

# What is Wellbeing?

Positive Mental Health According  
to Young LGBTQIA+ Individuals

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Haley (she/her)

Lesbian woman

Psychology student



No anxiety disorder

No depression

No personality disorder



Good mental health?



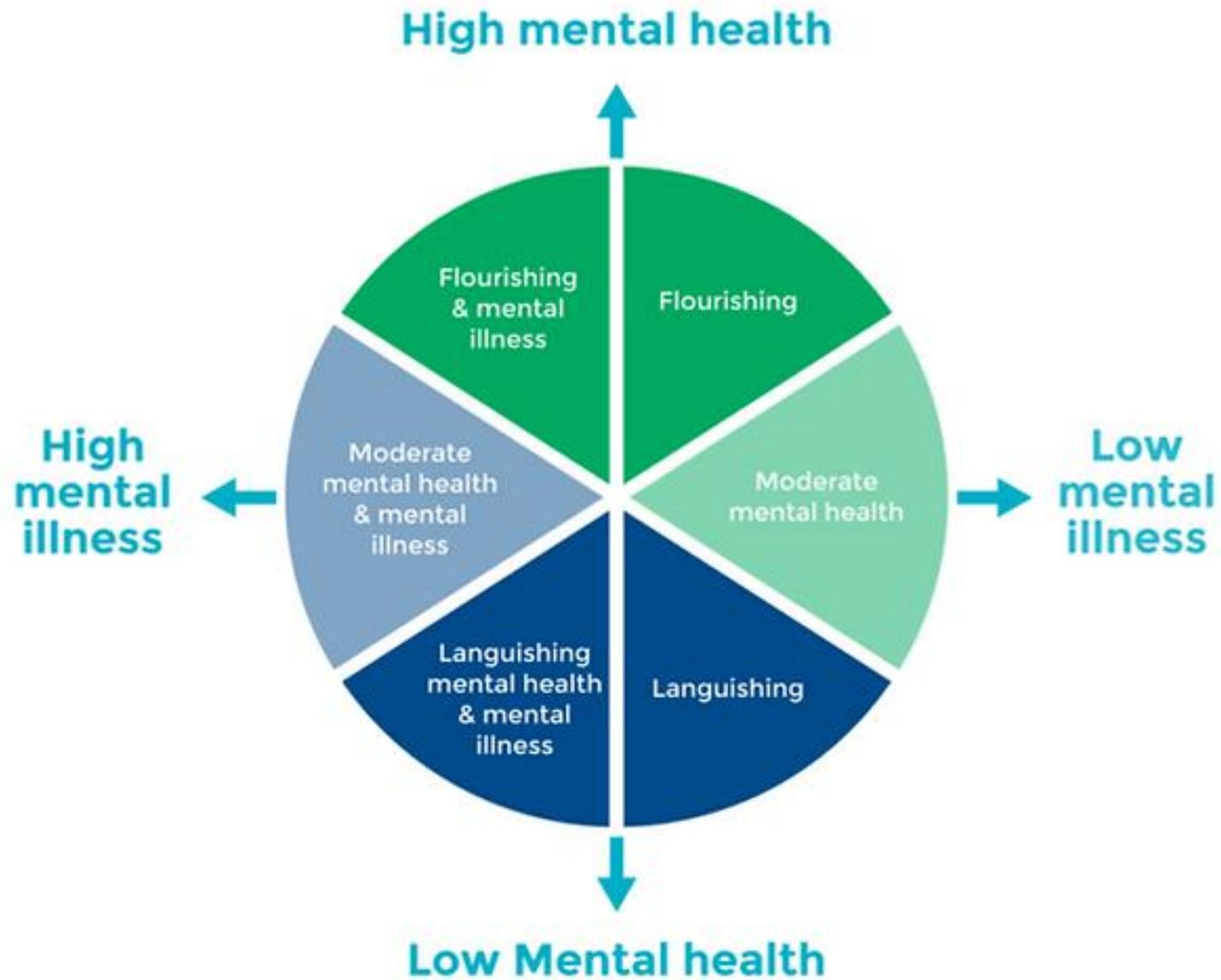
Is she satisfied in life?

