Self-Identified LGBTQ Students' PERMA Well-Being Profile

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Abstract: This research used a descriptive quantitative approach to determine the well-being of De La Salle University's self-identified LGBTQ students during Term 3 of the Academic Year 2020-2021. The personal information and the Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationship, Meaning, and Accomplishment (PERMA) Profiler were the two components of the survey questionnaires utilized by the researcher. One hundred twenty-nine (129) self-identified LGBTQ students took part in the study. The PERMA Profiler results indicated that the overall status of well-being was in the normal functioning (M=6.95). However, the scores obtained in Health (M=6.44), Negative Emotions (M=6.45) and Loneliness (M=6) seemed to be in the suboptimal functioning levels. Thus, it was recommended that programs be developed applying the PERMA Well-Being Framework to assist LGBTQ students cultivate and promote flourishing well-being.

Key Words: Well-being; PERMA; Flourishing; Self-Identified LGBTQ Students

1. INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (Kim, 2012) defines well-being as a complete state of physical, mental, and social well-being, rather than merely the absence of disease or disability. Well-being is more than simply affect, it also includes one's cognitive judgment with satisfaction in the whole life dimension (Carlquist et al. 2016).

Seligman (2011) developed the PERMA flourishing model, which consists of five aspects associated with psychological well-being: positive emotions (P), engagement (E), relationships (R), meaning (M), and accomplishment (A). The well-being model has been proposed as a framework based on positive psychology concepts, with the aim of boosting health, enhancing life happiness, developing and promoting creativity, and eventually moral growth and civic citizenship (Seligman, 2011).

Positive emotions are a key indicator of flourishing, and they may be nurtured or learned in order to increase one's well-being (Fredrickson, 2000). According to White, A. et. Al (2018), LGBTQ adolescents reported significantly more frequent negative emotions and bullying. LGBTQ youth also reported fewer instances of happy feelings at school and fewer instances of positive school experiences. Positive emotions can counteract the detrimental consequences of negative emotions and build resilience (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004).

According to research, those who are engaged and able to utilize their strengths will be happy in the long run. LGBTQ people have a wide range of interests and needs. Engagement also contributes to physical and mental well-being, as well as self-esteem (Reachout.com). Because LGBT people are at a higher risk of developing mental health disorders, Grossman (1992) proposed that they should have greater opportunity to engage in leisure and recreation.

Honneth's Theory of Recognition stressed the significance of recognition for LGBT people and communities, emphasizing the social environment's capacity to foster strong, connected communities that

support LGBT wellness. Samaroo (2017) found that LGBTQ youth's mental health improved when they were exposed to a friendly environment that lessened minority stress and enhanced social connections. Being acknowledged and valued for who one is vital to developing a good self-identity. It might be beneficial to their mental health to feel encouraged and protected in exploring and expressing their sexuality. It has the potential to alleviate discomfort, anxiety, and despair (Headtohealth, n.d.).

As stated by Bos, H. et al (2019), some investigators have examined meaning in life among sexual minority individuals (e.g., Michaels et al. 2018; Riggle et al. 2010; Shenkman & Shmotkin, 2016; Szymanski and Mikorski 2016). According to Szymanski and Mikorski (2016), having a meaningful life reduces the relationship between heterosexist discrimination and distress. Meaning in life moderated the connection between heterosexist discrimination and life happiness, according to Michaels et al. (2018). They suggested that having a meaningful life buffered the association between distal stigma-related stressors (i.e., homophobic stigmatization) and general psychological processes such as coping strategies.

Working for and achieving objectives, mastering an undertaking, and having self-motivation to do what you set out to achieve all contribute to a sense of accomplishment. This leads to happiness since people may look back on their lives with pride (Seligman, 2012).

