me. ...Probably the one thing that really came out of RYLA was that there are challenges there and I [meet them] if I really want to. That has always stuck with me.” Key to this respondent was the enduring nature of

---

7 Identifying information withheld.
the change—even through the lens of a depressive episode, the sense of an increased ability to respond to challenges remained.

As a final example of the impact of this enduring change in self-efficacy, Elizabeth mentioned the confidence she had to change her university studies. Following a discussion about living their passions, she said,

...that’s tied in with self-confidence because... at the end of my first year of engineering I had the confidence to decide that I would rather change across and do arts because I’d been doing one arts subject. So... self confidence facilitated me to live my passion and to study arts instead of maths and science.

This notion of “living my passion” was a common thread. While the phrase seemed to arise from RYLA itself, the concept matches to an increased sense of purpose and meaning in life.

Meaning

Linking the sense of empowerment and confidence to a greater sense of purpose and meaning, Eric wrote, “I felt like I could go out and change the world. I wanted to help everyone and pass on the RYLA experience”. Directly linked to specific content of RYLA, participants in both groups talked about a greater focus on balancing their personal, professional and community lives. For some, this meant increasing their community involvement, such as
starting Rotaract clubs (a subset of Rotary specifically for young people aged 18-30), volunteering as a supporter for RYLA or RYPEN (another Rotary youth program) or volunteering for other community organisations. Others, such as Laura, focused on the personal aspects, “...because I was already doing the community service. I needed the personal.”

Overall, they seemed to be expressing an increased effort to live in a way such that their lives had more significance and value. Steger (2009) defines meaning in life as the extent to which people see significance and purpose in their lives. While there were few direct references to an overarching significance or purpose, many comments suggested this. Laura described identifying one of her passions in life, explaining that at RYLA, “I realised from that moment... one of my major passions is helping other people achieve their goals and their dreams. And that’s totally changed my life and my career, my direction.” Elizabeth described a similar sense of identifying what gave meaning to her life during RYLA, “So I guess... it helped me clarify what my passions are and the big one being... helping other people being what they want to be, follow their dreams and their goals.” Indeed this was a common theme in both groups, and it was explicitly identified and agreed on in the second focus group. It was summarised by Thomas saying, when the second focus group were finalising the ranking of their top five, “I think everybody is saying, ‘living my passions.’”
The participants in the first focus group used different words to describe a similar experience. All three described establishing volunteer programs in order to “give back” to the community. Although semantically different, the notion of “giving back” seemed to play similar role for them as “living my passions” did in the second group. There was a notion that they had received something of value from RYLA and it was important to pass it on to others. Eric described the impact on his sense of meaning in the following way,

I looked at my performance life and how I was working in work and doing all my bits and pieces and what I was doing in my own life and realised that I didn’t really have a community circle. So after RYLA sort of opened up my eyes to what I could do to help the community—things like Rotaract and stuff like that that I have gotten involved in now—and RYLA has sort of opened my eyes to that and how I can help other people and really I felt like I could go out and change the world. That sort of opened me up to all that community stuff.

When trying to give words to the significance of this, Brian said:

I just believe leadership, that’s one component. RYLA to me was more than that, it was an actual life award. It was going right back, looking at your past but also at the same time because we are young people, looking at our futures, looking at what we can give to the world...
It is worth noting that many of the comments associated here with meaning could be interpreted as referring to altruism. That is, seeking to enhance the welfare of others. The decision to use the construct of meaning instead was based on the following considerations. First, altruism has been previously found to be a reliable predictor of meaning (Morgan & Farsides, 2009). Consistent with this finding, it could be considered that altruism is representative of the values of these participants and hence has some meaning for them. In contrast, it was difficult to imagine them acting altruistically without an implicit sense of meaning associated with these acts. Batson, Ahmad, Lishner, and Tsang (2002) distinguish between helping behaviours and altruism by noting that altruism requires a motivation to help others. Motivations imply a purpose and purpose is associated with meaning. Yet compelling cases could conceivably be made for the reverse argument, or for yet other constructs such as agreeableness. To avoid becoming overly bound in semantics, and remembering that a further study was planned to check the appropriateness of the themes identified, I decided to stick with the “gut instinct” of both the myself and the group facilitator and classify this theme as meaning. I thought that interpreting participant stories in this way was consistent with Steger’s (2009) definition of meaning outlined above and was a close fit with the following explanation, “Lives may be experienced as meaningful when they are felt to have significance
beyond the trivial or momentary, to have purpose, or to have a coherence that transcends chaos” (King, Hicks, Krull, & Del Gaiso, 2006).

**Openness**

Increased openness was expressed in the body language and tone of voice as much as the actual words and, since I was not present in the interviews, the group facilitator made the suggestion for this theme. Some of the comments that illustrate this theme are quite clear, such as “I feel like I am a more open person now than I used to be.” (Eric) or “I became more open, relaxed and willing to open up to new people” (Mark). To indicate the extent of this perceived difference, Mark even described it as a personality change saying, “It’s sort of personality changes I think more than anything else that RYLA didn’t necessarily create, but kind of catalysed.” This aspect of change was picked up in the second group when Kevin asked of the other participants, “Did anybody else find that their view of things like motivational speakers, particularly their views towards things like positivity, changed over the week? Because by the time I got to the end of it, end of the week, I was nowhere as cynical as I was at the start.”

One participant (Laura) mentioned her love of learning that she associated with stretching her comfort zones. This latter notion was particularly salient in the second focus group, with multiple comments on stretching comfort zones or taking risks. On their own, some of these could
be taken merely as an indication of heightened sensation seeking, for example Thomas mentioned sky diving, and Sarah reported sailing on tall ships. Both said these were activities they would not have done prior to RYLA. Yet these are also consistent with the personality trait, openness to experience. Indeed, McCrae and Costa (1997) note that sensation seeking, particularly a desire to seek a range of experiences, is related to openness. This interpretation of seeking experience as an aspect of openness is a good fit for the comments by Thomas and Sarah, especially within the context they were said. Thomas’s description of sky-diving was mentioned while explaining that, for him, the main change following RYLA was challenging his conventional way of life and doing things differently. Sky-diving was thus an illustration of choosing something different. As he said, “...would I like to go through life having never done it at all?” Similarly, Sarah’s tall ship experience was one of a series of examples of her “taking risks” that started with attending RYLA and included moving into a share house. This struck a chord with the group, as demonstrated by the facilitator’s comment at the time, “Everyone’s nodding, just to note that. So taking risks.”

This was then a recurring theme in the second focus group, and resulted in them listing increased risk taking in their top five most significant changes. Again, they were not referring to stimulation but to new experiences and alternative ways of doing things. I found it interesting to follow some of the conversation threads about risk taking as the group tried
to describe what it was about. There appeared to be some cross-over with the notions of self-efficacy and meaning. As an illustration, while discussing the content of their top five, Elizabeth said of risk taking, “I probably link it back to how I am overall though, like it would tie back in with... my problem-solving, my coping and my confidence.” Kevin responded with “But it kind of goes... a little bit into goal setting because I sort of think to achieve those goals I’ve got to take a certain element of risk to get there.” Finally Sarah explained how, for her, it was distinct from both confidence and goals saying, “I can see how it links in but also for me it was there were risks that I’m taking... not with any particular goal and not because of any confidence that I have in the situation. ...So for me it stands alone but I can see how it also ties in.”

Another aspect of openness is awareness of inner experiences (McCrae & Costa, 1997), a theme that was discussed in detail by the men in the first focus group. They struggled to define and explain this aspect of their experience, and so typically couched it in terms of emotional awareness or emotional intelligence. This struggle was perhaps best illustrated by Brian when, in the context of discussing friendship while negotiating their top five, said, “I would say in terms of friends and that sort of aspect, I would say... emotional empowerment or development or something like that. After a while your emotions change, how you relate to people, how you relate to yourself, so more emotional something!” Eric followed up by commenting, “I
think there are a few elements of it, one thing is awareness of your emotions, that you actually are conscious of them a bit more.” At a less esoteric level, all the participants in the first focus group mentioned they were engaged in a wider range activities following RYLA. Mark illustrated the importance of this when he explained it was one of his two most significant changes following RYLA. He said these were, “…self confidence and the ability to branch out and do things and... to be able to just be a bit more spontaneous, be able to step out of my comfort zone to do things. I took on some roles that I probably wouldn’t have done otherwise, that sort of thing.”

**Conclusion**

The three main themes identified from the data were increases in self-confidence (interpreted as general self-efficacy), meaning and openness. While alternative themes could perhaps have been identified, these three adequately account for the main points raised by the focus group participants. Although each of these could be broken into smaller sub-themes, the key research aim was to identify the common themes of change for subsequent hypothesis testing. Hence no attempt was made to explore sub-themes or look for more nuanced interpretations. The underlying assumption was that if “life changes” did occur at RYLA, and these changes were similar between participants, then they would be represented by the
most easily identified themes during analysis. However, this assumption is open to question and so the most readily identified themes may not adequately describe the changes experienced. Even if the assumption is correct, it remains possible that the themes were mis-identified or that the perceived changes were greater than the actual changes.

To test the validity of the identified themes, a subsequent quantitative study was planned to measure change in constructs related to each key theme (see Study 3 described in Chapter 6). But there were other concerns. The focus group participants often referred to specific content from RYLA, using a shared language and understanding that they all understood, even though they attended in different years. Since I had attended some parts of RYLA on a professional basis, I had some awareness of this shared language to inform my interpretations of their comments. However, I was also aware of the limits of my own involvement in previous RYLAs, and the possibility that there were aspects of the program of which I was unaware. To address this, and to experience as much of RYLA as possible in order inform subsequent analyses, I planned to attend and observe the entire week of RYLA in 2009.
Chapter 5.

Study 2: Observation of RYLA

Overview

Described below is a summary of Rotary District 9790’s RYLA conference (the District’s preferred term for the week) in 2009 from my perspective as an observer-as-participant (Gray, Williamson, Karp, & Dalphin, 2007) throughout the week. To be faithful to my experience of the week, I describe the activities of each day and then my reflections on them. As explained in detail below, I attempted to bracket my prior knowledge and experiences, including the themes identified in the previous chapter, and participate in each day as it was. My descriptions and reflections of each day demonstrate this. At the end of this chapter, I review the week with the benefit of hindsight, looking for links between the themes from the focus groups and my observations during the week.

There are three general points that need explanation prior to continuing. First, as explained in Chapter 1, I will discuss my experiences of the week from the first person perspective. This is a deliberate choice to highlight and acknowledge that these are my perceptions and opinions, based on my experiences and observations. While the other studies incorporate replicable data and analyses, the current study does not; it is an
account of a particular week in history as experienced by me. Further, while
the purpose of the study is to provide a basic understanding of the
experience of RYLA and the shared meaning and language that develops
during it, it cannot cover all aspects of the week. For example, one
component of the week mentioned by participants in Study 4 (see Chapter 7)
is the song Good Morning Baltimore from the musical “Hairspray”. This was
the song played, loudly, as a wake up call each morning. As a Facilitator and
Supporter at RYLA (explained below, refer to the Glossary for a summary)
this was not relayed to my sleeping quarters and so I was not even aware of
the song, let alone its significance, until near the end of the week.
Nevertheless, had I not attended RYLA, I would not have known this at all
and could not have understood the references in the later study.

The second point is about how much detail to disclose without
breaching the confidentiality that the RYLA team requested of all
participants (myself included). This policy within District 9790 serves three
key functions. First, it protects the confidentiality of all participants
throughout the week. Second, it allows some flexibility for the planning
team to vary content if required. Third, and perhaps of most relevance here,
it ensures that each RYLarian experiences their RYLA without
preconceptions of what will happen formed by prior knowledge. As noted by
the focus group participants in Study 1 (see Chapter 4), and subsequently
strongly reinforced by the participants in Study 4 (Chapter 7), RYLarians
knew very little about RYLA prior to their arrival and considered this to be an important, if not essential, part of the week. While at first glance this may raise questions for readers around informed consent (see note about *Challenge by Choice* in the Glossary), it was endorsed as an important part of the RYLA experience by all the focus group participants. Specifically, the request of the RYLA Supporter Team was that the precise content of RYLA not be discussed in detail. They encourage RYLarians to discuss their reactions to RYLA, the changes they experienced and the benefits (or not) they enjoyed without disclosing the specific activities and content involved. In short, the request was to speak in generalities when discussing RYLA.

The third point is that many Guest Facilitators visited RYLA to present material that was based on their work and intellectual property. It would be unfair to them, and unethical, to report the details of their work without their express permission.

**Ethical Considerations**

Together, these last two points raise a dilemma: how do I describe a week of data gathering, without breaching the intellectual property rights of Facilitators and the desire of participants to not publicly disclose the detail of the week? In short, I cannot. So I will compromise. I will honour the Guest Facilitators by only discussing their work in general terms. I will honour the participants by describing an outline of each day of the week and only
providing additional detail when needed to help explain or interpret subsequent focus group or survey comments. In addition, an earlier version of this chapter was reviewed by the RYLA Coordinator to ensure appropriate confidentiality was maintained: apart from a few corrections to terminology, no changes were suggested.

As explained in more detail below, I was not a passive observer of RYLA, but an active participant throughout the week with formal roles to fulfil. Here I am reporting not just the observed experiences of the RYLArrians, but also my own contributions. Hence I can make no reliable claims of objectivity as this study is the one most subject to my prior experiences and biases: I want to be clear that these are my perceptions of the RYLA week. It is my belief that using a first person narrative will help both the reader and myself remain aware of my personal voice and act as a reminder of my own potential biases and shortcomings. Another factor in overtly writing from my perspective is to better convey the experience itself. RYLA was not a passive, didactic, intellectual exercise, but an immersive activity engaging participants physically and emotionally as well as cognitively. This cannot be fully expressed with words, but it is my hope that the greater intimacy of first person will provide the reader with a taste of my lived experience throughout the week and, through my observations, that of the RYLArrians. This also forms the rationale for describing each day’s activities.
From an ethical perspective, considerable thought was given to my previous involvement with RYLA over several years and the potential impact this involvement may have had on my ability to objectively observe RYLA in 2009. Two factors were key. The first was that I had never before attended RYLA for an entire week, having attended for only a few days at most. The second was that my familiarity with the program might encourage more of a “big picture” view, a greater awareness of the overall program without getting too lost in detail.

Another factor to consider was whether to retain my role as a paid Facilitator since both the organising team of RYLA and my employer wanted me to continue with my official duties throughout the week. This, in itself, was an ethical consideration: was I to value the research above the stated desires of the program being researched? Further, were I to absent myself from the program, would I then change the nature of the program itself? In consultation with the RYLA organising team, I decided to continue with my existing formal roles, acknowledging the possibility that my role as a Facilitator would reduce my ability to observe all sessions. Given that the major aim of participating for the week was to understand the shared meanings generated during the conference, rather than to actively evaluate each session, this was considered acceptable. In light of the above, the University Research Ethics Committee approved the study prior to my attendance.
Observer-as-Participant

This study could be described as an exercise in participant observation. It involved active participation by myself as researcher, with the full knowledge of all the participants. As detailed in Chapter 6, in the two weeks prior to the conference the RYLA Coordinator emailed every attendee a brief message from me, a link to the survey used in Study 4 with a detailed explanation of the research (see the Plain Language Statement in Appendix E) and noting my attendance at RYLA. Further, as explained in more detail below, I was given time at the beginning of RYLA to explain my research, the multiple roles I was taking and to answer any questions the RYLArrians may have. Thus the approach I took to my researcher role could be described as an observer-as-participant (Gray et al., 2007).

Gold’s typology of observer roles (as cited in Atkinson & Hammersley, 1982; Gray et al., 2007) describes four roles including complete observer, observer-as-participant, participant-as-observer and complete participant. The first and last are self-descriptive, with the former typically completely open about the act of observation while the latter is typically covert about the observation role. According to Gray et al. (2007) the difference between the middle two roles is both the level of involvement and the level of disclosure. An observer-as-participant is likely to openly reveal the nature of their research and participate in light of that disclosure. In contrast, a participant-as-observer will become highly involved, but may downplay or
conceal their research observation role. Using this typology, I took the observer-as-participant role throughout RYLA. The nature of my research was disclosed to participants via email prior to their arrival and again at the beginning of the program. Opportunity was given for questions about the research and RYLArrians were invited to talk with me about my research during the week.

**Roles at RYLA**

It was very hard to attend to all the potential variables during RYLA. I had three roles to fulfil: a Facilitator representing Interactive EdVentures (my employer); a Supporter, a role given to me by the RYLA Supporter Team; and a Researcher, which included both observing and recording those observations. Of those three roles, I found that Researcher was the hardest to fulfil. To assist the RYLArrians, and to be explicit with the roles I was taking, I literally wore different clothing for each of those roles. As a Supporter I wore the blue RYLA t-shirt that formed the official uniform of the Supporter team. While the majority of the Supporter team wore it only on the first and last day, I wore it whenever I had that formal role to fulfil. When acting as a Facilitator, I wore a green t-shirt with my employer’s logo and changed my shoes. This was a visible cue to all the RYLArrians that my role had changed, that a **Leadership Challenge** was to take place and that they were to change their own footwear. When dressed in “civilian” clothes, I was
myself as participant researcher, with an open invitation to all participants to discuss the project if they wished.

I had professional responsibilities as a Facilitator that needed to be fulfilled and, ethically, these had priority. Part of the negotiations for researching RYLA were that I would maintain my professional role since both the Rotary District and my employer requested I continue as a Facilitator. This was partly due to my prior experience with the program, but also because it was difficult for the company I worked for to find staff with appropriate training and experience. As described below, the role itself involved responsibility for the physical and emotional safety of participants, so when wearing my “work” shirt this was my primary focus and all other responsibilities were set aside.

Being a Supporter was an unexpected role. On arrival, the RYLA leadership team requested that I take on the responsibilities of a Supporter and present myself to the RYLarians as a Supporter. In keeping with the observer-as-participant role, I agreed. They explained two main reasons for their request. The first was consistency for the RYLarians (as well as venue staff and guests) in that everyone staying the week had a clear role to fulfil for the duration of their attendance. The second reason was their belief that I would gain a better understanding of the week by being a Supporter: particularly by participating in a Colour Group (explained below) and also in the Supporter debriefs each evening. While some authors warn against being
forced into a given role (e.g., Gray et al., 2007), in this instance I did not believe it would reduce my ability to observe any aspect of RYLA and indeed agreed with the Supporter Team’s belief that belonging to a Colour Group would be beneficial.

Being a researcher is why I was there. But I found, very quickly, that it was difficult to both observe and record those observations. Colour Groups met for 30–45 minutes each day, and this time consumed much of my planned reflection time. Further, I sometimes found myself so tired from my exertions (see below for an explanation) that I needed to sleep during my personal “down time”, especially on days when I was also working in a professional role. With limited resources, I often found myself focusing more on content than either process or participants’ responses to the content and process; a trap I fell into many times during the week.

Bracketing of Prior Knowledge

One of the decisions I had to make as I prepared for RYLA was to decide what to focus on and how much interpretation to make as I recorded my observations. Specifically, I considered how much focus I should place on the three key themes identified in Study 1. I decided to ignore those themes for the duration of RYLA and focus on my daily experience. I cannot say that my observations below were not influenced by these themes since I had spent considerable time thinking about them while examining the focus
group interviews and then selecting appropriate measures for Study 3.

However, I made a conscious choice to participate and to observe what actually happened each day rather than risk recording what I might expect to see based on my research to date.

In the weeks leading up to RYLA, I avoided the theoretical literature and focused solely on the pragmatics of the survey for Study 3 (see Chapter 6 for details) and preparing for RYLA itself. This included preparing for the week’s observations, planning for the content I was hired to present and packing. My intention going into the week was to make detailed notes on my experiences and observations each day for subsequent interpretation, with particular attention given to the language used. If interpretations and ideas arose in the moment, based on those experiences, then I would note them also, but as much as possible I wanted to bracket my experience from theory.

As part of that bracketing, it is important to state clearly some key assumptions and beliefs I held prior to attending RYLA (Gray et al., 2007). The first is that, although it is called Rotary Youth Leadership Award (emphasis mine), I was cautiously skeptical of the use of the term “leadership”. Perhaps influenced by my reading of business leadership literature, and certainly influenced by my interpretations of the first two focus groups, I thought that RYLA was more likely to be a personal development program than a leadership development program. Also, although I had identified Openness to Experience as one of the three key
themes of change, this result was surprising to me and I was concerned that I had misinterpreted the data.

Finally, as explained below, during RYLA I was expected to present a simple model of the *Five Roles* of group leadership (see Appendix F). This model presents five different group roles, defined behaviourally, as important for team success. The model states categorically that each person is capable, indeed likely, to enact behaviours associated with multiple roles. The utility of this model is that individuals are encouraged to take responsibility for their behaviour in assisting a team to achieve its aims and to look at the balance of role-associated behaviours across the group rather than within specific individuals. Hence, although I had no pre-existing position regarding leadership theories, the content I was responsible for presenting could be seen as consistent with either behavioural or distributed leadership models. I made a conscious effort to set aside these beliefs throughout the week and believe that I was largely successful. However no person is without bias, so I leave open the question of the level of influence these beliefs had on my observations.

**Personal Complications**

While the bracketing, and balancing, of professional and research roles was challenging, the experience of RYLA was complicated for me on a personal level by ill health. I had experienced an acute and debilitating
illness 18 months before RYLA and was still recuperating. This extended recovery period was unexpected as, at the time the project was planned, my prognosis was for a full recovery well before RYLA. By the time the extent of my illness was known, I was committed to the project and decided to continue. The main impact was low energy, particularly after exertion, and a subsequent increased need for rest to recover. Given that I had professional responsibilities, and those responsibilities included care of the physical safety of others, I had to prioritise my recovery time ahead of observation and personal reflection. I found this frustrating and was disappointed when I had to use the time I allocated for reflection for recuperation instead. It also limited opportunities I would otherwise have had to observe sessions and talk with RYLarians. The practical consequence was that, as my responsibilities throughout the week increased, my observation and reflection time decreased.

**Research Questions**

Reflecting on my research questions, my key question was what changes occurred during, or as a result of, RYLA. So perhaps the challenges I faced during the week were not so problematic. After all, I was not trying to identify the causes of change, the factors contributing to change, or when the changes occurred, merely the nature of the changes themselves. The main purpose of attending for the whole week was to experience RYLA and
so have a deeper understanding of the RYLA experience, RYLArions’ shared
language and history, and, as a consequence, the research participants’
subsequent survey responses and focus group comments. I certainly gained
an understanding of how exhausting and overwhelming the experience can
be.

**RYLA 2009**

RYLA ran from Monday November 30 until Sunday December 6, 2009.
The full schedule of RYLA, from the time the RYLArions arrived, is included
in Appendix G. During the week, connection with the outside world was
minimal. Use of mobile phones was actively discouraged and there were no
radios, televisions or newspapers available apart from any that RYLArions
may have brought with them. Naturally, most participants had mobile
phones and used them to keep in touch with family and friends. Many also
used smart phones for email communication and Internet access for news
updates. Yet, despite this, most seemed willing to forego their regular
information diet for the week.

Described below is a brief overview of each day followed by my
reflections on that day. Since the Guest Facilitators were not part of the
current research project, approval was not sought to present detailed
content from their sessions. Hence, only a summary of the main sessions
each day is provided, with additional detail provided when referenced by
participants in Study 4 or to help illustrate the nature of the week. The purpose is to give the reader a sense of RYLA and the progression the RYLarians experienced over the week.

