

A photograph of a classroom with several children sitting at desks. In the foreground, a girl with long brown hair in a ponytail, wearing a yellow patterned shirt, has her right hand raised high. To her left, another girl with long dark hair is seen from the back. In the background, other children are also raising their hands, and a teacher is visible at the front of the room. The image is dimmed to serve as a background for the text.

Exploring Canadian Adolescent Perspectives on Contemporary Risk-taking: a strengths-based qualitative approach

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Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Study



Background

What is risk-taking?



A photograph of two young women lying on their stomachs on a grassy field. The woman on the left, with dark skin and curly hair, is smiling and covering her eyes with both hands. The woman on the right, with light skin and long blonde hair, is also smiling and covering her eyes with her hands. They are both wearing light-colored jackets. The background is a lush green field. An orange arrow graphic points to the right on the left side of the image.

Risk-taking in adolescence



Contemporary risk-taking



What is missing?

Existing frameworks may not reflect today's risk environment.

- Limited qualitative research
- Insufficient inclusion of youth voices

Research Question

“How do Canadian adolescents observe risk-taking in their environments and experiences?”





Objective

Objective: To understand the views, thoughts, and opinions of adolescents surrounding current risk-taking practices.

Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Study & CIHR RISCY Grant



- Surveillance and monitoring
- Introduction of measures to national surveys
- Capture patterns of risk-taking and determinants



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$$\arcsin(2)$$

Methodology

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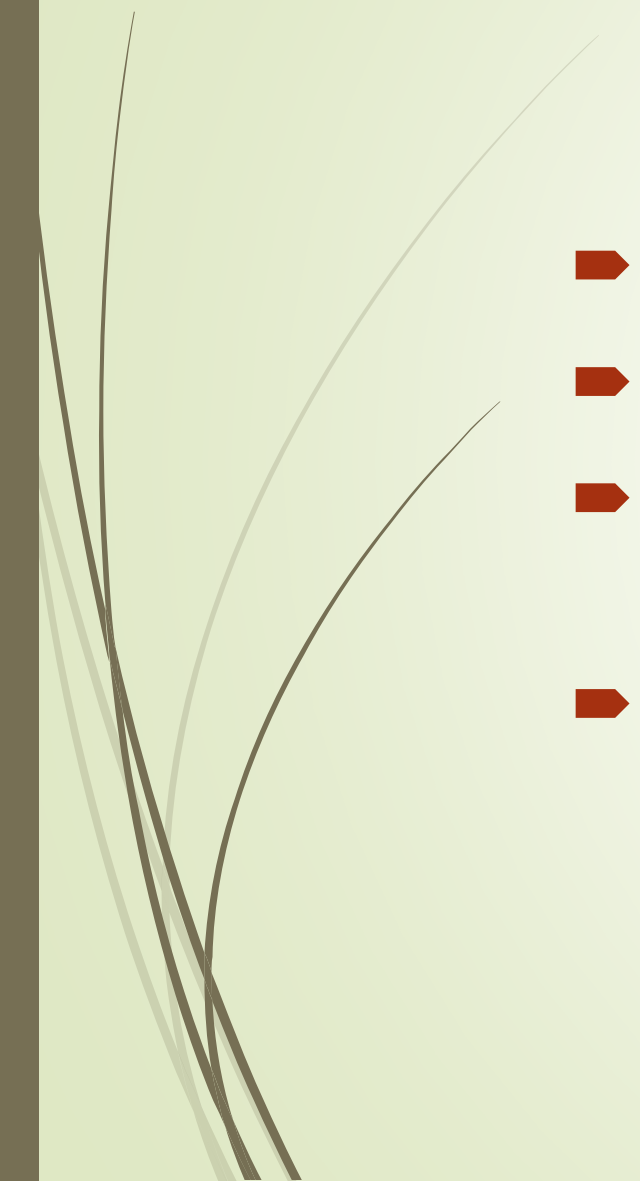


Youth Informed Approach

- HBSC Youth Engagement Panel
 - Integrated throughout research
 - Helped by providing feedback on: recruitment strategies/advertisements, development of conceptual model, interview guide, preliminary findings



Constructivist Grounded Theory

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- No a priori hypothesis
 - Positionality
 - Develop theory from peoples' lived experiences
 - Flexible through co-construction of themes with participant and researcher



