

Human flourishing in the face of a pandemic: A qualitative analysis

Tatjana Holschneider
S1585525

UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.

Faculty of Behaviour, Management, and Society
Department of Positive Psychology and Technology

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1st supervisor: Dr. Marijke Schotanus-Dijkstra
2nd supervisor: Dr. Jorinde Spook

Abstract

Background. Flourishing, a state of optimal emotional, psychological, and social well-being in three aspects (emotional, social, and psychological), has shown to have several health benefits for people. Although the number of studies about flourishing is rising, the understanding of flourishing as an individual experience in all its facets is still in its beginning. Qualitative methods could be especially suitable for exploring how people define flourishing under different circumstances, such as the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic in 2020. The study aims at exploring how people defined flourishing before (2019) and after (2020) the outbreak of the pandemic from their own and a role model's perspective.

Methods. In the current study a qualitative between-subject design was applied to compare the perception of flourishing of participants (N=83) in 2019 (before the pandemic) and of participants (N=36) in April 2020 (during the pandemic) by the use of two open-ended questions. The data were analysed with content analysis method.

Results and Discussion. In total, 14 themes were found, 12 belonging to Keyes model of well-being and two new themes: competence and mindfulness. No major differences were found between the samples from 2019 and 2020 regarding descriptions of flourishing, despite a more frequent mentioning of happiness in 2020. One explanation could be the early assessment in 2020, at which participants might not have yet been affected much by the pandemic. More differences were found between the descriptions of flourishing between the own versus a role model's perspective. Here it should be considered that the questions about flourishing for the own and a role model's perspective also differed qualitatively. Further, the category social well-being was mentioned much less frequently than the emotional and psychological well-being, which might be explained by the individualistic cultural background of the sample.

Introduction

We all want to be happy and live a “good life” – and as simple as it sounds, as complex and much-discussed is human well-being (Keyes, 2006; McGillivray, 2007). Already since the times of the ancient Greeks, humans philosophized about how to live a good life and how it could be defined (Ryff & Singer, 2008; Cashen, 2012, Ryff, 2014). Today, the mental state of optimal well-being may be best described by the multifactorial concept of *flourishing*, which was first introduced by Corey Keyes in 2002. However, it remains largely unknown how people experience well-being and flourishing under particular circumstances (Hamling, Jarden, Jarden, & Synard, 2020) such as the covid-19 pandemic.

Flourishing is a state characterized by the presence of high levels of *hedonic well-being* and *eudaemonic well-being* (Keyes, 2002). The hedonic dimension follows the pursuit of happiness, i.e., maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain (Waterman, 1993; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Veenhoven, 2003), which corresponds to *emotional well-being*: the experience of life satisfaction, happiness, and interest (Diener, 1984; Diener, Suh, and Smith, 1999; Diener & Ryan, 2009). The eudaemonic dimension puts the focus on functioning positively (Waterman, 1993; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Veenhoven, 2003) and corresponds to the concepts of *psychological well-being* and *social well-being*. Psychological well-being focuses on optimal personal functioning, how individuals develop and engage with existential challenges in (Ryff, 1989; Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002; Westerhof & Keyes, 2008). Social well-being focuses on functioning optimally in society (Keyes, 1998). Together, high levels of emotional, psychological, and social well-being build the state of *flourishing* (Keyes, 2002).

Flourishing is not only desirable state in itself, but also high levels of well-being have been shown to have positive effects on people’s general health status, such as increased longevity, improved recovery from illness, benefits for ageing well, increased resilience and a generally positive association with good physical and mental health outcomes (Ryff & Singer,

1998; 2008; Diener & Seligman, 2002; Chida & Steptoe, 2008; Veenhoven 2008; Huppert 2009; Diener & Chan, 2011; Machado & Bandeira, 2013; Schotanus-Dijkstra et al., 2016).

The covid-19 pandemic and flourishing

However, it is yet unclear how the perception of well-being and flourishing under different or exceptional circumstances (Hamling, Jarden, Jarden, & Synard, 2020) such as the covid-19 pandemic, might be different. The outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic in the first months of 2020 has not only changed people's routines in many senses, but also presented substantial challenges to many individuals. People around the world had to go in partial or complete lockdown and, among other restrictions, distance themselves from their loved ones, and change to practice home office (Kirchler, Pitters, & Kastlunger, 2020).

To date, studies on the covid-19 pandemic and well-being focus mainly on the negative impacts on people's well-being. For instance, it is shown that there was an increase in depression and anxiety, alcohol abuse, self-harming behaviour, and suicidality (e.g. Ahmend, Ahmed, Aibao, Hanbin, Siyu, & Ahmad, 2020; Goyal, Sheoran, Chauhan, Chhikara, Gupta, & Singh, 2020; Khan, Sultana, Hossain, Hasan, Ahmed, & Sikder, 2020; Marques de Miranda, da Silva Athanasio, Sena Oliveira, & Simoes, 2020; Mencacci, & Salvi, 2020). The general focus in the research field of psychology regarding the covid-19 pandemic appears to be rather pathology focused, whilst positive psychology research remains scarce.

Nevertheless, people's perception of well-being is not only a matter of an individual's choices and qualities but is also influenced by the sociocultural context (Lomas, 2015). Several studies showed that during crises and difficult times, people's values might change or shift (e.g. Verkasalo, Goodwin, & Bezmenova, 2006; Daniel, Fortuna, Thrun, Cioban, & Knafo, 2013; Sortheix, Parker, Lechner, & Schwartz, 2017). In this connection, Schotanus-Dijkstra et al. (2016) suggests that positive life events affect flourishing while negative ones do not. Whether the concept of flourishing is perceived or prioritized differently during crises though, like the current covid-19 pandemic, has not been studied so far. Further, it might not

be appropriate to declare the covid-19 pandemic as a purely positive or negative life event, although the consequences for people's mental health seem to be primarily negative. For instance, fit was found in a prior study (ter Avest, 2020) that people appeared to experience primarily negative, but also positive emotions in consequence of the covid-19 pandemic. Still, whether a crisis, such as the covid-19 pandemic, influences people's experiences and definitions of flourishing has not yet been explored.

Many studies about flourishing mainly focus on epidemiology (e.g. Schotanus-Dijkstra, 2016; Huppert and So, 2013), experimental studies (e.g. Nelson, Layous, Cole, & Lyuomirsky, 2016), and cross-sectional studies (e.g. Maples, Williams-Wengerd, Braughton, Henry, Haddock, & Weiler, 2020; Winter, Conner, & Jose, 2020). Research that aims at exploring flourishing as an individual human experience in all its facets, how different people experience, understand, and conceptualize flourishing in different circumstances, is mostly missing (Hefferon, Ashfield, Waters & Synard, 2017; Schotanus-Dijkstra, 2016). Even though the number of published qualitative research is rising, its contribution to the field of positive psychology research constituted only 11.5% in 2015 (Donaldson, Dollwet, & Rao, 2015). Qualitative research enables researchers to bring novel insights and deeper understandings of the elements of flourishing and well-being by incorporating ideographic approaches.