The difficulties that LGBTQ students encounter at school have been extensively documented (Bontempo & D'Augelli,2002; Busseri, Willoughby, Chalmers, & Bogaert,2006; Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer,2006; Jordan et al.,1997; Kosciw,2004; Kosciw & Cullen,2002; Malinsky,1997, cited by Hansen, 2007). They are dealing with a variety of demands and obstacles that may have a detrimental effect on their well-being, particularly in their emotions, engagements, relationships, purpose, and accomplishments. LGBT persons face distinct stressors such as stigma, prejudice, and discrimination, all of which have an influence on their well-being. Minority Stress Theory, developed by Ilan Meyer, discusses how societal pressures lead to mental health inequalities in LGBT groups (Meyer, 2003).

Despite the growing literature on LGBTQ, few or there is a dearth of studies that have been conducted along this line within the context of Philippine education. Hence, this paper determined the level of well-being of self-identified lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer students of De La Salle University anchored on the PERMA Well-being of Seligman (2011).

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

Data was collected and analyzed using a quantitative approach, the descriptive design, to determine the baseline level of well-being of self-identified LGBTQ students. Ethridge (2004) asserts that the main goal of descriptive investigations is to identify, characterize, or define what is. Descriptive research aims to shed light on existing challenges or problems through a data gathering procedure that allows them to explain the situation more fully than they could before using this approach (Fox & Bayat, 2007). The result of the collected data provided insights and helped the researcher better understand the needs of the self-identified LGBTQ students.

2.2 Participants

This research utilized a purposive sampling method as it served as an initial effort into engaging solely with LGBTQ students of De La Salle University (DLSU). LGBTQ is an acronym denotes lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer. Lesbian refers to women who are attracted to women. Gay refers to men who are attracted to men. Bisexual refers to individuals who are attracted to both men and women. Transgender is anyone whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs significantly from what is expected of them in their culture based on their sex assigned at birth. Queer is an umbrella term describing a wide range of people who do not conform to heterosexual and/or gender norms.

The members of the DLSU Prism, the university's recognized LGBTQ undergraduate student organization, were the primary focus of this study. However, due to a low number of respondents, the survey was also extended to all other self-identified LGBTQ students, including DLSU

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undergraduate and graduate students aged 18 and above. No LGBTQ students outside of the DLSU allowed to participate.

A total of 142 students completed the survey, with 13 of them identifying as heterosexual, thus, eliminated from the final results. A total of 129 students was eligible for data analysis.

Based on the participants' assigned sex at birth, more women (n=88; 68%) than men (n =41; 32%) participated in the study. The participants' age distribution revealed that the majority of them were between the ages of 18 and 21 (n=91;71%) and 22 and 25 (n=32;25%), with just a small number falling between 26 and 29 (n=4;3%) and 30-35 years old (n=2; 2%).

The majority of the participants were bisexual (n=66; 51 percent) and pansexual (n=23; 18 percent), with some being gay (n=16; 12 percent), queer (n=10; 8 percent), and lesbian (n=8; 6 percent), and a few being asexual (n=4; 3 percent) and questioning (n=2; 2 percent). The gender identity profile of the participants, on the other hand, indicated that the majority (74%) identified as cisgender n=95, while 21% identified as gender queer n=27, and 5% as transgender n=7.

The profile of the participants by college indicated that majority of them were coming from the College of Liberal Arts (n=53; 41%), RVR College of Business (n=25; 19%), Gokongwei College of Engineering (n=21; 16%), BAGCED (n=11; 9%), and College of Science (n=11; 9%), with only a handful number of participants from the School of Economics (n=4; 3%) and College of Computer Science (n=4; 3%).