Does she feel she is realizing her potential?

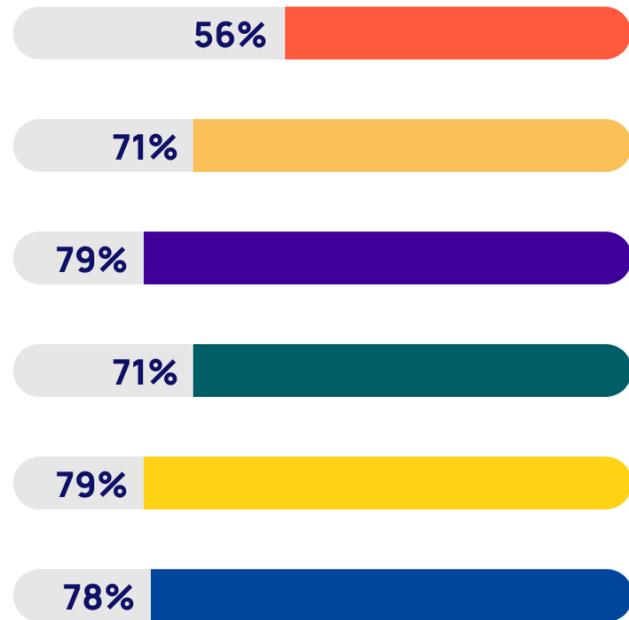
Does she feel valued by society?



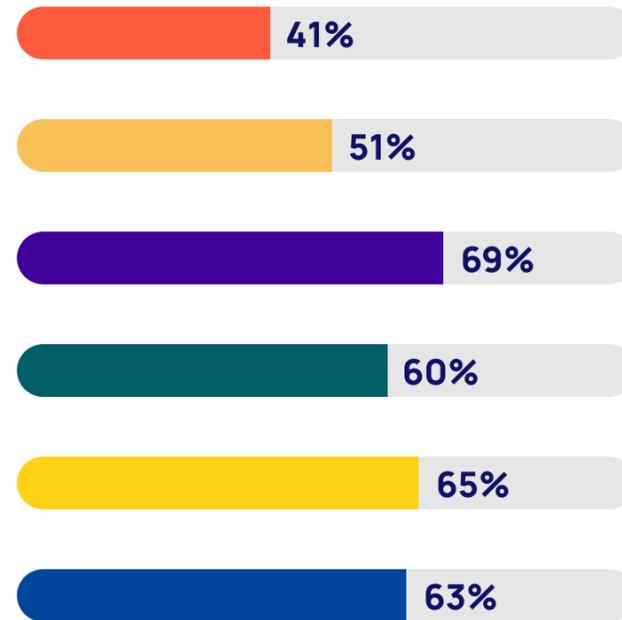
Absence of mental illness  
≠  
Presence of mental health



