

Positive Psychology Research in the Philippines: An Introduction

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Over the past two decades, advances in positive psychology has resulted in an exponential increase in the number of studies concentrating on the dispositional, interpersonal, and socio-contextual factors which can optimize adaptive psychological and well-being outcomes. However, most of these investigations have focused on expanding the science of positive traits, states, and institutions in Western cultural contexts. The generalizability and applicability of these Western models have to be scrutinized and reconsidered when they are transported to different cultural settings. There is also a need to come up with emic studies that closely reflect the lived experience of peoples across cultures.

In recent years, there has been a burgeoning interest in cross-cultural studies that include samples from non-Western cultures including the Philippines (see Church et al., 2014; Kuppens, Realo, & Diener, 2008; McGrath, 2015). There has been some noticeable increase in positive psychology research in Asian cultural contexts (see Caleon, King, et al., 2017; Caleon, Wui, et al., 2017; Duan, Ho, Tang, Li, & Zhang, 2014; Kumano, 2018; Low, King, & Caleon, 2016) including the Philippines (see King & Datu, 2017; Mesurado, Richaud, & Mateo, 2016; Rosopa, Datu, Robertson, & Atkinson, 2016). Given the critical role that sociocultural factors play in shaping well-being and optimal functioning (Steel, Taras, Uggerslev, & Bosco, 2018; Tov & Diener, 2009), it is important to investigate how positive psychological factors can serve as either antecedents or consequences of optimal psychological functioning in specific cultural contexts.

Much of the work in Asia has focused on positive psychological traits and states and their relationship to well-being outcomes in educational settings in Asia. Some of this research has been put together in a special journal issue on positive education in the Asian context (King, Caleon, Tan, & Ye, 2016) that featured studies exploring different positive personal and sociocultural factors which could contribute to key learning outcomes among student populations in Hong Kong, Macau, Mainland China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines. The positive education research included from the Philippines explored the roles of positive affective states (Villavicencio & Bernardo, 2016) and selected dispositional factors like psychological capital (Datu & Valdez, 2016; Ganotice, Yeung, Beguina, & Villarosa, 2016) and locus-of-hope (Bernardo, Salanga, Khan, & Yeung, 2016) play in catalyzing desirable learning processes and outcomes among Filipino student and non-student populations. Most other published positive psychology research in the Philippines has focused on positive traits and character strengths as predictor of students' well-being, adjustment and learning outcomes (see Datu, King, & Valdez, 2017, 2018; Datu, King, Valdez, & Eala, 2018; Datu, Valdez, Cabrera, & Salanga, 2017; King & Datu, 2017; Magno, Galang, Paterno, & Roldan, 2011), and this trend is reflected in the contents of this special issue.

However, there are also studies that delved into positive traits and states as predictors of various psychological outcomes of special populations such as survivors of natural disasters (Nalipay, Bernardo, & Mordeno, 2016, 2017), and women who experiences intimate partner violence (Bernardo & Estrellado, 2017a, 2017b); and also studies that look into predictors of well-being in special populations such as Moro National Liberation Front (a political organization of Muslim separatists) integreees (Redoble-Buot, 2006), abused children (Tarroja, Balajadia-Alcala, & Co, 2007), children left behind by migrant parents (Bernardo, Tan-Mansukhani, & Daganzo, in press; Graham & Jordan, 2011) and overseas Filipino workers (Bernardo, Daganzo, & Ocampo, 2016), and life satisfaction of older Filipino sexual minorities (Guevara, 2016).