Despite that positive psychology research has been dominated by quantitative research methods, several researchers and scholars pointed out to the importance of applying qualitative research in positive psychology since its beginning (Rich, 2001; 2017). Many topics have been investigated by qualitative and mixed-methods research, as for instance how well-being and flourishing are experienced by different populations (e.g., Herbst & Gonzalez-Guarda, 2018) or how the meaning of well-being may not only differ quantitatively but also qualitatively, depending on the individual's degree of well-being (e.g., Wissing, Schutte, Entwisle, Gericke, & Keyes, 2019). Black and Kern (2020) found that highly sensitive individuals value the presence of harmony when describing what well-being means to them,

while Clifton, Llewellyn, and Shakespeare (2018) found that individuals with quadriplegia acknowledge that flourishing does not include only *positive* experiences but also limitations, hardships, and failures (Clifton, Llewellyn, & Shakespeare, 2018).

In all those studies, the participants were asked about their own experience and understanding of flourishing but not how they would describe the concept of flourishing from another person's perspective. To get a more comprehensive understanding of flourishing it may be explore the concept of flourishing from both perspectives as this might yield different responses. For example, theories such as the actor-observer effect (Fiske & Taylor, 1991) illustrate how individuals tend to see their own behaviour as less stable and predictable than observers do, because as actors, people are more aware of the multiple forces, e.g., mood, which influence their behaviour as well as the richness of the own personality. Vice versa, as observers people tend to perceive others' behaviour as more stable from situation to situation (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; White & Younger, 1988). Such biases might influence how people describe flourishing from their own perspective in comparison to a role model's perspective. Consequently, by including both perspectives in this study, a more complete picture of flourishing might be attained.

Present study

The aim of the current study is to examine how the perception of flourishing from the own and a role model's perspective might be affected by those exceptional circumstances spawned by the covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, people's description of flourishing before and during the outbreak of covid-19 are explored. In line with Keyes (2002) definition of flourishing, it is expected that aspects of emotional, social, and psychological well-being are found both before and during the covid pandemic.

Methods

Study design

The current study used qualitative data that were collected by the University of Twente in Enschede, the Netherlands. Two studies with different samples respectively were conducted. Data collection took place in April 2019 (T0) and April 2020 (T1). Among other measurements, participants were sent two open-ended questions about the nature of flourishing and their view on it. Beforehand, all participants were thoroughly informed about their rights and the aim of the study and subsequently provided written statements of informed consent. The studies were approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Twente (no. 190320).

Participants and Procedure

Two different group of participants were recruited by convenience and purposive sampling, one in March 2019 and one in March 2020. Purposive sampling was used to ensure diversity among participants, with special regard to age. They had been approached in the social environment of the researchers. All participants had to fulfil the following inclusion criteria: (1) being 18 years old or older, (2) having an internet connection, and (3) having an email address, as data were collected online. After agreeing to participate, all participants were informed about the study procedure and purpose, emphasizing that all collected data would be anonymized. Before filling in the survey with two open-ended questions all participants gave informed consent. Each participant could take part in the survey at a freely chosen time by using their own computer or smartphone without supervision, which aided in increasing a feeling of anonymity.

In 2019, 157 eligible German- and English-speaking participants could be reached. After excluding those who did not answer at least one open question regarding flourishing, 83 participants remained. They all wrote their answers in German. The sample had a gender distribution of 53% males and 47% females with a mean age of 33.51 ($SD=15.48$). In 2020, 64 eligible German- and English-speaking participants could be reached. Again, participants who did not answer at least one open question were excluded. After that, 39 German

participants remained, out of which one female participant wrote her answers in English. The mean age of participants was 30.33 ($SD=15.01$). Out of the 39 participants, 24 were female (62%) and 15 (38%) male.

Data collection

As part of a larger study on the concept of flourishing, the participants were asked to write an answer to two self-developed open-ended questions about flourishing no longer than half a page. To lower the risk of response bias but still encourage participants to freely describe their thoughts, the questions had been formulated broadly. Those questions were: (1) “Please describe one or more situations in which you flourish. When you describe such situations, try to think about how you function as a person, how you function as a person in relation to others and/or how you function as a person in relation to society.” and (2) “Think about a person who you believe is representative for a person who is flourishing. Please describe this person: What makes you believe that this person is flourishing? How does this person act? What does he/she feel or think?”. These answers were all given in German and then translated into English by me.

Data Analysis

To analyse the data a content analysis was conducted using the program ATLAS.ti. Content analysis is a powerful and flexible technique to reduce data in a systematic and replicable way. Many words of texts are shrunk down and put into fewer content categories (Stemler, 2000). All data had been anonymized by assigning a number to each participant and deleting all names and locations. A deductive coding approach was applied. As theoretical framework Keyes’ model of well-being (Keyes, 2002) was used. Accordingly, the codes were derived from the Mental Health Continuum Short Form (MHC-SF) (Keyes, 2002), whose items serve as the definition of flourishing and are split into three main categories emotional well-being, psychological well-being, and social well-being (Keyes, 2002; Keyes et al., 2008; Lamers, Westerhof, Bohlmeijer, ten Klooster, & Keyes, 2011).

First, all answers were read carefully to get a first impression and a feeling for the content, the structure, and the context. First impressions were conserved by taking notes. The answers were then read again, and more considerate notes were made. Following, a preliminary coding scheme was created, which was applied to the first 10 answers from 2019 and 2020. Every block of text with a theme that appeared relevant for answering the research questions was highlighted and given a code. Those blocks of text were called fragments, which could entail a few words but also a whole paragraph about how an individual flourishes. A fragment ended when a new theme appeared. As it became clear during this process that not all data would fit within the three main categories, this method was complemented with an inductive approach. This means that a theme which appeared in more than one participant, and which could not be assigned to any of the three categories, was given a new code. One text fragment could be assigned with a maximum of two codes, but the guiding thought was to assign at best no more than one code to a text fragment. The development of the coding scheme as well as the coding itself was done by one researcher. To minimize errors, an iterative coding process was applied. The data were screened several times before the final coding scheme was created, and lastly, all new codes were scanned again for conceptual similarities and where possible, combined to single codes. Finally, codes which appeared less than 10 times were deleted. To limit the number of codes, the code descriptions of emotional, psychological, and social well-being, were extended. Those extended descriptions can be found in Table 2 together with the final coding scheme.

