



## Sense of Coherence, Self-Compassion, and Mental Well-being of Senior High School Students: An Explanatory-Sequential Inquiry

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### Abstract

The famous psychologist Erik Erikson regarded adolescence as the most critical stage of development. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a need to look into the intrapersonal dynamics of adolescents' mental health reflected through their sense of coherence, self-compassion, and mental well-being. Through an explanatory-sequential mixed-method inquiry design, the participants' (n=349) degree of sense of coherence, self-compassion, and mental well-being were explored and deepened using three standardized questionnaires in the quantitative and a semi-structured interview guide in the qualitative phase. Statistical and thematic analyses revealed that the participant's ability to create a systematic approach in dealing with the stressors is instrumental in showing care and concern towards themselves. Self-compassionate individuals are more adaptive to stress and better cope with problems in the immediate environment. The participants who reported high inclinations in showing care and concern towards themselves are less likely to experience or endure chronic mental health problems. They can control internal thought and emotional processes, while those with a low overall sense of mental well-being signal the need to address inner self-defeating thoughts. The paper proposes *intrapersonal counseling* as a new approach that mental health professionals, particularly guidance counselors, can use in their practice.

**Keywords:** Explanatory-sequential mixed-method; intrapersonal counseling; mental well-being; self-compassion; sense of coherence

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### 1. Introduction

The World Health Organization's (WHO, 2017) Sustainable Development Goals highlighted the importance of and priority to adolescent mental health. The onset of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) had prompted an increase in the global estimate of depression from 2017 to 2021 (Notivol *et al.*, 2021) <sup>[31]</sup>. These figures align with adolescents' transitional stage of physical and psychological changes, including the sudden shift from traditional face-to-face learning to virtual classes (Shen *et al.*, 2020). Investing in adolescents' well-being benefits their present condition and paves the way for a healthier future generation (Patton *et al.*, 2016) <sup>[40]</sup>.

In this line, within the field of positive psychology, attention to a particular construct, which spells one of the significant factors in facilitating adaptation to stress, has been growing. Sense of coherence (SOC) refers to a person's ability to understand, manage, and make meaning out of stressful situations (del Pino-Casado *et al.*, 2019) <sup>[16]</sup>. Moreover, this construct deals with how an individual would use resources like his own skills and abilities to combat threats to well-being and promote and maintain health. On the other hand, one closely similar construct seems essential in an individual's fight against mental health problems amid a global health crisis. Self-compassion deals with how individuals show care and concern for themselves amidst adverse life events (Terry & Leary, 2011, as cited in Bedoria & Marañon, 2019) <sup>[46, 4]</sup>.

Furthermore, in the Philippines, Filipino youth have gone through adjustments due to changes in the different aspects of society, namely the implementation of the Senior High School program and the onset of COVID-19.

Studies in the Philippines show that Filipino adolescents have been suffering from moderate to severe anxiety, depression, and fatigue associated with COVID-19 (Tee *et al.*, 2020; Labrague & Ballad, 2020) [23]. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates the challenges of implementing the K to 12 curricula (Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, 2021) [35]. These situations make the Filipino youth vulnerable to developing mental health problems.

Moreover, students in the Augustinian schools are taught of St. Augustine's teaching that a healthy person has inner unity. St. Augustine emphasized that internal disunity will lead to inner malady. Sense of coherence and self-compassion are intrapersonal constructs that could spell inner unity among the Augustinian students. Exploring the Augustinians' sense of coherence and self-compassion may provide benchmark data for the Augustinian schools to check whether St. Augustine's philosophy remains relevant amidst the crisis. After all, St. Augustine believed that studying the mind is necessary to explore the divine.

With this, the present study recognizes that sense of coherence and self-compassion are still new constructs in the Philippines, especially regarding their essential role in helping the populace manage the adverse mental health effects of COVID-19. Not only that, recent studies concerning these constructs (Carlen *et al.*, 2020; del-Pino-Casado *et al.*, 2019; Esposito *et al.*, 2021; Gupta & Panday, 2014) [8, 16, 19, 20, 9] and their importance in man's struggle with COVID-19 (Chi *et al.*, 2020; Cortes *et al.*, 2021; Danioni *et al.*, 2021) [12, 15] almost only use quantitative methods. The present study explored a mixed-method approach to deepen discussion and analysis of the constructs mentioned above. Lastly, there is a shortage in the literature examining the relationship among sense of coherence, self-compassion, and mental well-being, especially in the Philippines and within the Augustinian schools' context. Most studies explore the relationship of either sense of coherence and self-compassion or sense of coherence and mental well-being only and primarily outside of the Philippines (Krampe *et al.*, 2020; Gupta & Pandey, 2014; Mowlai *et al.*, 2016) [22, 20].

Looking through the lens of the *Salutogenic model*, the present study assessed and explained the intrapersonal dynamics of adolescents' mental well-being through a sense of coherence and self-compassion both on a quantitative and qualitative perspectives. The study's findings served as a basis for the conceptualization and development of a new counseling approach grounded on the sense of coherence and self-compassion and how they operate in man's battle against threats to mental well-being.

## Methodology

### Research design

This study utilized a mixed-method approach, specifically, the explanatory-sequential design. This design involves the utilization of both quantitative and qualitative methods. The sequential-explanatory design allowed the researcher to integrate and merge quantitative (descriptive-correlational and predictive) and qualitative (basic qualitative inquiry) data to deepen understanding and analysis of the sense of coherence, self-compassion, and mental well-being of the participants. The qualitative data will help deepen the results obtained from the quantitative phase (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) [14].

## Participants

For the quantitative phase, the study respondents were 349 Senior High School students in selected Augustinian schools in Bacolod City were chosen through stratified random sampling. In the qualitative phase, the researcher used maximum variation sampling and selected all participants who scored high in all three constructs and those who scored low in all three constructs. The random selection of participants in each group led to six (6) senior high school students who participated in the interview: three (3) who scored high in all three constructs and three (3) who scored low in all three constructs.

## Research instruments

The quantitative phase of the study utilized three standardized survey questionnaires. The first is the Sense of Coherence Scale (Antonovsky, 1987) [2]. The Sense of Coherence (SOC) includes 13 items using seven semantic differential points. The scale measures SOC in terms of its components. These components are meaningfulness (items 1, 4, 7, and 12), comprehensibility (items 2, 6, 8, 9, and 11), and manageability (items 3, 5, 10, and 13). The higher the score, the lower the sense of coherence. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  index was 0.824 for the whole instrument. The internal consistency indexes shown in the different dimensions were:  $\alpha = 0.591$  for meaningfulness;  $\alpha = 0.690$  for comprehensibility; and  $\alpha = 0.611$  for manageability.