Participant Sample

- Participants: N=15
 - 12-16 years of age, resides in Canada
- HBSC Youth Engagement Panel, COMPASS Youth Panel
 - Snowball sampling
 - Purposeful sampling

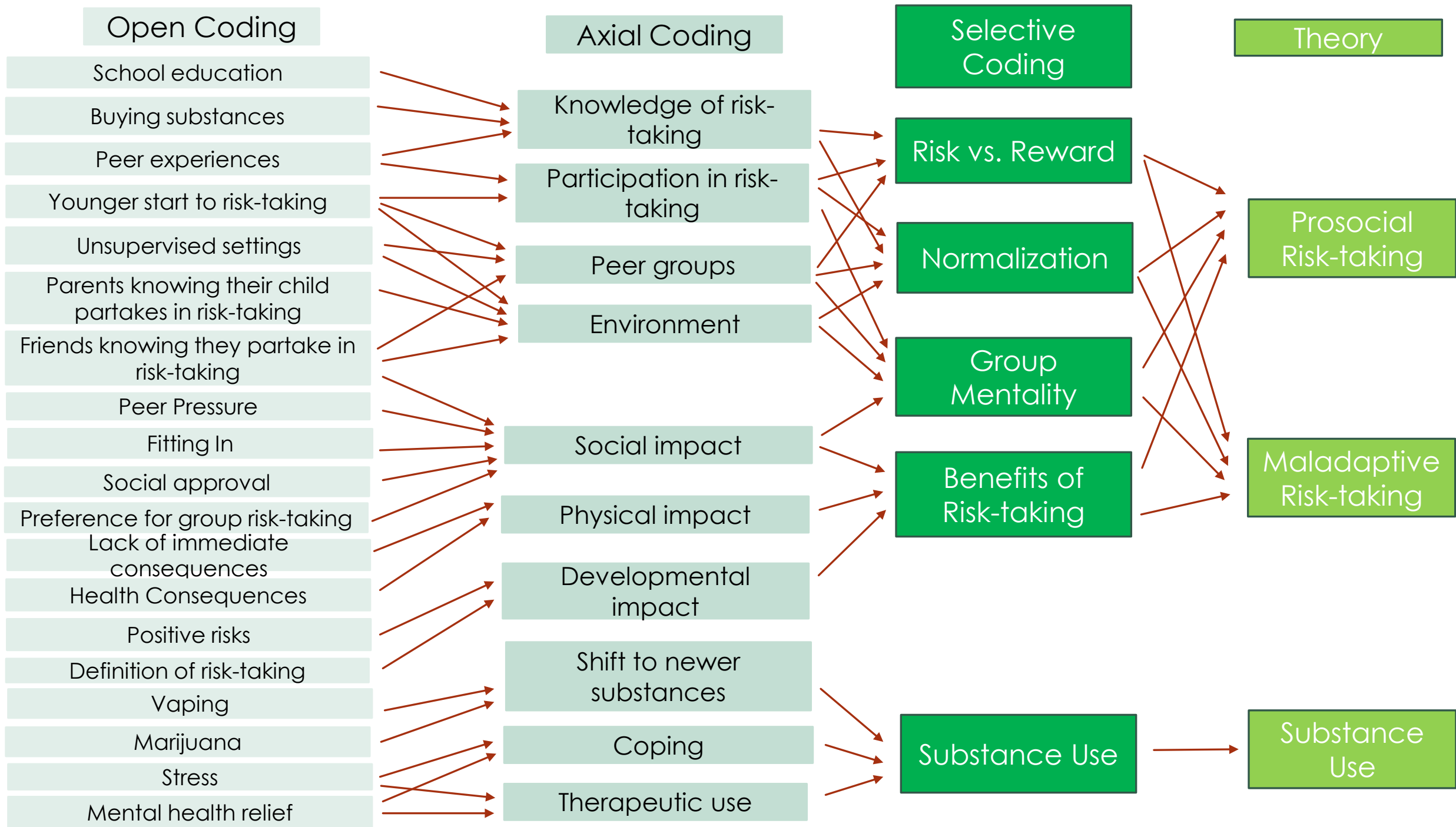


Data Collection

- Semi-structured interviews
 - Feedback from youth
 - Pilot tested
 - Online through TEAMS