Other published positive psychology studies in the Philippines involve validation of and descriptive studies using psychological scales associated with well-being in Filipino samples, like the Filipino translation of the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (Resurreccion, 2017) and the Subjective Happiness Scale (Swami et al., 2009), or the original English versions of the Interdependent Happiness Scale (Datu, King, & Valdez, 2016), and Satisfaction with Life Scales (Manalastas & Mondragon, 2006). But a larger number involves studying social psychological correlates and predictors of

various aspects of well-being (Bernardo, 2013; Chen, Bao, Shattuck, Borja, & Gultiano, 2017; Datu & Mateo, 2015; Edillo, Turiano, Reyes, & Villanueva, 2012; Uchida, Kitayama, Mesquita, Reyes, & Morling, 2008) or the how measures of well-being relate to other psychological outcomes like academic achievement (Datu & Valdez, 2016; King, 2015), job satisfaction of elderly workers (De Guzman, Largo, Mandap, & Munoz, 2014), work longevity of counselors (Datu & Mateo, 2017) or help-seeking in women who experience intimate partner violence (Bernardo & Estrellado, 2017a). Surprisingly, there are very few published studies that inquire into meanings associated with well-being of Filipinos (SyCip, Asis, & Luna, 2000) and of specific special populations of Filipinos (e.g., chronically ill and incarcerated elderly Filipinos) (De Guzman et al., 2012). This is surprising given the strong interest in exploring meanings of psychological concepts using emic or indigenous psychological approaches. But it is also possible that such studies have been conducted but are currently unpublished, as are other positive psychology studies conducted by psychology students and researchers in various universities and research centers in the Philippines.

Although there have been published research in positive psychology in the Philippines, there are still are a number of reasons that may point to the necessity of further cultivating positive psychology knowledge in the Philippines. First, the popularity of positive psychology in many parts of the world, including the Philippines, has opened the space for sharing pseudoscientific knowledge about positive psychological concepts. As with other psychological trends that have become fads, there is the danger of misappropriating some of the concepts and findings of the growing scientific subdiscipline of psychology in various domains of life. There are already people who advocate programs and interventions that purport to apply positive psychology, but actually misunderstand, misinterpret, or worse, bastardize the nuanced theoretical and empirical knowledge in positive psychology.

Second, amid the possibility of such misuse of positive psychological concepts, scientific research on positive psychology research in the Philippines could provide better guides to how to effectively apply positive psychological principles in the Philippine context. The need for these scientifically based applications seems particularly necessary given the growing stressors that threaten the psychological well-being of Filipinos. These stressors might relate to the intensifying background stressors of everyday traffic, pollution, work pressures in big cities, to the divisive political rhetoric and developments in contemporary Philippine society, to the uncertainties created by changes in economic and financial policies, to the malaise

brought about by systematic spread of fake news and information, and to the pressures experienced by students, their families, teachers, and other education professionals related to the shift to the K to 12 education reforms, among others.

Third, there is a need to understand whether the theoretical principles and empirical findings established regarding how positive traits, states, and institutions are linked to happiness as well as other optimal psychological outcomes in non-Western and interdependent societies (e.g., Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Singapore), also predict happy and successful life in the Philippine context. Or perhaps, whether there are distinct models that apply to the experience of Filipinos.

Finally, there is a need to further study the appropriateness of the very basic premises of positive psychology to the Philippine experience. For instance, are the existing Western models of well-being (i.e., subjective well-being, psychological well-being, psychological flourishing) equally applicable to Filipino populations? This clearly points to the need to explore the lay conceptions of well-being in the Philippine setting. As suggested by some scholars (see Joshanloo, 2014; Tsai, 2007) Eastern cultures might have different conceptions of happiness and positive affective states. Moreover, some cultures might even be averse to the pursuit of happiness (Joshanloo & Weijers, 2014). All these factors considered, there are many important reasons why we need more and better research on positive psychology in the Philippines.

These aforementioned reasons provide the motivation for this special issue on positive psychology research in the Philippines. The special issue hopes to push further, even in slight increments, the agenda of positive psychology that is based on sound scientific work. The special issue highlights the significance of adopting a 'positive psychological perspective' when designing empirical studies in the Philippine setting. In this regard, this special issue features five investigations exploring the association of positive personal qualities and states with like locus-of-hope, interdependent happiness, life satisfaction, and psychological thriving among Filipino student and non-student populations. The authors of these studies used either a quantitative and non-experimental design or a purely qualitative design to examine the advantageous side of espousing positive traits and experiencing positive subjective states among Filipino samples.