Table 2

Descriptions of each code with example quotes from the 2019 (T0) and 2020 (T1) sample and respectively example quotes from the self-perspective and role model-perspective

Code	Description	Example quote 2019 (T0) – answer own perspective (1) and a role model’s perspective (2)	Example quotes 2020 (T1) – answer own perspective (1) and a role model’s perspective (2)
Emotional well-being			
Happiness	-Feeling happy, grateful -Being optimistic, positive, having a positive aura -Laughing a lot, having fun, -Enjoying activities -Being carefree; Having no worries (at a certain moment) and not overthinking things	(1) "In moments I feel like I am experiencing flourishing, I feel gratitude and a kind of inner peace." (3104) (2) "I think that the person feels good as if he has a lucky day today." (3003)	(1) "It's a kind of light-heartedness where you get the feeling you can achieve anything, and nothing can stop you. It is something positive through and through." (1108) (2) "Every situation that seems negative to you she always looks at the good side, which means that she has a positive attitude towards life from the ground up. Sid laughs a lot and is cheerful, and she also describes herself as a loving person." (1106)
Interest (positive affect)	-Feeling interested in life -Openness, thus being open-minded and tolerant	(1) "Personally, it wasn't until ninth grade that I became more interested in school and realized that everything was much easier, and time passed faster when I was actively involved in class, through better grades and more interest in subjects I wasn't interested in before, I also experienced a kind of flourishing." (3001) (2) "I think it's because he just enjoys what he does, but he also manages to just get interested in new topics and just read into them completely without any reason." (3009)	(1) "In such situations I have the feeling to really live, to have time for things I want to do and discover, which make me curious and I often wish every day would be like this, [...]." (1309) (2) „Another characteristic is her adventurousness and spontaneity. She loves to try out new things and to experience as much as possible in life.“ (1111)

Life satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Feeling satisfied -Feeling satisfied in one's job (e.g., positive atmosphere, nice colleagues etc.) -Enjoying what you do (i.e., university, hobby, daily life etc.) 	(1) „Then I am very happy and satisfied with me and my life and think that I feel comfortable and that I don't want to change the situation in any way.” (3114)	(1) “It got better and better with time. ^[SEP] I have become calmer and more relaxed with the people around me. I don't see many things so pinched anymore and keep calm in critical situations. Today I am well - I have no complaints worth mentioning. I am very happy about that.” (1501)
		(2) “This person is satisfied with him/herself and his/her current life situation (family, friends, career, living situation, hobbies).” (3019)	(2) "In my opinion, first of all, this person is perfectly content in the life situation he/she is in right now." (1410)

Psychological well-being

Self-acceptance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Liking most parts of one's personality - Attempting to feel good about oneself even while aware of own limitations -Inner peace; being at peace with yourself 	(1) “This is when I flourish, this is when I am ME. John Sample in his pure form, as he lives and moves. The John I want to be, who I love. This helps me to survive.” (3129)	(1) “I then have the feeling of really being enough, not having to change for others and being able to enjoy.” (1309)
		(2) “I interpret this as a deep contentment with herself, she seems to be able to be who she feels and is.” (3003)	(2) “Further this person is at peace with themselves and has, not always bit often, thoughts such as “I am good the way I am” [...].” (1410)
Environmental mastery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Being good at managing responsibilities of one's daily life -Having and applying effective coping strategies that work well for oneself when faced with obstacles and difficulties 	(1) “With staff shortages, little time for job-specific tasks and challenges, I usually manage to maintain an overview and manage the stressful situations.” (3052)	(1) "You can also tell when you're working, for example, you're productive, you enjoy doing that work and you're just motivated." (1106)
		(2) „She doesn't make a big deal out of difficulties and challenges of everyday life and always finds solutions for them immediately, without even making a big problem out of it. She takes everything as it comes and also likes to act very spontaneously sometimes.“ (3151)	(2) “[...] she does not compensate for a bad mood by so-called frustration purchases but transforms the negative energy into positive energy through satisfaction with herself or yoga sessions or simply walks in the nature. “(1303)
Positive relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Having warm and trusting relationships with others -Prosocial behaviour: Helping others in any possible way, caring for others 	(1) „I experience flourishing when I have a time together with my friends or family that is characterized by being there for each other and with each other. Then I feel happy. The important thing is that the time is truly shared and you're all in." (3133)	(1) "There are a very large number of moments that I could call Flourishing. Among others, when: [...] I have intense and interesting conversations with friends or family." (1401)

	-Socializing: Enjoying being with a romantic partner, friends, or family	(2) "This person blossoms as soon as she can bring joy to other people, helps them to overcome difficult situations or experiences together. She transfers this to her everyday life in society or in the private sphere." (3033)	(2) "Since she's been with her boyfriend, who is a very even-tempered person himself, she seems like the personified contentment." (1112)
Personal growth	-Having experiences that challenge one to grow and become a better person -self-reflection -Experiencing flow: Getting soaked into what you are doing, forgetting everything else, being in the moment and "living for the moment", -Having hobbies or activities you enjoy	(1) "A situation where I thrive would be with my hobbies, for example. I play handball and violin. I play both in a team/orchestra. When I play, I'm happy because I forget all my problems and I'm just in my element. Moreover, I function well in relation to other people while doing it because you interact with them and it's a great feeling when, for example, a move works or you play through a piece flawlessly." (3115) (2) "She also made her hobby her profession, which I also admire very much. Even though she was not sure and had doubts whether she would be successful with it and earn enough money, she dared to take the step and started her own business with what she likes best and what she enjoys most." (3151)	(1) "When I undertake something, for example, something crafty. Crafting makes me a lot of fun and even if it's a challenge and I'm also annoyed in between, I always try to find a way to effectively get to the goal! When I reach my goal I am always very proud of myself and feel confident!" (1201-1) (2) "I think of my mother, who is totally absorbed in hiking. At that time, she is completely with herself and is also able to calmly deal with personal problems and think about them." (1201)
Autonomy	-Being confident to think or express own ideas -Taking responsibility for oneself: Doing things that are good for you and in accordance with your values, taking an active part in the course your life will take, includes stepping out of comfort zone -Includes selfcare: Spending time by yourself, treating yourself well	(1) "We leave each other the freedom that everyone can decide for himself and about his life." (3109) (2) "The person I am thinking of is, in my opinion, self-confident, goal-oriented and calm." (3111)	(1) "When I'm alone I thrive on taking time for myself, just pursuing my interests and doing something good for myself." (1106). (2) "I believe that she does not think much about how others see her or think about her, but intuitively does what is good for herself!" (1207)
Purpose in life	-Feeling that one's life has a sense of direction or meaning to it - Finding meaning in one's efforts and challenges	(1) "Flourishing is something I experience at school or university, for example, when I do a task well or realize that I can do something well. I then feel like I	(1) "However, when I then meet those expectations, I feel very good and proud of my accomplishments. I think that I then experience 'flourishing' and submit to society." (1107)

have a purpose and can be useful for something."
(3100)

(2) "In these situations, this person seems to have found her purpose. She is completely absorbed in the role and is happy with her role." (3128)

(2) „People who hold this state have found their "true" vocation and are very fulfilled by their profession, for example." (1309)

Social well-being

Social contribution

-Having something important to contribute to society (being of value for society etc. being a vital member of society)
-Being a helpful person

(1) "Doing useful things with my particular skills, which are good for other people and the world at large, feels pretty good, as for instance lectures at university as a hobby or give financial advice to friends and relatives." (3098)

(1) "By my studies alone (civil servant), I would be doing society a service if I did well in my studies." (1303)

(2) "Furthermore, he is always there for others and also wants to do his meaningful part in society, which he also does." (3001)

(2) "The person plans every day from morning till night, is involved in numerous voluntary organizations, nevertheless tries not to harm the environment every day, aligns all his actions with the good of society (keyword climate change), [...]" (1303)