2.3 Measures

PERMA Profiler (Butler & Kern 2016), a self-report evaluation instrument developed to quantify Seligman's five pillars of wellbeing: positive emotions, relationships, engagement, meaning, and accomplishment, was utilized for the needs assessment. This was accomplished through the usage of a Google form. The measure consisted of 23 items, with each PERMA domain having 3 items, and 8 filler items pertaining to health, negative emotion, loneliness, and overall happiness to provide more information about the respondent's level of well-being. Student participants were asked to answer the questions using an eleven (11)-point Likert scale (0-10, never to always/not at all to completely) with a Cronbach Alpha of 0.93 indicating a high internal consistency (Przybylko, et. Al, 2021). Well-being measures usually are skewed toward the positive end, such that the midpoint becomes about 6.5 to 7.5 (not 5, the middle of the 0 to 10 scale). Further, the PERMA Profiler indicated highly acceptable psychometric properties across various, large and diverse populations. This then capacitates the PERMA Profiler as an effective tool and measure of well-being (Butler & Kern, 2016).

A score for each PERMA domain, as well as for the dimensions of negative emotions and health were calculated by getting the mean score of the items comprising each factor: Positive Emotion (P= mean (P1, P2, P3), Engagement (E=mean (E1, E2, E3), Relationship (R= mean (R1, R2, R3), Meaning (M= mean (M1, M2, M3), and Accomplishment (A= mean (A1, A2, A3). Negative Emotion (N= mean (N1, N2, N3) and Health (H= mean (H1, H2, H3). The score for loneliness was obtained by getting the score for that item alone. An overall well-being score was obtained by getting the mean of all the items pertaining to the five PERMA domains, as well as the item that measures happiness (PERMA=mean (P1, P2, P3, E1, E2, E3, R1, R2, R3, M1, M2, M3, A1, A2, A3, hap). PERMA scores were interpreted as:

Very high functioning = 9 and above
(0 to 1 for negative emotion)
High functioning = 8-8.9
(1.1 to 3 for negative emotion)
Normal functioning = 6.5 to 7.9
(3 to 5 for negative emotion)
Sub-optimal functioning = 5 to 6.4
(5.1 to 6.5 for negative emotion)
Languishing = below 5
(above 6.5 for negative emotion)

The PERMA-Profiler can be administered to those above the age of 18 years. It displayed very good model fit, internal and cross-time consistency, and evidence for content, convergent, and divergent validity. The multifaceted character of flourishing was reflected in the visual presentation of scores as a profile across areas. The following personal demographic questions were asked to participants: Age, Assigned Sex at Birth, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and College.

2.4 Procedures

The researcher registered online at the author's website to obtain official authorization for the use of PERMA profiler for research and evaluation purposes. Only the researcher and the OCCS Director had access to the Google form replies. The survey data safely stored in the OCCS files under the supervision of the counselor in charge for three years before being destroyed/deleted. The survey questionnaire instrument was submitted for review and approval to the OCCS Director and the Research Ethics Office (REO).

After the survey questionnaire instrument tool was approved, it was disseminated to members of the DLSU Prism, a recognized organization for LGBTQ students, via email and social media channels such as FB Messenger and the DLSU Community Forum FB group. It was also placed on the OCCS Telemental Health Services in AnimoSpace /Canvas with the approval of the OCCS Director that reached all enrolled DLSU students.

Before filling out the Google form, the participants were notified of the purpose of the survey questionnaire instruments. They were also informed that their participation in the survey was entirely voluntary and that their data will be kept with the utmost confidentiality.

2.5 Data Analysis

Microsoft Excel was used to examine the data collected by the instrument. The mean of each item was determined, except for loneliness, and an excel

spreadsheet of the PERMA profile presented a snapshot of each participant's wellbeing was generated. In this study, mean and percentage were utilized to display the data obtained for the descriptive questions.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The primary goal of this study was to examine preliminary findings concerning the levels of well-being of self-identified LGBTQ students enrolled in Term 3 of the Academic Year 2020-2021.