The second data collection instrument was the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS; Neff, 2003) [28]. Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) is a 26-item questionnaire and rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always). It has six subscales, namely: self-kindness (items 5, 12, 19, 23, 26), self-judgment (items 1, 8, 11, 16, 21), common humanity (items 3, 7, 10, 15), isolation (items 4, 13, 18, 25), mindfulness (9, 14, 17, 22), and over-identification (items 2, 6, 20, 24). Self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification subscales are reverse scored. Self-Compassion Scale yielded high internal consistency reliability for the over-all scale ( $\alpha = 0.92$ ), and for each sub-scale ( $\alpha = 0.75-0.81$ ). Likewise, Neff (2003a) [28] found a high test-retest reliability over a three-week period of time for both the whole scale ( $r = 0.93$ ), as well as for the individual subscales – Self-Kindness ( $r = 0.88$ ), Self-Judgment ( $r = 0.88$ ), Common humanity ( $r = 0.80$ ), Isolation ( $r = 0.85$ ), Mindfulness ( $r = 0.85$ ), and Over-identification ( $r = 0.88$ ).

The last data collection instrument for the quantitative phase was the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEBMWS) (Tennant *et al.*, 2007) [45]. WEBMWS is a 14-item questionnaire on a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire includes items measuring mental well-being in the light of subjective well-being and psychological functioning. The score in this questionnaire ranges from 14 up to 70. The establishment of psychometric properties of this questionnaire involved students and the general population aged 16 and above. Construct validation of WEBMWS showed moderately high correlations with Scale of Psychological Well-being ( $r = 0.73$ ), Satisfaction with Life Scale ( $r = 0.72$ ), Short Depression Happiness Scale ( $r = 0.76$ ), Positive and Negative Affect Scale-Positive Subscale ( $r = 0.72$ ), and WHO-Five Well-being Index ( $r = 0.77$ ). The instrument is internally consistent at  $\alpha = 0.89$ . Its test-retest reliability coefficient was at  $r = 0.83$ .

For the qualitative phase, the structured interview questionnaire was used. The interview questions included in the questionnaire were based on careful analysis of the data from the quantitative phase concerning the items in the data collection instruments used in the same stage. The use of interviews in the qualitative phase of the present study enabled the researcher to deepen the data obtained from the quantitative phase. The open-ended questions opened up for rich discussion about the students' sense of coherence, self-compassion, and mental well-being.

### Data analysis procedure

For the quantitative phase, descriptive and inferential analyses were utilized using appropriate statistical tools. Mean was used to determine the degree of sense of coherence, level of self-compassion, and degree of mental well-being among the senior high school students and when viewed in terms of their sex, family structure, and birth order. Furthermore, the Spearman rank was used to determine the significant relationship between the sense of coherence and self-compassion and between the sense of coherence and mental well-being. In contrast, Pearson product-moment correlation was used to determine the significant relationship between self-compassion and mental well-being. Finally, Multiple linear regression was used to determine the ability of sense of coherence and self-compassion in predicting mental well-being. The data undertook a normality test with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to determine the normality of the variables. Results showed that sense of coherence [KS=0.072,  $p=0.000$ ] is not normally distributed while self-compassion [KS=0.045,  $p=0.084$ ] and mental well-being [KS=0.043,  $p=0.200$ ] are normally distributed. Thematic analysis was also used in the qualitative phase following Colaizzi's model (1978). The model was used to form categories and themes from the interview excerpts. Colaizzi's model involves using seven (7) steps in analyzing transcripts from interview sessions.

### Ethical considerations

The researcher confirmed to the Philippine Health Research Ethics Board (PHREB) ethical guidelines and addressed the general ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice to ensure the ethical soundness of the study. The study was ethically sound in terms of social value, informed consent, the participants' vulnerability, risk and benefits, privacy and confidentiality, justice, transparency, qualification of the researcher, adequacy of facilities, and community involvement. The Ethics Committee of the university gave the study ethics clearance.

### Results and discussion

#### Degree of Sense of Coherence, Level of Self-Compassion, and Degree of Mental Well-being of Senior High School Students

Analysis of data revealed that the senior high school students, as a whole, have a low degree of sense of coherence. Concerning sex, family structure, and birth order, results still reveal low degrees of sense of coherence among the participants. These results mean that the senior high school students show poor ways of adapting to stress by using ineffective coping mechanisms. The present study also revealed that senior high school students have high levels of self-compassion in general, and even looking at it through the lens of the different demographics. The figures mean that

senior high school students show tolerance of failures, though inconsistently. This data also suggests that senior high school students display a low level of pessimism and have a balanced perspective in life, which renders them capable of showing care and concern for themselves. The degree of mental well-being of senior high school students is high. In terms of the demographics, males have a higher degree of mental well-being, while students who do not live with both parents and eldest children reported a low degree of mental well-being. These results mean that senior high school students do not have pressing mental health concerns. But paying attention to the mean ( $M=45.74$ ), this numerical shows a baseline score between low and high degrees of mental well-being among the participants. Taking into account this perspective, we can infer that while senior high school students, in general, do not present with pressing mental health concerns, at the same time, they recognize that their mental well-being remains unstable.

As supported by data here in the Philippines, Filipino youth have undergone adjustments due to recent changes in their immediate environment, which prompted them to experience moderate to severe anxiety, depression, and fatigue (Tee et al., 2020; Labrague & Ballad, 2020) <sup>[44, 23]</sup>. This paper connects with the report of Blom *et al.* (2010) <sup>[5]</sup>, who found that a low degree of sense of coherence mirrors generalized anxiety and persistent depressive symptoms among adolescent girls in clinical and non-clinical cohorts. This contention was strengthened by Romeo (2013, who described adolescence as the stage that involves new demands; this includes the dilemma of moving into a state of independence and being free from dependency on the family. During this period are also several changes physiologically and cognitively. Somerville *et al.* (2013) <sup>[42]</sup>, as cited in Braun-Lewensohn (2016) <sup>[6]</sup>, mentioned that what makes the adolescence stage more complex is the presence of tension between regulation of behavior and sensitivity to positive environmental cues. Furthermore, the literature suggests that a high level of self-compassion is linked to decreased negative affect (Neff *et al.*, 2007) <sup>[30]</sup> and increased positive affect and happiness (Neff *et al.*, 2007) <sup>[30]</sup>. Furthermore, Arimitsu and Hofmann (2015) <sup>[31]</sup> found out that a high level of self-compassion is influential in the decrease of anxiety and depression. The wide array of studies also affirms the role of self-compassion in life satisfaction, which is the global cognitive evaluation of one's life (Diener *et al.*, cited in Yang *et al.*, 2016) <sup>[18, 49]</sup>.

Lastly, as positioned by Esposito *et al.* (2021) <sup>[19]</sup>, school closure has affected the mental health of children and adolescents. In the study of Rajkumar (2020) <sup>[36]</sup>, the everyday mental health struggles of people amid COVID-19 are anxiety, depression, and stress, with which Chi *et al.* (2020) also affirmed and added insomnia to the list. The study of Cao *et al.* (2020) <sup>[7]</sup> also revealed that a portion of their sample reported experiencing anxiety symptoms, which correlates with increased worries regarding academic delays, the economic impact of COVID-19, and even its daily impact on life.