In the first study, Bernardo and Fernando-Resurreccion (2018) examined the moderating roles of external locus-of-hope (LOH) dimensions on the link between financial stress and well-being among university students. Consistent with their hypotheses, whereas

financial stress negatively predicted well-being, all external locus-of-hope dimensions (i.e., family, peers, and spiritual) positively predicted the said outcome. Moreover, external-family LOH buffered the negative association of financial stress with well-being. Their investigation contributed to the existing line of evidence on the LOH theory through demonstrating the protective role of external LOH against the hazards of finance-related stress among undergraduate students.

The second research carried out by Datu and Lizada (2018) explored the link of interdependent happiness to different dimensions of academic engagement among university students from a rural context. The authors found that interdependent happiness positively predicted both behavioral and emotional engagement after controlling for demographic variables (i.e., age and gender). However, interdependent happiness did not predict behavioral and emotional disaffection. This investigation uniquely expanded the interdependent happiness literature through showing how interdependent happiness may be differentially related to various domains of school engagement.

Given that most studies conducted in the Philippine setting primarily focused on university and secondary school student populations, the third study of Mateo and Salanga (2018) assessed the association of life satisfaction with counseling self-efficacy, emotional awareness, and state flow among Filipino guidance counselors. Their investigation demonstrated that life satisfaction positively predicted emotional awareness and state flow even after controlling age, gender, civil status, and highest educational attainment. The authors' investigation expanded the line of evidence on how different well-being dimensions could predict work-related outcomes. This study also underpins the importance of fostering cognitive well-being among mental health professionals in the Philippine context.

The fourth investigation of Nalipay and Alfonso (2018) examined the link of self-compassion to hope as well as career and talent development self-efficacy among university students. This research showed that self-compassion positively predicted career and talent development self-efficacy. More importantly, self-compassion had indirect effects on career and talent development self-efficacy via the intermediate variable – hope. Their empirical study uniquely contributed to the extant literature on the psychological processes underpinning the link between self-compassion and self-efficacy outcomes especially in collectivist societies.

The last study of Buenconsejo (2018) explored the notion of psychological thriving via an interpretative phenomenological analysis among Filipino adolescents. The following major themes emerged in the study: (a) perception of the nature of spark; (b) family and social

groups as providers of guidance and support; (c) religious spark as source of positive experiences; (d) religious spark as source of negative experiences; and (e) compromises and adjustments amidst constancy of spark. This investigation extended the theorizing of psychological thriving or 'spark' in the Philippine context.

Taken together, the studies reported in this special issue, highlighted the roles that positive traits and states play in optimizing well-being, academic, and non-academic outcomes. The findings in each research directly contribute to the line of evidence on what desirable dispositions and states may potentially lead to a happy, meaningful, and successful life in ways that elaborate on established findings in the existing (but mostly Western) research literature. However, more investigations are warranted to further advance our understanding and application of the science of positive psychology in the Philippine setting. The articles featured in this special issue, together with the previous studies we cite in this introduction, will hopefully serve as a stimulus for further scientific research on this very broad area of study. As the studies featured and reviewed tended to focus on describing and testing theoretical models, future research should also venture into: (a) conceptualizing culturally-sensitive models of positive psychological concepts grounded from the unique experiences of Filipino populations; (b) evaluating the effectiveness of Western-derived positive psychological interventions and programs in the Philippine context; and (c) developing and testing positive psychological interventions that are premised on empirical concepts and findings based on Philippine research and adapted to Philippine realities. Positive psychology provides potentially useful tools for scientific understanding and interventions for psychologists in the Philippines, but it is imperative that Philippine psychologists further develop the knowledge base upon which positive psychology can thrive in the Philippines.

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