**Monday - Getting to know you**

The key aims for Monday were getting to know each other and settling in. Participants were collected from home by a local Rotary member and driven to a collection point where they boarded a chartered bus. As the bus travelled from northern Victoria to the conference venue east of Melbourne, it collected participants at several stops until all were on board. For those boarding at the first stop, they travelled approximately 300km and the journey took over 4 hours. A few RYLA Supporters travelled on the bus to begin the process of helping RYLarians get to know each other. In the meantime, the remaining Supporters were finalising preparations on site and briefing the staff from the venue and the Facilitators for the afternoon (including myself and a colleague from Interactive EdVentures).

On arrival, participants moved into their rooms and then went straight to lunch. Lunch was followed by a formal opening and introduction to the 2009 theme of *be the change that you want to be*. Time was provided for me to introduce myself, the research project and the three roles I would be taking during the week (researcher, RYLA Supporter and Facilitator working for Interactive EdVentures). Many participants who had not completed the
survey online chose to complete a pen and paper copy at this stage. When all were done, a fun series of games and activities were run by myself and a colleague. These were designed to ease tension, help participants get to know each other, establish a safe environment and finally to help them identify their goals and expectations for the week. This was immediately followed by an introduction to Colour Groups.

Colour Groups were a point of consistency throughout the week. They met every morning over breakfast and at least once more each day. While the groups were responsible for completing daily chores throughout the week, such as setting tables for meals or introducing Guest Facilitators, their main purpose was to provide opportunity for in-depth discussion in small groups (approximately eight people) of the daily content and to share concerns arising during the week. Each group was led by two Supporters. I was in Red Colour Group and was the third Supporter in this group. I had no formal role other than to be involved in the discussions. Because the content of Colour Group discussions is confidential, details will not be described below. It is important to know that they formed an important part of the week, allowing a structured opportunity for RYLarians to share their thoughts and experiences. This first Colour Group meeting, however, was mainly administrative: introductions, explanations of the purpose of colour group, distribution of materials and developing a group identity.
Following dinner, a Guest Facilitator provided a motivational and inspirational speech that subtly introduced many of the themes for the week. The final part of the day was an introduction to Individual Reflection Time. This was an allocated time each day, usually about 30 minutes duration, for personal reflection. While guidance was given in the form of written questions on the daily themes to act as prompts, RYLArians were free to choose their own method of reflection each day. For many this involved keeping a journal, for some it was meditation while others drew pictures. The only rule was that it was to be quiet time spent alone, without interaction with others. At the conclusion of the scheduled program for the day, the Supporter Team met to review the day, provide feedback on the content of the presentations and to discuss issues arising for the next day. This was a daily event for the Supporter team.

**Personal reflections.**

At the end of the day, I felt overwhelmed: a feeling I expect was shared by many RYLArians. For myself, I found it difficult to know what to attend to. Should I focus on content or process? On the people presenting or the participants reactions? The conversational tone or content? Detail or the general flow? I also faced a dilemma; obvious in retrospect, but unexpected at the time. As a Facilitator, part of my job was to relate my sessions to previous sessions. Hence I had a professional reason for attending to session
content. But as a researcher I was interested in the process as much, if not more, than content. This was a tension I struggled with for the entire week.

**Tuesday - Communication and project management**

As the first full day of the conference, Tuesday set the expectations for the rest of the week. Participants were given an agenda for the day (see Appendix G for a full schedule of the week, as seen by the RYLArians), noting only the time and title of each session. No other indication of content was provided until each session began. Several key recurring daily items were introduced on Tuesday, including juggling practice and singing as group warm-up activities and *Passion Speeches*. Passion speeches were an opportunity for each RYLArian to give a short impromptu speech on something they were passionate about. They were introduced as a way to practice public speaking, as well as a way to identify their own passions and learn more about each other. There were no other guidelines apart from the request that each RYLArian give three passion speeches during the week. Every lunch and dinner, from Tuesday onwards, was interrupted on multiple occasions by the tapping of a glass with a spoon and a volunteer standing to give a passion speech from a few seconds to several minutes duration. On Tuesday alone, passions included playing music, listening to music, family, pets, Rotaract, visiting elderly residents of a nursing home and mental health promotion.
The sessions for the day focused on three main themes: values, communication and project management. The first Guest Facilitator of the day ran a session on personal values and how they impact on interactions with others. She encouraged participants to question their immediate responses to situations. She also introduced the concept that the way we hold our body both reflects our personality and affects our communication. RYLArrians were encouraged to experiment using different “physiology styles”. The second Guest Facilitator gave a lecture on project management, culminating in the introduction of a large group project. This project involved RYL hosting a Rotary meeting the following evening. RYLArrians were expected to arrange all aspects of the evening and, apart from some basic information, were provided with very little guidance. This was their first major Leadership Challenge of the week and the term “challenge” was to be an important and recurring theme throughout the conference.

Given the lack of structure, which was an intentional component of the project, there was some initial resistance by many of the RYLArrians. Protests with phrases like, “There’s too much...” or “There’s not enough...” were voiced. Some focused on the details and content of the Rotary dinner, “What do Rotarians actually do?” while others worked on achieving group consensus, “What is our vision?” Still others looked for external supports, “Can we go back to the feasibility slide?” Yet, despite these initial concerns,
the RYLArions soon divided the task into practical segments and arranged themselves into working groups to address each component of the evening.

**Personal reflections.**

My notes from the day reinforce the value of hosting the Rotary dinner within the structure of RYLA. As a guest of this dinner in a previous year, I was aware of the importance placed on it by the Supporter Team, but had never really appreciated its full scope. I wrote, “It really is a project. It is real: a tangible task to be completed within a short time frame (approximately 28 hours).” Given that Rotary had partially or fully funded almost all of them, the participants had good reason to want to impress the Rotarians who attended. With the limited resources available, and even more limited planning and preparation time, it was a true challenge.

**Wednesday - The inner critic and working in teams**

The day started with the regular warm up activities (juggling practice with two balls and a song) and then introduced a new daily activity called *being-with*. This involved staring into a partner’s eyes for one minute, and then again for two minutes. Their instruction was to “just be” during the experience and observe their own thoughts and responses. Although I was unsure of the origins of the activity, I thought it had a similar effect as some mindful awareness strategies I had seen. The similarity lay in the focus on
the present moment; on paying attention to the immediate experience while being aware of one’s own responses.

The first Guest Facilitator presented an interactive session on using affirmations as a way of coping with the “inner critic”: the little voice of negativity that whispers in our mind. While not specifically based in any particular psychological approach, many components of the session were consistent with aspects of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (e.g., awareness of thoughts, questioning automatic thoughts, self-acceptance). This proved to be a key session, with RYLArians referring to it throughout the week.

The second Facilitator for the day was me: I ran the two Leadership Challenge sessions for the day. The first began with a review of the content so far and the RYLArians’ progression on the goals they identified on Monday. This was followed with basic group problem-solving activities, presented as an opportunity to practice implementing what they had learnt so far, with particular emphasis on project management. The second session began with the introduction of a simple model of effective group leadership behaviours. The model (outlined in Appendix F) is one that I originally learnt during my own training in adventure education and have modified in response to client feedback over the last 20 years. In short, it presents five types of behaviours key to high functioning groups. Its simple structure and behavioural focus resonates with groups, providing an easy approach to monitoring group action and a framework for modifying individual
behaviour. RYLarians were asked to identify the behaviours they think they used most often and then watch their own and others’ behaviours in subsequent activities. Important to the way the model was presented was that team members can choose to change their behaviours in response to group needs. A series of brief problem-solving activities provided the opportunity for developing familiarisation with the model. A key facilitation point arising during these activities was the importance of monitoring both process and outcomes. This was summarised during the sessions as “evaluation” and was frequently referenced over the next few days.

Following Individual Reflection Time, the remainder of the afternoon was allocated to preparations for the Rotary meeting. This involved rearranging the main meeting room for a formal dinner, planning the meeting to ensure it followed Rotary Club guidelines and honoured Rotary traditions, writing and printing a newsletter, preparing entertainment and presentations for the evening and ensuring Rotarians and other guests were welcomed on arrival. While some RYLarians calmly went about their allocated tasks, others appeared to be stressed by the imminent deadline. As an observer, it was difficult to establish if the difference lay in the nature of their tasks or their response to the challenge. The evening was then run as a regular Rotary Club meeting, with RYLarians as the guest speakers for the night.
After the Rotarians and guests left, the evening concluded with a detailed review of the evening, the challenges faced in preparing it and the processes used by the RYLarians in addressing those challenges. This appeared to be a pivotal moment in the progression of the week: from my perspective they appeared, from this point onwards, to be more cohesive as a group and more confident of their ability to deal with subsequent Leadership Challenges.

The RYLarians decided the evening was a success and nominated several aspects of the evening where they worked well. They linked specific details to concepts presented earlier in the week (e.g., communication, allocation of resources) and mentioned the importance of flexibility in adapting to unexpected circumstances (such as guests arriving early). Some reported that they thought their afternoon tasks were simple, requiring little effort, while others thought they had taken on responsibility for more work than they initially realised. Further, some said they were confident all the preparations would be successful and some expressed doubt they could do it (explaining my earlier observations of both calm preparation and frantic arousal).

When someone asked why have this project within RYLA, the RYLarians nominated it as a form of assessment. First they nominated it as an opportunity for the Supporters to assess them, but quickly reframed it as
an opportunity for them to assess themselves. Some of their subsequent statements included:

“Proves we can do it.”

“Provides a base level we can work from.”

“All of us used the tools and skills we had coming into RYLA.”

“Feeling pretty happy with ourselves.”

“We are worthy.”

“Validated why we came here, proved we had the skills we thought we had.”

“How awesome are we?”

**Personal reflections.**

The RYLarians appeared to thoroughly enjoy the Rotary dinner, although many reported being stressed by the effort. I noted above that the dinner appeared to be a pivotal moment, and it seemed to be so in several ways. First was the application of the content so far. The dinner served to provide the RYLarians with a concrete demonstration of the applicability of the material. They were able to use the content they were learning to complete the challenge. However I thought that the act of working together on such a concrete task, with real consequences, was just as important as the applied content and was independent of it. As the comments above illustrate, it acted as strong reinforcer of their self-concept and they noted the benefits and joys of working together. Together, I think these last two
points, reinforced self-concept and the joy of working together, may have
had the greater impact over the rest of the week than the session content
they used.

**Thursday - Balance and diversity**

Following the morning warm-up activities and song, the RYLArians
revisited the being-with activity from Wednesday. It was extended to three-
and-a-half minutes followed by a brief discussion of their experience.
Comments included, “It freaks me out a little,” “It was easier than
yesterday” and “The first 30 seconds were most difficult”. It appeared that
all but one pair completed the activity, and it seemed to me that they were
becoming more aware of their own responses and their ability to sit with the
discomfort. The entire room achieved a level of stillness quite unlike the
previous day and this quiet peace was carried through to the next session; a
brief review of positive affirmations to counter “the negative inner voice”
before the remainder of the morning was conducted by a Guest Facilitator.

Under the general topic of “Leading Yourself”, this speaker introduced
activities and lecture content around the key themes of mindful action,
balanced living, regulating mood and an open mindset. Of particular note,
was an activity asking RYLArians to physically act out different moods and
feel their actual mood change in response to their body positions. While
Tuesday’s session focused on using one’s body in communication, this
session focused on changing embodied emotions. Since they could change their mood at will during the activity, they could choose to do the same in their daily lives: a point frequently referenced during the next few days.

Another point that was often mentioned by RYLArians throughout the remainder of the week, particularly in their informal time, was the notion of balancing their commitments and energy across their personal, community and professional domains.

The afternoon sessions, which I missed for the health reasons discussed at the beginning of the chapter, were on the general themes of conflict resolution and personal leadership. The conflict session focused on two levels: first on emotional regulation and self-talk; second on specific conflict resolution strategies, with links to professional resources. A key component of this session was dealing with the actual person, not the stereotype of the person. I believe that one of the sessions also included role-plays practising effective listening skills and using “I” statements in “assertive” communication. The session on personal leadership followed up on the emphasis on balance in the morning presentation, with a specific focus on balancing physical, mental and spiritual needs. After dinner, there was a session on community service, with volunteers from various community organisations (including Rotary, Rotaract, State Emergency Services, Country Fire Authority and others) discussing the role of their organisation and why they volunteered.
Personal reflections.

My written reflections from the day, apart from the observations of the sessions themselves, were focused on the Rotary dinner from the previous evening. This, in itself, is evidence of the importance of the dinner within the week, but I find it curious that I was reflecting on the responses of the Supporter team in the evening debrief after the dinner. I noticed that some were comparing the evening to their own experience of the dinner, contrasting RYLArians’ analysis of the event to their own. I wondered about their own objectivity as they reflected on the evening. Perhaps I thought it may have some bearing on their interactions with RYLArians during the rest of the week but I suspect that, in my tiredness, I lost objectivity and became caught up in the events of the week.

Friday - Finances, public speaking, real vs perceived limits

The day began with the now-routine warm-up of juggling, song and being-with activity. By now, the RYLArians simply participated without comment in all three. Following the morning routine, the RYLArians were split into two groups for the remainder of the day. In the morning they rotated between Financial Literacy (run by a Guest Facilitator) and Leadership Challenges (run by me). Unfortunately, despite being a Facilitator on this day of the program for many years, I have never seen the financial literacy session. I understand they play a board game focusing on
personal financial management and then debrief their experiences after the
game. From my perspective, there were no observable differences between
the two groups, with little comment from the second group about their first
activity; they were focused on the challenges I was about to present.

The Leadership Challenge session I ran had three key aims: to have fun,
to challenge RYLarians to question their assumptions when stuck, and to
provide a difficult group challenge that would test their emotional self-
regulation and interpersonal communication skills. Building on the notion
of evaluation arising in Wednesday’s Leadership Challenge, this session
focused attention more on issues of process than outcome.

The afternoon followed a similar structure with the same two groups
rotating between a session on Public Speaking and another Leadership
Challenge session with me. The content of the public speaking session is
self-explanatory, although again I have never observed it since it coincides
with sessions I run. My session moved from the group problem-solving
activities of previous Leadership Challenges to more traditional adventure
activities. Through a structured series of activities, each participant
practiced relevant safety skills, then had the opportunity to be bodily lifted
by the group. Each RYLarian was able to experience physical and emotional
support from their colleagues as well as to provide it to others.
Opportunities were also made for them to direct the body lift activity (under
close supervision) and experience responsibility for coordinating the safety
of the group. Every RYLArian participated in at least two different ways—lifting, directing or being lifted—and most chose all three. A key facilitation focus was on identifying and stretching their level of comfort and identifying their perceived versus actual limits.

My colleague Paul, who was present for the first session on Monday, returned to run the final session with me before dinner. It had the sole purpose of introducing the safety equipment (harnesses and helmets) and safety skills (belay technique) required for Saturday’s challenge. No specific information about the day was provided, other than it was offsite, they would need to use safety equipment and the principle of Challenge by Choice introduced on Monday (see Glossary for details) would continue to apply. When participants asked what was going to be done, we respected the Supporter Team’s request that we not provide detail (again, as I understand it, so that the day would be experienced “as is” and not based on preconceptions) and so we simply reasserted that it was yet another Leadership Challenge where they could implement what they had been learning so far. For those who had safety concerns, we emphasised that their level of participation was entirely their choice, provided statistics on the safety of the activities and reassured them that could ask as many questions as they wanted the next day.

After dinner and passion speeches, some of the Supporters took the group for a walk as part of their reflection time. When the RYLArians
returned, they discovered that the main meeting room had been decked out with board games, foot baths, hand creams and nail polish. The final session of the evening, titled *Mind, Body and Soul: Looking after yourself* was introduced as a “pamper” night and the opportunity for them to relax and look after themselves. They took the opportunity to paint each other’s nails (some of the women loved painting the men’s toenails, mine included), provide shoulder and head massages and do each other’s hair. Numerous card games and other table games were started and the conversations were playful, affirming and relaxed.

**Personal reflections.**

This was the day that I most struggled to record my observations as I had professional duties all day. I missed Colour Group as I packed away the safety equipment and was late to dinner. By the time I was done, I was exhausted. After dinner, I needed a nap prior to the evening’s “pampering” and even then I still had to retire early. I was aware that I had another full day to follow and I simply had to honour my professional responsibilities. However, I did enjoy the pamper night and the easy camaraderie that RYLArians shared. In the time I was there, it seemed everyone was involved in a social activity of some kind, whether in pairs or small groups. The fact that none of the men, regardless of their background, refused to let their nails (or hair) be painted was an indication of the trust that had developed. Scrabble quickly switched from a competitive game to win, to a playful game.
of collaborative story making. This was a group clearly at ease and enjoying each other’s company.

**Saturday – Challenge**

Following the normal morning routine everybody, including myself, boarded a bus to travel to the day’s Leadership Challenge: a planned sequence of activities on a Challenge Ropes Course. All that the RYLArions knew at this stage, however, was they were going off-site, that the challenge would involve ropes and harnesses and that I coordinated it on behalf of my employer. On arrival at the venue (a suburban location in Melbourne), there was a mixture of relief (it wasn’t rock climbing) and considerable anxiety (it was still up high). My immediate responsibility was to brief the other company staff, who had been preparing the equipment while I was en route with the RYLArions, on some of the content areas from the week that may be relevant to the day. I gave them a list of key words and phrases (such as “five roles”, “inner voice” and “what is your goal?”) to use as prompts when working with RYLArions.

As on Friday, the group was split into two and for most of the morning worked on low-ropes course elements. The general sequence was safety briefing, team-focused activities then individual challenge activities (requiring safety support from the group). An example of a team-focused low ropes activity is the Mohawk Walk: Without touching the ground, a group
must support each other across a series of cables suspended approximately 60cm high (see Figure 1). The morning finished with the two groups rejoining for a brief activity and a preview of the afternoon’s high ropes course options. Again, emphasis was placed on choosing one’s own challenges and supporting others in their challenges.

The afternoon began with a review of the safety equipment introduced the previous evening and an opportunity to practise the associated skills. Following a final site-specific safety briefing, the RYLArians were then able to choose the high ropes activities they wanted to challenge themselves with, and were able to move freely between the different activities in very small groups (four to five people). Under the supervision of ropes course staff, they belayed each other (kept each other safe with ropes) and provided support and encouragement to those around them. Sometimes the entire group would stop to watch someone attempt an activity that was particularly challenging such as jumping off the Leap of Faith (see Figure 2, also described in the Glossary). Many times, RYLArians were heard to yell support to someone standing on the pole from across the venue. A key point, frequently referenced throughout the day, was that fear was a signal to pay attention. Fear was framed as a healthy, normal, response. Thus what each person then did while experiencing their fear was their choice: they might choose to continue, or choose to come down, but each choice was valid and supported. Similarly, many participants reminded each other of content
from the week, such as changing their emotion by changing their body position or using positive affirmations.

The main theme of the day was “challenge”; how did they use what they had learned during the week to challenge themselves or to support others with their challenges? Despite, or because of, the high level of anxiety on Figure 1. RYLArions completing the Mohawk Walk low ropes course activity in 2009. Image has been cropped for clarity. Where faces are identifiable, permission has been received to use their likeness; other faces have been obscured. Photo used and adapted with the permission of Rotary District 9790 RYLA committee.

Figure 1. RYLArions completing the Mohawk Walk low ropes course activity in 2009. Image has been cropped for clarity. Where faces are identifiable, permission has been received to use their likeness; other faces have been obscured. Photo used and adapted with the permission of Rotary District 9790 RYLA committee.
arrival in the morning, there was a buzz by the end of the afternoon. At the end of the ropes course component of the day, the group gathered to review what they had done, make some reflections on their experiences and give feedback to each other. The RYLArians looked relaxed and confident as they discussed their experience. A highlight, mentioned by several, was watching others choose to be challenged. There was an expression of genuine pleasure in the success and accomplishments of others.

Overwhelmingly, the comments were positive, with particular emphasis given to feeling safe. Many of the RYLArians attributed their willingness to challenge themselves and their perceived boundaries to this sense of safety. There was also an expression of pleasure in watching others be challenged. Many commented, either generally or with specific examples, of the joy and inspiration they experienced in watching others stretch themselves. Finally, many made specific reference to content from different parts of the week.

At the end of the day, the group returned by bus to the conference venue while I remained behind to complete my professional duties (packing up equipment, staff debriefing, completing safety logs, etc). By the time I returned to the site dinner was almost finished. Sadly this meant that I missed the conversations on the ride home as well as over dinner; possibly my greatest personal disappointment for the week.
Figure 2. Participant jumping off the *Leap of Faith* high ropes course activity at RYLA 2009. Image has been cropped for clarity. Photo used and adapted with the permission of Rotary District 9790 RYLA committee.
The Colour Group Challenge was an opportunity for each group to prepare, and then present, a short skit about their key memories from the week. This provided a great opportunity to observe what the RYLarians perceived as most significant for themselves. There was a lot of humour in their presentations, but I also found it interesting to note the recurring themes. One of these was the trust that had developed over the week and that was particularly evident on the ropes course activities. Related to this, was the importance of the support and encouragement that was provided. Some groups then linked this to the Five Leadership Roles content and that providing support was an active choice they could make to contribute to team effectiveness. Two groups mentioned physiology styles in their presentations and several commented on the chatter of their inner voices. As one RYLarian said, “One of the best things was learning about the inner voices ’cos those things just love to talk!”. But the most frequently mentioned content from the week was the impact of body posture on mood. All of this was presented in a wonderfully generous, uninhibited, way. For myself, this session remains a highlight of the week and a treasured memory of RYLA. I noted at the time that it would be interesting to see if these same content areas would be discussed in the post-RYLA surveys or the final focus group.

The last part of the evening was a dance party: loud music, DJ requests, disco lights and uninhibited dancing provided an opportunity for the
RYLArians to celebrate their week together. In a subtle way, it also marked the beginning of the end. This was their last night together and tomorrow they would be going home. I participated briefly then went to bed, utterly exhausted.

**Personal reflections.**

I was completely exhausted. I state this again because I think it has relevance for my interpretations of the day. I was, personally, proud of the work my colleagues at Interactive EdVentures had done. Physically and mentally though, the day was draining. As senior staff for my employer, I was always alert to the physical safety of our participants (the RYLArians), the flow of the day, the movement and responsibilities of our staff, as well as the process needs of individuals under my direct supervision (Do they need encouragement? Is there an aspect of the week’s content that is relevant to this moment? What are their goals? What links are they making to the week’s content?). Even when 100% healthy I find these days draining, so it was all the more so while recuperating. I was very grateful for the recovery time I had given myself over the previous days.

The impact of this, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, is that my notes from Saturday are minimal and sketchy. On one level I am pleased that I remembered to take notes at all, but also frustrated that the data were thin. Yet two thoughts stand out for me from the day, both hinted at in my observations recorded above. The first thought was that there was a link
between support and challenge, one that I wanted to explore further. The second, in response to the emphasis that so many RYLarians placed on using their body to manage their mood, was wondering how this related to emotional regulation and what impact it might have beyond RYLA. A final thought I had, in response to my exertions during the day and subsequent exhaustion, was wondering how functional I would be on Sunday.