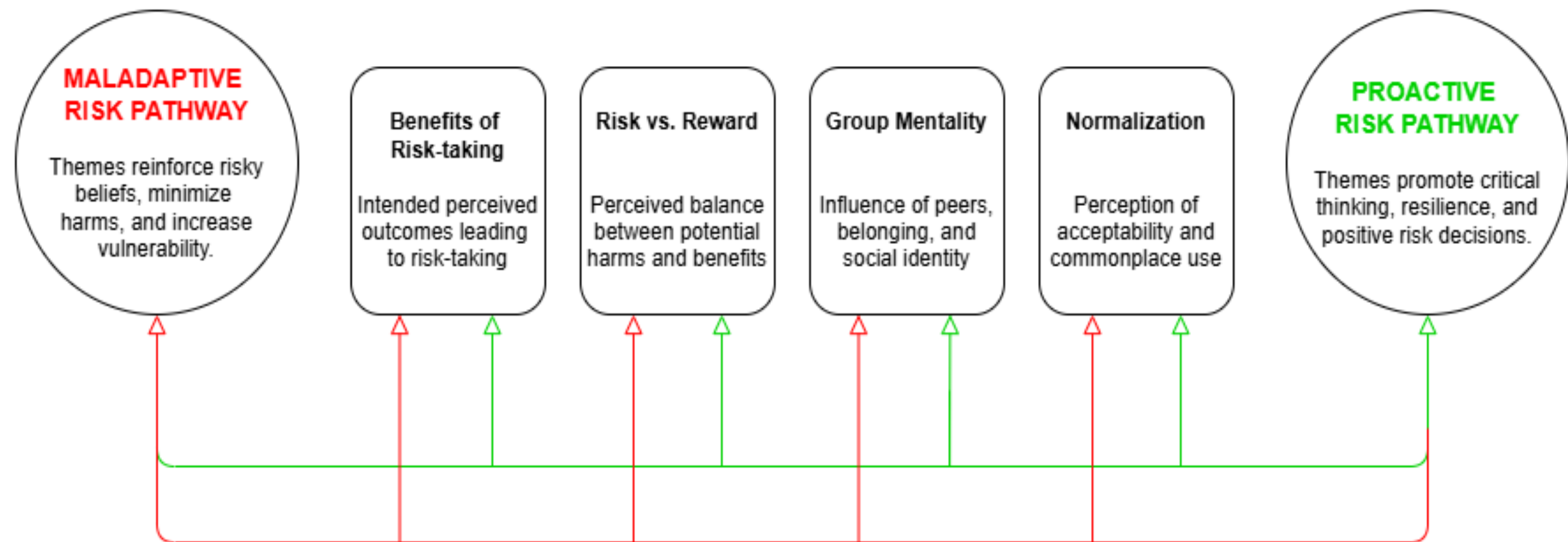
Findings





ADAPTIVE RISK-TAKING THEORY

Adolescents' understanding of risk-taking is moulded by their surrounding environment over time. Behaviours can be interpreted as positive or negative and are malleable, dependent on their social norms, affiliations, and behaviours endorsed by their families and peer groups.



Maladaptive Pathway →

Proactive Pathway →

Themes are not fixed; they are malleable and can shift towards either pathway based on context, experiences, and support.



Benefits of Risk-taking: *What am I getting out of this?*

"I feel like a lot of times people take risks because they think there's always some kind of bad thing, but that's not entirely true. A lot of times you can take risks which have zero consequences whatsoever. Like if you're applying for a job, for example, in the worst-case scenario when you apply you just get rejected, but that would be the case if you hadn't applied, you just didn't get the job. But I think that you have everything to gain if you do apply honestly."

"I think they see it as like a social benefit or a reward. Like, hey, if I sneak out tonight and I talk about it in class tomorrow people are going to ask me about it for months."



Risk vs. Reward: *What's at stake?*



"The main, probably most important, consequence would be like social aspects, which is their friends, because that is pretty much most of what matters to us. Other consequences, like their health, is not very important, because like that's 100 years down the road, that's it's a very far away thing. Like it doesn't seem that it's actually going to impact us."



Group Mentality: *How do I fit in?*

"I would say it's just the average teenage experience...If lots of kids do it then usually it pulls in other kids 'cause you don't wanna feel left out."