#### Relationship between sense of coherence and self-compassion of senior high school students

There was a significant positive relationship between sense of coherence and self-compassion [ $\rho(347)=0.479$ ,  $p=0.000$ ] among Senior High School students. The results mean that as individuals show the capacity to manage and understand the sources of their stressors, they can offer care and concern



towards themselves. These individuals who are doing a great job showing care and concern towards themselves can manage and understand the stressors around them adaptively. The result of the present study is consistent with the results of the research of Mowlaie *et al.* (2016) [27], which found a significant relationship between a sense of coherence and self-compassion. Likewise, in the study of Lloyd (2017) [24], self-compassion was found to be positively associated with adaptive coping strategies. These adaptive strategies may represent a sense of coherence. These include the rational appraisal of both external and internal stimuli as being understandable and easily grasped. Therefore, the use of adaptive coping strategies represents a sense of coherence. It reflects the person's capacity to organize factors that contribute to or threaten his mental well-being. Adaptive coping strategies may also include using resources a person thinks he has to combat the threats to his general sense of health.

**Table 1:** Relationship between Sense of Coherence and Self-Compassion of Senior High School Students

Variable	$\rho$	df	p
Sense of Coherence x Self-Compassion	.479*	347	0.000

Note: \*the correlation is significant at  $p \leq 0.05$

### Relationship Between Self-Compassion and Mental Well-being of Senior High School Students

There was a significant positive relationship between self-compassion and mental well-being [ $r(347)=0.153$ ,  $p=0.000$ ] among Senior High School students. This result means that senior high school students who show a great deal of taking care of themselves have a positive evaluation of their life in general and are satisfied with coping with the challenges of day-to-day living.

One of the most consistently researched aspects of self-compassion is its link to an individual's well-being. A recent meta-analysis by MacBeth and Gumley (2012) [25] discovered a large effect size when examining the association between self-compassion and psychopathology across 20 studies. Greater self-compassion is linked to lesser anxiety and depression because one of the critical features of self-compassion is the lack of self-criticism, which leads to the development of these psychopathologies. Self-compassion protects against anxiety and depression when controlling for self-criticism (Neff, 2003a) [28].

Furthermore, Neff (2003a) [28] found out that self-compassionate individuals ruminate less than those who lack self-compassion, maybe because they know they can break the cycle of negativity by accepting their human imperfection with kindness. A study by Raes (2010) found that rumination mediated the correlation between self-compassion and depression and anxiety, suggesting that reduced rumination is one of the critical benefits of self-compassion. Additionally, Arimitsu and Hofmann (2015) [3] also found self-compassion to be instrumental in decreasing anxiety and depression.

**Table 2:** Relationship between Self-Compassion and Mental Well-being of Senior High School Students

Variable	r	df	p
Self-Compassion x Mental Well-Being	.153*	347	0.004

Note: \*the correlation is significant at  $p \leq 0.05$

### Relationship between sense of coherence and mental well-being of senior high school students

There was a significant negative relationship between sense of coherence and mental well-being [ $\rho(347)=-0.230$ ,  $p=0.000$ ] among Senior High School students. The results mean that as individuals show capacity in managing and understanding the stressors around them, their overall evaluation of their life tends to be in a negative light. This result came as a surprise since the literature available speaks of a positive relationship between a sense of coherence and mental well-being. However, possible reasons and justification would validate this result—first, how the instruments were presented. The Sense of Coherence Scale includes most negatively worded items, while the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale includes entirely positively framed items. In psychometrics, we may refer to this phenomenon as acquiescence bias or the tendency to agree to whatever statements are presented to you. The second is the timing of the data gathering. The data was gathered during a global health crisis, which may have caused the participants to have confusion, and some were experiencing inner conflicts. Results could have been different if the researcher had measured the construct without a pandemic. And thirdly, this is believed to be a statistical issue. If we go back to the means, the overall mean of senior high school students in mental well-being is 45.74, with a standard deviation of 11.11. The mean score is just several units away from an interpretation of a low degree of mental well-being. With a high standard deviation, this may suggest the presence of outliers which may have caused some statistical abnormalities in the data. This issue, however, can be addressed by sophisticated statistical procedures.

**Table 3:** Relationship between Sense of Coherence and Mental Well-being of Senior High School Students

Variable	$\rho$	df	p
Sense of Coherence x Mental Well-Being	-.230**	347	0.000

Note: \*the correlation is significant at  $p \leq 0.05$

### Predictors of mental well-being among senior high school students

Multiple linear regression indicated that there was a significant collective effect between the sense of coherence and self-compassion on mental well-being [ $F(2, 344)=26.180$ ,  $p=0.000$ ,  $R^2=0.131$ ]. The individual predictors were examined further and indicated that both sense of coherence [ $\beta=-5.358$ ,  $t=-6.535$ ,  $p=0.000$ ] and self-compassion [ $\beta=8.553$ ,  $t=5.913$ ,  $p=0.000$ ] significantly predict mental well-being.

These results mean that the individual's ability to organize, understand, and manage the sources of stress in his immediate environment and with his ability to show care and concern towards himself, leads to a healthy perspective about life in general, or the absence of any mental health problems related symptoms. The nature of mental well-being as a construct includes thriving amidst adversity. Adolescents are at a stage where they have the necessary physical and psychological strength to thrive amidst challenging times. This capacity to succeed may have included their sense of coherence and self-compassion.

These results are consistent with the existing literature exploring the predictive ability of self-compassion and sense of coherence in mental health-related constructs. Carlen *et al.* (2020) showed that a sense of coherence successfully predicted mental health in adolescence. The study further referred to the Sense of Coherence (SOC) Scale as an appropriate measure in screening for adolescents who would benefit from supportive measures to strengthen their mental well-being. Additionally, the study of Mowlaie *et al.* (2016) [27] revealed a negative relationship between worry and sense of coherence and self-compassion. The said study showed that self-compassion serves as a buffer against worry and negative thoughts. Furthermore, Lloyd (2017) [24] revealed that higher levels of self-compassion and a sense of coherence were associated with lower levels of stress.

**Table 4:** Predictors of Mental Well-being Among Senior High School Students

R	r <sup>2</sup>	F	df	p
0.363	0.131	26.180	2, 344	0.000
Variables	Beta	t	p	
(Constant)	41.393	8.862	0.000	
Sense of Coherence	-5.358	-6.535*	0.000	
Self-Compassion	8.553	5.913*	0.000	

### Qualitative Findings and Analysis

#### Sense of Coherence, Self-Compassion, and Mental Well-Being in High Scorers

Four (4) central themes were derived from the interviews conducted with participants who all scored high in the three constructs under investigation. The four central themes were the following: Internal Thought and Emotional Processes Make the Difference, Perspective-taking is a Skill that Matters, Recognizing Flaws and Struggles and Their Common Humanity, and The Self in Relation to Others.