**Sunday – Transitions**

The final day appeared to have two main aims: review the week and provide a transition back to the RYLarians’ home environments. There were opportunities for guided reflection in a large group and RYLarians were asked to consider their one, five and ten year goals based on what they had experienced during the week. In private reflection time, they wrote their goals in as much detail as they could, then shared them with their Colour Group. They were also given the recommendation to use a “3 week rule”: to allow a three week “cooling off” period to evaluate and assess their goals before enacting any life-changing decisions they may subsequently regret. During morning tea, and again at lunch time, RYLarians wrote messages to each other in their notebooks and made plans to meet. After lunch, the week culminated in a graduation ceremony to which RYLarians’ families and representatives of their sponsoring Rotary clubs were invited. The ceremony was brief, but moving. Beginning with a video compilation of the week, it
included brief speeches by the RYLA Coordinator, representative RYLArrians, Rotary dignitaries. I also provided a brief explanation of my research. At several times, RYLArrians and Supporters, including myself, were moved to tears. Each RYLArrian was presented with a certificate of attendance and a CD-ROM of photos and memorabilia from the week. As the ceremony finished in song, there were many tears as RYLarians said goodbye to each other.

**Reflections on the week.**

RYLA was exhausting and exhilarating, for the RYLArrians and for me. As a professional working with RYLA for a number of years, I have always enjoyed the time I have spent with RYLArrians, but to spend the entire week there in 2009 was a much greater pleasure. I truly enjoyed the relationships formed with the RYLArrians and Supporters and have a deeper appreciation of how the various elements of the week fit together. Yet I also left RYLA feeling frustrated and disappointed. I was keenly aware on multiple occasions during the week of how reliant I was on my body. I gained an unexpected understanding of the limits of the researcher as research instrument and the role of my body within my research. It remains a source of deep disappointment that my convalescent body was not capable of conducting all of the research activities I expected of it. The times that I had intended to use for diarising were instead needed for recuperation. Hence,
while the experience of RYLA remains a personally rich one, the data I recorded had less detail than expected or desired.

The outcome is that I cannot annotate my narrative of the week as fully as I believe the week warranted. The nature of the data, the notes and reflections on my own participation during the week, are such that it is impossible to “run the experiment again”. Savage (2007) mentions the “transience of the body in action” (p. 334). While she raises this in the context of the role of the body in research, that reflecting on physical actions can shed light on the participative experience, the concept also has salience for me as an explication of the fleeting moment. The RYLA in which I participated has passed and cannot be re-experienced, I have now only my memories, my notes and the visual record of photographs and videos.

**Post-RYLA**

As suggested by Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, and Mattis (2007), I developed a strong relationship with many of the RYLarians over the course of the week. Since I participated as a Supporter then, like the other Supporters, I was invited to “friend” many (indeed most) of the RYLarians on FaceBook in the days and weeks following the conference. This created a personal ethical dilemma. I felt, as Suzuki et al. described it, a pull to maintain the relationships. Yet I was also aware that it would be difficult to discriminate the content of ongoing social contact with RYLarians and
Supporters from the content of my own reflections on the week and any subsequent analysis and interpretation of survey and focus group data.

Further, although there would likely be interesting and potentially useful information disclosed in online discussions that could help in interpreting the data obtained from Study 2, this had not formed part of my agreement with participants when I outlined my involvement prior to RYLA, nor had I raised it with my University Ethics Review committee. Hence I sent a message to all RYLarians explaining that, until the research project was complete, I could not accept any friendship requests using online social media.

**Personal reflections since RYLA**

Looking back now, I see the Rotary dinner on Wednesday night as a key event in developing self-efficacy in the RYLarians. Although I think that other activities and content were also important, I believe the dinner played a central role in four key ways. First, as reflected in their comments on the night, the RYLarians believed it used their existing skills, and so provided a mastery experience that reinforced their belief in their own abilities. Second, they were able to watch each other prepare for the dinner, acting as a form of vicarious experience (mastery and vicarious experiences are discussed in greater depth in Chapter 6). Third, although the Leadership Challenges throughout the week provided many opportunities for mastery and vicarious
experiences, the dinner had “real world” implications. Given also that it was completed by the end of the third day, their perceived success framed their remaining challenges. Finally, it provided a key bonding experience that helped cement their relationships and increase their willingness to trust each other in subsequent activities.

Since RYLA, I have been curious about the origins and utility of some of the activities, particularly the daily being-with activity and the notion of using body position to change mood. I was surprised to learn that the being-with activity—staring into another’s eyes—has been used in couples counselling by Robert Epstein (2010). Epstein reports that the activity, which he calls Soul Gazing, increases feelings of liking and loving. Apart from his own work with clients and students, Epstein’s claims appear to be based on studies by Kellerman, Lewis, and Laird (1989). These earlier studies found that holding a mutual gaze for 2 minutes increased feelings of love for the other person, but only when the gaze was understood by both parties as mutual. While an increase in feelings of love towards the other person may have been an effect of the being-with activity, it was not something that I observed or heard the RYLArians mention.

Holding another’s gaze is also a common exercise in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). The “Eye Contact Exercise” (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999, p.244) is a core ACT intervention and the gaze is held for about 3 minutes. Since the exercise is usually uncomfortable, its purpose is
for clients to be aware of the painful or difficult content that can arise in life and that, when such content arises, conscious committed action remains possible. That is, clients can continue to choose to gaze into another’s eyes, even when they become aware of discomfort. This use of the extended eye-gaze activity within ACT is exactly the way it was presented at RYLA, as an exercise in sitting with discomfort and observing one’s own responses; consistent with my observation at the time of it encouraging a form of mindful awareness.

Subsequent to RYLA I also found support for changing mood by changing body position within the literature on embodied cognition and embodied emotion. In brief, these theories account for the effects that body and facial positions have on tasks as diverse as learning (Cook, Mitchell, & Goldin-Meadow, 2008; Goldin-Meadow & Wagner, 2005), expression of willpower (Hung & Labroo, 2011), recognition of rhythm (Phillips-Silver & Trainor, 2007), persistence in difficult tasks (Friedman & Elliot, 2008), memory retrieval (Dijkstra, Kaschak, & Zwaan, 2007), self-evaluation (Briñol, Petty, & Wagner, 2009) and estimation of quantities (Eerland, Guadalupe, & Zwaan, 2011). Regarding embodied emotion, Niedenthal (2007) noted that body movement, posture and facial expression can change the experience of emotion. Other reviews report similar findings, and their neurological correlates, from a wide range of studies and a number of theoretical approaches (e.g., Fiori, 2009; Heberlein & Atkinson, 2009;
Niedenthal, Barsalou, Ric, & Krauth-Gruber, 2005). As Niedenthal and Maringer note, “Embodiment theories are appealing for the study of emotion because they hold that what individuals ‘know’ about emotion is represented by their capacity to simulate or partly re-experience emotion” (2009, p.122). Of more direct relevance to the exercise at RYLA, Carney, Cuddy, and Yap (2010) reported that holding a “high-power” pose (expansive and open posture) for one minute resulted in an increase in testosterone, a decrease in cortisol and an increase in risk taking (as estimated by a gambling task) along with a corresponding subjective sense of feeling more in control. In contrast, holding a “low-power” pose created the opposite effects: decreased testosterone, increased cortisol, comparatively less risk taking and lower sense of control. Their conclusion was, “By simply changing physical posture, an individual prepares his or her mental and physiological systems to endure difficult and stressful situations, and perhaps to actually improve confidence and performance” (p. 1367). Although it is beyond the scope of this project to conduct a critical review of the embodied cognition literature, it is interesting to note that it is consistent the RYLA activities.

Apart from curiosity about the science associated with specific activities from the week, I also reflected on some of my challenges during RYLA. Apart from health, the other great challenge was balancing the different roles I was expected to fulfil. Although I expected it to be demanding, I don’t think I appreciated just how difficult it would be to
participate as a Supporter, plan and deliver content as a Facilitator and also record my thoughts and observations throughout the week as a researcher. For example, I had not considered the opportunity cost of remaining onsite at the ropes course while the RYLArians took the bus back; it was only on reflection that evening I realised what I had missed. Yet, in the weeks and months following RYLA I developed an ever greater appreciation for the week. Although balancing the multiple roles was a greater limitation than expected, the overall experience has contributed enormously to my understanding of the week and informed all of my subsequent analyses.

I noted at the beginning of this chapter that I was skeptical of the word “leadership” and concerned about the focus group theme of Openness. On reflection after RYLA, I was still unsure of the appropriateness of leadership. While I could recall dozens of instances of individuals influencing others towards a common goal, I was uncertain how that would generalise to each RYLArian’s home environment. My thoughts about Openness, however, did change, particularly when considering self-awareness and emotional regulation. Although I didn’t notice it at the time, when subsequently reviewing my notes from Thursday I found it interesting that self-awareness and emotional regulation were integral to several of the sessions throughout the day. I began to wonder if the combination of these sessions, plus the content related to stereotypes and conflict resolution, contributed to the theme of Openness identified in the focus groups. Hence, I began to look
forward to analysing the results of the quantitative study to determine if this was, indeed, subject to change after participating in RYLA along with the other themes of self-efficacy and meaning.
Chapter 6.

Study 3 - Quantitative survey

The themes from the Study 1 focus groups were used to select quantitative measures prior to the 2009 RYLA described in Study 2 (see Chapter 5). As reported in Chapter 4, there were three key areas of change identified from focus group discussions. These were general self-efficacy, sense of meaning and openness to experience.

**General Self-Efficacy**

The construct of general self-efficacy (GSE) is an extension of the work of Bandura on perceived self-efficacy (Scherbaum, Cohen-Charash, & Kern, 2006). Perceived self-efficacy refers to a person’s beliefs regarding their ability to perform the actions required for a given outcome (Bandura, 1977, 1997). Bandura (1997) observed that a person’s perception of their own ability has more influence on the outcome of their efforts than their actual ability. A person who has the ability to perform a complex action, but does not believe they can, is unlikely to invest the time and energy required to successfully complete it. In contrast, someone who does hold such an efficacy belief will likely continue to attempt the task, even in the face of failure, until they develop the necessary skills and strategies required for
success. In short, perceived self-efficacy represents what we think we can do (Maddux, 2009).

Bandura (1977, 1997) has described four possible sources of increased self-efficacy beliefs: enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion and interpretation of physiological and affective states. Bandura (1997) maintained that all influences on self-efficacy beliefs operate through one or more of these and, additionally, require subsequent cognitive processing. According to Bandura (1997), enactive mastery experiences are direct experiences of success. These experiences of successful action have the most direct and generalizable influence on perceptions of efficacy.

Vicarious experiences arise when someone compares themselves to others. The greater the perceived similarity, especially in regard to existing competence, the more salient the comparisons and the greater the impact on self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997). Thus, observing similar others succeed in an endeavour will enhance the belief that one can also succeed. Conversely, if they fail then perceived ability will diminish. While vicarious experiences are generally considered to be weaker than direct ones, they can be particularly salient in novel situations. The high levels of uncertainty associated with minimal prior experience can be somewhat ameliorated by watching what similar others do and how they go about doing it: that is, by
attending to others’ apparent affective states and levels of perseverance in addition to the specific skills and strategies they use.

Vicarious experiences can also occur when using oneself as the referent. This can occur in three ways: by watching video recordings of oneself successfully negotiating the desired skill, by visualising mastery of that skill, or by remembering past success. Bandura (1997) reported that the first technique is especially effective if the mis-starts, mistakes and setbacks are edited out or the recording is structured to maximise perceived performance. The second approach uses mental rehearsal of skilled performance, ideally repeated in a staged progression of increasing difficulty. Maddux (2009) described such imagined experiences as a distinct source of efficacy beliefs. Finally, reminders of earlier successes can also boost efficacy beliefs.

Social persuasion, also described by Bandura (1997) as verbal persuasion, refers to the efforts of others to influence self-efficacy beliefs through expressions of faith in capability. Bandura notes that social persuasion can help individuals sustain effort in the face of difficulties. Social persuasion is most effective when it focuses on ability (rather than efficacy), is grounded in necessary skill development and is given by judges perceived to be credible and competent by the recipient.

Bandura also notes the important role of physiological and affective states (1997), or emotional arousal (1977), in forming self-efficacy beliefs.
These somatic indicators include autonomic responses to stress such as increased heart rate, respiration and perspiration. However Bandura (1997) notes that these are not the only physiological factors that are interpreted as indicators of self-efficacy. Feelings of tiredness or pain may inform people’s self-efficacy beliefs in regard to activities involving physical exertion. With both sources of physiological information, it is the context and subsequent interpretation of the relevant sensations that impacts on self-efficacy beliefs. Similarly, mood can bias attention to, and memory of, mood-congruent cues, thus impacting interpretation of events and subsequently efficacy beliefs.

Common to all these sources of perceived self-efficacy is the role of cognition. That is, experiences themselves are insufficient; it is how one attends to and interprets the information within those experiences that will subsequently impact self-efficacy beliefs. All four of the above sources of efficacy beliefs are also more effective when there are strategic elements involved. That is, if the successful action (or vicarious modelling, social feedback or interpretation of physiological state) includes indicators of the mental processes involved then it will be more effective than if it was simply a mechanistic experience. So if a doctoral candidate attends to the fact that his supervisors want to see a draft chapter, and then interprets his subsequent completion of that chapter as a stress response under pressure, then his perceived thesis-writing self-efficacy is unlikely to improve. If, in
contrast, he were to focus on the *strategies* he used and interpret use of those strategies as evidence he could do the same again, then the same perceived self-efficacy may improve.

High self-efficacy has been linked to a number of positive outcomes, including psychological and physical well-being, self-regulation of behaviour, effectiveness of psychotherapy and team success (Maddux, 2009). Generally, self-efficacy beliefs are thought to be specific to distinct areas of competence. For example, one person may believe in their public speaking efficacy but have doubts about their swimming ability. While Bandura has argued that it does not make sense to look at self-efficacy without context (Bandura, 1997), others have argued that, in addition to domain-specific competencies, people have a general sense of self-efficacy (Jerusalem & Schwarzer, 1992; Scholz, Doña, Sud, & Schwarzer, 2002; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). General Self-Efficacy (GSE) represents the confidence a person has in their competence to cope with a wide range of novel situations (Luszczynska, Gutiérrez-Doña, & Schwarzer, 2005). There is evidence that GSE is a universal construct, valid across different cultures (Luszczynska, Scholz, & Schwarzer, 2005; Scholz et al., 2002).

The notion of GSE matches the experience described by the focus group participants in Study 1. As described in Chapter 4, these past RYLArions reported an increased belief in their ability to cope, indeed thrive, in challenging situations across a range of settings. While some mentioned
specific areas, such as choosing a university degree, or comfort with public speaking, they all agreed on an increase in their general confidence. They noted that, with this newfound confidence, they were comfortable and less stressed when approaching the boundaries of their perceived abilities.

Bandura (1997) has questioned the value of measures of general self-efficacy, noting that when changes in performance are associated with GSE, the change is usually better explained by specific efficacy beliefs. Despite this, Bandura also suggests that, within a “network of efficacy beliefs” (1997 p. 43), some efficacy beliefs are more general and of more importance: that is, the more fundamental the belief, the more wide-ranging the impact on a person’s life. Although Bandura clearly preferred specific efficacy measures over general ones, he seemed to tacitly acknowledge the possibility that general self-efficacy can play an important role in behaviour.

According to Chen, Gully, and Eden (2004), GSE is “a relatively stable, trait-like, generalised competence belief” while “self-efficacy is a relatively malleable, task-specific belief” (p. 376). This is in contrast to Bandura who explicitly differentiates self-efficacy beliefs from traits, noting that specific efficacy beliefs vary over both time and context (Bandura, 1997). Either way, it was clear from the focus group participants that their perceived self-efficacy had changed since attending RYLA. As noted in Chapter 4, the previous RYLArians who participated in the Study 1 focus groups described an increased confidence in their abilities to respond to life events. While this
was interpreted as an increase in GSE, there are very few studies reporting similar such changes. A review of the existing literature using Google Scholar and both the PubMed and PsycINFO databases found few studies using GSE as a dependent variable or reporting measurable changes in a GSE scale. One study (Moran & Brady, 2010) that reported a change in GSE in three parents and three adolescents (of unstated age) unfortunately did not use a measure of GSE, but instead used the Children’s Hope Scale. Although the authors reported that this measure was equivalent to measuring general self-efficacy, they reported no independent studies to verify their claim and provided no comparison with standard GSE measures. Further, it is unclear if any of their six participants were within the 8-16 year old age group for which the Children’s Hope Scale has been validated (Snyder et al., 1997) so it is difficult to assess the reliability of their results, let alone the validity of the purported change in GSE.

One of the few studies to measure change in GSE examined the effects of cognitive-behavioural coping skills on test-anxious college students (Smith, 1989). Participants in a coping skills training program reported significant change in specific self-efficacy (both test anxiety and academic performance) and in general self-efficacy while a control group showed no significant change. The measured changes in both the specific self-efficacy domains were correlated with the change in general self-efficacy.
In a study on the effects of a three day challenge ropes course program on commencing students at the South African Military Academy, no significant change in GSE was found in the intervention group at eight weeks follow-up, while the comparison group (young career officers already enrolled in the Army Gymnasium) reported a significant increase in GSE over the same time frame (Stadler & Kotze, 2007). As noted by the authors, it is possible that the lack of change in the intervention group was due to the military context of their training program and the inherent limitations on self-directed behaviour this imposed over the eight-week follow-up period. Further, the comparison group was on average two years older and was already acculturated into the military environment.

One of the difficulties in searching for studies reporting changes in GSE is the apparent confusion between general self-efficacy and specific self-efficacy. For example, in the report by Stadler and Kotze (2007) mentioned above, they cited one previous study that had reported the effect of an adventure program on self-efficacy. However, while Stadler and Kotze used a measure of GSE, the authors they cited had created their own specific scale measuring perceived self-efficacy on outdoor tasks such as rock-climbing, outdoor cooking or flora identification (Propst & Koesler, 1998). A meta-analysis on the effectiveness of challenge ropes courses by Gillis and Speelman (Gillis & Speelman, 2008) reported a mean effect size of 0.48 across seven studies measuring self-efficacy. Unfortunately, the authors
provided no guidance as to the nature of the self-efficacy being reported, or even if the same type of self-efficacy was measured in each of the studies included for analysis. It is possible that they all measured GSE, but equally possible that none of them did. Indeed it is possible that they all measured a different specific self-efficacy. Most other studies that have measured change in self-efficacy have measured some form of domain-specific self-efficacy, such as leadership self-efficacy (McCormick, Tanguma, & López-Forment, 2002; Samuels, Foster, & Lindsay, 2010), academic self-efficacy (Gerhardt & Brown, 2006; Zimmerman, 2000), wilderness-skills self-efficacy (Propst & Koesler, 1998), etc. Thus there is little comparable research into the effects of short-term interventions on changing GSE.

Yet, despite the lack of research reporting change in GSE, it remains clear from the study outlined in Chapter 4 that the focus group participants described a significant increase in confidence. Whether this was a state-type change specific to certain activities and contexts, or a general trait-like change generalizable across situations, is a secondary question. Indeed, the study by Smith suggested that GSE is correlated with changes in specific self-efficacies (1989). Further, while Bandura (1997) may be correct that any observed change in general self-efficacy may be better accounted for by specific self-efficacies, it was unclear from participants which specific domains may apply in this instance. Hence it is reasonable to begin by measuring general self-efficacy. Based on interpretation of the past
RYLArian comments reported in Chapter 4, the first hypothesis of this study is that *GSE will increase following participation in RYLA.*

**Meaning in life**

While self-efficacy can be viewed in either a general or domain-specific way, similarly meaning in life can be interpreted in a number of ways (Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005; Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006; Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan, & Lorentz, 2008). Steger (2009) discusses a range of approaches to considering meaning in life and notes that there are two main approaches to defining it. The first defines meaning in motivational, or purpose-centred, terms where meaning is derived from the pursuit of goals. The second approach he described as a cognitive, or significance-centred, one where meaning is generated by the active interpretation of experience; it represents a way of integrating elements of life into a coherent story. Identifying that both approaches have theoretical and experimental support, Steger then defined meaning in life as “as the extent to which people comprehend, make sense of, or see significance in their lives, accompanied by the degree to which they perceive themselves to have a purpose, mission, or over-arching aim in life” (2009 p. 682).

In their handbook on character strengths, Peterson and Seligman (2004) include sense of purpose in their description of spirituality. They use Nelson’s (1997, cited by Peterson & Seligman, 2004) definition of spiritual
and religious events as those that are attributed to divine or transcendent powers. However, although they distinguish between religiousness and spirituality, they focus most of their attention on religiousness, noting that, to date, little attention has been given to the functional differences between the two. They explained the conceptual difference by explaining that spirituality incorporates “both the private, intimate relationship between humans and the divine, and the range of virtues that result from that relationship” (pp. 602-603) while religiousness involves adherence to the prescribed beliefs and worship practices associated with a divine figure. Since the focus group participants did not speak about religious involvement or experiences, but all of the scales to measure spirituality listed by Peterson and Seligman involved religiousness or religious belief, none of those religious-based measures were appropriate in this context.

In the context of life happiness Peterson, Park, and Seligman (2005) describe a meaningful life in terms of Aristotle’s notion of eudemonia which they describe as “being true to one’s inner self” (p. 26). They note that similar concepts have been described by a number of philosophers and psychologists, but that all share the underlying principle of using one’s abilities to contribute to the greater good. This appears to be precisely the sense of meaning suggested by focus group participants in Chapter 4. This was illustrated by comments like, “…looking at what we can give to the world”; “…helping other people achieve their goals and their dreams.”;
“...helping other people be what they want to be...”. The participants discussed their experiences since RYLA in terms that are consistent with both Peterson et al.’s (2005) and Steger’s (2009) definition of meaning in life. They described, quite clearly, a greater sense of purpose in their lives, with meaningful goal setting one of the main changes they identified.

Participants in both groups also tried to describe the sense of significance they now found in their lives, with almost all them describing their work in the community as a way of “giving back” or contributing to something beyond themselves. This, in turn, is consistent with Peterson et al.’s notion that meaning is created through dedication to a larger entity. Thus it was hypothesised that participants in RYLA would demonstrate a significant increase in sense of meaning.

**Openness to Experience**

The concept of openness to experience was the third theme identified within the focus group discussions. Openness is one of the domains of the Five Factor Model (FFM) of personality, also known as the Big Five (see, for example, McCrae & John, 1992; Wiggins & Trapnell, 1997). While commenting on a seminal work on the FFM written by Tupes and Christal in 1961, McCrae (1992) noted that it was one of a number of independent studies to identify five stable factors that characterise personality. These five superordinate personality traits go by many names, but are typically called
Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism and Openness to Experience (McCrae & John, 1992; Wiggins & Trapnell, 1997). Wiggins and Trapnell (1997) summarised the convergence between the different theoretical approaches that independently led to identifying these five traits. They described the key distinction between these various approaches as the different emphasis each places on description of traits versus explanation of traits, although they also note that Goldberg’s empirically-based lexical approach does not readily fit within this distinction. Each of the Big Five personality factors consists of secondary, more specific, traits. Hence they can each be described by a group of thematically similar adjectives that describe a bipolar range of character traits.