Table 1.
Demographics of the Participants in relation to PERMA Dimensions

Factor	P	E	R	M	A	OWB	H	N	L
Assigned Sex at Birth									
Female	6.44	7.37	6.98	6.72	6.76	6.83	6.37	6.49	5.72
Male	6.76	7.91	6.97	7.09	7.38	7.19	6.55	6.24	6.39
Gender Identity									
Cisgender	6.57	7.50	7.01	6.85	6.90	6.94	6.57	6.34	5.95
GenderQueer	6.64	7.77	6.78	7.17	7.53	7.15	6.24	6.63	5.85
Transgender	5.88	7.34	7.34	5.54	5.67	6.34	5.50	6.54	6.00
Sexual Orientation									
Asexual	6.42	7.67	7.42	7.08	6.33	6.98	6.50	6.42	5.00
Bisexual	6.58	7.69	7.02	6.87	7.14	7.04	6.59	6.49	5.94
Gay	6.67	7.44	6.90	6.81	6.96	6.94	6.40	6.50	6.63
Lesbian	6.84	7.17	7.63	7.38	6.80	7.14	5.96	6.09	4.88
Pansexual	6.45	7.44	7.13	6.74	6.80	6.88	6.57	6.67	5.52
Queer	5.67	6.43	5.67	6.20	6.40	5.99	5.23	6.00	6.90
Questioning	8.83	7.67	7.83	7.83	7.33	7.94	7.83	3.70	6.00

*Data presented in Mean Scores
*Number of participants presented in the Method, Participants section

Assigned Sex at Birth

Table 1 depicted the characteristics of the participants depending on their assigned sex at birth. For female respondents, the positive emotions (P) appeared to have inadequate functioning with a mean score of 6.44, whereas other dimensions such as engagement (E), relationships (R), meaning (M), and accomplishment (A) appeared to have normal functioning. As a result, the overall well-being (OWB) of the female participants was within the range of normal functioning. However, it appeared that health (H), negative emotions (N), and loneliness (L) were generating inadequate performance.

On the other hand, it indicated that all PERMA dimensions fall within normal functioning for

male participants, with an overall well-being mean score of 7.19 being within normal functioning. However, it appeared that negative mood and loneliness were also associated with inferior performance among female participants.

Gender Identity

Based on table 1, participants who identified as cisgender and genderqueer had satisfactory in all five (5) PERMA dimensions. While transgender participants tended to have insufficient positive emotions (M=5.88), meaning (M=5.54), and accomplishment (M=5.67). As a result, having a suboptimal overall state of well-being.

The participants, regardless of gender identity, appeared to be experiencing loneliness, as evidenced by their unsatisfactory functioning score. Genderqueer and transgender participants seemed to have persistent negative emotions, implying that they were experiencing a high level of negativity. While the Cisgender participants tended to perform inadequately when it comes to negative emotions.

Participants who identified as cisgender were operating normally in terms of their health, whereas participants who identified as genderqueer and transgender were not functioning as well in terms of their health.

Sexual Orientation

Except for queer sexual orientation, the general well-being of the participants appeared to be within the normal functioning range across all sexual orientations. However, it appeared that almost all sexual orientation categories had inadequate functioning in terms of negative emotions, with the exception of pansexual, which seemed to be languishing, and questioning sexual orientation, which appeared to have normal functioning.

In terms of loneliness, participants with gay and queer sexual orientation appeared to encounter loneliness, as evidenced by scores that fall within the languishing functioning range. While participants

who were bisexual, pansexual, or questioning their sexual orientation had inferior functioning.

Overall PERMA Profile

The figure 1 presented the graphical representation of the overall PERMA scores for each dimension regardless of assigned sex at birth, sexual orientation and gender identity. The overall mean score for Positive Emotion (P) is 6.54, which indicates normal functioning. Engagement (E) has the highest mean score of 7.55, suggesting that it is still operating normally. Relationships (R) have a mean score of 6.97, which indicates regular functioning. The mean score in the dimension of Meaning (M) is similarly 6.85, suggesting normal functioning. Accomplishment (A) scores, similarly, with a mean of 6.97 indicating normal functioning. The participants had an average PERMA score of 6.95 for overall well-being (OWB), indicating that their well-being is generally normal.