Social integration

-Belonging to a community (e.g., social group, neighbourhood, or one's city) (having sth. in common with those that constitute one's social reality)

(1) "For example when one is seen as an important part of a society and by that flourishes in certain situations." (3060)

(1) "Moments when I feel well integrated and accepted in society." (1401)

(2) "The person I am describing is no one in particular. I am describing all those who are members of a team. These people behave like a unit on and off the court and strengthen each other." (3060)

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Social acceptance

-Feeling that people are basically good (trusting and feeling comfortable with others, believing that they can be kind and industrious)

(1) "[...], but one must never forget, that each individual is precious." (3020)

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(2) "Regarding other people, I am very open." (3153)

(2) "For her each human being is special." (1202)

Other

Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Feeling good when one achieves something, mostly in their job or at university, feeling proud -Being or feeling self-efficient -Virtuous character traits (e.g., being honest, trustworthy, intelligent, humble, helping others or thinking of others first) -Being respected/admired/appreciated by others for what one does or have 	(1) "In my working life, my ability to work in a team is valued, as I often act as a diplomatic mediator in controversial situations. Through informed argumentation, I manage to reduce the emotional components, which ultimately leads to a good result." (3154)	(1) "I flourish, when I am proud of myself, for example when I have run a marathon or when I am successful in my job." (1413)
		(2) „A satisfied person has a feeling of success." (3095)	(2) "When he encounters new people has almost no biases and treats everyone fairly and equal." (1113)
Mindfulness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Being mindful in what you do, noticing the small things in life, being in the "here and now" -being mindful with yourself and others -Includes being carefree sometimes and not overthinking things 	(1) "When I go for a walk und hear the birds twitter and simply observe nature, then I feel delighted." (3080)	(1) "For example, when I go for a walk, the sun is shining, I hear the wind in the leaves of the trees and the chirping of the birds, I stop for a moment, close my eyes and take a deep breath. that's a wonderful feeling. I can sit by the pond and watch the fish and just enjoy the here and now." (1509)
		(2) "In general, she rarely has the demand for perfection. She is less interested in modifying things than in perceiving them in their fullness. In her everyday life she is therefore very spontaneous and relatively unstructured. She tries to be happy in the present moment." (3106)	(2) "These persons function by being strongly focused on themselves, in my opinion. They feel inside themselves and take care of themselves. They don't just change for someone and have realized that there is only one chance to enjoy this life." (1309)

Note. The numbers behind the quotes refer to the participant IDs the sample quote is taken from

Results

The content analysis revealed that 12 of the 14 ingredients of flourishing were present in the data, except for social coherence and social actualization. Moreover, two new ingredients were found: competence and mindfulness. The codes that were mentioned most often were happiness (15.2%), positive relations (13.5%), and competence (12.4%) (see Table 2). Regarding the three main categories, 43.5% of the codes could be attributed to psychological well-being. Emotional well-being made up 30.3% of all ingredients mentioned in the descriptions of flourishing. Social well-being was the least mentioned category (10%). Only three of the original five ingredients of social well-being appeared frequently enough to be included in the coding scheme. The most frequently applied code was social contribution (6.5%).

Comparison before and during covid-19 pandemic

Regarding the general outcome of how flourishing was described in 2019 (T0) versus 2020 (T1), few differences appeared but most codes occurred rather equally frequent in both years. Most prominent was the more frequent mentioning of emotional well-being in 2020 (34.8%) compared to 2019 (28.3%), which can mainly be attributed to the more frequent mentioning of happiness in 2020 (21.9%) than in 2019 (12%). Despite this, two more codes showed a difference: competence and mindfulness. While competence was mentioned more often in 2019 (14%) than in 2020 (9.1%), the occurrence of mindfulness was higher in 2020 (6.3%) than in 2019 (2.7%). Regarding the qualitative content assigned to the codes, no differences could be found between the samples from 2019 and 2020.

Comparison from one's own and role model's perspective

By contrast, more differences appeared regarding the frequency codes occurred in descriptions of flourishing from one's own perspective compared with a role model's perspective (see Table 3). The greatest difference was visible in the category emotional well-

being, especially in the code happiness, which made up 25.4% of all mentioned codes in the descriptions of flourishing from the own perspective in contrast to 34.3% from a role model's perspective. Smaller differences were found in almost all codes, which will be described below.

Table 2. *Frequency of codes in 2019 (T0) and 2020 (T1).*

Codes	Total frequency (N=984)	2019 (T0) (N=664)	2020 (T1) (N=320)
Emotional well-being	298 (30.3%)	188 (28.3%)	110 (34.8%)
Happiness	150 (15.2%)	80 (12%)	70 (21.9%)
Life satisfaction	88 (8.9%)	63 (9.5%)	25 (7.8%)
Interest	59 (6.0%)	45 (6.8%)	14 (4.8%)
Psychological well-being	428 (43.5%)	297 (44.8%)	131 (40.9%)
Positive relations	133 (13.5%)	97 (14.6%)	36 (11.3%)
Autonomy	91 (9.2%)	62 (9.3%)	29 (9.1%)
Personal growth	78 (7.9%)	57 (8.6%)	21 (6.6%)
Environmental mastery	57 (5.8%)	36 (5.4%)	21 (6.6%)
Self-acceptance	57 (5.8%)	40 (6%)	17 (5.3%)
Purpose in life	12 (1.2%)	5 (0.8%)	7 (2.2%)
Social well-being	98 (10%)	68 (10.3%)	30 (9.3%)
Social contribution	64 (6.5%)	42 (6.3%)	22 (6.9%)
Social integration	20 (2.0%)	15 (2.3%)	5 (1.6%)
Social acceptance	14 (1.4%)	11 (1.7%)	3 (0.9%)
Other	160 (16.3%)	111 (16.7%)	49 (15.3%)
Competence	122 (12.4%)	93 (14%)	29 (9.1%)
Mindfulness	38 (3.9%)	18 (2.7%)	20 (6.3%)

Table 3. *Frequency of codes in the description of flourishing from the own perspective and a role model's perspective.*

Codes	Total frequency (N=984)	Own perspective (N=448)	Role model's perspective (N=536)
Emotional well-being	298 (30.3%)	114 (25.4%)	184 (34.3%)
Happiness	150 (15.2%)	60 (13.4%)	90 (16.8%)
Life satisfaction	88 (8.9%)	28 (6.3%)	60 (11.2%)
Interest	59 (6%)	26 (5.8%)	33 (6.2%)
Psychological well-being	428 (43.5%)	194 (43.3%)	234 (43.7%)
Positive relations	133 (13.5%)	80 (17.9%)	53 (9.9%)
Autonomy	91 (9.2%)	28 (6.3%)	63 (11.8%)
Personal growth	78 (7.9%)	52 (11.6%)	26 (4.9%)
Environmental mastery	57 (5.8%)	18 (4%)	39 (7.3%)
Self-acceptance	57 (5.8%)	13 (2.9%)	44 (8.2%)
Purpose in life	12 (1.2%)	3 (0.7%)	9 (1.7%)
Social well-being	98 (10%)	50 (11.2%)	48 (8.9%)
Social contribution	64 (6.5%)	33 (7.4%)	31 (5.8%)
Social integration	20 (2%)	16 (3.6%)	4 (0.7%)
Social acceptance	14 (1.4%)	1 (0.2%)	13 (2.4%)
Other	160 (16.3%)	90 (20%)	70 (13.1%)
Competence	122 (12.4%)	66 (14.7%)	56 (10.4%)
Mindfulness	38 (3.9%)	24 (5.4%)	14 (2.6%)