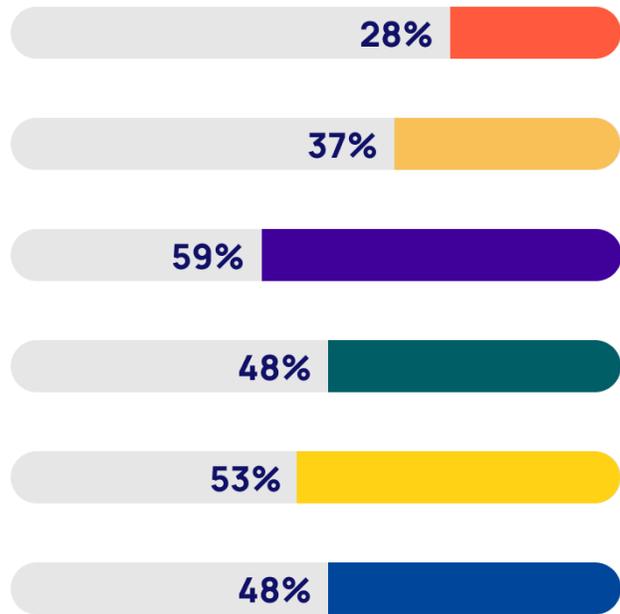
### Experienced symptoms of anxiety



### Experienced symptoms of depression



**Considered suicide  
in the past year**



Cisgender  
boy/man

Cisgender  
girl/woman

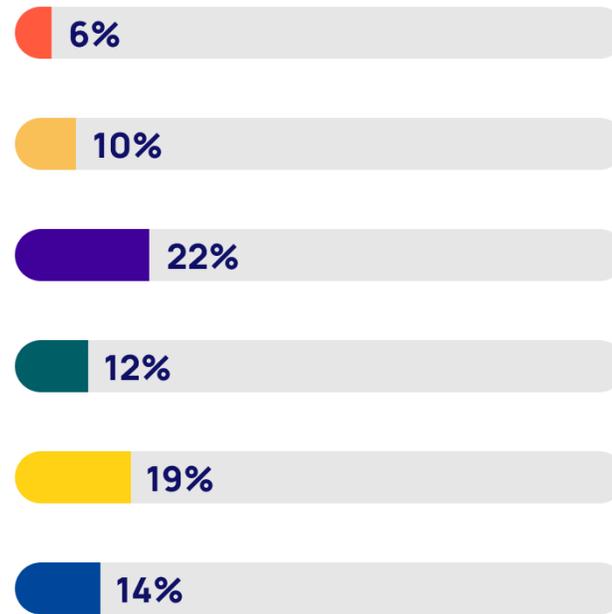
Transgender  
boy/man

Transgender  
girl/woman