Identifying semantically similar adjectives within every-day language, and then placing them within a trait model, formed the basis of Goldberg’s lexical approach (Goldberg, 1990; Wiggins & Trapnell, 1997). For example, Extraversion, sometimes called Surgency (Goldberg, 1990; Wiggins & Trapnell, 1997) or Positive Emotionality (Caspi, Roberts, & Shiner, 2005), can be described with synonyms such as spirit, gregariousness, spontaneity, playfulness, humour and optimism (Goldberg, 1990). The opposite end of the same scale, introversion, could be described with terms like aloofness, silence, reserve, shyness, passivity and pessimism (Goldberg, 1990). Watson and Clark (Watson & Clark, 1997) noted that a range of studies report high correlations between contemporary definitions of Extraversion and
measures of positive affect leading them to propose that positive emotionality is the common component. In their review of personality development, Caspi et al. (2005) noted that the three key facets of Extraversion are a tendency to positive mood, sensitivity to reward and enjoyment of social attention.

In contrast to the positive affect associated with Extraversion, Neuroticism is considered to be highly correlated with negative affect. Words like anxious, emotional, fearful, guilt-prone and insecure (or, at the other end of the scale, emotionally stable, independent and adaptable) are characteristic of Neuroticism (Caspi et al., 2005; Goldberg, 1990; Watson & Clark, 1997). Goldberg (1990) and Caspi et al. (2005) described traits associated with high Agreeableness as cooperative, empathic, considerate, generous, courteous; low Agreeableness is represented by traits such as aggressive, rude, selfish, cruel and deceitful. Traits thought to represent high Conscientiousness include responsible, organised, efficient, dependable, attentive, persistent and logical while the reverse include negligent, inconsistent, forgetful, unreliable, careless and distractible. Both Goldberg and Caspi et al. used terms like intellectual, curious, imaginative, insightful and creative to describe the final personality factor, Openness to Experience.

Openness to Experience, sometimes simply described as “Openness” within this thesis, involves receptiveness to novel ideas and unconventional
approaches and an appreciation of creative and artistic ventures. People who score highly in measures of Openness are considered open-minded and independent thinkers, whereas people low in openness prefer the familiar and conventional. McCrae and Costa (1997) note that open people are more tolerant of ambiguity and can access a greater range of experiences simultaneously, leading to more intense experiences. A longitudinal study of a cohort of Californian undergraduate students, assessed in their first week of college aged 18 and again in their fourth year aged 22, reported that over 80% of respondents did not show any reliable change on four of the five personality factors over this period. The fifth factor, neuroticism, was stable for 75% of respondents (Robins, Fraley, Roberts, & Trzesniewski, 2001). In contrast, a recent study of German high school graduates reported a small increase in Openness ($d = 0.16$) in the two years after leaving school (Lüdtke, Trautwein, & Husemann, 2009). The other personality variables to change were Neuroticism ($d = -0.28$), Agreeableness ($d = 0.25$) and Conscientiousness ($d = 0.30$) while Extraversion showed no significant change.

Although Openness is generally considered to be higher in youth, decreasing during the 20’s to become relatively stable from about age 30 (Costa & McCrae, 1997), a more recent study has suggested that Openness decreases slightly with age, with no difference in rate of change after age 30 (Srivastava, John, Gosling, & Potter, 2003). Consistent with this latter study,
a review of the stability of personality factors conducted by Caspi, Roberts, and Shiner (2005) suggested that personality factors show the greatest variability in young adulthood, and are then relatively stable throughout adulthood, with consistent patterns of change for both men and women (e.g., Openness increases in adolescence and emerging adulthood and decreases slightly in old age). Consistent in all of these studies is that Openness is generally stable, albeit with a measurable developmental decrease associated with increasing age.

Changes in personality, not attributed to development, are rare although not undocumented. While the Big Five personality dimensions of Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism have been measured in countless studies, they are usually used as independent variables (e.g., McElroy & Dowd, 2007). Based on studies such as these, and the consistent reports of construct stability over time reported above, it was surprising that the concept of Openness to Experience arose from the focus groups as one of the candidates for change at RYLA. Yet there are some studies investigating personality change. For example, Davenport, Bore, and Campbell (2010) compared people diagnosed with borderline personality disorder prior to treatment with participants with the same diagnosis who had completed a 14-month program of dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT). While the study was a between-group design, limiting interpretation of within-person change, there were significant differences on
Agreeableness and Conscientiousness between the two groups. Further, while the pre-treatment group means differed from the normative means for Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Neuroticism, only the latter was significantly different from the norm for the post-treatment group.

Another clinical study reporting significant change in a Big Five personality variable investigated temperament and personality stability in women completing a residential drug treatment program (Borman et al., 2006). This study found a significant, but small, decrease in Neuroticism over the four-week treatment period, but no significant change in any of the remaining Big Five factors. In a study on the psychometrics of using a personality measure during a depressive episode, Costa, Bagby, Herbst, and McCrae (2005), also compared the personality variables of participants who responded positively to a pharmacological treatment to their scores prior to treatment. They found significant changes in neuroticism, extraversion, openness and conscientiousness. Another study, specifically investigating personality changes following treatment for depression, reported significant change on all five personality variables (De Fruyt, Van Leeuwen, Bagby, Rolland, & Rouillon, 2006). Examining the effect sizes, most of the reported changes were small ($d \leq 0.21$) except for neuroticism ($d = 0.55$).

Apart from these few studies reporting personality changes in the context of therapy, there are a few that also report change following life events. In one such study, participants completed a self-report personality
measure, based on the FFM, twice over an average interval of eight years (Löckenhoff, Terracciano, Patriciu, Eaton, & Costa, 2009). After controlling for initial personality scores and demographic variables, those who had undergone significant adverse life events in the two years prior to follow-up reported increased Neuroticism and decreases in the openness to values facet of Openness to Experience and the compliance facet of Agreeableness. In a very different study, Halama and Lačná (2011) investigated personality change following religious conversion experiences. In their study of 60 converts, the authors compared self-reports and partner reports of a Big-5 measure of personality, as well as meaningfulness and self-esteem. Their results suggested significant change on four of the personality variables with significant decreases in neuroticism and increases in agreeableness, conscientiousness, and extraversion as well as meaningfulness and self-esteem. However, the analysis of these religious converts was based on retrospective completion of the pre-conversion measures. That is, they completed the measures twice at the same time, once for their current perceptions and a second time for their perceptions of their personality prior to their conversion experience. Hence, both the validity and the reliability of the reported changes are open to question.

While none of these studies are conclusive, taken together they suggest that Openness might be subject to change following significant life events. In light of this, and interpretations of focus group comments discussed in
Chapter 4, it was hypothesised that *Openness to Experience would increase following participation in RYLA.*

**Other Variables of Interest**

Since the primary aim of the current study was to confirm the key themes identified in Study 1, it was hypothesised there would be increases in (1) perceived general self-efficacy, (2) sense of meaning and (3) openness to experience in participants following RYLA. A secondary aim of the study was exploration of additional themes of change that may not have been identified in Study 1. Given that Openness is considered a trait, a characteristic stable over time, and that General Self-Efficacy has also been described as trait-like (Chen et al., 2004) it is possible that other trait-like factors may also change over the course of RYLA. For example, some focus group participants mentioned increased social activity and the discussions and demeanour of the focus group members overall suggested increased positive affect following RYLA, both of which could be considered an aspect of Extraversion (Caspi et al., 2005). This illustrates the possibility that other relevant themes were either not identified or not given sufficient prominence in analysis of the focus group discussions.

Further, as noted above, confidence is a trait associated with extraversion. Hence, although focus group comments regarding confidence were interpreted as referring to general self-efficacy, it is possible that
RYLArians may have also been describing increased extraversion. It is also possible that focus group discussions were misinterpreted and that comments thought to indicate Openness to Experience may instead be more related to Extraversion. As noted by Ng, Ang, and Chan (2008) and Hartman and Betz (2007), measures of personality have been correlated with, and mediated by, various self-efficacy domains. Therefore, all five personality domains were included in the analyses reported in this thesis. Similarly, it is possible, if not probable, that other constructs related to meaning, such as satisfaction with life, also changed. Hence, given the exploratory nature of the research, such additional constructs were also measured. Together, these domains will allow for confirmation of the initial themes of change through conventional hypothesis testing and also provide additional information for subsequent interpretation and analysis.

**Method**

**Participants**

Of the 26 RYLArions attending RYLA in Rotary District 9790 in 2009, 24 agreed to participate in the current study. There were 13 females and 11 males aged 18-27 years ($M=22, SD=2$). Participants were from a geographic area ranging from the regional city of Geelong in southern Victoria to rural towns in southern New South Wales. Approximately one quarter of participants were from suburbs in the greater Melbourne area.
Materials

General self-efficacy.

To measure GSE, the 10-item General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) was used. The GSES provides an indication of perceived general self-efficacy, or confidence in one’s competence to deal with new or unusual situations. Items such as *I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough* and *I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events* are scored on a 4-point Likert scale resulting in a total score between 10 and 40. Higher scores indicate higher perceived general self-efficacy.

The GSES has adequate psychometric properties (Scherbaum et al., 2006), with strong cross-cultural evidence that it measures a unitary construct (Scholz et al., 2002). Estimates of internal consistency with the original German sample were adequate with Cronbach alphas between .82 and .93 (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) and subsequent estimates with English samples have returned similar results (e.g., an alpha of .85 was reported by Scherbaum et al., 2006). Scholz et al. (2002) reported alpha coefficients of .87 or above for English speaking countries and cited previous studies indicating that the GSES had test-retest reliability estimates of up to .75 over a one year period for German speaking adults in stable circumstances. Other, lower, estimates of 12 month test-retest reliability
cited by Scholz et al. were either for students or for adults experiencing distressing life circumstances (refugees or patients undergoing surgery).

**Meaning.**

To measure change in sense of meaning, the Orientations to Happiness Scale (Peterson et al., 2005) was used. This 18-item scale measures pleasure, meaning and engagement as three orientations to happiness corresponding to hedonic happiness, eudemonic happiness, and flow. While other measures of meaning were considered, such as the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (Steger et al., 2006), the Orientations to Happiness Scale was chosen because of the possibility that other related constructs, namely pleasure and engagement, may be salient to RYLA. It was intended that a multi-construct scale such as the Orientations to Happiness Scale would allow for greater post-hoc analysis should meaning not be a relevant construct, and more nuanced analysis if it were.

Each orientation to happiness is measured by six items with respondents answering on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*Not like me at all*) to 5 (*Very much like me*). Hence the total score for each subscale ranges from 5 to 30 with higher scores on a subscale indicating greater endorsement of that orientation. Each subscale has adequate internal consistency, with reported Cronbach alpha coefficients of .82 for pleasure and meaning and .72 for engagement (Peterson et al., 2005). A German validation study of the scale reported high test-retest reliability over a 3- and 6-month period.
(Ruch, Harzer, Proyer, Park, & Peterson, 2010) and results from 27 nations indicate that all three subscales, particularly Engagement and Meaning, predict satisfaction with life (Park, Peterson, & Ruch, 2009). A study comparing participants from Australia with those from the United States reported comparable data between the two nations, but that Australians tended to score higher on Pleasure and Engagement and Americans on Meaning (Vella-Brodrick, Park, & Peterson, 2009). A subsequent multinational study, with a larger Australian sample ($N = 1354$), found a similar pattern of results between respondents from Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Ireland, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, and Sweden (Park et al., 2009). The mean scores for Australian respondents in that study were 2.94, 3.10 and 3.42 for Pleasure, Meaning and Engagement respectively.

**Openness.**

The Australian Personality Inventory (API; Murray et al., 2009) is a recent public domain measure of the five factor model of personality, based on the work of Goldberg (1999). The API has five subscales corresponding to the five personality factors of Neuroticism (N), Extraversion (E), Openness to Experience (O), Agreeableness (A) and Conscientiousness (C). Each subscale is measured with ten 5-point Likert items with responses ranging from 1 (very inaccurate), through 3 (neither inaccurate nor accurate), to 5 (very accurate) and results in a score between 10 and 50. Half of the items in each
subscale are reverse scored. Based on a large community sample ($N = 7615$), with age and gender proportions comparable to the Australian population, Murray et al. (2009) report adequate internal reliability estimates ranging from .71 (O) to .83 (N). Although they reported some discrepancy in the number of factors derived from the raw data with this sample (six factors instead of the expected five), correcting for apparent measurement error (using within-subject mean-standardised scores) resolved the number of factors. Further, they reported that the correlation between raw data scores and corrected scores was high enough that such correction was unnecessary to obtain meaningful results. Using a younger sample of university students ($N = 271$) closer in age to the current study, Murray et al. reported that each factor corresponded with the equivalent factor in the NEO Five-Factor Inventory. Consistent with the studies mentioned above, Murray et al. report the younger sample returned higher means for Openness, and also Extraversion, compared to the larger sample. Taking the results of both samples, Murray et al. concluded that the “API performs adequately as a measure of the FFM” (p. 173) and is thus a valid public-domain alternative to more costly pre-existing measures.

**Satisfaction with life.**

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWL; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) is a brief measure of life satisfaction. It consists of five items (e.g., “I am satisfied with my life”) scored on a 7-point scale ranging from
1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), thus total scores range from 5 (low life satisfaction) to 35 (high life satisfaction). Diener et al. (1985) reported an alpha coefficient of .87 and test-retest reliability coefficient of .82 at 2 months. In the multinational study by Park et al. (2009) mentioned above, mean scores for Australians on the SWL were 21.62.

Procedure

The project was approved by the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee prior to any correspondence with participants or data collection. In the week before RYLA the RYLA Co-ordinator, on my behalf, sent participants an email inviting them to complete the initial survey online. Paper copies were also available for completion on the first day. Included with the survey, both electronic and paper versions, was an explanation of the research (see Appendix E). Invitations to complete the follow-up surveys online were emailed 8 days following RYLA and at follow-up, 4 months later. The four survey instruments, plus three questions for inclusion in a subsequent qualitative study (see Chapter 7), were compiled for electronic completion online using SurveyMonkey. The qualitative responses were separated for later analysis (see Study 4 outlined in Chapter 7) and remaining responses were collated.
Results

Descriptive statistics for each of the measures can be seen in Table 1. Baseline levels were compared to previous studies on General Self-Efficacy (Cohen & Cairns, 2011), $t(522) = -0.87, p = 0.39, d = -0.32$; Meaning (Vella-Brodrick et al., 2009), $t(351) = 1.16, p = 0.245, d = 0.26$; and Openness (Murray et al., 2009), $t(292) = 1.09, p = 0.28, d = 0.23$. There were no significant differences. Note that Murray’s (2009) younger sample was used for comparison as it was deemed more similar to the RYLA sample, especially given the developmental changes in Openness described above. The other two studies were selected because they included Australian samples since national cultural differences have been found on both the General Self-Efficacy Scale (Scholz et al., 2002) and the Orientations to Happiness scale (Park et al., 2009).

Inspection of line graphs of the means for General Self-Efficacy, Meaning and Openness (see Figure 3) indicates each increased after RYLA, sustained until at least the four month follow-up. Paired samples $t$-tests comparing pre-RYLA scores to follow-up at four months were conducted for each of these variables using a Bonferroni adjusted alpha of .017. Significant increases were observed for all three variables, with mean General Self-Efficacy increasing by 4.00, 98.3% CI [2.12, 5.88], $t(18) = -5.61, p < .001$, $d = -1.287$. Meaning increased by 0.49 [0.08, 0.96], $t(18) = -3.10, p = .006$,
\( d = -0.711 \) and the mean Openness to Experience score increased by 3.22 [1.07, 5.37], \( t(17) = -3.98, p = .001, d = -0.937 \).

Further comparisons were conducted to test for significant change in the remaining variables. Since these were for exploratory purposes, and given the small sample size, no adjustments to alpha levels were made. As can be seen in Table 2 significant increases from pre-RYLA to follow-up were also observed for all remaining variables except Neuroticism, which showed a significant decrease, and both Conscientiousness and Satisfaction With Life which showed no significant change.

Table 1

*Mean results at each time interval*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-RYLA</th>
<th>Post-RYLA</th>
<th>Follow-up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( n )</td>
<td>( M (SD) )</td>
<td>( n )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30.00 (4.27)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3.42 (0.73)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasure</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3.49 (0.66)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2.90 (0.61)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27.38 (7.49)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>35.26 (7.91)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>36.00 (5.43)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>38.04 (5.11)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>34.04 (6.31)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction With Life</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23.13 (6.35)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

Comparisons from pre-RYLA to follow-up without Bonferroni adjustment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>t (df)</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Cohen's $d^a$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pleasure</td>
<td>-3.56 (18)</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>-0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>-3.24 (18)</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>-0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>3.15 (17)</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>-3.89 (16)</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>-0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>-2.24 (17)</td>
<td>0.039</td>
<td>-0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>-1.95 (17)</td>
<td>0.068</td>
<td>-0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWL</td>
<td>-1.98 (17)</td>
<td>0.065</td>
<td>-0.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^a$Negative values for Cohen’s $d$ indicate an increase at follow-up.
Figure 3. Means for General Self-Efficacy (GSE), Meaning and Openness to Experience measured prior to RYLA, one week after RYLA and at 4-month follow-up. Confidence intervals shown were calculated using the method outlined by Loftus and Masson (1994; Masson & Loftus, 2003). Since only participants responding at all three data points (n = 18) were included, displayed results are more conservative, with lower means and larger confidence intervals than would be otherwise displayed.
Discussion

The results support the first hypothesis that RYLarians would report increases in General Self-Efficacy. Given the strong emphasis on the importance of this to our focus group participants in Study 1, it was encouraging to see such clear evidence of change. What was not expected was the duration of the magnitude of that change as there did not appear to be any movement back to baseline levels, even four months following the event. Perhaps given the focus group comments, some from participants several years after attending RYLA, this should not have been a surprise.

The results support the interpretation of focus group comments that GSE was an important change for participants. They also provide further evidence for the validity of GSE as a construct within, as Bandura (1997) says, a “network of efficacy beliefs” (p. 43). The results could be seen as consistent with Bandura’s contention that all efficacy beliefs can vary over time and context. However, if this were the case, it would be reasonable to expect greater variability at four months follow-up. If, in contrast, Chen, Gully, and Eden (Chen et al., 2004) are correct that general self-efficacy is a stable, trait-like, belief then it would be expected that, following a significant event, the observed change would be maintained. The current study is one of the few studies to provide direct evidence that levels of GSE can be influenced in a short-term program. In the studies discussed above,
only Smith’s (1989) coping skills intervention, implemented over five 1-hour sessions, showed significant change in a specified GSE measure.

The only other study reported above to specifically measure change in GSE was Stadler and Kotze’s (2007) study of the effects of a 3-day ropes course intervention on GSE and self-concept in first year Army Academy students. While the results are not directly comparable due to the military setting of their study and more focused nature of the program they evaluated (involving ropes course activities only), it is interesting to note they found no significant change in GSE. A more recent meta-analysis of ropes course studies (Gillis & Speelman, 2008) reported a mean effect size of 0.48 for change in self-efficacy. As noted above, the kind of self-efficacy measured in each study included in their meta-analysis was not discussed and they specifically excluded studies that incorporated activities other than ropes courses. Even with these limitations, the effect size of 1.29 in the current study is of note.

The second hypothesis, that RYLArions would report an increase in sense of meaning, was also supported: demonstrated by the change of 0.7 of a standard deviation when comparing pre-RYLA scores to follow-up. This is consistent with, and a validation of, the interpretation of participant comments made in Study 1. Park et al. (2010) noted that the definition of “meaning” used by Peterson et al. (2005) in the Orientations to Happiness scale was a general one that related meaning to external goals. While this is
further validation of the selection of this scale for the current study, it leaves open the possibility that other forms of meaning that were not measured may not have changed for the RYLarians. Despite this, Park et al. (2010) contend that meaning is consistently associated with wellbeing, regardless of the specific definition used. Given this, it can be inferred that RYLarians have a greater sense of wellbeing from participating in RYL. This is unsurprising given the comments of previous participants reported in Chapter 4.

The results also support the third hypothesis, that participants would report increases in the personality trait of Openness. Given that the Big Five personality traits, including Openness, are generally considered stable (Caspi et al., 2005), it is interesting to note the level of measured change following RYL and that this change endured over four months. The effect size of 0.94 over this period contrasts with the reported standardised change over two years of 0.16 for German school leavers (Lüdtke et al., 2009). While it remains possible that there would be a subsequent return to baseline levels, the measured change is consistent with the interpretation of focus group comments. This suggests that the observed change will, to some extent, be sustained. That is, it is not just an artefact of the RYL experience, a temporary fluctuation in response to an exciting event, but appears to be an enduring change in the way these participants interact with the world.
There are alternative explanations to consider. For example, there is some evidence that test-retest correlations of personality measures are less stable for people under 30 years of age (Costa & McCrae, 1997), indicating that the Big Five may show increased variation in this age group. However, this does not account for the fact the observed change occurred in only one direction. If it were simply individual variation, we would expect movement in both directions. Nor does the previously reported reduced stability in this age group explain the sustained change after 4 months, particularly since Figure 3 suggests there was no significant difference between one week post-RYLA and four months later.

That there should be a measurable change in Openness to Experience at all is interesting. As noted above, most studies measuring one or more of the Big Five personality traits use them as independent variables (e.g., McElroy & Dowd, 2007) and Caspi et al. (2005) noted that there is little research into the short-term stability of personality factors. While there are some suggestions that higher levels of Openness to Experience are associated with increased levels of happiness (see Steel, Schmidt, & Shultz, 2008 for a meta-analysis of measures of personality and subjective well-being), there appears to be little research evidence to support the claim, and even less to suggest ways of creating such an increase. Thus it appears that the effect of RYLA, at least in District 9790, in increasing openness to experience is a rarely documented event. Given that results suggest it may
also impact on three of the remaining Big Five personality variables, this becomes even more remarkable.

Comparing the results of the current study with the clinical studies discussed above, on borderline personality disorder (Davenport et al., 2010), substance dependence (Borman et al., 2006) and depression (Costa et al., 2005; De Fruyt et al., 2006) respectively, is informative. First, those studies were all conducted with clinical samples reporting significant levels of impairment. In the DBT study (Davenport et al., 2010), the means for Agreeableness and Conscientiousness for the pre-treatment group were approximately 1.5 standard deviations below the norm while the post-treatment group showed no significant difference from the norm. For Neuroticism, the pre-treatment and post-treatment groups were approximately 2.2 and 1.9 standard deviations above the norm respectively. Thus the changes assumed to be due to treatment were all shifts towards the norm. In contrast, the direction of change, at least for Openness, in the current study was away from the norm. Further, the intervention in the DBT study could not be considered short-term as it lasted at least 14 months, while RYLA lasted only seven days.

That each of the three key variables of interest—GSE, Openness and Meaning—showed lasting significant change supports the focus group comments, and previous anecdotal reports, that RYLA is a life-changing experience. In finding no significant differences when comparing the
baseline data to the results of previous studies using the same measures, it was clear that the RYLarians’s results were similar to previously reported means. Hence none of the reported significant changes in the current study could be explained as an instance of regression to the mean. Instead, each significant change was away from the mean, indicating positive life change.

It is interesting to note that significant changes were also observed in all remaining variables except Conscientiousness and Satisfaction With Life. It was surprising to find significant change in so many of these variables although analysis is limited by the small sample size, reducing the confidence in the findings. Of particular note was that, while each of the three measures of orientations to happiness (Meaning, Engagement and Pleasure) showed significant change at follow-up, Satisfaction With Life did not. Yet in previous studies, Satisfaction With Life has consistently been correlated with Orientations to Happiness, particularly the Meaning and Engagement scales (Park et al., 2009; Peterson et al., 2005; Ruch et al., 2010; Vella-Brodrick et al., 2009). It is partly due to this correlation that the Orientations to Happiness scales has been linked to psychological well-being. Hence it is hard to interpret these current results. Perhaps this is simply an artefact of the small sample and the reported discrepancy may resolve with a larger sample or longer time-frames.