#### Theme 1: Internal Thought and Emotional Processes Make the Difference

One evident theme that stood out from the interviews with participants who scored high in all three constructs was their ability to execute mastery, and make use of their internal thought and emotional processes to their advantage, in order for them to adapt to the challenging times. These individuals were observed to have Positive Quality of Thoughts, use Cognitive Restructuring, knows how to Manage Expectations, evidence of Emotion Regulation, and Coping that Works.

#### Positive Quality of Thoughts

In trying to gain access into the worldview of the participants, inspection of the quality of thoughts that they have is very important. The positivity in terms of the thoughts of the participants who scored high in all constructs involved is very evident.

*“If there are minimal negative thoughts and it’s more of positive ones. And when I don’t think any negative things about myself, just the positive ones and when I lift myself up with it. I think those are my indicators that I have a stable mental health.”* (Participant 1, personal communication, December 8, 2021, Lines 463-465)

Another participant responded that she clings to seeing things positively when asked about how he deals with groupmates who do not help in accomplishing group tasks:

*“Yes, sir. Because I just try to view it in a positive way, that it’s still my grades who’s at stake. So even if I would do it on my own, just as long as I know I can save my grades, I would do it.”* (Participant 2, personal communication, December 8, 2021, Lines 45-46)

Conversing with the high scorers, their optimism is very evident in the way they look at situations and the way they provide rationalizations about their choices, and about their take on certain ideas. They would sometimes refer to having positive thoughts, not as a coping strategy, but a protective factor that helps them become successful in buffering the effect of the pandemic and the changes that come along with it. After the World War, Martin Seligman, the former president of the American Psychological Association, noticed that psychology is mostly focusing on psychopathology. Seligman advocated for positive psychology, and optimism is its core concept. Optimism has been found to bring many benefits to individuals like good state of physical health, enhanced happiness, and success (Hao *et al.*, 2016) [40]. Optimism was also found to correlate positively with other positive indicators of mental health (Zhou *et al.*, 2015).

#### The Ability to Use Cognitive Restructuring

One notable theme that is evident in the participants is the ability to restructure their cognitions. Cognitive restructuring is all about identifying negative thought patterns and challenging them, replacing them with more realistic thought patterns.

*“Sometimes Sir there are really days that these thoughts are very strong, so what I do if that happens, I just do breathing exercises. And on some occasions, I just think that there are things that I cannot control, and even if I have insecurities, I am still blessed.”* (Participant 3, personal communication, January 4, 2022, Lines 130-132)

Cognitive restructuring is one of the core components of cognitive therapy of Aaron Beck. It is done by identifying, evaluating, and modifying the faulty thoughts of a distressed individual (Corey, 2014) [11]. Cognitive restructuring was empirically proven to help individuals who are suffering from anxiety, depression, and other mental health disorders. While in cognitive therapy, cognitive restructuring is facilitated by a therapist who acts as a teacher or a director, the high scorers in the present study seem to use cognitive restructuring even without the assistance of a therapist. It is evident on how they would challenge their thoughts and counter it with more productive ones.

#### Managing Expectations

Another important theme that stood out among the high scorers is their ability to manage expectations. Expectations will always be part of human lives. We conceive expectations as part of our inner tendency to understand the world and

predict the motives and actions of the people around us.

One participant said:

*“I don’t think so, Sir. I always trust the people around me, especially my family, but I also manage my expectations. That’s why I think Sir when someone acts strange, and beyond my expectations, I am no longer surprised, as I believe, people are capable of change”* (Participant 2, personal communication, December 8, 2021, Lines 79-81)

With this response, managing expectations was used by the participant to buffer the negative impacts of unexpected behavior from the people around her. Albert Bandura’s concept of self-efficacy can be applied in our ability to be confident in our skills pertaining to something (Feist *et al.*, 2018). To manage expectations takes beliefs on one’s ability to do such for it entails frustrations and even negative outcome expectations.

### Capacity to Regulate Emotions

Emotion regulation is defined as a process by which a person influences what emotions he has, when he has them, and how he experiences and expresses them (Gross, 2014, 2015a, b). Gross contended that emotion regulation is concerned with the changes in the dynamics, duration, and speed of emotion occurrence, and also paying attention into the consequences. One participant looks at being too transparent with emotions as something that will be taken advantage by other people, so she makes sure, that her emotions are at bay most of the time.

*“Well yes, I do. But then I feel like if you show your emotions that you’re angry or like annoyed, I feel like that’s a weakness and they can take advantage of that. That’s why I always make sure to keep at bay most of the time. I do have emotional outbursts, if it becomes too much, but they’re very seldom.”* (Participant 2, personal communication, December 8, 2021, Lines 504-506)

Emotion regulation constitutes three components; the first one talks about initiating actions which are triggered by emotions. In conversation with the high scorers, they were very proactive in terms of acting upon emotional episodes. They, as much as possible respond to it productively, rather than being consumed by it. Second, inhibiting actions triggered by emotions. While this appear to be quite negative, the high scorers do not engage in inhibitory actions as part of escapism, but rather on looking at the situation first before doing anything. And lastly, modulating responses triggered by emotions. The high scorers were evidently good in terms of regulating and calculating their emotional responses so that they will not be drained, or be affected negatively in return.

### Coping that Works

When asked about what they do to cope with the challenges that they are facing, one participant responded:

*“By reading books sir, and watching funny videos, or even start to talk about it with my friends and family. That way, I feel like my feeling’s becoming light again, and I eventually find myself better.”* (Participant 1, personal communication, December 8, 2021, Lines 429-430)

As reflected in a reliable medical-content website WebMD (2020) [47], positive thinking, or optimism has big impact on one’s mental health. This does not mean that you ignore reality of that you are undervaluing your problems, rather, this means that you recognize the good and the bad, yet you expect that things will go well. This is also consistent with the basic principle of Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) that thoughts influence behavior and emotions (Dias & de Simoni, 2020) [17]. Following the principles of CBT, the power of thoughts to influence the behavior and emotions of a person is so strong that when a person is ruled by cognitive distortions, he may develop symptoms of depression, anxiety, and other mental health problems.

### Theme 2: Perspective-Taking is a Skill that Matters

The second major theme that encompass how participants who scored high in all three constructs under investigation manage their mental health and try their best to remain at their best is the workings of their perspective. This includes the participants’ tendency to focus more on solutions, view difficulties as motivations, and feel hopeful about the future.