Happiness

The descriptions of happiness (15.2%) were rather broad, which is reflected in the many ways happiness was described. It compassed various emotions, expressions, and behaviours, such as laughing, feeling grateful, having fun, enjoying an activity, being playful, pleasant feelings in one's body or being optimistic. Descriptions of happiness ranged from writing about someone who "spreads good mood" (participant 1305) or who "enjoys his life and also likes to go to parties to forget the difficulties in life." (participant 1107) to more detailed descriptions as this one: "Flourishing feels like everything is just fine in that moment and you are completely satisfied. The body also feels lighter, and you grin and laugh a lot more. In such situations there is nothing that could disturb you and the world seems to be in order." (participant 1106). Furthermore, happiness appeared more frequently in 2020 (21.9%) than in 2019 (12%) and was mentioned less often when describing flourishing from one's own perspective (12.4%) than from on a role model's perspective (16.8%). There was also a qualitative difference in between the two perspectives in the how happiness was described. When writing about a role model, people often remained more generic in their descriptions, by writing about a role model being happy, positive, or how they would laugh a lot appear, or had a positive appearance. In contrast, happiness was described in more detail when describing flourishing from one's own perspective. Participant 3075 described flourishing as follows: "In moments of flourishing I feel like I could achieve anything and anything I would try would work out. It feels like I have reached the maximum of blissful happiness and one wishes that this state would last forever, as all negativity bounces off too.". Another difference was that people tended to use more anecdotes to describe feelings of happiness when writing about oneself and that happiness was often felt when some kind of interaction with others took place. For instance, participant 1107 wrote that flourishing was about "[...] finding joy in the simple things of everyday life. For example, when I make a face for a kid and make it laugh.". Moreover, it stood out that people repeatedly described situations in

which they come home from work, finished an exam, or are done with a stressful period of time; when they can forget their worries and their to-do-lists for some time and consequently feel very relieved and (able to be) happy.

Life satisfaction

People tended to describe life satisfaction (8.9%) more literally than happiness. A flourishing person was described as one that is “completely satisfied in the situation in life they are currently living.” (participant 1410) or “not wanting to change this situation in any way”, because one is “happy and satisfied with life” (participant 3114). Sometimes, flourishing was also described by illustrating certain behaviours or characteristics of people, as participant 1509 wrote: „I am thinking of a woman, who arrived at work in a good mood every day. [...] I had the feeling that this woman had found THE WAY for herself.”.

Generally, the relative mentioning of life satisfaction was slightly lower in 2020 (7.8%) than in 2019 (9.5%). Moreover, it stood out that life satisfaction was generally mentioned more often from a role model’s perspective (11.2%) than from the own perspective (6.3%).

Interest

Interest (6%) was characterized as being a person who is “always open, friendly and ready to approach others” (participant 1305) or possesses traits as “adventurousness and spontaneity” (participant 1111) or “loves trying out new things and to experience as much as possible in life”. Participant 3001 described this illustratively: „Just in the 9th grade I started developing interest in school and noticed that everything is easier and time passes faster when I am active during classes. By getting better grades and developing more interest in topics I did not care about before, I experienced a kind of flourishing.”. Hence, flourishing in this category was experienced through curiosity, interest, and openness in general.

Positive relations

Positive relations (13.5%) included any kind of close relations with others, such as family, friends, or romantic partners. Sometimes descriptions were limited to the pure

presence of such relationships, e.g., having “an intact family, a good relationship, good friends” (participant 1108), but often people went further and described activities they do together, what they feel for them, when they are with them, wrote about moments together, or described what makes their friends, family, or partner so special for them. The relative occurrence of the category was somewhat lower in 2020 (11.3%) than in 2019 (14.6%) and people mentioned positive relations more often when writing from their own perspective (17.9%) than from a role model’s perspective (9.9%). The difference was not only quantitatively noticeable but there was also a qualitative difference; when people wrote about a role model, they tended to say that flourishing people have people they love and who they are close too. Participant 1112, for instance, wrote about a female friend: “Since she is with her boyfriend, who is a very calm person, she appears like the personification of satisfaction.”. When writing about themselves, people generally wrote about similar experiences and feelings but more in depth and with more examples. Among those, people claimed to flourish when simply being with friends and family, having deep, intense, or long conversations with them, being there for each other, and enjoying different activities together. What further stood out was the frequent mention of prosocial behaviour in the descriptions of one’s own flourishing, as participant 3136 wrote: “I like it a lot when I make others happy or surprise them. It is a very pleasant feeling to see somebody happy. In turn, this effect makes me happy myself.”. Lastly, it appeared that when writing about oneself and being with one’s friends or family, participants often pointed out to the feeling of (self-)acceptance they have among them, which seemed to be an important factor for why they enjoy their company. This was nicely described by participant 1410: “Furthermore, I have the feeling of flourishing when I am with my family. Because in the circle of my family I feel the feeling of having arrived. Because with them I can really be me and do not have to pretend. They give me a feeling of "You are good the way you are" and "Be yourself".”.

Autonomy

Flourishing by being an autonomous (9.2%) person included being able to stand up for oneself, expressing oneself, living according to the own values, taking care of and responsibility for oneself – in short: being confident and aware of oneself and acting accordingly. For participant 311 a flourishing person was “self-confident, goal-oriented, and even-tempered”. For participant 3153 being autonomous looked as follows: “She has a sense of having her life under her control, doesn’t keep fear nor hate in her heart and is focused on her goals.”. Yet, for participant 1106 else, moments of flourishing occurred when “spending time alone, following one’s interests and taking good care of oneself.”. Thus, there was a variety of ways how autonomy expressed itself as a facet of flourishing. When describing flourishing from a role model’s perspective, the participants named autonomy more often (11.8%) than when writing from one’s own perspective (6.3%).

Personal growth

Personal growth (7.9%) was mentioned often in relation to the experience of flow and enjoying hobbies. As participant 3124 wrote, having a “hobby is an important factor in the experience of flourishing, because one is usually good at it and feels comfortable among like-minded people. One can rest one’s mind and forget about everyday life, feel good and enjoy.”. Nevertheless, personal growth was not only about hobbies and flow but experiences that make one grow and to reflect and integrate own experiences, thoughts, behaviours, and attitudes. In this way, a flourishing person was also described as an individual who “is mostly aware of his negative traits and often tries to change his behaviour for the better if possible.” (participant 1113). Participant 1201 described a flourishing person as someone who would “flourish when hiking” and then “having the time and muse to think and reflect on personal problems.”. Hence, personal growth is a code that captured various themes and includes more heterogenous fragments than some other codes, as for instance life satisfaction. Personal growth was mentioned slightly less often in 2020 (6.6%) than in 2019 (8.6%) and fewer participants mentioned it in the descriptions of flourishing in a role model (4.9%) than from

one's own experience of flourishing (11.6%). The experience of flow was impressively described in the mails about one's own experience of flourishing. Representatively for those illustrations of flow experiences stands this text fragment: "I play the violin and handball. When I play, I forget all my problems und I am completely in my element. Further, I function well in relation to other persons, because one interacts with them and it is a great feeling when, for instance, a move works out or when one plays an error-free play." (participant 3115).