In some respects, the personality results of the current study were similar to those reported by Halama and Lačná (2011) in their study on
personality change following religious conversion. Unlike RYLarians, the religious converts did not report a change in Openness to Experience, but instead reported change in Conscientiousness. Their partners, however, did report an increase in Openness within the converts, in addition to all the other variables. However, again unlike the current study, the analysis of these religious converts was based on retrospective completion of the pre-conversion measures, so the validity of the reported changes is open to question.

While all the changes reported above were sustained at four-month follow-up, it remains possible that the changes were temporary and the RYLarians would subsequently return to baseline levels of GSE, Openness to Experience and Meaning. This regression to baseline, however, seems unlikely on two grounds. First the selection of these variables was based on comments from past RYLarians, some of whom attended RYLA as long as eight years prior to the focus groups. Hence their very selection was based on the reported long-term stability of the changes. Second, visual inspection of Figure 3 shows Openness and Meaning displayed some indications of a possible return to baseline at follow-up, albeit non-significant. However, this possibility can be checked in two ways. First, the face validity of the results can be checked with the participants. Specifically, do they report similar changes to the initial focus groups and do they agree with the interpretations made by the researcher? Second, the participants could
complete further follow-up measures and third, future studies could make comparisons with control groups. As discussed above, the third option was not considered viable for this initial exploratory study, and time limitations prevented further quantitative follow-up with the current participants. However the first alternative, checking the results with the actual participants and comparing their responses to Study 1, was possible and is the focus of the final study outlined in the following chapter.
Chapter 7.

Study 4: Focus group 3

There were three clear themes to arise from the initial focus groups reported in Study 1: enhanced sense of general self-efficacy (GSE), greater sense of meaning in life, and a sense of greater openness to experience. Each of these themes were subsequently verified by the quantitative analysis conducted in the third study. In Study 3, participants in the 2009 RYLA showed significant increases, sustained over a 4-month period, on all the three variables. Results also suggested the possibility of similar changes in the Orientations to Happiness variables of engagement and pleasure, and the personality factors of neuroticism (decreased), agreeableness and extraversion (both increased).

High perceived GSE has been associated with a range of positive outcomes. A meta-analysis of studies across three nations found GSE was positively associated with health behaviours, well-being and coping strategies (Luszczynska, Scholz, & Schwarzer, 2005). Since Study 3 reported sustained increases in perceived GSE, it would be expected that the 2009 RYLarians would report improvements in these areas of their lives. However, while the measured change from the third study confirmed the increase in GSE identified from the Study 1 focus groups, it provided little
additional insight into the mechanism of that change or how it was experienced in daily living.

Similarly, there was little from the previous study that could explain the measured increases in Meaning. Meaning is considered one of the three orientations to happiness (Peterson et al., 2005), along with pleasure and engagement. That is, humans experience happiness through living a meaningful life (eudemonia), a pleasurable life (hedonism), or an engaged life (flow). Given that the results reported in Study 3 suggest increases in all three, we would expect RYLArians to be happier. But, as with GSE, there is little information on the nature of that happiness, the mechanisms that contributed to the observed changes during RYLA and the way that change is experienced in their daily lives following RYLA. In other words, we know the extent of the change, the statistical significance of it, but still have little information on the personal significance of the change.

Finally Openness to Experience, Neuroticism, Agreeableness, Extraversion and Conscientiousness are the core aspects of personality represented by the five-factor model (Goldberg, 1990; McCrae & John, 1992; Wiggins & Trapnell, 1997). While these traits are generally considered to be stable across time, the results of Study 3 indicated a significant increase in Openness following the week at RYLA. Further, the results suggested there might also be increases in Agreeableness and Extraversion and a decrease in Neuroticism. As discussed in Chapter 6, such marked change in personality
variables has rarely been discussed outside of therapeutic intervention studies and there are few, if any, within-subject designs measuring such changes. While certainly consistent with the anecdotal reports discussed in Chapter 2 it is important to verify such changes and, as mentioned above, ascertain the personal significance for the people involved.

Study 2, outlined in Chapter 5, described my observations of RYLA and reflections on the week. This provided some insight into the content, activities and processes throughout the week that may have contributed to the measurable changes observed in Study 3. While this is valuable information, it does not suggest which parts of the week the RYLarians valued nor provide clear indicators of the possible mechanisms at work. Feedback from the 2009 RYLarians who had completed the measures could help validate and interpret the extent and personal significance of the measured changes from Study 3. Such feedback could also serve as a corroboration of the relevance of the observations from prior RYLarians and the subsequent interpretations made of those observations.

Through the use of a focus group discussion and qualitative survey questions, the aims of the current study (Study 4) were to corroborate the interpretations made in previous studies and illustrate the changes reported. These represent the purposes of triangulation and complementarity respectively (Greene et al., 1989), as discussed in Chapter 3. By confirming the results of previous studies with a sample of RYLarians, there can be
greater confidence in the validity of those results while forming a deeper understanding of the changes that occurred to inform the subsequent analyses and attempts to integrate results described in Chapter 8.

Method

Participants

Of the 26 participants in RYLA 2009, 19 provided qualitative responses on the post-RYLA survey, and 15 of these completed the same questions in the follow-up survey. The eight focus group participants, five male and three female, all attended RYLA for the first time in December 2009. They originated from a diverse geographic area, including the eastern and outer western suburbs of Melbourne, through to northern Victoria and southern New South Wales. Some participants travelled by car for hours to attend. For ease of reference, the following pseudonyms will be used when discussing the participants: Kirk, Campbell, Lillian, Monty, Ella, Heather, Milton and Calvin.

The fact that participants were willing to travel a considerable distance to participate was indicative of their enthusiasm for RYLA and of their ongoing support for the project at this stage, 8 months after the conference. There were no withdrawals prior to the focus group and some RYLArians who could not attend spontaneously volunteered to participate on another date or for one-to-one interviews. It is important to acknowledge this
enthusiasm for two reasons. First, it is a possible source of bias: the participants who attended, and those who offered to volunteer for one-to-one interviews, had an agenda that they wanted to share. As Ella said during the focus group, “...one of the reasons why I think this research is so important [is so] we can raise that awareness of how good it is..., that a week can make a big change to everybody.” However, this same enthusiasm can simultaneously be seen as a validation of the choice to use a focus group to illustrate the changes described in the previous studies. It is consistent with the quantitative results reported in Study 3 and is an indication that a large proportion of the participants (at least one-third) experienced RYLA in a way that was consistent with the “life changing” event described in the two focus groups of Study 1.

Procedure

The study was approved by the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee prior to recruitment. There were two data sources for this study. The first was from the written qualitative comments included as the last three questions in both the post-RYLA survey and subsequent follow-up survey conducted in Study 3 (see Chapter 6). The questions, listed below, were based on the interview schedule of the first two focus groups.

1. Before RYLA: Why did you choose to participate in RYLA?
2. During RYLA: What do you remember as being important at the time?
3. Since RYLA: What do you think has changed within you as a result of attending RYLA?

The second data source was a focus group held in July 2010, approximately eight months after the conclusion of RYLA and four months after the follow-up measures were completed. All the RYLarians from 2009 were emailed an invitation to participate. Participants were provided with a summary of their rights regarding privacy and confidentiality (see Appendix H) and signed a consent form on arrival (see Appendix I). The focus group was conducted by the same independent facilitator who moderated the group discussions in Study 1.

The facilitator followed the same basic structure she used for the focus groups in Study 1. That is, she asked about their experiences before, during and after RYLA. However, this time she also provided a brief summary of the key comments from the first focus group, asked if these matched their experiences and if they had other experiences to add. Specifically, the facilitator asked these 2009 RYLarians (see Appendix J for a full outline of the discussion):

1. Did they, like participants in Study 1, know little of RYLA before arrival and attend due to the recommendation of a trusted friend?

2. During RYLA, did they find the similarity of shared experience (that everyone was in the “same boat”), the social aspects, the content and the theme of challenge to be important?
3. Participants in the previous focus groups mentioned their lives were different, so could they describe examples of how their lives had changed following RYLA?

Each of the themes from item 2 (see the section titled “During” in Appendix J) was written on a card that participants could look at and refer to if required. The facilitator was briefed to prompt participants for specific examples and to seek dissenting stories. That is, she was encouraged to ask for examples of stories that supported the previous responses and also those contrary to them. Another difference from the first focus groups was that, instead of asking “what changed” following RYLA, this time participants were asked for examples of change and were invited to tell their stories about these changes. Finally, a summary of the three themes from the first focus groups was presented and they were asked if these themes were relevant to them and if there were other themes they might like to add. As with Study 1, the focus group conversation was recorded and professionally transcribed.

The focus group transcript was compared to the audio recording and corrected where necessary. In addition to the core questions of “What changes occurred?” and “What did participants perceive as important?” that underpinned analysis in Study 1, two further questions were “How do participants explain their experiences?” and “Are these comments consistent with interpretations made in earlier Studies?” The corrected
transcript, along with the two sets of survey comments (from one-week post-RYLA and four-month follow-up) were entered into the NVIVO 8 software package and explored using the same method of thematic analysis outlined in Study 1. Because the survey comments were anonymous, there was a probability that most, if not all, of the focus group participants also contributed survey comments. Hence these were not considered as additional sources of information during analysis, but viewed as complementary data sets. That is, additional weight was not given to themes solely because they were present in both the survey and focus group, but information from the two data sets was examined in order to interpret the common themes. In an additional step, the focus group transcriptions from Study 1 were subsequently included to determine if further themes, or additional examples of existing themes, could be identified from the larger data set.

Results and Discussion

Before RYLA

In the discussion about prior expectations, all of the participants from RYLA 2009 emphatically agreed that they knew very little about RYLA before they arrived. Ella commented that she had been attempting to attend RYLA for several years. Yet, despite this perseverance and her statement that she “probably knew a little bit more than... some of these guys”, she maintained
that she only knew the general “concept” that it was “going to push boundaries”, but didn’t know any of the specific content. Some of the other participants noted that they actually had negative expectations prior to attending and emphasised that they only attended because of the encouragement of friends. Lillian said, “I was actually encouraged quite strongly to come to RYLA because I had quite negative views of it to begin with.” Heather also reported having low expectations, stating, “I just thought it would be incredibly cheesy the whole thing. Like... when you were in high school and you did all those, you know support each other games and all that. I thought it was going to be all that, but it was totally different, but that was my idea just going into it.” Milton reported being dismayed by some of the initial activities thinking, “…oh God, it’s like Grade 6 camp.”

Campbell said, “…I don’t know about you guys, but beforehand I was pretty unaware about what was going to happen. I was pretty negative about it, I thought I was going to go away and it was just going to be one of those…” (interjection by another participant, “Cult camp”) “…Like a cult camp. I thought I was going to be like taking pills and jumping off the edge of the earth. ...What I’m saying is, I had a pretty negative... opinion about it beforehand.” This notion of RYLA being perceived as being cult-like was also expressed by Lillian. She explained that her negative opinion was based in her own reaction to a friend who returned the previous year “all happy and rainbows and daisies” but wouldn’t disclose any of the content. She said,
“...his automatic response was a very smug and arrogant, ‘I can’t tell you because... it’s our little thing, we can’t tell you what happened.’”

Yet despite the lack of knowledge, and even the resultant negative perspectives coming in to RYLA, there was general agreement that not knowing what to expect was an important part of the experience. Heather explained it like this:

You didn’t have any preconceived notions of you’re going to do this activity, okay this activity is you’re working with this person and you’ll have to do this. None of that. It was straight “right, just gather in the middle of the room” and see what happens. So no preconceived ideas, ...so the first time we actually formed our opinions was when we were learning about it and had to do it.

Milton backed up Heather’s comments saying, “Yeah the unexpected was just going to happen, we didn’t know what was going to happen and I think that’s what helped us grow, like 100% I reckon. Yeah, just not knowing just made it so much better, so much better.” This was supported by the rest of the group, as indicated by the facilitator’s comment, “Everyone seems to be nodding, everyone’s nodding.”

**During RYLA**

Possibly the most common theme endorsed as important during RYLA was *challenge*. Challenge was mentioned by many RYLarians in their post-
RYLA and follow-up surveys in response to the question, “During RYLA: What do you remember as being important at the time?” Sample responses ranged from the simple statement, “Challenging myself” to the more emphatic, “Challenging myself in all aspects.” Interpretation of responses was more difficult. For example, while this statement seemed related to increased self-efficacy, “Challenging myself with the tasks I was faced with, particularly those tasks I felt incredibly difficult to do” others suggested greater self-acceptance “being yourself, and not being afraid to be challenged.” This latter comment, suggesting an increased willingness to be challenged, is also consistent with increased openness. One survey respondent seemed to link increased self-efficacy to increased openness, “I am more confident and more capable, I am more willing to have a go at new things, to challenge myself.”

In the final focus group, the theme of challenge was enthusiastically endorsed as an important part of the RYLA week when the facilitator presented four possible themes from the previous focus groups and the survey responses. As discussed in the Method, the themes were written on cards and were then introduced by the facilitator as follows, displaying cards with one theme written on each as she spoke:

The important parts of the RYLA week, identified so far are, and I might give you these on bits of paper, one was the sense that everyone was kind of in the same boat, like no one knew many people
or what to expect, ...as one theme’s that’s been identified. ...The second one was the social aspect, that was considered an important part of the week. So, making friends. Okay, skills and content presented, that’s another one and finally, being challenged throughout the week, was considered the other most important part of the RYLA week.

After expressing general agreement, Lillian described her initial negativity over the first few days of the program. She went on to explain how her opinion changed on the fourth day when she participated in what she described as “trust activities” when she, “started learning new stuff and that new stuff was... stuff that I knew that I needed to learn.” She appeared to phrase her response as an endorsement of the skills and content of the week, but when the facilitator asked her about this (“So the skills and content one?”) she was clear, “No the being challenged, everyone’s in the same boat... The whole being challenged, my challenge finally came a little bit later than everyone else’s I felt.”

Ella’s endorsement of challenge was even stronger saying, “I think everything was a challenge though, that should be on a really big card. It was a kind of joke at the end of the week because it was like a whole challenge by choice. I choose to be challenged. Every Single thing was a challenge.”

A few of the participants commented on the importance of recognising that challenges were different for different people. Milton summarised this
well when he described his own experience, “Actually I found that different people had different challenges, like for me it was public speaking was the thing that I really challenged myself with at RYLA. Some people breezed through that and then at the end of the week, when we did the ropes course and stuff I did the leap of faith and …other people were terrified. So yeah different things challenged different people.”

The discussion of challenge lead to another aspect of RYLA that the participants believed was valuable: the level of support during the program. Kirk initially made the link between the two by commenting on the empathy that developed watching people challenge themselves in different ways, “Just the understanding that you know for someone public speaking is not a problem, and for another person you know something physical might be more of a problem …and you [feel] great empathy towards people overcoming their different things that they’re challenged by.“

Heather discussed this too. She said, “I was really challenged in… having 25 RYLarians, plus all the supporters there, actually seeing [my] weaknesses …was a massive challenge.” She went on to say, “ ’cause you learnt everything and everyone and… there were lots of lectures and sessions... about... supporting and things like that. And it kind of felt like, even though they were all individual... achievements, every little individual achievement was nearly a group achievement. Everyone could relate to me...”
Later in the discussion, Monty also mentioned support. Where Heather related it to content, he related it to the process: to the way the seminar had been arranged and the role of the Supporters. “I think one of the strengths of the program was having the Supporters there who had been through a similar experience and they were just literally supporting.” Campbell reinforced Monty’s remarks, “Even just the name Supporter… [gives] so much more confidence in the whole group. Even just that simple name, like if it was a group leader, I think it would have been different than Supporter.”

In the post-RYLA survey responses, one of the RYLArions wrote, “One major highlight for me was how the activities that took place built… a team of 26 people who supported each other as we approached every leadership activity (e.g., Project Management and more importantly for some the high ropes course).” Another wrote, “The support and encouragement, learning to feel it’s okay not to go as far in challenges (i.e., on the ropes course) as others.” This focus on the level of support was also expressed in the initial focus groups from Study 1. As Eric said in the first focus group, “…everyone was so friendly and supportive and I think that was one of the best things for me, it was why I ended up getting so much out of it.”

The importance of the friendships made during RYLA was another recurring theme across all the data sources: the three focus groups, the written survey responses during the initial focus groups and the post-RYLA questionnaires. For the item, “During RYLA: What were your impressions of
RYLA during the week? What do you remember as being important at the

*R* during the first focus group, Eric wrote, “I was scared to not know

anyone, usually I am quite quiet and find it hard to make friends but I found

the whole group to be very supportive and now have a whole heap of new

friends that I still speak to quite often.”

In response to the same item, Mark wrote, “I quickly felt close to the

others present, a strange experience” and then followed up with the related

comment, “the chance to meet new people and feel accepted, welcomed and

having the chance to support them”. During the subsequent discussion he

expanded on these points, explaining, “So this was sort of a whole new thing
to try and meet people and talk to people, and I think that I found that quite

challenging, but that actually became one of the best and most important

parts of the week was that you actually quite quickly feel close to this group

of complete strangers and I felt that at the time and I was able to do things

and say things that I wouldn’t do really before openly.”

It is of note that both Eric and Mark reported that not knowing anyone

was a challenge for them, but both found the supportive social environment

at RYLA helped them to meet other RYLarians and develop friendships. As

Mark wrote, “The lack of judgement and freedom to be myself was valuable.”

While their comments might be consistent with the increase in extraversion

suggested by Study 3, there were explicit links to the theme of Challenge.

For example, in the second focus group from Study 1, following a discussion
about the increased challenges the participants sought for themselves following RYLA, Thomas said, “But yeah, it was a combination of that but also having the whole new circle of friends and people to have contact with.”

In the qualitative responses to the Study 3 survey were many observations on the importance of the friendships made. This is illustrated by comments like, “So many close friends I have made in such a short time”; “Developing friendships” and “But probably one of the most important thing was the friendships that I made, it was important to see how all these activities have made our group so together and so close. I must say that was probably the most amazing thing.” What was apparent across all three groups, and the survey comments, was an appreciation of the friendships developed during the week with the other RYLarians.

After RYLA

As with the two focus groups of previous RYLarians, participants in the focus group of 2009 RYLarians strongly endorsed the notion of improved self-efficacy. Again, they typically defined it in terms of confidence. Comments such as Heather’s “I guess that... confidence is probably the biggest” or, when questioned by the facilitator, Milton’s firm affirmation of confidence when he said, “Yeah that was the biggest one for me.” Campbell said, “I feel more confident talking to everyone at this table about their personal experiences and so if I get to that fork in the road and say, ‘I don’t
know where I’m going to go with it’ [I can] say, ‘I’ve done this before’ ...and stuff like that makes you more confident.” This linking back to a sense of having done it before suggests a sense of mastery and reinforces the notion that the construct referred to is self-efficacy.

Survey responses included comments like “confidence, perspective on life, I [am] much more positive and willing to challenge myself” and “I am more confident and more capable, I am more willing to have a go at new things, to challenge myself.” The latter comment picks up a theme that emerged during the third focus group. Participants’ comments often linked increased openness with both challenge and confidence—sometimes implicitly, but at other times overtly. Ella said “...we had that confidence and it does link back into that openness and the willingness to change.” Similarly, Calvin said, “The open to possibilities and mainly the change bit, being able to change or adapt to what the situation is. And also my confidence to be able to deal with those situations.”

While there was an apparent consensus in the group that Openness was important, after some discussion they decided that they had to already be open in order to attend RYLA in the first place. The following brief exchange summarises their views well:

Facilitator:  Okay, so that’s more openness to possibilities of change you think is less important?
Campbell: Yeah. Before the conference, I personally think, everyone here [had] that kind of attribute.

Lillian: 'Cause you wouldn’t have gone to RYLA otherwise.

Campbell: Because taking that first step on the bus or even driving to the RYLA conference, even saying yes, I think that proved that we had that kind of attribute beforehand. But when we got there, I think it played more of a role in the activities that we did.

A new theme that was identified from the final focus group and the survey responses was that of emotional self-regulation. Participants described, in various terms, a greater awareness of their own emotional responses and a sense of their ability to modify those responses. For example, when discussing her responses to conflict in her workplace, Ella said, “…I still have that same management conflict, but it doesn’t faze me anymore. I just take a step back and do what I do well and I get a lot more out of it, so just ownership of my decisions and seem to have achieved more with that.” Implicit within her comment on “ownership” of her decisions is a belief that she could choose to respond differently.

Similarly, near the end of the focus group discussion, Lillian was attempting to name the biggest change for her. Of the themes openly discussed, she thought meaning and purpose were the closest match for her, but there was something else she wanted to communicate but struggled to
find the words. In a brief to and fro discussion with the facilitator she explained how she was using RYLA to be “better” at what she did. Eventually she compared herself to her colleagues explaining, “I believe I’m in a...mentally healthier place than the other person or the other party that I’m involved with at the time. So if there’s an argument or I need to meet a deadline or if there’s someone that I need to interact with, ...I feel like my understanding is more complete. ...Understanding what I need to do and understanding the other person’s point of view as well.” She clarified further by saying “Like if I hadn’t learned all this sort of stuff, after the interaction... I’d be very, ‘if I had done that, could I have possibly have done this better, if only, if only, if only.’ Rather than ‘yeah I’m pretty sure I did the best I could do, I thought about it at the time, I’m happy with what I’ve done.’”

On their own, these two comments would not be enough to warrant mention, but they represent other comments made throughout the interview and are consistent with similar comments made in the survey responses. In response to the question After RYLA: What do you think has changed within you as a result of attending RYLA, survey responses included:

“...and also I know that I can change my mood so that has been beneficial being able to leave outside issues outside.”

“I now know how to control my moods, which was a problem I had previously faced. Within the short amount of time since RYLA I have
also been able to apply 'your problem, versus my problem' concept, as I would previously take on others burdens unnecessarily.”

“I am a lot more positive and try to stay positive as others around you will feed off your mood and emotions.”

“If I’m feeling down at all, I change my body position [to change my mood].”

A similar theme was apparent when revisiting the initial focus groups, especially the first one. In that first group, there were several comments specific to monitoring emotional state. As a clear example, Eric said, “I think there are a few elements of it, one thing is awareness of your emotions, that you actually are conscious of them a bit more.” Brian immediately responded with, “Hmm, and you are conscious of others too, their emotions ...before RYLAL I’d sort of ask someone, ‘what’s wrong?’, but now I sort of say, ‘Something seems to be troubling you,’ or, ‘you know you seem troubled.’ So you... get that sense you can understand... other people’s emotions. ...It’s not just about you, it’s about other people as well, noticing their emotions and you know you can do that with looking in their eyes and all these different things.” Clearly Brian was extending the notion of emotional awareness to others, although it is also worth noting that Eric was clear that he did not have the same outcome, “I didn’t take anything like that out of it. I understand... everyone takes something different but, I dunno, I didn’t get that.”
While Brian mentioned his awareness of others’ emotions again later in the discussion, the three participants all agreed on the importance of awareness of their own emotions and listed “emotional intelligence”, including “knowing how to deal with them”, as their fourth most important outcome when asked to rate their top five.