#### Focus on Solutions

One participant said that she’s more focused on getting over a bad experience:

*“I’m more of focusing on how can I get over it Sir or how can I find solutions to it. So yes, I can say I am more of a solution-focused person.”* (Participant 1, personal communication, December 8, 2021, Lines 346-347)

Another participant said that when she, for example, fails or got a wrong item in a test, she would not weep over it and be sad, but instead, she tries her best to find the correct answer, and find out where did she went wrong:

*“I think I do fixate and obsess over anything that’s wrong um for example like, when I took a test and like I didn’t know what I was doing most of the time, and at the end of the test, I was kind of um, like down, and I would always like, I’ll be like “why did I do that?” like I could’ve studied more and um, I would try to like, solve it like through them, the correct way to solve the problem that was in the test. S I would try to solve it correctly and when I do solve it correctly, I would be like, I wish I could do it again. Like the test, like why did I do that? Stuff like that.”* (Participant 2, personal communication, December 8, 2021, Lines 446-451)

Focusing on solutions rather than problems is evidently contributing to the attainment of the sound mental health. In psychotherapy, one therapeutic approach is solution-focused brief therapy (SFBT) which focuses more on the future aspect of working through psychological problems, rather than focusing more on the causes of the problems. SFBT were found to be effective in people with depression (Gingerich & Peterson, 2013). Empirical support found SFBT to be more effective when compared to other therapy options, despite its briefer sessions.

#### Viewing Difficulties as Motivations

This goes with the acceptance that life will always have problems, and it depends on the person on how she would



look at these problems. Viewing difficulties as solutions helps an individual to become more resilient and hopeful. As one participant puts it, she sees failures as avenues for her to do better next time:

*“It depends on the situation because sometimes I do blame myself but on other occasions, I see this as an inspiration to do better next time. However, if I were to choose between the two, I would say that I take them as motivation. This is because I have high expectations for myself, and I started to recognize that failure will really be part of my life. As an athlete, we would sometimes lose. So, instead of blaming myself, I tend to make these as my motivation, instead to do better next time.”* (Participant 3, personal communication, January 4, 2022, Lines 168-172)

The high scores were evidently the ones who also do good in their studies, taking in the context of only their own evaluation of their academic performance. Talking to them, I have seen the benefit of looking at problems as motivations rather than looking at them as hindrance to move forward and proceed. This is synonymous to the concept of adversity quotient. Adversity quotient is concerned on how an individual manage, direct, and endure challenges and difficulties in life. In the study of Safi'i *et al.* (2021), adversity quotient was found to have positive impact on students' achievement, learning autonomy, and performance. The high scorers' ability to rise above the adjustments and challenges brought about not just by the pandemic, but also by the changes in the educational landscape has been instrumental in their journey of keeping afloat not just academically, but also psychologically. They displayed a great deal of ego strength that enabled them to still perform satisfactorily in school.

### Feelings of hope about the future

Hopeful thinking may not be one of the signature values or characteristics of adolescents however, data from interviews tells us otherwise. Participants who scored high in all three constructs expressed a great deal of hope about their future. While they are not certain about their specific directions, they are maintaining hopeful dispositions about it.

*“Right now I'm thinking what I would want to have as a goal but sometimes I would get influenced by other things so it changes. I don't know what really my goal in life is, but I feel like I have a path, but I don't think it's open yet.”* (Participant 1, personal communication, December 8, 2021, Lines 96-97)

*“Yes, I have. I am very hopeful that I will become what I want to be someday. It's just that it's quite blurry for now.”* (Participant 2, personal communication, December 8, 2021, Lines 125-126)

*“Hmm I think they're good naman sir. I am hopeful for the future, and I always love to talk to people, especially if I am playing basketball.”* (Participant 3, personal communication, January 4, 2022, Lines 206-207)

When people are confronted with problems and difficulties, one tendency is for them to escape or to stay away from the situation, and try to avoid it as much as they can. Alfred Adler

in his Individual Psychology made mentioned about the safeguarding tendencies with which people use whenever they are faced with problems, and this is to protect themselves from public disgrace. These may include making excuses, standing still or avoiding responsibility by ensuring themselves against any threat of failure, and hesitating or the tendency to procrastinate (Feist *et al.*, 2018).

However, what this study has discovered is the ability of the adolescents to focus more on solutions and not dwell too much on problems. This particular inclination may have been influenced by several factors like their family environments, their models growing up, and the prominence of social media and technology. As adolescents are aging, they may be perceiving a fast-paced world, thus, spending too much time on problems may not be of most appealing for them.

### Theme 3: Recognizing Flaws and Struggles, and their Common Humanity

Another central theme that was very instrumental in participants who scored high in all three constructs involved in the present study is their ability to recognize their own struggles, and the commonality of it among others as well. This theme includes two important points: first is recognizing imperfections, and second is recognizing the commonality personal struggles with others.

#### Recognizing imperfections

One consistent narrative with participants in this cluster is their recognition of their imperfections. Here are significant statements coming from the participants:

*“Yes, sir there are times like that. About my appearance, sometimes when I look at myself in the mirror I don't it find it good that I'm like this, but I still thought to myself that I should be thankful for what I look like because I don't have severe flaws like those people with disabilities.”* (Participant 1, personal communication, December 8, 2021, Lines 339-341)

*“Sometimes. When I look myself in the mirror I like, say something bad but then I just let it go. I have to accept that I am not perfect.”* (Participant 2, personal communication, December 8, 2021, Lines 491-492)

When we analyze the statements, these mostly speak of self-compassion. Accepting our imperfections is a way of giving ourselves a favor not be critical of it. This resembles self-kindness as one of the core components of self-compassion. Often, when a person encounters failures, he would tend to throw harsh words to himself, but would unlikely to say the same harsh words directly to a friend or family member, when they did him wrong. Neff (2003a) <sup>[28]</sup> reported that when asked directly, people tend to say they are kinder to others when compared to themselves. The western culture, for example, had placed great emphasis on being kinder to others, but not so much to themselves (Neff & Dahm, 2015) <sup>[29]</sup>.

#### Recognizing the commonality of personal struggles with other

Aside from recognizing their imperfections, participants in this cluster also communicated how they recognize that they are not the only ones struggling, that others are also experiencing it, maybe even worse that how they experience

it.

*“When I experience difficulties, I also think that these are also experienced by other people because I think that the world is a big place and there is always a possibility that people have the same problems that I do. I also think that other people experience difficulties that are greater than mine and that makes me feel like I can solve my problems. It somehow gives me courage because I know that other people also solved the challenges that I faced.”* (Participant 3, personal communication, January 4, 2022, Lines 162-165)

These significant statements from the participants all resemble the common humanity as one of the core components of self-compassion. The central thought of common humanity is an individual’s recognition that everyone commits mistakes, fails, and gets messed up at some point in their lives (Neff & Dahm, 2015) <sup>[29]</sup>. Imperfections serve as one of the stillest connections among humans. The concept of common humanity helps an individual realize that he is not alone in his battles because other people are also having their taste of failures. However, when an individual becomes too overwhelmed with life’s difficulties, he tends to feel isolated and thinks that he is alone in his battle. This tunnel vision makes an individual’s suffering even worse (Neff, 2011).