"... if they're going to choose any substance, they'd probably go with what their friends do."

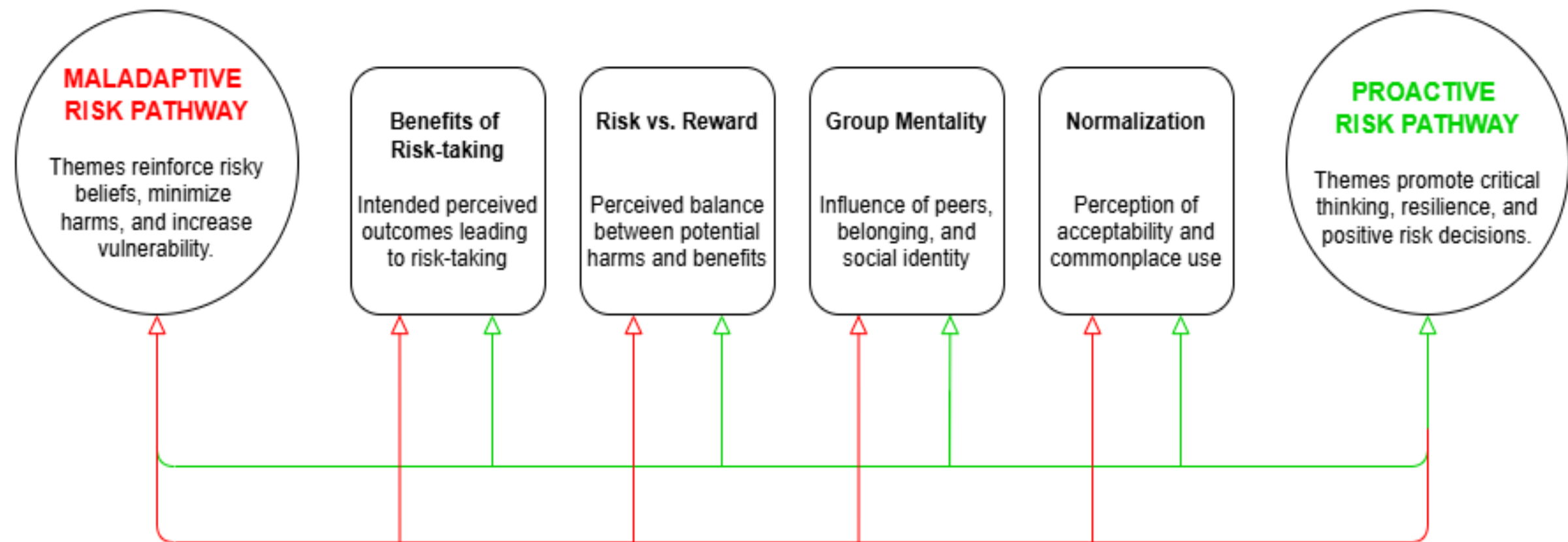
"...you don't want to be the odd one out."



Normalization: *Everyone knows, but who participates?*

"it's definitely more normalized now. Like when I was 12, if someone did something like that, they wouldn't have many friends. But now it's very normal and like no one really cares that much..."

"I feel like a lot of people probably do risky things, but they don't keep it open for everyone else to know that they do this stuff right... So it's not as obvious to know who does what."



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Proactive Pathway →

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Substance Use

“We're definitely seeing that big shift to vaping, especially as it's also being promoted towards younger kids, like even younger than me, with the different kinds of flavours.”

“Honestly, the one that I saw the most for people around my age is probably vaping.”

“There's a few really known store owners that they'll ask you how old you are and they kind of just go with whatever you say.”



Implications

- Positive risks require as much attention in research as negative risks.
- Engagement in risk-taking is an intersectional decision-making process
- These risk pathways are adaptable, and adolescents can change pathways over time



Why is this important?

- Approach to risk-taking
 - Needs to be environment-focused
 - Emphasis on strengths-based initiatives promoting risks that challenge, not harm; rather than preventative
- Integrative novel theory
 - Social Learning Theory
 - Problem Behaviour Theory
 - Positive Youth Development

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING 😊



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Extra slides





Strengths:

- Perspectives of adolescents
- Novel integrative theory
- Methodology

Limitations:

- Accessing the most at-risk groups
- Self-desirability bias