Nonbinary/  
genderqueer

Questioning

**Attempted suicide  
in the past year**



6%

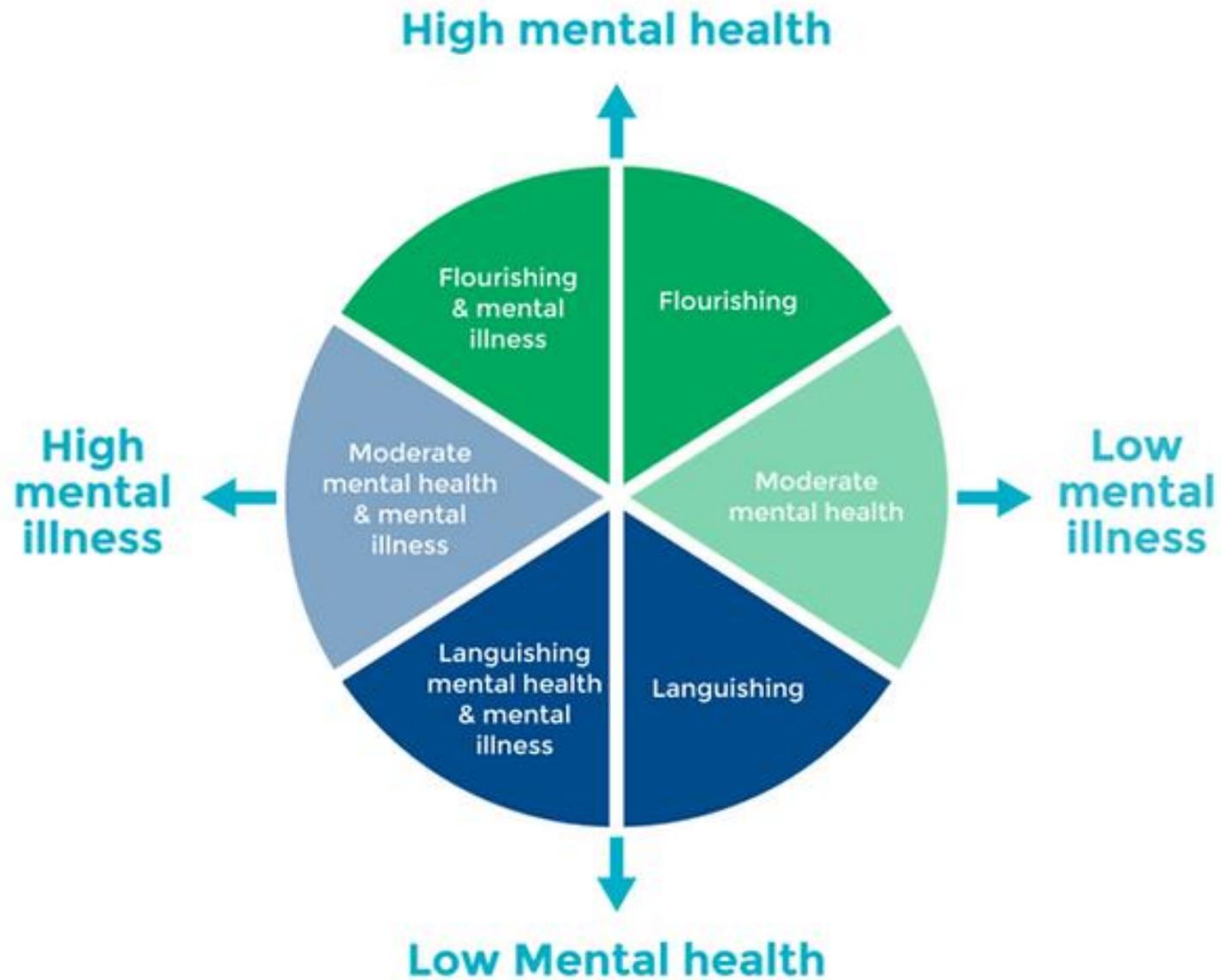
10%

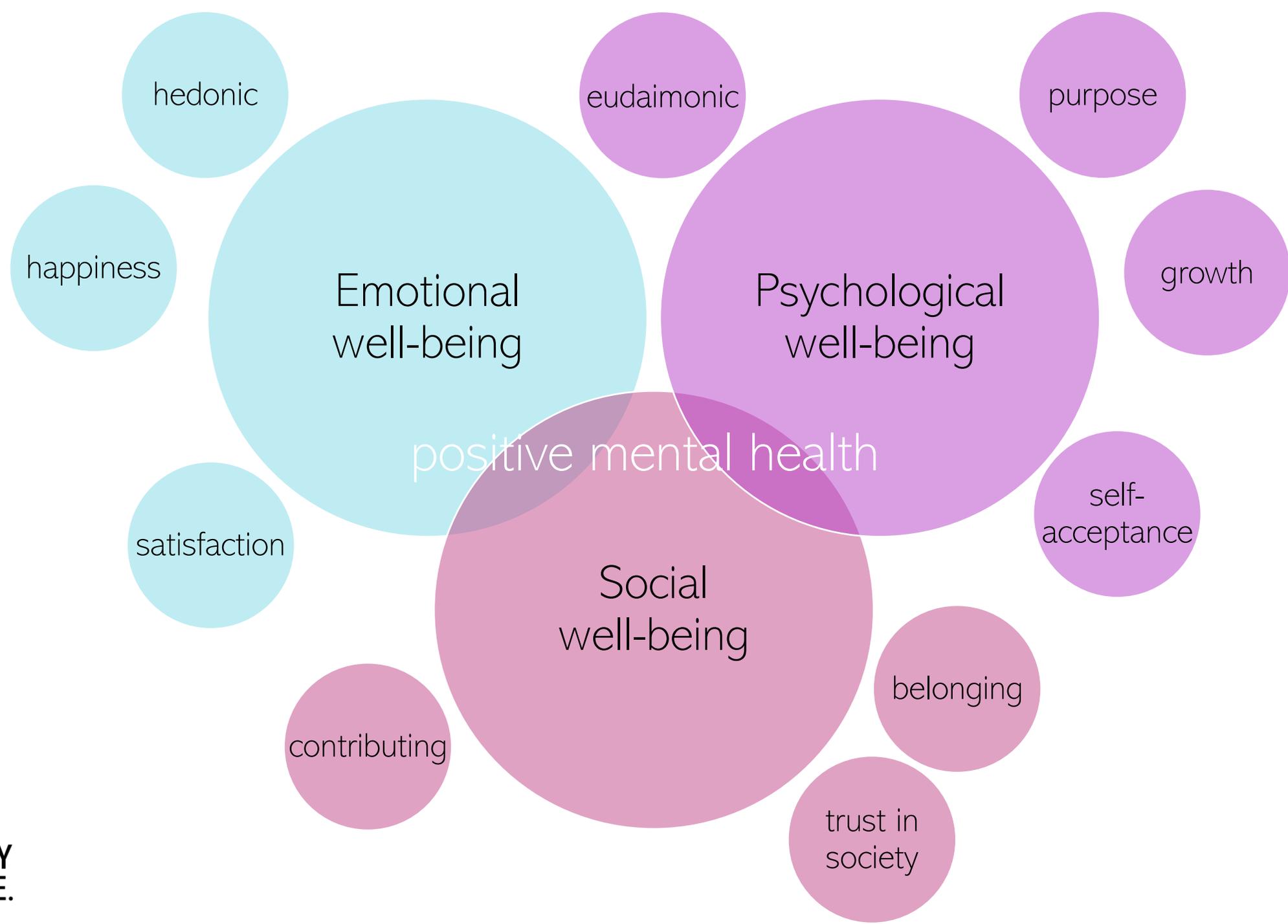
22%

12%

19%

14%





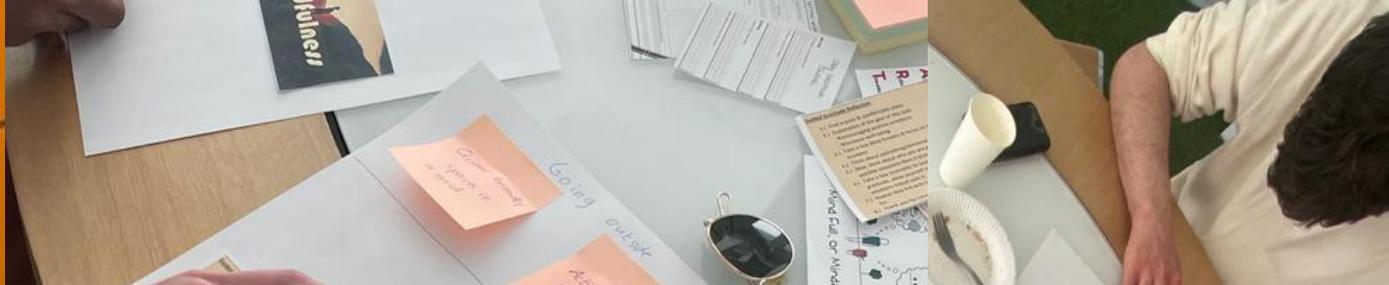
# Positive mental health in LGBTQI+ people

- 47% of lesbians and gay men experience positive mental health (Bariola et al., 2017)
- 20% of sexual minority college students (Oh, 2022)
- 13% of transgender & non-binary college students (Oh, 2022)
- Very limited information on how LGBTQI+ people talk about and make sense of positive mental health