Emotional awareness, or regulation, was a much smaller theme in the second focus group of Study 1, barely rating a mention. Sarah, however, did describe in some detail one aspect of emotional regulation she had been using since attending RYLA, “…that was something that I took away and that I use now, being able to change your mood by changing your physical state. …That’s changed me, being able to use that. You know, if you’re stressed out because it’s 3 in the morning and you still haven’t got your essay done and it’s due in at 9 the next morning, you know, rather than sort of sitting like this, you sit up and sit down and then you’re a bit more calm and collected and your thoughts come a bit easier.” It was difficult to hear in the recording of the group, as there was lots of talking over the top of each other, but while identifying their top five most significant changes since RYLA, this was on their list. I was only aware of this because the group used a whiteboard to track their discussion and, of their own volition, wrote down everything on the board and gave me a copy.

This sub-theme identified from the focus groups and surveys may help interpret the tentative finding from Study 3 that suggested a measurable
decrease in Neuroticism in the months following RYLA. It is unclear from the comments above if the emotional awareness and regulation that participants were describing is the same as emotional stability, which is typically considered to be the inverse of neuroticism (Caspi et al., 2005; Goldberg, 1990). It would appear that, even if not directly comparable, the changes are at least conceptually related.

Other focus group comments, not related to emotional regulation, also support the contention that Neuroticism decreased. The following short exchange between Heather and the facilitator in the third focus group illustrates the decreased anxiety and negative affect she experienced after RYLA:

Heather: I just had years of just, you know, typical... teenage girl dramas: ...you know eating problems and self harm and all... that line of stuff, so I’d been fighting that for about five years... so yeah, it was some problems in my own personal thinking that I hadn’t been able to come in with. Seeing some counsellors and stuff like that. It was a course like RYLA that really, just in one week, it was all changed. So that’s my biggest thing that I got out of it obviously yeah.

Facilitator: That’s absolutely big. All in that one week?
Heather: Yeah, yeah. So it shows how beneficial it is I guess. So yeah, just a lot of negative mind frames and self doubt, a lot of [it was] minimised quite a bit so that I could actually break it down and do what I wanted to do and not have to worry about all those little other niggling things in the back of your mind all the time. So yep.

These comments suggest that, as RYLArians’ general self-efficacy increased, so did their emotional regulation. Hence, we would expect to see a negative correlation between GSE and Neuroticism. Returning to the data from Study 3, correlations between these two variables were calculated. Pre-RYLA and at follow-up, these correlations were $r = -0.757, p = .001$ and $r = -0.601, p = .014$ respectively. These results offer support to the hypothesis, and provide one way of interpreting the RYLArians’ experience. While the results cannot demonstrate a causal relationship, in light of the content of RYLA and the participant comments, it is reasonable to suggest that improving GSE will have a consequential impact on Neuroticism. This is an area worthy of further investigation.

Following up on the theme of Extraversion, there were a few comments in the earlier focus groups that could be considered representative of an increase in Extraversion. For example, in the first focus group, Eric said, “I find it a lot easier to make friends and stuff like that too.” However, while Eric was clear that this was a change for him, he ascribed it to an increase in
his self-confidence, describing it a part of his “emotional makeup” in a way consistent with general self-efficacy. While the comment could represent change in both GSE and Extraversion, none of the other participants in the first two focus groups provided examples that were similar to Eric’s. That is, although the social aspect of RYLA was discussed and endorsed by both groups, it was mentioned in the context of additional friends and shared experience rather than a change in the way they interacted with other people.

In contrast to these earlier groups, changed social behaviour was a common theme following RYLA in 2009. One RYLarian wrote in their survey, “I’m much more confident about myself, and am able to talk to and make real conversation with people I don’t know, which before RYLA I would never of [sic] thought about”. It was interesting to note that, like Eric, this person related their increased social confidence with increased general self-confidence. In the third focus group, at least three of the eight participants mentioned examples consistent with increased extraversion. Calvin expressed this clearly when he said, “I feel I’m a lot more social, like I will go out and talk to almost anybody now and just, I’m in a group situation.” Kirk described something similar when he said, “I found like a social life sort of thing. ...I’m finding myself broadening social circles. Like ‘cause I grew up in a small town with a few friends and now I’m sort of finding more comfort in you know just going outside of that and talking to more people and stuff.”
Milton described a similar change and his belief that others could see the change in him. When prompted for changes following RYLA, Milton immediately said, “Positive thinking is the biggest change for me” explaining further, “I’m not as a depressed as I was and… you know, just how we learnt how to affirm more positive thinking. ...I came out of my shell a bit at RYLA and it’s just kept going ever since.” When asked if other people could see the difference, Milton replied, “I suppose, yeah. I talk to people more and people have noticed it. Yeah.”

Participants commented that they had a more positive, optimistic, outlook following RYLA. While increased social activity was clearly important to Milton, it is interesting to note that he attributes this to “positive thinking”. While this could be interpreted as another manifestation of enhanced self-efficacy, similar to the anonymous survey comment, the changes he described match almost exactly the definition of extraversion as described in Chapter 6 (see, for example, Goldberg, 1990).

The apparent change in Extraversion reported in Study 3, while yet to be verified by further studies with larger numbers, is intriguing. Since it was not a common theme in the initial focus groups, it is possible that that there was a higher proportion of extroverted young people participating in those first two focus groups. To test the converse, that there was a higher proportion of introverted people who attended RYLA in 2009, baseline results for Extraversion from Study 3 were compared to Murray et al.’s (2009)
younger sample. No significant differences were found, $t(292) = -0.77$, $p = 0.44$, $d = -0.15$.

Regardless of the broader representativeness of this change, it may be relevant to consider the possible contributors for the 2009 RYLArians. Both Calvin and Milton indicated they thought that not knowing other people on arrival was an important factor in increasing their comfort with social interactions. When the focus group was discussing the importance of friendships and social interactions during RYLA, Calvin explained his belief that this was important beyond the week of RYLA itself:

Well not knowing anybody when you first go into it, it means that you’ve got an open mind, you’re not just going to go and stick to what you know. So therefore you’re willing to go out and talk to and get to know other people rather than just, I know that when I’m with people I know I’m normally just very shy, so I’ll just stay with them and not go outside and talk to anyone else whereas now it’s sort of willing to open up to, well not open up, but talk to a lot more people in a lot of different situations.

Milton reinforced Calvin’s view, saying, “I think the social aspect was probably the big one for me [too].” Like Calvin, he directly attributed not knowing others to helping him socialise more, “…not having anyone… who I knew or had anything in common with to go and gravitate towards, …I had
to come out of my shell and talk to new people and stuff. So that was the best part for me.”

Yet even those who didn’t indicate they had become more extraverted agreed that not knowing others was important. In fact, all of the participants in the final focus group at some stage commented on the value in not knowing anybody on arrival. Ella summarised it well when discussing increased confidence when she said, “I think we’re all individually more confident to do things because we didn’t have that stereotype. If we were with 20 of our normal everyday friends, we wouldn’t have achieved any of it because you would have said, ‘I don’t do that.’ But... because we didn’t know each other at the start, we were more confident to show new things.”

Comments like these suggests the 2009 RYLarians’ willingness to try new things, a component of Openness, was related to their changed environment and lack of self-expectations. Perhaps this empowers participants to do different things and trial alternative behaviours, thereby increasing their behavioural repertoire. This, in turn, may lead to an increase in general self-efficacy. While speculative at this stage, this suggests a possible relationship between openness and general self-efficacy in addition to the one between self-efficacy and emotional regulation.

In returning to the initial focus groups, there were similar comments made by RYLarians from previous years. For example, Brian explained the
importance of not knowing anybody and how that changed his reactions to activities during the week:

I can’t agree more with everything like that. We had a saying and Tim sort of introduced it to us, and it was “challenge by choice”. …Even after the first couple of hours, I [was] still thinking, “you know, if they get me doing bloody handstands, I am going to tell them to piss off” and all this sort of stuff. I am not into any of this, “You can do it” and all this sort of stuff… So when he said “challenge by choice” [bells] that hadn’t rung before started ringing, …like, “Well you know, wake up, you’re not at home, you’re not with your normal people, you are not limited, you’ve got this opportunity in front of you, and it’s entirely up to you what you want to do with it.” And when I sort of got that through my head… I got this sense I wasn’t being judged and it didn’t matter what I did because they didn’t know me anyway. So you know it was entirely up to me and there was that sense of overwhelming freedom I think, that you had this wonderful opportunity and you chose where it was to take you.

Linked to this was an acknowledgment of the diversity of people that attended. While barely mentioned in the initial focus groups, it was a recurrent theme in the post-RYLA focus group. As one of the youngest participants, Heather described her experience in detail:
And at first I felt, I was a little bit intimidated... and thought, “Oh no like these people are going to have so much more... life experience than me and... have done more things than me.” ...So yeah, throughout the week I kind of realised, hang on, it’s not such a big deal you know. Like we’re all at different stages of our lives and such, but through that confidence you know to come out and after RYLA it’s easier to talk to different people, different age groups and that.

Again, in Heather’s comments, the theme of increased confidence is apparent and linked to social interactions. Along similar lines, Monty said, “It was terrific to have the diversity of people all there together and you knew no one. And to have the program as it was... it allowed you to reach a point where you come into this room [now] and feel comfortable.”

Taken together, the comments from the post-RYLA focus group, along with the RYLArions’ survey comments, provided support for the themes of increased General Self-Efficacy, Meaning and Openness. The focus group participants endorsed the interpretations made and their discussion added initial support to the additional changes reported in Study 3 (such as increased Extraversion and decreased Neuroticism), with some further support for these found in the initial focus groups. The importance of the combination of support and challenge, first noted in my reflection on Saturday in Study 2, were also apparent in the focus group discussion, as was the increased ability to regulate emotion. Further, some speculative links
were made between some of the different constructs such as general self-efficacy, Openness and Neuroticism. Integrating these findings with the results of the previous studies and placing them within the existing body of research and theory is the remaining challenge.
Chapter 8.

Integration of themes

In the investigations described in the preceding chapters, the three themes identified in the first study (increases in General Self-Efficacy, Meaning in life and Openness to Experience) were all supported by the subsequent studies. Results from the third study indicated they each displayed measurable change in the expected direction and exploratory findings from that study suggested additional changes: increases in engagement and pleasure (as part of the Orientations to Happiness measure) and, from the Big Five model of personality, increases in Extraversion and Agreeableness and a decrease in Neuroticism. A subsequent focus group, whose participants also completed the survey used in Studies 3 and 4, validated the findings regarding GSE, Meaning and Openness and provided additional examples to help illustrate participants’ experiences of change.

This final focus group, along with the qualitative responses to the Study 3 survey, provided further support for the proposed additional changes identified above. Finally, the experience of attending RYLA described in Study 2 provided insight into the nature of the week and allows some additional confidence in the interpretations of the focus group and survey comments. Beyond interpreting the impact of RYLA itself, taken together
the results of these four studies have implications for both personality and leadership theory. Positive psychology theory may provide a theoretical framework to link the observed changes and aid their interpretation.

There are some initial implications that are worth highlighting. First, there appear to be very few studies reporting measurable change in trait-type measures (such as GSE or the Big Five) and even fewer outside of therapeutic interventions. Hence the results from Studies 1, 3 and 4 indicating that GSE and Openness to Experience showed significant change extending over at least a four month period after the week of RYLA are notable. As discussed in Chapter 6, such results usually indicate a shift towards the mean, whereas the current studies report a shift away from the mean in a positive direction. Further, the results of Study 3 also suggest similar changes may be observed in three of the remaining four personality variables.

It is also worth comparing the results of these studies to some of the research mentioned in Chapter 2. For example, Stott and Hall (2003) reported that participants in the 6-week Greenland wilderness project improved their emotional regulation, self-efficacy and social skills. Since they used their own measure, without comparative data, it is difficult to draw extensive conclusions from this, but thematically the results are similar to the trait-like changes reported by the RYLarians above. While there were undoubtedly other benefits to the longer program, it seems the
themes of change in those six weeks were similar to those measured in the 1-week RYLA conference. Importantly, the latter were measured with established instruments allowing comparisons to both existing and future studies.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Zaccaro (2007) specifically mentioned cognitive flexibility, adaptability and tolerance for ambiguity as traits that enhance behavioural flexibility and hence leadership. These qualities are consistent with the increased self-efficacy and Openness reported above. However, in the model presented by Zaccaro (2007; Zaccaro et al., 2004) fundamental characteristics such as traits are not considered amenable to leadership development efforts. Indeed, Zaccaro specifically questions if leadership development programs can foster change in qualities such as Openness to Experience (2007). The results from the current studies clearly suggest that leadership development generally, and leadership education specifically, may have an effect on traits. Thus, despite Zaccaro’s concerns, it may still be worth pursuing leadership education (to use Brungardt’s, 1996, terminology) in order to increase leadership effectiveness within organisations.

Exploring the themes

The results of the current studies have implications beyond organisations though. Given that much of the leadership literature reviewed
in Chapter 2 was specific to management, one of the questions arising was what effect a youth leadership education program, such as RYLA, may have.

If the reported changes in trait-like variables are an accurate interpretation, then it is reasonable to expect meaningful effects in a wide range of domains—consistent with the reports of the RYLArions described in studies 1 and 4. With a principal focus on the three key themes of General Self-Efficacy, Meaning and Openness, an initial attempt is made to interpret and explain the themes and observations from the four Studies. Given the exploratory nature of the studies, the intention is to highlight possibly relevant theory and suggest areas for future research.

The results provide clear evidence for a change in General Self-Efficacy, demonstrated by reported changes in confidence in Studies 1 and 4, and measured changes in GSE in Study 3. In looking at the context of participants’ comments, and reflecting on the nature of the RYLA conference reported in Study 2, some tentative explanatory accounts for this change can be identified. Bandura has explained that self-efficacy can be enhanced in four ways (1977, 1997, 2004): direct mastery experiences (success experiences), vicarious mastery experiences (social modelling), social persuasion (structured support) and emotional regulation (interpreting physical and emotional states). Examples of all four methods of developing self-efficacy can be identified during RYLA.
The leadership challenge experiences, mentioned by so many of the RYLarians in both the interviews and surveys, may represent opportunities for mastery experiences (direct mastery). The challenges were graded during the week, designed to move from a group focus to an individual focus, and from relatively straightforward challenges to more complex, immersive or emotionally engaging ones by the end of the week. Given this, and that each of these experiences had evidence of success built in—either through observable physical success or feedback from peers—it is possible that the leadership challenges contributed to the increase in General Self-Efficacy in light of Bandura’s theories.

Bandura has observed that successful achievements are the most effective source of self-efficacy as they provide direct evidence of ability to succeed (1997). He noted also that such experiences cannot be too easy or they will lead to expectations of quick success leading to subsequent discouragement in the face of difficulty. He has argued that resilient self-efficacy must require perseverance in overcoming difficulty and this process is enhanced by activities requiring “generative skills” (1997, p. 80). It may be useful to compare programs similar to RYLA with and without such “leadership challenge” experiences to determine whether they contribute to developing self-efficacy above the presentation of content.

RYLarians also observed each other successfully completing challenging tasks (vicarious mastery) and, both during the week and in the
focus groups, identified the provision of structured support (social persuasion) as an important theme throughout RYLA. The focus on awareness of their own emotional states, and emphasis on their ability to change those states, perhaps illustrates the emotional regulation component of Bandura’s theory. Another potential contributor to the emotional regulation component of developing self-efficacy was the emphasis on paying attention to their body as a signal to inform their decisions. This may have helped RYLArrians reinterpret the emotional valence of their physiological states, especially during the physical leadership challenges.

With such a clear emphasis on challenge in the focus groups, it is not surprising to see that both Openness to Experience and perceived General Self-Efficacy increased following RYLA. While the data cannot indicate a causal direction, the results are consistent with Peterson and Seligman’s (2004) description of Openness to Experience as a higher order dimension of curiosity; one of the 24 strength of character virtues. They describe Openness as a predisposition and curiosity as “a mechanism of action” (p. 127). In summarising the diverse literature cited by Peterson and Seligman, it appears that when curiosity exceeds anxiety, individuals are more likely to explore their environment. This, naturally, leads to new experiences and appears to enhance feelings of competence and control through integrating those experiences. However, the reverse is also plausible. That is, a greater sense of General Self-Efficacy may encourage
participants to be more open and curious. Taking into account the survey comments and the post-RYLA focus group conversations, it seems likely to be a bidirectional relationship, with each reinforcing the other. While the current studies lend indirect support to Peterson and Seligman’s claim, it may be useful to test this in future, perhaps by using their Values in Action Inventory of Strengths.

The measured change in Openness and other personality variables leads to the obvious question of whether the RYLarians experienced personality change. While Chapter 6 discussed some of the few studies to investigate variation in personality variables, even fewer researchers discuss such variation in terms of personality change. Dweck (2008) has argued that beliefs are fundamental to personality and, therefore, that changing beliefs can change personality. Dweck noted that “broad personality traits can be assessed, but they contain no implications for how you might change them” (p. 392) contrasting them with the precision of measuring beliefs and the information about changing personality implicit within those beliefs. Dweck particularly focused on two classes of belief, belief about the malleability of self-attributes and belief about social acceptance, and then argued that modest interventions focusing on these can facilitate measurable personality change, reporting changes in Openness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism and Agreeableness.
This is an intriguing and—given the results of the current studies reported above—persuasive notion. If Dweck’s (2008) unique conceptualisation that personality is a function of beliefs is correct, then this could help explain the results of the RYLA studies. However, Dweck’s theory appears to describe beliefs in a way that is very similar to the concept of self-efficacy. The theory states that the greater the belief someone can change their own attributes, the more likely they are to do so and persevere in the face of challenges. This could be reframed: increased confidence one can adapt to new and challenging situations leads to increased perseverance in the face of those challenges; a definition consistent with General Self-Efficacy (e.g., Luszczynska, Gutiérrez-Doña, & Schwarzer, 2005). This project was not designed to resolve such distinctions, and an in-depth analysis of theory is beyond its scope, but it is interesting to consider the possibilities. If Dweck’s explanation of belief is the same as, or even closely related to, GSE then perhaps the increase in GSE reported in the quantitative results, and described in the qualitative data, may help account for the personality changes. Further research into the interactions between personality and GSE is warranted.

Pillemer (2001) has described the importance of momentous events in the life story, noting that episodic memories of key events can contain reference cues for future problem-solving. There are two key points that emerge from Pillemer’s research that are of relevance to RYLA. The first is
that Pillemer’s observation about the concentration of meaningful memorable events in early adulthood, particularly around age 20, is consistent with Arnett’s (2000) conceptualisation of emerging adulthood discussed in Chapter 2. This suggests that RYLA may be particularly effective because of the age range of its participants.

The second key point of relevance from Pillemer’s (2001) research is the observation that people refer to these memorable events throughout their lives and use them as an ongoing guide to appropriate action. The focus group participants all identified RYLA as a landmark event, even those that had attended several years prior. This may be because RYLA is especially “novel and distinctive” as suggested by Pillemer (p. 125). Although Pillemer was discussing life transitions such as beginning or graduating from college, the description seems particularly appropriate for RYLA. Pillemer suggested that, at these transition times, people’s existing routines and behavioural guides don’t apply, leading them to be especially attentive to events in order to appropriately adapt to their new context. This appears to be a very close match to the unanimous endorsement by all the focus group participants of the importance of not knowing other people on arrival and that the entire week was challenging. Perhaps the lack of their regular social networks and supports, along with a novel and challenging environment, led to RYLarians paying particular attention to their environment and willingly experimenting with new routines and scripts.
Further, Pillemer noted that memories of momentous events can act as specific illustrations of more general rules and knowledge. Again, this seems to match the descriptions by RYLarians of their memories of the week described in Chapters 4 and 7.

It is interesting to note that the two themes of support and challenge, that consistently emerged as important during the week of RYLA, are consistent with those of a *cultivating* learning climate (Little, 1975). Although Little’s model was originally based on family climate, and then interpreted in terms of university experiences, it provides a useful framework for describing effective learning environments. It is important, however, to note a distinction between the model as presented by Little and how it is presented here. According to Little, there are four types of learning environments based on the two dimensions of support and social orientation. More recently, the social orientation dimension of Little’s typology has been reframed as *Demand/Challenge* (Coates, 2009; Outhred & Chester, 2010). This more recent interpretation of Little’s typologies is represented in Table 3. This presentation has been used as the basis of efforts to improve educational and social outcomes for university students, with recent research supporting Little’s contention that cultivating environments (high challenge and high support) are most conducive to effective learning (Chester, Xenos, & Burton, 2012; Outhred & Chester, 2010). Applying the
typology to the current project, it seems clear that the experience of RYLA matches that of a cultivating learning climate.

My observations from RYLA in Chapter 5 noted the important role of the challenges throughout the week and the comments from participants on how they felt safe and supported when engaging with those challenges. This was reinforced by the survey comments and focus groups discussions outlined in Chapter 7 where the themes of support and, especially, challenge were prominent. As discussed in that fourth study, the RYLArrians in the final focus group made clear connections between support and challenge, consistent with the description of a cultivating learning environment. Since these are considered conducive to effective learning, RYLA could be expected to be an effective learning environment.

### Table 3

*Recent conceptualisation of Little's (1975) learning environment typologies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demand/Challenge</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High</strong></td>
<td>Indulging</td>
<td>Cultivating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low</strong></td>
<td>Neglecting</td>
<td>Training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There are other, similar, presentations of effective learning environments. For example, Eraut (2007) reported that the three key factors he found to support early career learning were the extent young professionals felt supported, were able to meet challenges and the increased confidence that resulted in meeting those challenges. Although Eraut said that confidence was similar to, but distinct from, self-efficacy, it was unclear on what grounds the distinction was made. The same three factors identified by Eraut were reported by RYLarians: support, challenge and confidence, with the latter interpreted as general self-efficacy. It seems probable that increased self-efficacy was an outcome of RYLA, so it is reasonable to assume that support and challenge contributed to this increase.

There are some interesting parallels between the roles of support and challenge observed at RYLA, and the notions of acceptance and commitment in therapy. While the latter two are discussed in great detail in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT, Hayes, 2004) and Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT, Linehan, 2004), both concepts have equivalents in other therapeutic approaches. For example, the notion of therapist acceptance could be linked to containment in psychodynamic approaches (Spurling, 2004), unconditional positive regard in person-centred approaches (Cain, 2010), or the therapeutic alliance in cognitive therapy (Beck, 1995). Each allows a relationship to form and they all provide a basis for future change, and sometimes are sufficient in themselves for change to occur. At the heart
of all of them is an acceptance of the person as they are in the moment. This acceptance matches RYLArions descriptions of support in Study 4 and the observations reported in Study 2.

Similarly the word *challenge* as used at RYLA seemed to be an invitation to do something new, something different, and often something difficult but rewarding. This shares some similarities with commitment within therapy. Commitment implies a dedication to change and all forms of psychotherapy are concerned with bringing about change. Both DBT and ACT overtly describe the dialectic of acceptance and change (or commitment), contributing to the names *Dialectical* Behaviour Therapy and *Acceptance and Commitment* Therapy respectively. Describing the aim of ACT as the development of more effective behavioural patterns, Hayes (2004) noted that commitment involves, “taking full responsibility for these behavioural patterns: changing when change is needed, and persisting when persistence is needed” (p. 23). In DBT, this has been described as “a relentless insistence on problem solving” (Swenson, Sanderson, Dulit, & Linehan, 2001, p.309). Similarly, RYLArions were encouraged to take responsibility for their own actions when faced with a group or individual task and to choose their behavioural contributions. This applied in numerous ways for the whole week, with the concept encapsulated by the phrase “Challenge by Choice”. Always the RYLArions were encouraged to choose to stretch themselves, to try a new behaviour, to experiment with change.
This emphasis on change is key. While RYLA was not, and did not present itself as, therapy, it shared with therapy a focus on change. Perhaps then, support and challenge represent the requirements of effective change environments. This is consistent with Little’s cultivating learning environment discussed above, since learning entails change, but extends it to settings beyond education.