#### **Theme 4: The Self in Relation to Others**

The last theme on this cluster talks about the tendency of how the high scorers tend to have high degree of self-reliance, yet also highlights the importance of social support in their journey towards achieving a sound mental health. This theme includes discussion on self-sufficiency/self-mastery, self-care/self-love, and social support from family and friends.

#### **Self-sufficiency/Self-Mastery**

When asked about how she manages to keep herself afloat even in the midst of a challenging times, one participant answered:

*“Well I think that um, in this situation, uh you can’t really think about anyone else but yourself because you’re just at home. And I think that it’s also, like a time for people to think about themselves than to think about what’s going on around them like when they’re at school um, face to face, they mostly have a lot of people around them like their classmates, their teachers and stuff like that so they would always like worry about what’s going on um, around them but now that they’re like at home, it’s just mostly them for most of the time so I think that like their self-compassion grow.”* (Participant 2, personal communication, December 8, 2021, Lines 383-388)

#### **Self-Care/Self-Love**

Another highlighted phenomenon within this cluster is the ability of these participants to show self-care, and or self-love towards themselves. This is evident of the high level of self-compassion that they have. Here are significant statements coming from the participants regarding how they managed to take care of themselves even in the middle of a pandemic:

*“Um like taking care of my body like exercising doing*

*skincare routines, uh, just chilling, like yeah eating foods that are healthy for me.”* (Participant 2, personal communication, December 8, 2021, Lines 396-397)

*“Yes, I can agree that senior high school students are doing well in terms of showing care and concern to themselves because they have more opportunities to do self-care activities. What I mean by this is that they have more time for hobbies, self-improvement, and relaxation due to the flexibility of most online classes. Based on my personal experience, I can say that I am doing well in terms of showing care and concern for myself because of the time given to me. I fix my schedule to always have time for my hobbies to show care to myself.”* (Participant 3, personal communication, January 4, 2022, Lines 191-196)

#### **Social Support from Family and Friends**

While it is evident that high scorers have high inclinations towards being self-sufficient, they also are recognizing the important role of social support in their journey towards achieving a sound mental health. As one participant puts it:

*“I think sir it’s both because my family supports me, same goes with my friends, but I think what I need most is myself, hence in times of downfall, I prepare and trust myself because I believe that it is yourself who can truly help you.”* (Participant 1, personal communication, December 8, 2021, Lines 43-45)

*“Well, I think it’s with one of those like my parents they helped me with it like yes, they helped me to be the person I am today and yeah, from then on, I just like try to do the things confidently.”* (Participant 2, personal communication, December 8, 2021, Lines 341-342)

In the study of Rutenfrans-Stupar *et al.* (2019) <sup>[39]</sup>, self-mastery has been shown to be related with social participation and quality of life. Self-mastery also played a mediating role between optimism, and social participation and quality of life. The study also revealed that social participation and health are associated with self-mastery, and the absence of external locus of control should be viewed as an aspect of self-mastery.

In relation to social support, the study of Harandi *et al.* (2017) highlighted the correlation between social support and mental health. The authors recommended that it is important to strengthen social support in vulnerable populations like women, elderly, patients, workers, and students.

#### **Sense of Coherence, Self-Compassion, and Mental Well-being in Low Scorers**

The second cluster focuses on identifying themes that would describe how participants who have scored low on all three constructs construe their experiences. There are four needs that arise from conversations with these participants: The Need to Address Inner Critical Blames, The Need for Cognitive Restructuring, The Need for Self-Sufficiency, and The Need for Emotional Regulation.

#### **Theme 5: The Need to Address Inner Critical Blames**

What is evident in low scorers are the presence of cognitive distortions or patterns of irrational thinking, and their tendency to undervalue taking care of themselves. In this theme, two (2) subthemes were identified: *Self-blame and*



*Self-Care is not a priority.*

### **Self-Blame**

*“There are times that I consider the failure as inspiration to do better next time, but usually, I blame myself for being a failure because I think I don’t have any potential in everything, that why I just couldn’t be like the others? Why couldn’t I just be my ideal self? These questions keep running inside my head whenever I fail to succeed. I’m being like this as I don’t like disappointments especially from the others.”* (Participant 6, personal communication, January 3, 2022, Lines 120-123)

Self-compassionate individuals recognize their negative emotions, bestow kindness upon themselves, and recognize that they are part of suffering humanity. This is what is lacking with the participants in this cluster, as they try to be critical and harsh on themselves, instead of bestowing kindness, care, and concern towards themselves. According to Neff and Germer (2018), in trying to understand self-compassion, researchers should note that it has “yin” and “yang” qualities, which stems from the Chinese philosophy of opposite yet interdependent qualities like male and female, good and bad, etc. Self-compassion is yin in the sense that it leads toward comforting, validating, and soothing in times of suffering. It is yang in the sense that it leads toward protecting, motivating, and providing self-security. In trying to analyze the means of the “yin” and “yang” sub-scales of the Self-Compassion Scale, it should be directly observed that yin sub-scales (Self-Kindness, Common Humanity, and Mindfulness) should have higher means compared to yang sub-scales (Self-Judgment, Isolation, and Over-identification). Yang sub-scales are reversed scored, which means high score denotes a more self-compassionate response, and in turn should somehow match with its yin counterpart.

### **Self-Care is Not a Priority**

In the high scorers, self-care was evident. In the low scorers, while they were engaging in self-care activities, these self-care activities were inconsistent, and were somehow not a priority.

*“Yes sir, sometimes I really forget to take care of myself. Right now, sir I have cough sir. Due to lack of sleep trying to fit in all my works in order to pass sir, while not leaving out my responsibilities in the house. Taking care of my child?? I really try to ah handle my time sir. So that’s why I sometimes forgot to take vitamins to sleep eat umm and drink a lot of water umm. Basically, not caring for myself sir while putting others first before me.”* (Participant 4, personal communication, December 10, 2021, Lines 179-183)

*“Unahon gd b ang academic sir. So like nadulaan kana time nga mag care simo self since sang stress man sa family kag sa academics naga mixed man so wala na self-care.”* [I really have to prioritize academics, Sir, that’s why I don’t have time anymore to take care of myself since the stress coming from my family and academics are all mixing up, so there’s really no self-care at all] (Participant 5, personal communication, December 6, 2021, Lines 101-102)

A study of Neely, Schallert, Mohammed, Roberts, and Chen

(2009) <sup>[9]</sup> reported that self-compassionate people feel less fear of failure, and when it happens that they fail, they are not reluctant to try again. Self-compassion studies across years also highlighted the role of the construct to positive health behaviors like sticking to diet (Adams & Leary, 2007), reducing smoking (Kelly, Zuroff, Foa, & Gilbert, 2009), help-seeking (medical treatment) behaviors (Terry & Leary, 2011) <sup>[46]</sup>, and exercising (Magnus, Kowalski, & McHugh, 2010). Other researches had linked self-compassion to personal initiative, self-efficacy, and intrinsic motivation (Neff *et al.*, 2005; Neff *et al.*, 2007). A meta-analysis conducted by Baillargeon (2017) using twenty-six (26) empirical studies and an over-all 7,662 participants, found out that self-compassion and motivation have a positive significant correlation. Also, a study by Magnus (2007) reported self-compassion to be positively correlated with intrinsic motivation and negatively correlated with both extrinsic and introjected motivations.