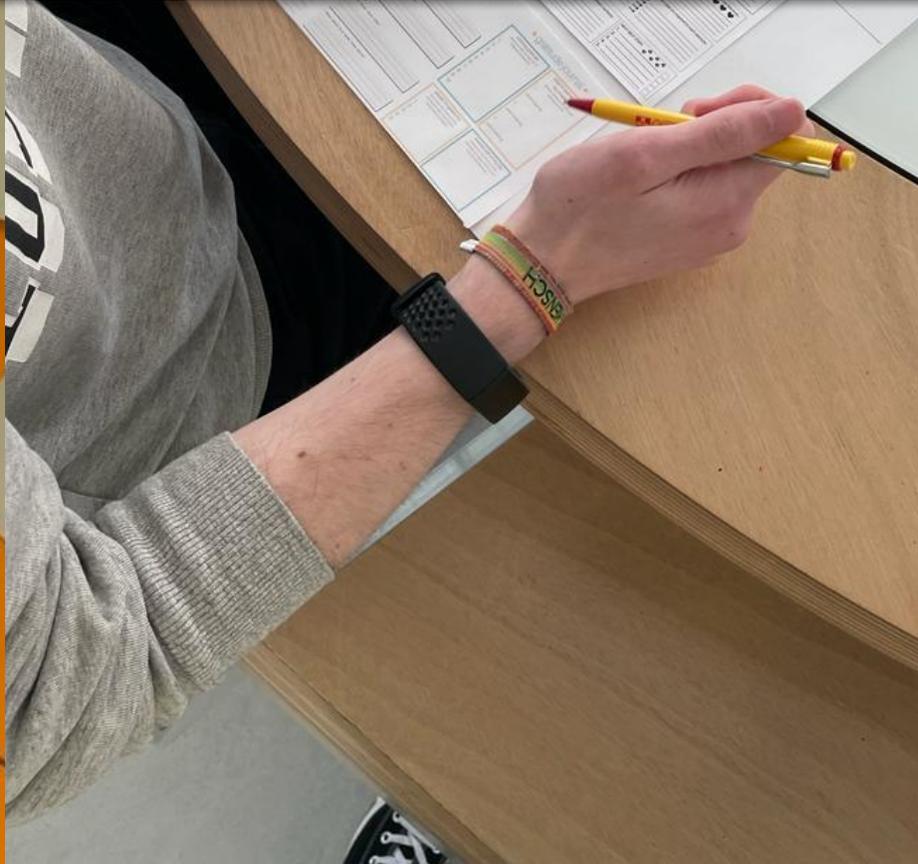
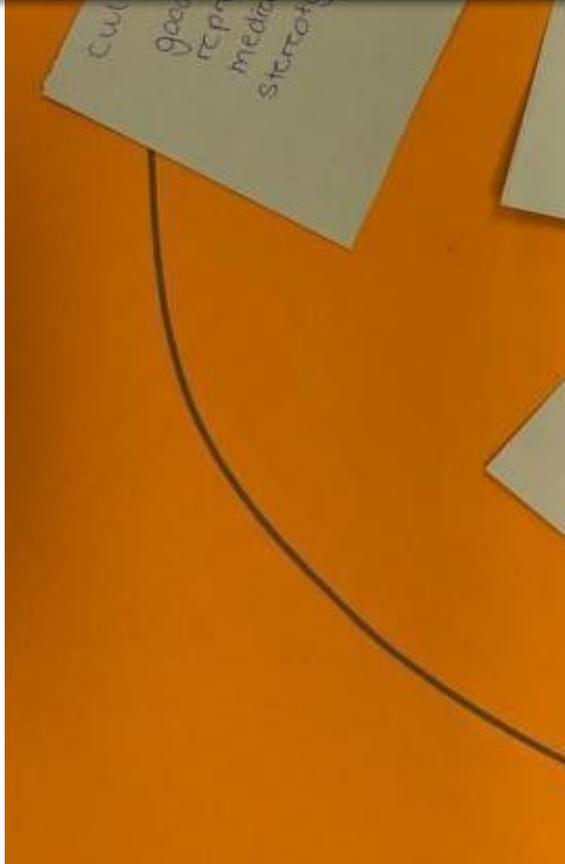


How do young LGBTQI+ people conceptualize and experience positive mental health?





How do young LGBTQI+ people conceptualize and experience positive mental health?



Queer happy  
people?

Gender  
euphoria

Emotional  
well-being

Concealment

Social  
well-being

Psychological  
well-being

LGBTQI+  
community

Queerness as  
growth

Pride

# Queer happy people?

When I think about like, queer people, I'm not thinking about like, oh, we are depressed. I don't think about like depressed people, I usually think about like happy people."

I think that if you would have an environment or community where everyone was in the LGBTQIA+ community, that everyone would be like, happy and fine.

It's a community that you know you can rely on, a community that respects each other. It's a really, I see it as a really energetic environment, where everyone is really happy and always ready to support each other or hype each other up.

I just thought nobody would understand me. I think that's where the loneliness came from. Feeling empty was very present. I didn't really have any motivation to do anything. And also didn't feel like doing anything at all. I experienced all of this, I think when I was 17, or something, and I didn't really have any coping mechanisms to deal with it. So, I was just very clueless of what I had to do, I think. I just thought that I would just never get happy or never be happy.