Environmental mastery

A representative quote for environmental mastery (5.8%) was the following: „She doesn't make a big business of difficulties and challenges of everyday life and always finds solutions instantly, without even letting them grow into a real problems. She takes things as they come and likes to act spontaneously." (participant 3151). Like many other coded fragments, it is about *doing* something rather than feeling in a certain way. Environmental mastery could be related to different areas of people's lives, i.e. at home, at work, with one's family and social life, or a mix of it. In this connection, participant 3111 mentioned the importance of "having a good work-life balance" to flourish, which is a good summary of other coded fragments. In general, environmental mastery was mentioned more frequently when writing about a role model's flourishing (7.3%) than about one's own experience (4%).

Self-acceptance

Self-acceptance (5.8%) was often described by having thoughts like "I am good the way I am". (participant 1410), and the importance of "being at peace with oneself" (participant 1410). Certainly, people also mentioned different aspects of self-acceptance as liking one's appearance as well as being "self-confident" (participant 1403). Generally, self-acceptance was described in a rather generic way and no explicit situations were mentioned. Further, it appeared more often when describing flourishing in a role model (8.2%) than from the own perspective (2.9%). What was striking is that when writing about flourishing in

oneself, self-acceptance was often linked to positive relations in the sense that people felt very accepted, worthy, and able to be their true self when being people they love, as good friends or family. Quite illustratively, participant 1309 wrote that when being around friends: “I then have the feeling of really being enough, not having to change for anybody, and being able to enjoy.”.

Purpose in life

Purpose in life (1.2%) was mostly linked to performance, meaning that flourishers would “have found their ‘true’ calling and are, for instance, have a sense of fulfilling in their job.” (participant 1309) or “have created great things in their life.”, but they could also “be humble and understood the meaning and value of life” (participant 1401).

Social contribution

The types of answers that were given related to social contribution (6.5%) were almost all qualitatively similar – the participants felt they could contribute something to society either with their job, by volunteering, or smaller acts of kindness. Participant 1415 noted:” This feeling [flourishing] I also experience when I do something for our society, like donating blood or volunteering somewhere.” and participant 3036 wrote: “The job gives me the feeling of being needed and doing something good“. As in most codes, there were also descriptions that only appeared ones, as participant 3098 felt that “having the impression of leaving something lasting in the world is also part of it [flourishing]. Children play a very important role in this.”

Social integration

Flourishing through social integration (2%) was mostly described explicitly, as in the following two examples: “Especially when I exchange thoughts with people I am close to, I feel like a member of society.” (participant 3019) and “moments in which I feel accepted and integrated in society.” (participant 1401). Thus, the coded fragments included relatively homogeneous content and very often words as “integrated” or “member” were used.

Social acceptance

The descriptions of social acceptance (1.4%) generally remained short and were not elaborated on. Participant 3129 described it by defining a flourishing role model as someone who “largely accepts people.” or participant 3049 as someone who “approaches or deals with people in an unbiased manner and also values those who think or act differently.”. The mention of social acceptance appeared more often when writing from a role model’s perspective (2.4%) than when writing from one’s own perspective (0.2%). Thus, flourishers were here individuals who have thoughts like “each human being is somebody special.” (participant 1202) or who think that “every single person is precious in their own way.” (participant 3020). These kinds of thoughts were only attributed to others but not to oneself.

Competence

Competence (12.4%) showed itself in various facets, such as in experiences of self-efficacy, achievement at work or university – as participant 3095 wrote: “A satisfied person has a feeling of success.”. Yet, competence was also being good in what one does. For example, participant 3154 wrote: “At work my capacity for teamwork is valued, as I often act as the diplomatic mediator in controversial situations.”. Participant 3156 described his boss: “Peter has my full respect, because he is above-average intelligent, he can very quickly analytically evaluate situations and often gives answers, which present the clear results in less than one minute.”. As also illustrated in those quotes, competence was also about being valued and appreciated for one’s qualities. Possessing valuable qualities and virtuous character traits was also described often when writing about flourishing in a role model, as participant 1113 wrote: “When he encounters new people he has almost no biases and treats everyone fairly and equally.”. Generally, competence occurred less often in 2020 (9.1%) than in 2019 (14%) and it appeared less when describing flourishing from a role model’s perspective (10.4%) than from one’s own perspective (14.7%). Regarding the qualitative content, participants mostly remained vague in descriptions from a role model’s perspective.

From the own perspective, people used more diverse descriptions by incorporating more examples and writing about more diverse activities. For example, participant 1409 wrote about winning a soccer game: “When I win with my soccer team, I am happy and flourish with new self-confidence. You feel better and know that the hard work (in this example now the training) pays off.”. Another difference was that description from a role model’s perspective contained more descriptions of virtuous character traits. A role model would be described as a “competent” (participant 3023), “warm and honest” (participant 3136), “authentic” (participant 3133) or “an insightful and emphatic person” (participant 3001), but no participant attributed such adjectives to themselves.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness (3.9%) was defined by being and “living in the here and now”, not overthinking, but letting go of worries and noticing the small things in everyday life. According to a participant, flourishers “notice what is going on in them and take care of themselves” (participant 1309) and moments of flourishing were described as times you “don’t think but simply live” (participant 1201). Participant 1207 formulated it as follows “I feel well when, for example, I see a cherry tree in the sun. I see the sun and the spring, and I have a warm feeling around my heart.”. Participant 1301 experiences mindfulness “on Saturdays, when the morning is relaxed and starts with yoga and is followed by a lovely breakfast with sunshine.”. Participant 1509 drew an even more vivid picture: “When I go for a walk for instance and the sun is shining, I can hear the wind blowing through the leaves and the birds’ twittering, then I hold on for a moment, close my eyes, and take a deep breath in and a deep breath out. This is a fantastic feeling. I can sit next to the pond and look at the fish, and simply enjoy the here and now.”. In contrast to competence, mindfulness was mentioned more frequently in 2020 (6.3%) than in 2019 (2.7%) and it occurred more often when participants described flourishing in themselves (5.4%) than in a role model (2.6%).

Discussion

The current study explored how people described flourishing before the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic in 2019 (T0) and during the outbreak in 2020 (T1) from their own and a role model's perspective. Most of the 14 elements of flourishing, as described in Keyes' model, were mentioned by the participants. Only social coherence and social actualization were not found in 2019 nor 2020. Additionally, social well-being was, compared to emotional and psychological well-being, mentioned less frequently by the participants. Moreover, two other factors were found that are not included in Keyes' model: competence and mindfulness. The most frequently mentioned ingredients to flourishing were happiness (15.2%), positive relations (13.5%), and competence (12.4%).