Building on the comments the RYLArians made about self-regulation, a different way to interpret the results is through the framework of emotional intelligence (Salovey, Caruso, & Mayer, 2004) or emotional and social skills (Riggio & Reichard, 2008). Salovey et al. (2004) present a four-branch model of emotional intelligence to describe fundamental emotion-related skills. In brief, these four branches form a hierarchy of abilities, beginning with emotion perception, identification and expression. The next level involves using emotions to facilitate thought, then understanding and the relationships between emotions. The fourth and, according to Salovey et al., superordinate level is emotional monitoring and regulation. Regarding this last level, Salovey et al. describe five component steps. They state that individuals need to (1) believe they can modify their emotions; (2) accurately monitor their own mood states; (3) identify emotions that need to be regulated; (4) use appropriate emotion regulation strategies to change, or maintain, mood states; and (5) assess the efficacy of these strategies.
Riggio and Reichard (2008) extended the work of Salovey et al. (2004) into the domain of leadership effectiveness. Citing previous work by Riggio, they outlined a model that applies six skills, three emotional skills and three social skills, to leadership effectiveness. The three emotional skills are emotional expressiveness, emotional sensitivity and emotional control. These refer, respectively, to communicating non-verbal messages, receiving non-verbal messages and regulating emotions. The three social skills they outlined were social expressiveness, social sensitivity and social control. While emotional expressiveness refers to non-verbal communication, social expressiveness describes verbal communication. Social sensitivity applies to both listening to verbal communication, as well as interpreting social situations. Social control describes the ability to take on sophisticated social roles.

Perhaps then, these concepts of emotional intelligence (Salovey et al., 2004) and emotional skills (Riggio & Reichard, 2008) could help explain some of the changes observed and described by RYLArians. As noted in Study 4 (Chapter 7), there were several comments in the participant survey that described forms of emotional regulation as some of the key changes the RYLArians noticed in themselves. Similarly, the focus group participants described the importance of the RYLA sessions on managing their mood, and were observed in Study 2 (Chapter 5) using these strategies on the ropes course. With quantitative data from Study 3 (Chapter 6) indicating increased
self-efficacy and decreased neuroticism; content presented during RYLA specific to mood regulation, conflict resolution and awareness of their own thoughts and behaviours (Study 2); and examples given by RYLarians of monitoring and managing their moods (Study 4), it is relatively straightforward to map these to the skills required for emotional regulation described by Salovey et al.

For a start, belief that one can modify one’s emotions is a form of emotional self-efficacy. While the increase in General Self-Efficacy reported in Study 3 may be related, many of the RYLarians’ comments in Study 4 demonstrated an increased confidence in their ability to monitor and change their emotions and moods. Statements like, “I now know how to control my moods” and “I know that I can change my mood” clearly express such beliefs. Similarly, their comments suggest an increased ability to monitor and identify mood states (e.g., “I am more aware of my frustration...”), implement emotional regulation strategies (e.g., “...I sat down and thought, ‘breathe’...”) and assess the utility of those strategies (e.g., “There was a better thought process there...”). These comments were supported by the measured decrease in Neuroticism in Study 3. Given that the personality variable of Neuroticism is sometimes described by its opposite, Emotional Stability (Goldberg, 1990), this makes sense. One would expect an increase in emotional regulation to result in increased emotional stability and hence decreased neuroticism.
A similar process can map the emotional skill components of Riggio and Reichard’s (2008) model of leadership effectiveness to RYLA. RYLarians’ descriptions of increased emotional regulation, and their measured decreases in neuroticism, are both consistent with Riggio and Reichard’s three emotional skills. The applicability of their three social skills, however, is less clear. Since the model was not referenced prior to data collection, none of the observations were made with it in mind, relevant measures were not used, and the comments by the RYLarians offer ambiguous support. Yet it is an intriguing notion when the content of RYLA is considered. It is possible that activities at RYLA such as the daily Passion Speeches, and the regular requirement for verbal interaction during activities, could contribute to social expressiveness. Perhaps the fact that the RYLarians did not know each other beforehand, as emphasised by them in the focus groups, also contributed to improved social expressiveness.

While it is also conceivable that social sensitivity and social control increased at RYLA, very little of the data specifically refer to associated behaviours. It was not a major theme in any of the qualitative data, perhaps identifiable as a sub-theme at best. However, some of the content of the week did specifically address the type of behaviours that Riggio and Reichard (2008) describe. There were sessions that included content specific to non-verbal communication (emotional expressiveness) and also active listening (consistent with the verbal listening component of social sensitivity). The
various leadership challenges throughout the week provided opportunities to practice, and get feedback on, interpreting social situations (social sensitivity). Content such as the five leadership roles provided overt guidance on taking different social roles within a group (social control).

Given the relevance of the content presented during RYLA to Riggio and Reichard’s (2008) model, it is worth considering if any of the measured outcomes may be relevant. For example, could the measured increase in Extraversion relate to social expressiveness? Likewise, could increased Agreeableness be related to social control? Semantically, there are similarities between the constructs, but there is insufficient evidence to make strong claims for them. Thus, while the content of RYLA can be readily linked to the six social and emotional skills outlined in Riggio and Reichard’s leadership effectiveness model, the relevance of their model to RYLA cannot be adequately determined, nor can the data offer direct support for the model. This is an area of investigation recommended for future studies.

One final way of understanding what happened for the RYLArians, a theory to integrate and explain the four studies in this thesis, is Fredrickson’s *broaden-and-build* theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2001, 2004, 2008). This theory posits that, while negative emotions trigger a specific action tendency that involves a narrowing of attention and a reduced action repertoire, positive emotions broaden the range of available thoughts and actions. Further, the resources developed or obtained during
positive emotional states endure beyond the emotion itself and can lead people to become more open and resilient and enhance overall well-being. This is a two-way interaction, in that increased openness and broadened thinking also increase positive emotion (Fredrickson, 2008). According to Fredrickson, activities to increase awareness, such as mindfulness, will increase openness and thus contribute to positive emotions and enhance resiliency. An example of such an activity during RYLA was the Being With exercise described in Study 2 (Chapter 5).

However, although Fredrickson specifically named openness to experience, it is not clear if the term is used to refer to the personality factor Openness to Experience. A recent publication on the relationship between personality factors and mindfulness (van den Hurk et al., 2011), however, has lent support to this link. The study found that mindfulness skills were positively associated with Openness (and also Extraversion, while negatively associated with Neuroticism and Conscientiousness). This indirectly supports the link between Openness to Experience and Fredrickson’s description of openness. Fredrickson also noted that increases in positive meaning (Fredrickson, 2008) are associated with increased positivity.

The findings of the current project are consistent with the broaden-and-build theory. The RYLarians demonstrated an increase in positivity—shown by the clear increase in meaning (eudemonic happiness) and possibly also both pleasure (hedonic happiness) and engagement (flow)—and also
Openness. Hence, according to the broaden-and-build theory, we would expect them to show increases in resilience and personal resources (Fredrickson, 2004) as well as helping others more and being more social (Fredrickson, 2008). These are all consistent with the reports of the RYLArians in the focus groups.

**Limitations and suggestions for further research**

While it is clear that measurable changes are reported by the RYLArians, the design of the current studies is unable to provide strong evidence of causation. While use of a comparison group would have strengthened any causal claims, this was not appropriate for this project. The most important reason is that, prior to the studies described in the previous chapters, it was not known whether any changes did occur at RYLA. It was possible that there were no changes; that the anecdotal evidence of RYLA being life changing was, as suggested in Chapter 2, simply the biased interpretations of a fun week away. So the first step was to identify possible areas of change and then a preliminary indication of the magnitude of that change. This was the function of the current studies. However, now that the key areas of change have been identified, further research incorporating relevant comparison groups will add considerably to the confidence in claiming causal connections. A key issue to be addressed in such studies will be identifying what a “relevant” comparison group may entail.
The small samples limited the range of quantitative analyses that could be conducted and reduces the power of those that were. Although mitigated by comments from previous RYLArians supporting the results, it remains possible that there were cohort effects or that the comments were misinterpreted. The latter includes the possibility that my own involvement with RYLAs as a Facilitator biased my interpretations of the qualitative data. Further, it was also possible that those who attended the focus groups or contributed written comments to the surveys were those who experienced greatest change or displayed the greatest support for RYLAs. This leaves open the possibility that the qualitative data was skewed by the favourable bias of those who responded. While potentially reducing the range of experiences described, given the stated aims of the study (to identify and measure the areas of greatest change), this was acceptable. Indeed it may be a strength: Since this was an exploratory study designed to identify greatest changes following RYLAs, it was reasonable to initially focus on those who described ongoing change after some years. However, for future studies of similar programs, a greater range of participants may provide a more nuanced understanding, especially if there are participants with less positive experiences.

A related issue is the fact the current series of studies only investigated RYLAs within a single Rotary District. Further, selection of focus group participants in Study 1 was limited to those who attended RYLAs that were
as similar as possible to the RYLA used in the remaining three studies.

Hence it is possible that this particular RYLA is unique and provides an experience unlike any other. Given that RYLAs range from 3 to 10 days, and can be offered to adolescents as young as 14 with different developmental needs and responses, then it is to be expected that other RYLAs will be different and may result in different outcomes. Other leadership programs offered by different organisations are likely to be different again. Taken together, the above points raise concerns about the generalisation of results. As an exploratory study, it was not intended to be conclusive so it remains open whether RYLA in other districts, or other leadership programs, achieve similar results.

Despite these limitations, the mixed-method research design of the current project provides a sound initial investigation into programs such as RYLA. Given the lack of prior research into similar leadership programs, and the range of possible theories that could be relevant, the current studies provided a foundation for further research. Future investigations now have suggestions for relevant variables to be investigated (GSE, personality and measures of meaning and happiness), theoretical explanations that can be tested, and a sample that can form an initial comparison group. For other programs, the current project provides an example of how qualitative and quantitative techniques can be combined to provide a method for evaluating the key changes experienced by participants.
In addition to the methodology used, the analysis of the current studies suggest several specific areas of research worthy of further investigation. For example, the ability of leadership education programs to enhance Openness appears to be a new finding, contrasting with Zaccaro’s (2007) questioning of this possibility. Further, the association between openness and GSE is worthy of further research, particularly in light of Peterson and Seligman’s (2004) observations about curiosity and anxiety. Perhaps future studies could use their Values In Action Inventory of Strengths along with a measure of GSE to explore this relationship further. Further research into the effects of GSE are warranted, particularly in light of Dweck’s (2008) theory that beliefs are the foundation of personality and changing belief changes personality. The importance of experiences such as RYLA’s leadership challenges in enhancing GSE is currently speculative, and could be verified with further research. The application of Riggio and Reichard’s (2008) leadership effectiveness model to programs such as RYLA is another area of future investigation, along with the association of semantically related variables (such as Extraversion and Agreeableness) to the six emotional and social skills the model describes. The importance of RYLA as a landmark event (Pillemer, 2001) is worthy of investigation, as is the importance of age (e.g., do landmark events play a particular role for emerging adults or are there similar effects for other age groups?). Finally, the potential role of support and challenge as necessary conditions for
effecting change was discussed, but further work is needed to test this idea from both theoretical and applied perspectives.

**Conclusions**

The key questions, asked in Chapters 1 and 2, were what changes occur for the young people attending RYLA and were these changes measurable. From the four exploratory studies conducted, it is clear that there were measurable changes and that they included increases in General Self-Efficacy, Openness to Experience and Meaning. It is likely there were similar increases in Engagement, Pleasure, Extraversion and Agreeableness and a decrease in Neuroticism. Participants in the 2009 RYLA also described an enhanced emotional regulation. So it seems that RYLarians are happier, more open and more self-aware after participating in RYLA. A secondary question was whether RYLA had an impact on leadership, or whether it was “just” a personal development program. Although leadership itself was rarely discussed in the four studies of this project, it seems that RYLA could have impacted on leadership capacity given that Zaccaro (2007) has noted that increased openness enhances leadership. Further, the increased emotional awareness and regulation described by many participants along with the measured reduction in Neuroticism, suggest an increase in emotional intelligence: an essential component of effective leadership.
(Riggio & Reichard, 2008). Hence it is reasonable to conclude, at least tentatively, that participating in RYLA can improve leadership.

Clearly follow-up work will be needed to replicate and verify the results, and to help understand the theoretical implications. As a starting point, the effect of the unique and distinctive environment of the week may mark RYLA as a landmark event for participants (Pillemer, 2001) while the combined effects of support and challenge may create a cultivating learning environment conducive to learning (Little, 1975) and change. Taken together, the effects may be explained by Fredrickson’s broaden-and-build theory (2001).

While other theories may prove to better account for the changes observed, the current sequence of studies support the anecdotal evidence reported in Chapter 2. RYLA, at least in Rotary District 9790, is a positive life changing experience.
Glossary

Challenge by Choice

Originally coined by Karl Rohnke of Project Adventure (Rohnke, 1989), as used at RYLA this phrase emphasises and respects the choices each participant has within each activity. Within the opening session of RYLA, this philosophy is explained by Interactive EdVentures staff. Participants are encouraged to “choose their challenge” by varying their level of engagement or asking for alternatives with a more appropriate challenge. If need be, they always have the option of sitting out an activity. In all of the sessions run by myself, as well as many run by RYLA Supporters, Challenge by Choice was actively referred to and discussed. Note that Challenge by Choice is not always interpreted in the same way in the adventure community. For example, some describe it as prescriptive and only applying to the level of engagement within a given activity (e.g., Haras, Bunting, & Witt, 2006). However, the way it was used within RYLA is similar to the way Haras et al. (2006) define Inviting Optimum Participation in that participants were literally invited to choose their own level of challenge and, where possible (such as on the Ropes Course) they were provided with multiple activity options.
**Challenge Ropes Course**

The Challenge Ropes Course, or just Ropes Course, is an adventure program designed to provide people with the opportunity to be engage in structured risk taking (Rohnke, Tait, & Wall, 1997). It consists of activities constructed from wood, rope and cable, usually between telegraph poles or trees, at various heights above the ground (typically less than metre for low ropes, and up to 12 metres or more for high ropes). Through the use of structured safety procedures and equipment, the actual risk is usually very low while the height generates a strong sense of perceived risk for most participants. Some activities are structured to require group problem-solving, while others are targeted specifically at fear of height. The general aim is to create success experiences.

**Colour Group**

At the beginning of the week, each RYLArian was allocated to a Colour Group: a small group of four to six RYLArians facilitated by two Supporters. Colour Groups have breakfast together, do chores together and meet each afternoon or evening to discuss the key themes from the day. The main aims of the Colour Groups are to distribute information throughout the week, check RYLArians’ welfare, provide small group support, allow for guided discussion of daily content and manage minor housekeeping chores such as setting meal tables or welcoming Guest Speakers. They also give Supporters
the opportunity to check if there are any concerns or misunderstandings that can be fed back to the Supporter team meeting or to refer to the onsite counsellor.

**Facilitators**

Facilitators lead specific content sessions during RYLA. If unpaid volunteers, they were designated *Guest* Facilitators. Facilitators usually only attend for a short period of time, perhaps staying for a meal but only rarely staying overnight.

**Individual Reflection Time**

This refers to time allocated each day for personal reflection. While suggestions were given to participants for activities they could do during this time (write a journal, draw, meditate, set goals, read a book, etc.), the only rules were that it was quiet “solo time” and communication with others was prohibited.

**Leadership Challenge**

Throughout the week, RYLarians had the opportunity to apply the content they were learning to group tasks. These ranged from simple group problem-solving activities lasting a few minutes, to organising a Rotary dinner, to participating in the Challenge Ropes Course.
**Leap of Faith**

The Leap of Faith is a Challenge Ropes Course activity that involves a person climbing a shortened telephone pole (approximately 6 metres high), balancing on top and then leaping off. In 2009, participants had the option of catching a trapeze or simply stepping off the pole. Safety was ensured by a belay rope attached to a chest and seat harness.

**Rotary**

Rotary is an international volunteer organisation, with over 1.2 million members dedicated to humanitarian service (Rotary International, n.d.). Rotary activities are primarily arranged at a district (regional) and club (local) level.

**RYLA**

RYLA is an acronym for Rotary Youth Leadership Award.

**RYLarians**

RYLarians is the term used to describe the young people who participate in RYLA. In Rotary District 9790, all RYLarians are between the ages to 18-30.

**Supporters**

Supporters are the volunteers who organise and run RYLA throughout the week. As suggested by the name, Supporters are expected to support the
experience of RYLA by ensuring administrative tasks are done, arranging resources for Guest Speakers, facilitating Colour Groups, communicating program information to RYLArions and role modelling participation throughout the RYLA week. Most Supporters are previous RYLArions, while others may be Rotary volunteers. Supporters meet each night for a Supporters meeting where any concerns can be addressed, requests for help with specific sessions are raised, changes to the schedule are communicated and any other administrative issues are dealt with.
References


012008


doi:10.1146/annurev.psych.55.090902.141913


doi:10.1007/s10902-011-9265-7

doi:10.1016/j.cognition.2007.04.010


in patients treated for major depression. *Psychological Assessment, 18*(1), 71-80. doi:10.1037/1040-3590.18.1.71


Journal of Educational Psychology monograph series II, Number 4:
Student learning and university teaching [Monograph] (pp. 113-133).
Leicester, UK: British Psychological Society.
doi:10.1348/000709906X162424


Linehan (Eds., Mindfulness and acceptance: Expanding the cognitive-behavioral tradition (pp. 30-44). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.


quantitative approaches. *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches*, 3(2), 114-139.


doi:10.1016/S1054-139X(02)00421-4


doi:10.1016/S1054-139X(02)00421-4


Schriesheim, C. A. (2003). Why leadership research is generally irrelevant for leadership development. In S. E. Murphy & R. E. Riggio (Eds.), *The...*
future of leadership development (pp. 181-197). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.


Stott, T., & Hall, N. (2003). Changes in aspects of students' self-reported personal, social and technical skills during a six-week wilderness
expedition in Arctic Greenland. *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning, 3*(2), 159-169.


doi:10.1006/ceps.1999.1016
Appendices
Appendix A: Plain Language Statement (Study 1)

Project Title:
Evaluation of the psychological outcomes of a residential leadership program.
Study 1: Identification of themes.

Investigators:
• Tim Edwards-Hart
  Candidate for Doctor of Psychology, RMIT University
timothy.edwards-hart@rmit.edu.au, 03 9925 7376

• Dr Andrea Chester
  PhD, MA, Grad. Dip. Coun. Psych., BA
  Research Supervisor, RMIT University
andrea.chester@rmit.edu.au, 03 9925 3150

Introduction:
You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by RMIT University. This information sheet describes the project in straightforward language, or ‘plain English’. Please read this sheet carefully and be confident that you understand its contents before deciding whether to participate. If you have any questions about the project, please ask one of the investigators.

Who is involved in this research project? Why is it being conducted?
This research project is being conducted by Tim Edwards-Hart, as part of a Doctor of Psychology degree, under the supervision of Dr. Andrea Chester and Prof. Ken Greenwood. It is designed to investigate the psychological outcomes for young people participating in RYLA. This project has been approved by the RMIT University Human Research Ethics Committee and is being funded by RMIT University.

Why have you been approached?
You have been approached to participate because of your involvement with RYLA in Rotary District 9790 since 2003.

What is the project about? What are the questions being addressed?
This study is the first of two designed to identify and measure the most significant personal changes of RYLA. Specifically, this study aims to identify the key areas that are likely to change for participants in the way they think about, and respond, to life events following RYLA. This information will then be used to design a questionnaire for this year’s RYLarians.

If I agree to participate, what will I be required to do?
If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to complete a short survey and participate in a focus group interview. Separate interviews will be conducted with past RYLarians and past RYLA supporters. It is expected that each interview will take approximately 1 to 1½ hours and will discuss why you chose to participate in RYLA, your experiences of RYLA and the changes that have occurred since attending RYLA. Each interview will be recorded for later transcription and analysis.

What are the risks or disadvantages associated with participation?
Participating in this study should pose few, if any, risks to you outside your normal daily activities.

What are the benefits associated with participation?
While there may not be any direct benefit to you as a result of participating in this study, your involvement will contribute to a greater understanding of the benefits of RYLA and may help improve future RYLA’s and other similar programs.
What will happen to the information I provide?
After the each interview, the audio recordings will be transcribed and then analysed to identify the common themes identified by each group. This information will then be used to design a questionnaire for this year's RYLArians.

Your participation in this study will remain anonymous and you will not be personally identified in any publication arising from the study. The information that you provide will only be accessible to the identified researchers and will be retained in secure file-server on the RMIT University computer system. Paper files will be kept in a locked filing cabinet within the Division of Psychology at RMIT University. All information will be kept for 5 years before being destroyed. Any information that you provide can be disclosed to other parties only if (1) it is to protect you or others from harm, (2) a court order is produced, or (3) you provide the researchers with written permission.

What are my rights as a participant?
Participation in this study is on a voluntary basis and you are under no obligation to be involved. You have the right to withdraw your participation at any time, without prejudice. Please note that, due to their group nature, it may be impractical to identify and remove specific comments made by you during the interviews. If you are concerned about this, or any other aspect of the project, please contact Tim Edwards-Hart or Dr Andrea Chester as soon as convenient. Tim and Andrea will discuss your concerns with you confidentially and suggest appropriate follow-up, if necessary.

Whom should I contact if I have any questions?
If you have any questions about this study, please do not hesitate to contact Tim Edwards-Hart on 03 9925 7376 during business hours or via email at timothy.edwards-hart@rmit.edu.au.

Yours sincerely
Tim Edwards-Hart
G. Dip. Beh. Sci.,
G. Dip. Adol. Hlth & Welfare,
B. App. Sci. (Hons)

Andrea Chester
PhD, MA

Any complaints about your participation in this project may be directed to the Executive Officer, RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee, Research & Innovation, RMIT, GPO Box 2476V, Melbourne, 3001. The telephone number is (03) 9925 2251. Details of the complaints procedure are available at www.rmit.edu.au/governance/complaints/research
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form (Study 1)

RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee  
HREC Form 2b

Prescribed Consent Form For Persons Participating In Research Projects Involving Interviews, Questionnaires or Disclosure of Personal Information

College School of Science, Engineering and Technology 
Project Title: Health Sciences 
Evaluation of the psychological outcomes of RYLA. 
Study 1: Identification of themes.