### **Theme 6: The Need for Cognitive Restructuring**

Another need that came out of conversations with low scorers is the need for them to restructure their cognitions. While cognitive restructuring is evident in high scorer-participants, patterns of irrational thinking and functional fixedness. This includes Presence of Anxiety, Lack of Motivation, and Uncertainty of the Future.

#### **Presence of Anxiety**

Noticeably, presence of anxiety can be observed in low scorer-participants. While anxiety on a normal level is healthy, because it prompts us to be prepared for something, or to take action, anxiety could also be unhealthy if its pervasive and becomes a normal part of one’s life, that it starts to impair one’s functioning.

*“It’s really making me anxious sir, because I wanted to look like this, or that, pero wala man ko choice but not to focus on it nalang. Pero I can say nga it really bothers me, even up to now hehe daw wala nako gani mayo gapangispiyo sir.”* [It’s really making me anxious sir, because I wanted to look like this, or that, but I don’t have a choice nut to focus on it. But I can say that it really bothers me even up to now. I would rarely even look at my self in the mirror, Sir] (Participant 5, personal communication, December 6, 2021, Lines 129-131) In the study of Alibudbud (2021), it was found out that the rate of depression and anxiety among students have increased over the past years. It was also found out that students are more susceptible to developing depression and anxiety problems when compared to the general population. The study highlighted that, students who have difficulty coping with their studies have an increased risk for depression and anxiety. The study also communicated the role of institutional mental health care programs to decrease the risk of students in developing depression and anxiety symptoms.

#### **Lack of Motivation**

Lack of motivation was also evident in participants belonging to this category. In the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition (DSM-5), one of the major features in diagnosing major depressive disorder is the lack of motivation or pleasure to things that are once enjoyed (APA, 2013).

The participants were noticeable demotivated to function as they are not used to this kind of set-up, or even not used to not seeing their peers and talk about their experiences through

a cup of refreshment or a good day at the beach.

*“Umm. Right now sir ah. Really can't say yes but It's not really a no. but I've been doing, my daily life is revolving about work and school sir. So, those two things something of a pleasure like playing games is part of my stress reliever and going to school is more of my obligation so, I can't really put an answer to that sir.”* (Participant 4, personal communication, December 10, 2021, Lines 99-101)

### Uncertainty of the Future

One of the most notable characteristics that were found in participants who all scored high in all constructs being explored was their maintenance of hopeful thinking. However, the opposite is observed in the low scorers. Low scorers have consistent narrative of the uncertainty of their future based on their own evaluation.

*“Umm. Before sir I have that clear goal but right now it's the, its as if it does not matter again. I'm still not quite sure about the course I would like to take and not sure If not really or if I'm in the standards or I can perform well in the course I am about to take sir. That why I am 50/50.”* (Participant 4, personal communication, December 10, 2021, Lines 54-56)

The present researcher has published a study on the mediating role of hope in self-compassion and career and talent development self-efficacy which paved the way for the creation of a career guidance program infused with these constructs. The literature regarding hope has viewed it as a character strength, as several researches on character strength highlighted the important role of hope which correlates with life satisfaction and happiness (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004; Shimai, Otake, Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2006; Buschor, Proyer, & Ruch, 2013; Martinez-Marti & Ruch, 2014), and with work satisfaction across occupations (Peterson, Stephens, Park, Lee, & Seligman, 2010; Slezackova & Skrabska, 2013). In the field of education, hope has been associated with better academic achievement (Park & Peterson, 2009), college satisfaction (Lounsbury, Fisher, Levy, & Welsh, 2009), and positive classroom behavior (Wagner & Ruch, 2015). Chan (2009) also found out that educators who have high levels of hope tend to be more satisfied with their lives and exhibit more positive emotions. In addition, Chang and Banks (2007) found out that hopeful thinking is linked to lesser tendency to develop depression, because hopeful thinking makes an individual adaptive when it comes to facing life's problems. Hope has also been viewed to predict greater life satisfaction (Valle, Huebner, & Suldo, 2006), and produce greater academic, athletic, job performances (Hoy, Suldo, & Mendez, 2013; Kemer & Atik, 2012; Marques, Lopez, & Mitchell, 2013; Peterson & Byron, 2008; Savage & Smith, 2007).

### Theme 7: The Need for Self-Sufficiency

Another important theme that rose out of the interview with the low scorers are their need for self-sufficiency. Self-sufficiency was a major indication of well-being for the participants who scored high in the three constructs involved in this study. Low scorers were found to have signs of dependency, sets distance, and apathy.

### Sign of Dependency

While this paper is not in any position to diagnose any participant by only using interview as a tool, this attempts to communicate the risk of individuals who show signs of dependency in developing dependent personality disorder. Dependent personality disorder includes avoidance of personal responsibility, difficulty being alone, fear of abandonment, oversensitivity to criticism, pessimism and lack of self-confidence, and trouble making decisions.

*“Based on my Personal experience, I totally agree with this one because there are times that whenever I hear some negative feedbacks from the others or should I say judgements from them, I will usually downgrade and judge myself while looking into the mirror and will exactly hoarse the negative words to myself that comes from the other people. With this, I will automatically think that whatever I do, I just can't satisfy the others, so what's the point of showing care to myself?”* (Participant 6, personal communication, January 3, 2022, Lines 71-75)

### Setting Distance

Another meaningful extraction that came out from conversation with the low scorers is their tendency to set distance, rather than confronting the situations. Setting distance could mean that they do not want to endure the possible negative consequences if they confront problems and people, or they do not trust their ability to face their problems squarely.

*“I think the aspect of my personality that I don't like is being an Introvert. Usually, I'm shy to express myself with the others, I prefer to be quiet as much as possible to avoid judgements and negative feedbacks. But I don't like it as I think I have no one to comfort me, to accompany me, and to entertain me whenever I needed someone. I deal with it by trying to get along with my friends and try to be open with them to get advices.”* (Participant 6, personal communication, January 3, 2022, Lines 126-130)

### Apathy

While apathy is not considered as an official defense mechanism, how it operates resembles like that of a defense mechanism. In psychoanalysis, defense mechanisms are used by the ego to prevent itself from feeling the anxiety brought about by the conflicting demands of the id, the superego, and the outside environment. With apathy, this is also brought about by conflict of thinking about the emotional and psychological prerequisites in confronting situation, and the thought of suffering the consequences of such actions.