# Gender euphoria

One week ago, two weeks ago, I have no concept of time. But I finally saved up to buy a binder. And when it came in the mail, I was like, oh, let me try that on immediately. And I had to, like, physically sit down on my bed, because I just felt like, everything was drained from me. And I was just like this. Like, for a moment, I felt completely numb, because everything was like, settling in. And then I cried my eyes out, because I was so happy that my chest was flat. Yeah. And it just was this, this also this moment of validation of like, seeing these changes on my body, and then also feeling good, and it feeling great. And it's, it wasn't like, it was not a party feeling. But it was like this. Oh, my God, finally, like finally, this something feels really, really, right. And that is something that I can like, remember what makes me feel good. So, for example, for comfort, I can just put on the binder and then be like, all's good. Awesome for now.

I think for a lot of people that grew up, they never question it at all. They might not experience much euphoria or dysphoria, either, or they just don't think much about it. Yeah, I would say like, that's, like what I never saw a lot of straight people talk about, oh, today, I'm so happy that I feel very masculine, feminine, androgynous whatever. So, I would say yeah, it's related so that you have more appreciation for when it's actually in sync and, and match when you know how it feels when it isn't.

# Queerness as growth

It's [queerness] a very radical form of just pure self expression. (...) and for me queerness for me is then breaking fully away from anything prescribed and focusing on myself and exploring myself and expressing that as well, to the world. I feel like a lot of people who say like "Oh yeah, I'm straight cisgender" and they don't ever reflect on it. Like they haven't really, like they're in an environment where they are able to really think about it or where they are challenged to questions their gender and sexual identity, even if you come to the conclusion that you're cis het. Still, I think that exploration and identity expression is central which I why I think that it's a big strength that we can live very authentically as ourselves as queer people.

I also had confidence, I think kind of growing up and always being different. I kind of learned early on to not give a damn about what people do. And I see with other friends around me having a much harder time with standing out. And I think I've always kind of stood out, so I don't really care anymore.

# Pride

But when doing my bachelor I met people, a new crowd of people, these people who accepted me the way I am, I did not have to hide myself anymore. That's when I realized there are also people who will accept you for who I am. That's when I started coming out to people. And it just went on and on and on, and I'm just really proud of what and who I am. I'm really happy that I'm not straight, and I'm gay (laughs).

I feel proud to be bisexual, I feel proud to be in this community.

I have a lot of people looking at me all the time. That can be anxiety inducing, but just through stupid confidence and pride that I project outwards that helps me just to kind of live my life. Being very proud outwards helps because there's always someone saying that I shouldn't be.

# LGBTQI+ community

I feel like, because we have like such a nice community, obviously we had some ups and downs but it's like you have a sense of community, coming together, activities together. Have some deeper connection, like sometimes when you meet straight people it's a bit different. Like usually with a straight. I feel like it's something nice and it's a strength that you can easily connect with, with people from the community.

Not saying that the community is going to be equal to therapy, and because of that you are not going to be depressed all of the sudden. But it does help a lot to have people like you around you.

When I was in my "straight phase," it was so difficult to make new friends. Or get to know people, get you know, do the activities and stuff. It is not so easy, but ever since I was happy with who I am and since I started communicating with people from the LGBTQIA+ community, I made a lot of friends, like a lot. And it is a strength because it gives a social confidence, that I always wanted. Even now, even here at university. A few of my straight friends, they're like: I wish I was gay so I could make so many friends.