Name(s) of investigator(s): 
1. Tim Edwards-Hart Phone: 0418 553 996 
2. Dr Andrea Chester Phone: 03 9925 3150

1. I have received a statement explaining the interview/questionnaire involved in this project.
2. I consent to participate in the above project, the particulars of which - including details of the interviews or questionnaires - have been explained to me.
3. I am aware that interviews will be audio recorded.
4. I authorise the investigator or his or her assistant to interview me, administer a questionnaire and to record the audio of the interview.
5. I acknowledge that:
   (a) Having read Plain Language Statement, I agree to the general purpose, methods and demands of the study.
   (b) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied.
   (c) The project is for the purpose of research and/or teaching. It may not be of direct benefit to me.
   (d) The privacy of the personal information I provide will be safeguarded and only disclosed where I have consented to the disclosure or as required by law.
   (e) The security of the research data is assured during and after completion of the study. The data collected during the study may be published, and a report of the project outcomes will be provided to the RYLA Sub-committee of the New Generations Committee of Rotary District 9790. Any information that will identify me will not be used.

Participant’s Consent

Participant: ____________________________ (Print Name) ____________________________ Date: ______________

Witness: ____________________________ (Signature) ____________________________ Date: ______________

Where participant is under 18 years of age:

I consent to the participation of ____________________________ in the above project.

Signature: 
(1) ____________________________ (Signature of parents or guardians) Date: ______________
(2) ____________________________ ______________

Witness: ____________________________ (Witness to signature) ____________________________ Date: ______________

Participants should be given a photocopy of this consent form after it has been signed.

Any complaints about your participation in this project may be directed to the Executive Officer, RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee, Research & Innovation, RMIT, GPO Box 2476V, Melbourne, 3001. The telephone number is (03) 9925 2251. Details of the complaints procedure are available from the above address.

Human Research Ethics Committee, June 2005

235
Appendix C: Focus group questionnaire (Study 1)

Name (optional): ____________________ Year attended RYLA:________________________

Year(s) supported RYLA: ____________________

Explained below are the topics of this evening’s conversation. To help jog your memory, and help us understand the interview afterwards, please take a few moments before we start to note some key thoughts beside each point.

**Before RYLA: Why did you choose to participate in RYLA? What were your expectations?**


**During RYLA: What were your impressions of RYLA during the week? What do you remember as being important at the time?**


**After RYLA: What were your impressions of RYLA after it finished? What do you think changed within you as a result of attending RYLA?**
### Focus Group Outline

Focus groups will use the following structure:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5:00 pm</td>
<td><strong>Set-up</strong> Set up a table with name tags &amp; surveys for participants. Arrange seats in a circle ready for discussion. Test audio equipment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:15/6:30</td>
<td><strong>Arrival</strong> Welcome participants as they arrive. Ask them to wear their name tag and to complete the survey. Inform them that the survey is to assist discussion. <em>&lt;Pizza to arrive around 6:30&gt;</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:50 pm</td>
<td><strong>Intro</strong> Introduction of facilitator and project. Overview of the process: interaction between participants is actively encouraged – tell participants to talk; OK to question each other and revise opinions already given; only one person to speak at a time. Will aim to finish in about an hour, but definitely no more than 90 minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 pm</td>
<td><strong>Grp Intro</strong> <em>&lt;Start audio recording&gt;</em> Introduction of each participant, incl: name, town/suburb currently living, year attended RYLA, year(s) acted as supporter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:10 pm</td>
<td><strong>“Before”</strong> Impressions of RYLA before attended. <em>Key question: Why did they choose to go?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:25 pm</td>
<td><strong>“During”</strong> Impressions of RYLA during the week. <em>Key question: What do they remember as being important at the time?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:45 pm</td>
<td><strong>“After”</strong> Impressions of RYLA after it finished. <em>Key question: What do they think changed as a result of RYLA?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:05 pm</td>
<td><strong>“Most significant”</strong> Group discussion on what was the &quot;most significant&quot; change. Narrow down to 4 or 5 contenders, write them on index cards and then ask group to rank them in order. Write the ranking on the cards for transcription purposes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:25 pm</td>
<td><strong>Conclusion</strong> Ask for final comments and thank everyone for attending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:30 pm</td>
<td><strong>Finish</strong> <em>&lt;Stop recording&gt;</em> Timing is important, aim to keep sessions less than 90 minutes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E: Plain Language Statement (Study 3)

Project Title:
Evaluation of the psychological outcomes of RYLA. Study 2: Confirmation of themes.

Investigators:
• Tim Edwards-Hart
  BAppSci(Psy)(Hons), GDipAdolHlthWelf.
  Candidate for Doctor of Psychology, RMIT University
  timothy.edwards-hart@rmit.edu.au, 03 9925 7376

• Dr Andrea Chester
  PhD, MA, Grad. Dip. Coun. Psych., BA
  Research Supervisor, RMIT University
  andrea.chester@rmit.edu.au, 03 9925 3150

Introduction:
You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by RMIT University. This information sheet describes the project in straightforward language, or ‘plain English’. Please read this sheet carefully and be confident that you understand its contents before deciding whether to participate. If you have any questions about the project, please ask one of the investigators.

Who is involved in this research project? Why is it being conducted?
This research project is being conducted by Tim Edwards-Hart, as part of a Doctor of Psychology degree, under the supervision of Dr. Andrea Chester and Prof. Ken Greenwood. It is designed to investigate the psychological outcomes for young people participating in RYLA. This project has been approved by the RMIT University Human Research Ethics Committee and is being funded by RMIT University.

Why have you been approached?
You have been approached to participate because of your involvement with Rotary District 9790’s RYLA in 2009.

What is the project about? What are the questions being addressed?
This study is the second of two designed to identify and measure the most significant personal changes of RYLA. Specifically, this study aims to measure and confirm the results of the first study, which aimed to identify the key areas of change for participants in the way they think about, and respond, to life events following RYLA.

If I agree to participate, what will I be required to do?
If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to complete an online questionnaire on three occasions: before RYLA, immediately after RYLA and about 3 months following RYLA. It is expected that the each questionnaire will take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. You may also be invited to participate in a focus group discussion in 2010. Details of the focus groups will be provided in 2010 when invitations are distributed.

What are the risks or disadvantages associated with participation?
Participating in this study should pose few, if any, risks to you outside your normal daily activities.

What are the benefits associated with participation?
While there may not be any direct benefit to you as a result of participating in this study, your involvement will contribute to a greater understanding of the benefits of RYLA and may help improve future RYLA’s and other similar programs.
Security of the website
Users should be aware that the World Wide Web is an insecure public network that gives rise to the potential risk that a user’s transactions are being viewed, intercepted or modified by third parties or that data which the user downloads may contain computer viruses or other defects.

Security of the data
This project will use an external site to create, collect and analyse data collected in a survey format. The site we are using is Survey Monkey. If you agree to participate in this survey, the responses you provide to the survey will be stored on a host server that is used by Survey Monkey. No personal information will be collected in the survey so none will be stored as data. Once we have completed our data collection and analysis, we will import the data we collect to the RMIT server where it will be stored securely for a period of five (5) years. The data on the Survey Monkey host server will then be deleted and expunged.

What will happen to the information I provide?
Your participation in this study will remain anonymous and you will not be personally identified in any publication arising from the study. The information that you provide will only be accessible to the identified researchers or their research assistants and will be retained in secure file-server on the RMIT University computer system. Paper files will be kept in a locked filing cabinet within the Division of Psychology at RMIT University. All information will be kept for 5 years before being destroyed. Any information that you provide can be disclosed to other parties only if (1) it is to protect you or others from harm, (2) a court order is produced, or (3) you provide the researchers with written permission.

The part of the questionnaire that asks for your name and date of birth will be separated from the remaining questions before any analysis is conducted. Note that, since the primary investigator will be attending RYLA this year, an independent person will separate your names from your responses.

What are my rights as a participant?
Participation in this study is on a voluntary basis and you are under no obligation to be involved. You have the right to withdraw your participation at any time, without prejudice. You have the right to have any unprocessed data withdrawn and destroyed, provided it can be reliably identified and you have the right to have any questions answered at any time.

If you are concerned about this, or any other aspect of the project, please contact Tim Edwards-Hart or Dr Andrea Chester as soon as convenient. Tim and Andrea will discuss your concerns with you confidentially and suggest appropriate follow-up, if necessary.

Whom should I contact if I have any questions?
If you have any questions about this study, please do not hesitate to contact Tim Edwards-Hart on 03 9925 7376 during business hours or via email at timothy.edwards-hart@rmit.edu.au.

Yours sincerely

Tim Edwards-Hart
G. Dip. Beh. Sci.,
G. Dip. Adol. Hlth & Welfare,
B. App. Sci. (Hons)

Andrea Chester
PhD, MA

Any complaints about your participation in this project may be directed to the Executive Officer, RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee, Research & Innovation, RMIT, GPO Box 2476V, Melbourne, 3001. The telephone number is (03) 9925 2251. Details of the complaints procedure are available at www.rmit.edu.au/governance/complaints/research.
Appendix F: Summary of the Five Roles model used at RYLA

**Listening behaviours**

- Listen to ideas
- Ensure ideas are heard
- Remind others to listen

**Action behaviours**

- Help plan go smoothly
- Ensure things get done
- Contribute with action
Support behaviours

• Encourage others
• Make sure everyone is safe
• Create a positive environment

Ideas behaviours

• Come up with ideas
• Tell group the ideas
• Evaluate ideas
Organising behaviours

- Organise ideas
- Coordinate people
- Make sure everyone does their job

Group Leadership Behaviours – Key points

- A model of Group or Team leadership behaviours
- Note it describes behaviours, not people. People can do different behaviours at different times.
- All five behaviour types required for an effective team
- Overall team performance is affected if any behaviour type is absent or inefficient – ALL are equally important
- People will usually do more than one type of behaviour, often all five, but will usually have a tendency or preference for one over the others
- This is a descriptive model, not prescriptive. It describes what you tend to do, it does NOT prescribe what you are or what you will do. People can choose their own behaviours.
### Appendix G: Schedule for RYLA 2009

#### Monday

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1pm</td>
<td>Arrival and welcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.15-2.15</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.15-5.15</td>
<td>Formal Opening of RYLA and Getting to Know You</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.20-6.00</td>
<td>Introduction to Colour Group Discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.00-7.00</td>
<td>Dinner &amp; Passion Speeches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.00-9.00</td>
<td>Marketing Yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.00-9.30</td>
<td>Introduction to Individual Reflection Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11pm</td>
<td>Quiet time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Where not scheduled, morning, afternoon and evening break times will be announced by facilitators.

“A journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.00am</td>
<td>Wake up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.00-8.40</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.45-9.15</td>
<td>How We Learn and Warm up activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.15-12.15</td>
<td>Values-Led Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.15-1.15</td>
<td>Leadership Challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.15-2.15</td>
<td>Lunch &amp; Passion Speeches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.15-6.00</td>
<td>Project Management Principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.00-7.00</td>
<td>Dinner &amp; Passion Speeches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.00-7.20</td>
<td>Individual Reflection Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.20-8.00</td>
<td>Colour Group Discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.00pm</td>
<td>Values-Led Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.00pm</td>
<td>Quiet time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Where not scheduled, morning, afternoon and evening break times will be announced by facilitators.

“Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results”
— Albert Einstein
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.00am</td>
<td>Wake up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.00-8.40</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.45-9.15</td>
<td>Warm up activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.15-11.15</td>
<td>Positive Living/Your Potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.15-11.30</td>
<td>Morning tea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.30-1.15</td>
<td>Leadership challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.15-2.15</td>
<td>Lunch &amp; Passion Speeches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.15-3.45</td>
<td>Leadership challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.45-4.00</td>
<td>Afternoon tea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.00-4.30</td>
<td>Individual Reflection Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.30-6.30</td>
<td>Preparation time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.30-7.00</td>
<td>Rotarians arrive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.00-9.30</td>
<td>RYLarians host Rotary Club of Yea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.00pm</td>
<td>Group debrief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.00pm</td>
<td>Quiet time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Where not scheduled, morning, afternoon and evening break times will be announced by facilitators.

“Whether you think you can or you think you can't, either way, you're right”
– Henry Ford
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.00am</td>
<td>Wake up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.00-8.40</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.45-9.15</td>
<td>Warm up activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.15-12.00</td>
<td>Real Life Real Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.15-1.15</td>
<td>Conflict Resolution/Diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.15-2.15</td>
<td>Lunch &amp; Passion Speeches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.15-4.15</td>
<td>Personal Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.30-5.00</td>
<td>Individual Reflection Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.00-5.30</td>
<td>Colour Group Discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.00-7.00</td>
<td>Dinner &amp; Passion Speeches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.00-9.00</td>
<td>Community Circle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.00pm</td>
<td>Quiet time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Where not scheduled, morning, afternoon and evening break times will be announced by facilitators.

*What makes my heart sing?*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.00am</td>
<td>Wake up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.00-8.40</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.45-9.15</td>
<td>Warm up activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.15-10.30</td>
<td>Rotation 1: Financial literacy and leadership challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.30-10.45</td>
<td>Morning tea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.45-12.00</td>
<td>Rotation 2: Financial literacy and leadership challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.00-1.00</td>
<td>Lunch &amp; Passion Speeches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.00-2.15</td>
<td>Rotation 3: Public speaking and leadership challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.15-2.30</td>
<td>Afternoon tea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.30-3.45</td>
<td>Rotation 4: Public speaking and leadership challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.00-6.00</td>
<td>Leadership challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.00-7.00</td>
<td>Dinner &amp; Passion Speeches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.00-7.45</td>
<td>Colour Group Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.45-8.20</td>
<td>Individual Reflection Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.20pm</td>
<td>Relaxation night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11pm</td>
<td>Quiet time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Where not scheduled, morning, afternoon and evening break times will be announced by facilitators.

“What if?”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.00am</td>
<td>Wake up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.00-8.30</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.30-9.00</td>
<td>Warm up activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.00am</td>
<td>Bus departs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.15-5.00</td>
<td>Leadership challenge (including lunch)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.00pm</td>
<td>Bus departs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.30-7.00</td>
<td>Individual Reflection Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.00-8.00</td>
<td>Dinner &amp; Passion Speeches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.00-8.45</td>
<td>Colour Group Discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.45-9.30</td>
<td>Colour Group Challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.30pm</td>
<td>Celebration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11pm</td>
<td>Quiet time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Where not scheduled, morning, afternoon and evening break times will be announced by facilitators.

“Fear, the worst of all enemies, can be effectively cured by forced repetition of acts of courage”
– Napoleon Hill
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.00am</td>
<td>Wake up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.00-8.40</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.45-9.15</td>
<td>Pack and clean up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.15-9.30</td>
<td>Warm up activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.30-1.00</td>
<td>Group Reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.00-2.00</td>
<td>Lunch &amp; Passion Speeches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00-3.00</td>
<td>Presentation Ceremony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3pm</td>
<td>Goodbye</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Where not scheduled, morning, afternoon and evening break times will be announced by facilitators.

“What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us”
– Ralph Waldo Emerson
Appendix H: Plain Language Statement for Study 4

Project Title:
Evaluation of the psychological outcomes of a residential leadership program - Study 2: Confirmation of themes.

Investigators:
Tim Edwards-Hart, Candidate for Doctor of Psychology.
timothy.edwards-hart@rmit.edu.au, 03 9925 7376
Dr Andrea Chester, Research Supervisor.
andrea.chester@rmit.edu.au, 03 9925 3150

Introduction:
You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by RMIT University. This information describes the project in straightforward language, or ‘plain English’. Please read this carefully and be confident that you understand its contents before deciding whether to participate. If you have any questions about the project, please ask one of the investigators.

Who is involved in this research project? Why is it being conducted?
This research project is being conducted by Tim Edwards-Hart, as part of a Doctor of Psychology degree, under the supervision of Dr. Andrea Chester and Prof. Ken Greenwood. It is designed to investigate the psychological outcomes for young people participating in RYLA. This project has been approved by the RMIT University Human Research Ethics Committee and is being funded by RMIT University.

Why have you been approached?
You have been approached to participate because of your involvement with RYLA 2009 in Rotary District 9790.

What is the project about? What are the questions being addressed?
This study is the second of two designed to identify and measure the most significant personal changes of RYLA. Specifically, this study aims to measure and confirm the results of the first study, which aimed to identify the key areas of change for participants in the way they think about, and respond, to life events following RYLA.

If I agree to participate, what will I be required to do?
If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to participate in a focus group discussion. It is expected that the discussion will take approximately 90 minutes and will discuss why you chose to participate in RYLA, your experiences of RYLA and, especially, the changes that have occurred since attending RYLA. Each interview will be recorded for later transcription and analysis.

What are the risks or disadvantages associated with participation?
Participating in this study should pose few, if any, risks to you outside your normal daily activities.

What are the benefits associated with participation?
While there may not be any direct benefit to you as a result of participating in this study, your involvement will contribute to a greater understanding of the benefits of RYLA and may help improve future RYLA’s and other similar programs.
What will happen to the information I provide?
After the interview, the audio recording will be transcribed and then analysed to identify common themes and to help understand the results of the surveys that RYLARIans were invited to complete following RYLA and earlier this year. Your participation in this study will remain anonymous and you will not be personally identified in any publication arising from the study. The information that you provide will only be accessible to the identified researchers and will be retained in a secure file-server on the RMIT University computer system. Paper files will be kept in a locked filing cabinet within the Division of Psychology at RMIT University. All information will be kept for 5 years before being destroyed. Any information that you provide can be disclosed to other parties only if (1) it is to protect you or others from harm, (2) a court order is produced, or (3) you provide the researchers with written permission.

What are my rights as a participant?
Participation in this study is on a voluntary basis and you are under no obligation to be involved. You have the right to withdraw your participation at any time, without prejudice. Please note that, due to their group nature, it may be impractical to identify and remove specific comments made by you during the interviews. If you are concerned about this, or any other aspect of the project, please contact Tim Edwards-Hart or Dr Andrea Chester as soon as convenient. Tim and Andrea will discuss your concerns with you confidentially and suggest appropriate follow-up, if necessary.

Whom should I contact if I have any questions?
If you have any questions about this study, please do not hesitate to contact Tim Edwards-Hart on 0418 553 996 or via email at timothy.edwards-hart@rmit.edu.au.

Yours sincerely

Tim Edwards-Hart
G. Dip. Beh. Sci.,
G. Dip. Adol. Hlth & Welfare,
B. App. Sci. (Hons)

Andrea Chester
PhD, MA

Any complaints about your participation in this project may be directed to the Executive Officer, RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee, Research & Innovation, RMIT, GPO Box 2476V, Melbourne, 3001. The telephone number is (03) 9925 2251. Details of the complaints procedure are available at www.rmit.edu.au/governance/complaints/research.
Appendix I: Informed Consent Form (Study 4)

Prescribed Consent Form For Persons Participating In Research Projects Involving Interviews, Questionnaires or Disclosure of Personal Information

College School of Project Title: Science, Engineering and Technology Health Sciences Evaluation of the psychological outcomes of RYLA. Study 1: Identification of themes.

Name(s) of investigators: (1) Tim Edwards-Hart Phone: 0418 553 996
(2) Dr Andrea Chester Phone: 03 9925 3150

1. I have received a statement explaining the interview/questionnaire involved in this project.

2. I consent to participate in the above project, the particulars of which - including details of the interviews or questionnaires - have been explained to me.

3. I am aware that interviews will be audio recorded.

4. I authorise the investigator or his or her assistant to interview me, administer a questionnaire and to record the audio of the interview.

5. I acknowledge that:
   (a) Having read Plain Language Statement, I agree to the general purpose, methods and demands of the study.
   (b) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied.
   (c) The project is for the purpose of research and/or teaching. It may not be of direct benefit to me.
   (d) The privacy of the personal information I provide will be safeguarded and only disclosed where I have consented to the disclosure or as required by law.
   (e) The security of the research data is assured during and after completion of the study. The data collected during the study may be published, and a report of the project outcomes will be provided to the RYLA Sub-committee of the New Generations Committee of Rotary District 9790. Any information that will identify me will not be used.

Participant’s Consent

Participant: ____________________________________________

(Print Name) Date: __________________________

Witness: ____________________________________________

(Signature) Date: __________________________

Where participant is under 18 years of age:

I consent to the participation of ____________________________________________ in the above project.

Signature: (1) ____________________________________________ Date: __________________________

(Signatures of parents or guardians)

(2) ____________________________________________ Date: __________________________

Witness: ____________________________________________ Date: __________________________

(Witness to signature)

Participants should be given a photocopy of this consent form after it has been signed.

Any complaints about your participation in this project may be directed to the Executive Officer, RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee, Research & Innovation, RMIT, GPO Box 2476V, Melbourne, 3001. The telephone number is (03) 9925 2251. Details of the complaints procedure are available from the above address.

252
Appendix J: Outline for Focus Group 3 (Study 4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:00 pm</td>
<td>Set-up: Set-up a table with name tags &amp; surveys for participants. Arrange seats in a semi-circle ready for discussion. Test audio equipment. Hang signs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 3:30 pm    | Arrival & afternoon tea: Tim & Mel to welcome participants as they arrive. Ask them to wear their name tag.  
<**Tim to leave room approx 4:00**> |
| 4:00 pm    | Intro: Introduction of the group discussion.  
- Two main aims: 1. confirm key the themes identified from previous focus groups and surveys; 2. better understand changes since RYLA.  
- Overview of the process: interaction between participants is actively encouraged (tell participants to talk); OK to question each other and revise opinions already given; only one person to speak at a time (remind participants during the session). Will aim to finish in about 90 minutes. |
| 4:05 pm    | Grp Intro: Introduction of each participant, by name, starting with Melissa as facilitator (to demonstrate). |
| 4:10 pm    | "Before": Impressions of RYLA before attended.  
"Previous RYLAarians have indicated they knew very little about RYLA beforehand and attended on the recommendation of a friend or someone they trusted. Does this match your experience?"  
**Note**: Check for general agreement &/or get any "dissenting stories" |
| 4:20 pm    | "During": Focus: What was important during the RYLA week.  
"...the important parts of the RYLA week identified so far are": 1. a sense that everyone in was in the same boat (no one knew many people, everyone was challenged); 2. the social aspect of RYLA (e.g. making friends); 3. the skills and content presented; 4. being challenged throughout the week. Do you agree with these? Is there anything you would add?"  
<**Present prompt cards as introduce each theme**>  
**Note**: Again, check for general agreement. With "dissenting stories" or additional content, encourage specific examples. |
| 4:35 pm    | "Change": Focus: Examples of change.  
"In the surveys & previous focus groups, people have suggested that aspects of their lives were different after RYLA. Can you give examples of things that may have changed for you as a result of RYLA?"  
**Key question**: What do they think changed as a result of RYLA? Specific examples please. |
**Outline - Focus Group 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>&quot;Themes&quot;</th>
<th>Focus: Themes of change.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4:35 pm</td>
<td>&quot;When we have looked at other stories like yours, we have identified 3 common themes&quot;: 1. increased confidence; 2. greater meaning and purpose in life; 2. a sense of being more open to possibilities and change. Do you think these could summarize some of your experiences? Are there others that you would like to add?&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(25 min)</td>
<td><code>&lt;Present prompt cards as introduce each theme&gt;</code></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Note: Look for points of agreement and dissent. Encourage discussion on the themes (it doesn't matter if people agree or disagree, it's their comments that are important).</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conclusion</th>
<th>Ask for final comments and thank everyone for attending</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5:20 pm</td>
<td>&lt;Stop recording&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10 min)</td>
<td>&lt;Phone Tim on 9925 7742 (office) or 0418 553 996 (mobile)&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Note: Aim to keep the session to less than 90 minutes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finish interview</th>
<th>For those that are interested, Tim will provide a summary of the research results so far, including preliminary findings from the surveys.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5:30 pm</td>
<td>5:30pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research feedback</th>
<th>5:30pm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>