Main findings

In the descriptions of flourishing before and during the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic the same themes were mentioned and no great differences between 2019 and 2020 were found. Still, some themes occurred more often in one of the samples than in the other. The most prominent difference was found in the code happiness. The relative percentage of its occurrence was lower in 2019 (12%) than in 2020 (21.9%), which was also reflected in the generally more frequent mentioning of emotional well-being in 2020 (34.8%) compared to 2019 (28.3%). Surprisingly, the occurrence of the two other parts of emotional well-being, interest and satisfaction in life, was only slightly higher in 2019.

The more frequent mentioning of happiness in the aftermath of the outbreak of the pandemic (T1) is consistent with the findings of a study by Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin (2003), who discovered that three weeks after the terrorist attacks from September 11th, 2001, people did not only experience negative emotions, but also frequently experienced positive emotions, such as gratitude or love. Their study shows that in the aftermaths of sudden stressful events or during crises, positive emotions can rise. This is in accordance with

our finding that the sample from 2020 mentioned the experience of happiness more frequently in their perception of flourishing than the sample from 2019.

A possible explanation for the generally limited changes in the descriptions of flourishing between before (T0) and during the pandemic (T1), apart from happiness, could be the point of assessment in 2020 (T1). The first lockdown in Germany was declared on March 22, 2020, (Bundesministerium für Gesundheit, 2020) and data were collected in April 2020 (T1). Hence, it could be that at that point of time participants were not (yet) affected by the pandemic and the according regulations as much as they might have been after a longer period of time. At the beginning of the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic, many people encouraged an attitude of togetherness and hope (More in Common, 2020), but after a few months this attitude shifted more and more towards a general frustration in society. In this connection, the first large demonstration against the new regulations to diminish the spreading of the virus took place (Der Tagesspiegel, 2020; FAZ, 2020, More in Common, 2020). Such sociocultural dynamics might also explain why people's perceptions of flourishing did not differ a lot between 2019 and shortly after the outbreak of the pandemic in 2020.

Additionally, a prior study (Schotanus-Dijkstra et al., 2015) found no association between flourishing and negative life-events. If the covid-19 pandemic is viewed as a predominantly negative life-event, this might be another possible explanation for not finding major differences in the descriptions of flourishing between the two samples. Thus, my results indicate that on the short-term crises as the covid-19 pandemic might not have a great impact on how people perceive the concept on flourishing. However, the more frequent mentioning of happiness after the outbreak of the pandemic might reflect an emotional reaction similar to the awakening of positive emotions by people after the terrorist attacks from 11th September 2001 (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003).

Regarding the definitions of flourishing from the participants' own perspective versus the perspective of a role model, more differences were found in the frequency codes were

mentioned. It stood out that emotional well-being, especially happiness, was mentioned more frequently in the descriptions from a role model's perspective than from one's own perspective. These findings are consistent with the study results of Jordan et al. (2011). In four studies they found that people underestimated how often and to what extent their (close) peers experienced negative emotions, while they accurately estimated how often their peers experienced positive emotions and even overestimated the extent to which their close peers experienced positive emotions. The great majority of the participants in my study chose close peers as role models and mentioned emotional well-being much more frequently in their perspective. Jordan et al. (2011) could further uncover that those estimation errors could partially be explained by the suppression of negative emotions, that they are talked about less frequently than positive emotions, and that they are experienced more often when one is alone, and consequently not seen by peers (Jordan et al., 2011). Thus, the more frequent mentioning of emotional well-being from a role model's perspective could be explained by a biased estimation to what extent emotional well-being played a role in their flourishing experience.

However, codes belonging to the categories psychological and social well-being also showed differences in their frequencies between a role model's and one's own perspective. In contrast to emotional well-being, within the other two categories no overall consistent tendency towards a more frequent occurrence in one of the perspectives was found. Those differences might be interesting to look at in the light of social cognitive theories such as the actor-observer bias (Jones & Nisbett, 1971; Fiske, & Taylor, 1991), or the fundamental attribution error (Fiske, & Taylor, 1991). They imply that people make fundamental errors when comparing oneself to others. In the case of those two theories, it is implied that when people try to explain others' behaviour, they consider situational factors much less than when explaining one's own behaviour. Thus, people might attribute the same behaviour to more stable traits, attitudes, or habits, depending on whether this behaviour was shown by oneself

or seen in someone else. In connection to this, other studies (e.g., Kolar, Funder, & Colvin, 1996; Wall, Taylor, Conchie, Dixon, & Ellis, 2013) further demonstrate that judging others' personalities or aspects of it is influenced by many factors. The traits extraversion and consciousness, for example, were found to be judged more accurately in others than openness or neuroticism (Wall, Taylor, Conchie, Dixon, & Ellos, 2013). With this in mind the variances between the descriptions of flourishing from one's own and from a model's perspective might also display the different errors humans make when thinking about others' versus one's own behaviours, attitudes, emotions, or personalities.

This might also bring light into the finding that in 6 of the 14 codes differences were found in how the codes were described from a role model's perspective versus one's own perspective. Those differences mainly manifested in more general descriptions when describing ingredients of flourishing in a role model. When writing about one's own experience with flourishing, people tended to use diverse examples and described their emotions in more detail. This finding is in accordance with the fact that people have full access to their own emotions and experiences across all times and settings, while they can only observe others' experience and their expressed emotions from the outside and only in social settings (Jordan et al., 2011). The access to a richer amount of information about oneself might explain why the descriptions of flourishing from their own perspective was described in more detail too. Taken together, those results indicate that there is a difference in how people define flourishing from their own perspective and how they define it from a role model's perspective. Yet, those difference only concern the weighting of different ingredients to one's flourishing, because overall the same ingredients to flourishing were mentioned from both perspectives.

Another surprising finding was that the themes mindfulness and competence were found in the data which are not included in Keyes' model. In another well-being model, the PERMA model by Seligman (2011), accomplishment is listed as a factor of flourishing.

Accomplishment has substantial overlap with competence, despite that competence also comprised the possession of virtuous character traits. The PERMA model consists of four more ingredients: positive emotions, engagement, (positive) relationships, and meaning. Those ingredients are in line with Keyes' (2002; 2005; 2006) definition of flourishing, comprising both eudaemonic and hedonic well-being (Seligman, 2011), but there are also differences, as the absence of ingredients capturing social well-being in the PERMA model.

Mindfulness cannot be found in either of the two models. In contrast to both models, the results of this study show that various people think of mindfulness as an ingredient to flourishing. Still, these results are consistent with Black and Kern's (2020) work, in which they explored what flourishing meant to highly sensitive individuals. Their identified relevant ingredients to flourishing were self-awareness, emotional self-regulation, connecting with nature, contemplative practices, and practicing self-compassion (Black & Kern, 2020). Those ingredients can be assumed to require mindfulness as base, e.g., to be aware of and compassionate with oneself, one must be mindful with what is going on in oneself. Hence, these results imply that even though Keyes' model and the PERMA model provide good definitions of flourishing, they might not grasp the full spectrum flourishing can mean to different people.