Figure 1
Overall PERMA Score
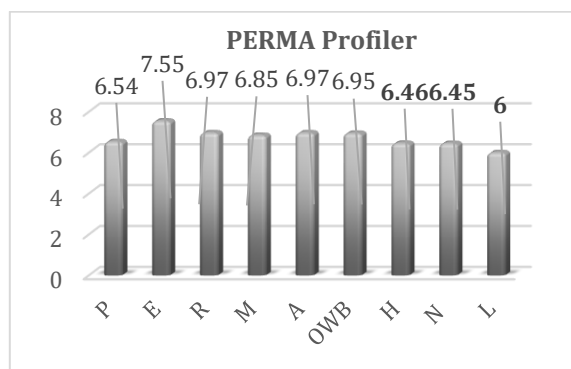
On the other hand, there are three (3) dimensions fall within the suboptimal functioning, below the normal functioning, these are the health (M=6.44), negative emotions (M=6.45) and loneliness (M=6).

4. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The survey questionnaire items were used to get an understanding of the baseline level of well-being of DLSU's self-identified LGBTQ students,

which would be relevant in establishing a program aimed at cultivating their well-being. Based on the results of the PERMA Profiler gathered data, it can be concluded that generally, the self-identified LGBTQ student participants' level of well-being was at normal functioning. They appeared to be functioning at a normal level in the dimensions of Positive Emotion, Engagement and Relationship, Meaning and Accomplishment. However, the scores obtained in Health, Negative Emotions and Loneliness seemed to be in the suboptimal functioning levels.

The PERMA Profiler (Peggykern.Org 2020), assesses a subjective sense of health— how well people feel each day. Emotions are an important part of people's well-being. Emotions can range from very negative to very positive, and range from high arousal (e.g., excitement, explosive) to low arousal (e.g., calm, relaxed, sad). For Positive emotion, the PERMA-Profiler measures general tendencies toward feeling contentment and joy. For Negative emotion, the Profiler measures tendencies toward feeling, sad, anxious, and angry. Based on the findings, the LGBTQ student participants seemed in the suboptimal functioning when it comes to negative emotions. Moreover, the participants appeared to feel lonely in their daily life as indicated in their suboptimal functioning score in loneliness.

While the results showed that the participants' general well-being was in normal and that they scored normal on all PERMA categories, the goal of the PERMA Model is to flourish. Human flourishing comprises striving for self-actualization and fulfillment, which entails going beyond normal functioning and attaining the maximum level of well-being. Furthermore, the amount of negative feeling among self-identified LGBTQ student participants was unsatisfactory, indicating a need for improvement in this area. The results on the dimension of Health revealed that it was lower than the typical operating level, indicating that more work is required to raise it.

Based on the findings, most self-identified LGBTQ student participants are coping with issues and anxieties that are potentially harmful to their well-being, as seen by their low mood and loneliness scores. This only emphasizes the need of having a program that may help students become more conscious of their baseline level of well-being and inevitably lead to a more thriving society.

LGBTQ persons face distinct stressors such as stigma, prejudice, and discrimination, all of which have an influence on their well-being. Minority Stress Theory, developed by Ilan Meyer, discusses how societal pressures lead to mental health inequalities in LGBTQ groups (Meyer, 2003).

This study demonstrated the importance of LGBTQ students having well-being programs to assist them have a successful life path and to prevent any mental health disparities. The PERMA well-being model has been proposed as a framework based on positive psychology concepts, with the aim of boosting health, enhancing life happiness, developing and promoting creativity, and eventually moral growth and civic citizenship (Seligman, 2011). Thus, the researcher will utilize a psychoeducational approach to provide series of webinars and consultations to DLSU's self-identified LGBTQ students. Following the PERMA well-being model framework, the program aims to cultivate and promote happiness and well-being among LGBTQ students. As a result, the researcher predicted a flourishing LGBTQ student community with a more inclusive and resilient social support system.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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