# Concealment

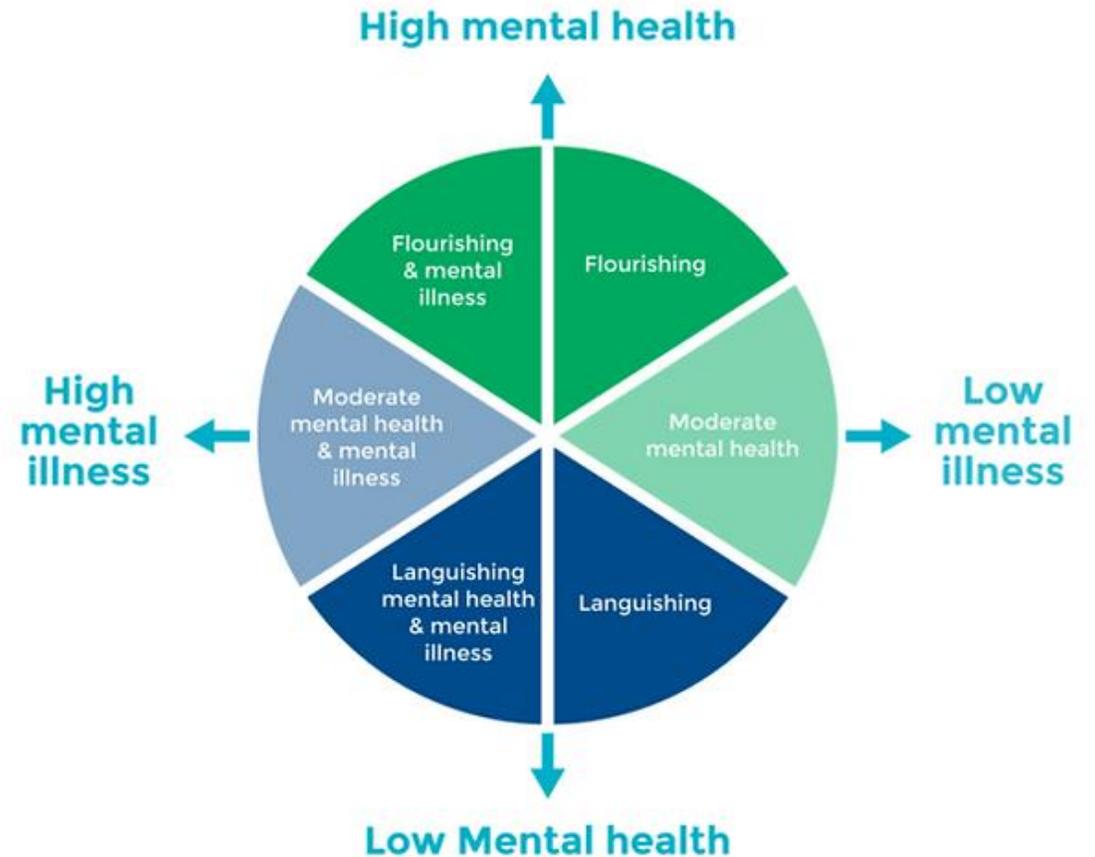
With anyone who is who's sexist, anyone, like, if I know that a person has a negative opinion of queer people, I will be inherently and deeply distressed for the entire time that I have to be around that person. (...) They haven't said something yet, I'm still expecting them to say something. And if I expect them, if there's a possibility, in any way of physical violence, then that's the absolute worst. But even just like verbally, I have zero, need to justify my own gender identity. Explaining gender identity to someone who doesn't really want to understand it, they just wanted me to have to justify it. Zero interest. It's so stressful, and it really hurts.

With like, strangers, I don't really hide myself consciously, but I try to only really talk about it when I know that the other person that I'm talking to or interacting with is... He's not going to like swing on me or something. Because it's happened before and that was like that stopped me from talking about queerness openly with strangers.

I refrain from pursuing my gender euphoria, because I know that there's more value for my mental state, that if I go to this event, and not get harassed, yeah, just for my identity, always unprovoked. (...) go stealth, to be safe, and at least have some peace of mind and not stress during that event. And I value that more than just wearing a binder, I can always then like, cope at home, smoke some weed and wear the binder to compensate for what I had to go through.

# Implications for queer positive mental health

- Queerness, pride, gender euphoria, LGBTQI+ community are unique resources of positive mental health
  - Concealment and social expectations of positivity may be unique burdens of positive mental health
  - More research is necessary on positive mental health of queer people and interventions to improve it.
- Interested as a participant, co-designer co-researcher, etc.? Please let me know!



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