A last finding of this study that merits comment is the relatively limited mentioning of social well-being (10%), even though five out of the 14 aspects of flourishing in Keyes' model belong to the social well-being category. Keyes' model of well-being has been shown to be a valid construct (Keyes, 2018) but social well-being appeared to be of little importance to the participants compared to other aspects of flourishing. An explanation for this might be that the participants from this study all lived in an individualistic culture. Definitions of well-being and flourishing might vary among collectivistic and individualistic cultures. In collectivistic cultures, connection is prioritized, which results in a greater need for individuals to fit in and to interdepend (Triandis, 1995; Lechuga, 2012), which is represented by the

category social well-being. Thus, social well-being plays an important role in flourishing in collectivistic cultures (e.g. Lu & Gilmour, 2006; Diener, Diener, & Diener, 2009; Pflug, 2009), while in individualistic cultures more emphasis is put on autonomy and independence (Triandis, 1995; Lechuga 2012). Consequently, social well-being might be of less importance to individuals from individualistic cultures, like the sample of this study. Hence, the generalizability of my results might be limited to people from individualistic cultures as no individuals from collectivistic cultures were represented in the sample.

Strengths and limitations

Strengths of this research include the large sample size and the broad and open formulated questions, which were sent to the participants. Both questions were formulated to invite participants to write about topics they consider important without being pushed into a certain direction. In addition, by collecting the responses to the questions in a written form, instead of carrying out interviews, anonymity could be increased. This can make it easier for people to reveal personal information as well as provide participants with the time they need to formulate an answer. Further, the current study is the first in exploring how people describe flourishing before and during a pandemic.

However, the results of this study should be interpreted in light of several limitations. The development of the coding scheme and the coding were done by me only, which increased the chances for personal biases or errors in coding. For instance, it could be possible that another researcher might have been less familiar with the concept of mindfulness and thus might not have found it in the data or attributed the respective text fragments to other codes. To limit the chances of such biases or errors to occur, the coding scheme was discussed several times transparently with my supervisor from the University of Twente and adjustments were made accordingly. To increase the transparency of the coding, the descriptions of the codes were formulated in detail. Two other limitations concern the sample. First, no within-subject comparison could be assessed, as the samples from 2019 and 2020

were recruited independently from each other by different researchers. Moreover, the sample from 2019 was more than twice as large as the sample from 2020, which might have resulted in a less reliable comparison, as a larger sample in 2020 could have produced a greater variation of codes or raised new topics. Besides the difference in size, the samples also differed in their gender distribution. While there was a fairly equal gender distribution in the sample of 2019 (53% males and 47% females), the sample of 2020 included more females (62%) than males (38%). A final limitation is that only individuals from an individualized country were included.

Future directions for research

As the point of assessment in 2020 (T1) took place shortly after the outbreak of covid-19 pandemic, in April, it could be of value to repeat this study with a sample from one year after the outbreak of the pandemic. Possibly, people's perceptions of flourishing have changed during the prolonged period living with the pandemic and several months of lockdown. If this study will be replicated it is suggested to include more than one researcher in the development of the coding scheme and the coding process to increase the reliability of the results. To get an even deeper insight into how individuals perceive flourishing in the face of the covid-19 pandemic, a further assessment after the pandemic, i.e., when people's routines are not influenced by the pandemic anymore, could be taken. Such a study should at best be carried out with the same sample. In addition, the repetition of similar studies with samples with more diverse cultural backgrounds is suggested, as in the field of psychology research is often conducted in and with individualistic cultures, which naturally leads to a focus on independence and the individual (Kristjansson, 2010; Richardson & Guignon, 2008).

Conclusion

This study showed that there are core ingredients of flourishing that are well captured by Keyes' model but also that flourishing is a very personal experience, and no model of flourishing exists that includes the full scope of ingredients to it so far. People also mentioned

the same ingredients to flourishing from their own versus a role model's perspective, despite that some ingredients were more present when they described flourishing from one or the other perspective. Besides this, my results indicate that people's definitions of flourishing might also be rather stable in relation to crises as the current covid-19 pandemic. As it is the first study that compared the descriptions of flourishing before and during the covid-19 pandemic, it may serve as base for future research. I encourage other researchers to repeat this study with participants having lived with the pandemic more than a year. Living under those circumstances for a longer period of time might affect people's perception flourishing differently than only a few weeks as in the current study. Investing in research on flourishing in difficult times and crises is a step towards a more wholesome enhancing of flourishing among all people, regardless the circumstances they live in.

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Appendix

Table 4. *Frequency of codes per year and perspective combined.*

Codes	Total	2019 – own	2019 - role	2020 – own	2020 - role
	frequency	perspective	model	perspective	model
	(N=984)	(N=311)	(N=353)	(N=137)	(N=183)
Emotional well-being	298 (30.3%)	79 (25.4%)	109 (30.9%)	35 (25.5%)	75 (41%)
Happiness	150 (15.2%)	33 (10.6%)	47 (13.3%)	27 (19.7%)	43 (23.5%)
Interest	59 (6.0%)	23 (7.4%)	22 (6.2%)	3 (2.2%)	11 (6.0%)
Life satisfaction	88 (8.9%)	23 (7.4%)	40 (11.3%)	5 (3.6%)	20 (10.9%)
Psychological well-being	428 (43.5%)	135 (43.4%)	162 (45.9%)	59 (43.0%)	72 (39,3%)
Self-acceptance	57 (5.8%)	7 (2.3%)	33 (9.3%)	6 (4.4%)	11 (6.0%)
Environmental mastery	57 (5.8%)	11 (3.5%)	25 (7.0%)	7 (5.1%)	14 (7.7%)
Positive relations	133 (13.5%)	58 (18.7%)	39 (11.0%)	22 (16.1%)	14 (7.7%)
Personal growth	78 (7.9%)	39 (12.5%)	18 (5.0%)	13 (9.5%)	8 (4.4%)
Autonomy	91 (9.2%)	18 (5.8%)	44 (12.5%)	10 (7.3%)	19 (10.3%)
Purpose in life	12 (1.2%)	2 (0.6%)	3 (0.8%)	1 (0.7%)	6 (3.3%)
Social well-being	98 (10.0%)	33 (10.6%)	35 (10.0%)	17 (12.4%)	13 (7.1%)
Social contribution	64 (6.5%)	21 (6.8%)	21 (5.9%)	12 (8.9%)	10 (6.0%)
Social integration	20 (2.0%)	11 (3.5%)	4 (1.1%)	5 (3.6%)	0
Social acceptance	14 (1.4%)	1 (0.3%)	10 (2.8%)	0	3 (1,6%)
Other	160 (16.3%)	64 (20.6%)	47 (13.9%)	26 (19.0%)	23 (12.6%)
Competence	122 (12.4%)	52 (16.7%)	41 (11.6%)	14 (10.2%)	15 (8.2%)
Mindfulness	38 (3.9%)	12 (3.9%)	6 (1.7%)	12 (8.9%)	8 (4.4%)