*“I do the same, Sir. I am not used to arguments, and even if I have a lot of things to say, or even if I want to argue, I would choose to stay silent instead.”* (Participant 6, personal communication, January 3, 2022, Lines 45-46)

*“Sometimes Sir when I am being blamed for something I truly didn't do. But in order to keep., to keep the story short and end the problems right there and I tend to keep quite but when I really know m hurting my own feelings sir, but in order to, in order for problems immediately I just tend t to keep to myself but it really bugs me and I'll*

*be agitated in everything for hours trying to calm myself.”* (Participant 4, personal communication, December 10, 2021, Lines 142-145)

In this particular theme, Karen Horney's Psychoanalytic Social theory would be of most application. While this paper does not position low-scorer participants as neurotic, these certain trends of behavior may lead to something pathological if not prevented. Horney made mention about the neurotic trends with which both normal and neurotic people would use in their attempt to solve basic conflicts (Feist *et al.*, 2018). The three neurotic trends are (1) moving toward people, in which compliant people protect themselves against feelings of helplessness by attaching themselves to other people; (2) moving against people, in which aggressive people protect themselves against perceived hostility of others by exploiting others; and (3) moving away from people, in which detached people protect themselves against feelings of isolation by appearing arrogant and aloof.

### **Theme 8: The Need for Emotional Regulation**

Another main takeaway from the interview with low scorers is their inability to regulate their emotions. Going back to the characteristics of the high scorers, emotional regulation was very evident, which suggests that they have been successful in making sure that they react to situations accordingly, and that they know how to regulate the necessary emotional output which would only be proportionate to the situation at hand.

### **Lack of Emotional Control**

Emotional control refers to an individual's capacity to exercise control over responding to situations requiring emotional output. Emotional control is concerned about regulating both the negative and the positive emotions making sure that emotions are expressed in a socially tolerable and flexible way.

*“I think it's hard to control emotions especially when I'm in the serious situation just like with the people whom I love, hurt me. But sometimes, I can control it like I'm just gonna keep quiet and just overthink and cry at night.”* (Participant 6, personal communication, January 3, 2022, Lines 56-57)

### **Managing Disappointments and Handling Expectations**

One area with which low scorers do not do well as well is on how they manage their disappointments, and on how they handle their expectations. Throughout the interviews, the participants were sending a signal that they have difficulty handling situations which involves disappointments especially coming from friends and family members. This may mean that they have no internal resource to combat this experience, and this may be due to their lower tolerance to stress, and the inability to develop emotional resilience in childhood.

### **This was the response of one participant, when asked why she is pressuring herself to do well in academics.**

*“There are times that I consider the failure as inspiration to do better next time, but usually, I blame myself for being a failure because I think I don't have any potential in everything, that why I just couldn't be like the others?”*

*Why couldn't I just be my ideal self? These questions keep running inside my head whenever I fail to succeed. I'm being like this as I don't like disappointments especially from the others.”* (Participant 6, personal communication, January 3, 2022, Lines 120-123)

In the study of Cote *et al.* (2014), they found out that the ability to implement emotion regulation strategies is closely linked with sound well-being and financial success following series of experiments conducted in laboratories. This may resemble that implementing emotion regulation strategies leads to happier and more successful life. In the study of Silvers (2022), adolescent stage was considered to be the pivotal period for emotion regulation development. The study explored on caregiving experiences as having outsized role in shaping emotion regulation during adolescence. The study also explored on behavioral and neurobiological indices of emotion regulation that develops in adolescence. This tells us that adolescence is a very critical stage of development with which a lot of changes are happening. Some adolescents may progress towards growth, while others develop psychopathology. This gives the impression that emotion regulation is a skill that every individual, more importantly, every adolescent should develop.

### **Integration of the Quantitative Results and Qualitative Themes**

Through integrating both qualitative and quantitative data, the cognitive faculty of an individual asserts its superiority in how an individual organizes and manages stressors in the environment and on how to stay mentally sharp, in general. It was evident that the mechanism by which high scorers deal with everyday hassles is intrapersonal, much like the nature of the constructs under investigation. These manifestations are intrapersonal in that these individuals focus more on mastering their internal thought and emotional processes, including how they regulate their emotions, how they look at situations, manage expectations, utilize coping, and others alike.

Following the principle of the Cognitive Behavior Theory, which states that there is a mutual relationship among Cognition, Emotion, and Behavior (Corey, 2014) <sup>[11]</sup>, participants display a great deal of control over these faculties, evidently mastering their cognitive faculty more than the others. The participants showed how cognitive restructuring makes a difference in how they survive every day and how it almost entirely sets them different from the low scorers. Next is the communal spirit of acceptance. One of the indications for one to say that he is self-compassionate is when he looks at his struggles and challenges as part of his shared identity with other community members. In Filipino Psychology, there is a concept called *Kapwa*, translated as shared identity, or collective identity of the Filipino Culture (Pe-Pua & Marcelino, 2000). The idea of *kapwa* is telling us that once we recognize that we are sharing a part of ourselves with others, we will no longer feel alienated and isolated. Within the concept of self-compassion, this is referred to as common humanity. Common humanity was evident in the participants, in a sense that they recognize that while they are struggling, others are, too.

Furthermore, the low scorers provided us with insight into their needs. There is no hiding that participants who scored low on the scales given to them struggle to use consistent coping strategies, the battle with negative, self-defeating



thoughts, and the struggle to regain control over emotions above others. Cognitive distortions are faulty thinking patterns that prevent an individual from maximizing his potential and eventually being unproductive for most day hours (Corey, 2014) <sup>[11]</sup>.

And finally, the exercise of control over emotions. Through the interviews, it was also evident that low scorers have problems with emotion regulation, or the capacity to properly

channel emotional reactions, in a productive and controlled manner. Emotional regulation is a skill that has to be mastered by every individual. Empirical evidence shows that emotional regulation is linked to an overall sense of success. It encompasses even our capacity to be confident with our skills and abilities, thereby touching other facets of our functioning (Hu *et al.*, 2014).

**Table 5: Joint Display of the Quantitative Results and Qualitative Themes**

Quantitative Results	Qualitative Themes	Metainferences
A high degree of sense of coherence, level of self-compassion, and degree of mental well-being	Theme 1: Internal Thought and Emotional Processes Make the Difference Theme 2: Perspective-taking is a Skill that Matters Theme 3: Recognizing Flaws and Struggles and Their Common Humanity Theme 4: The Self in Relation to Others	A. Cognitive Faculty Asserts its Superiority B. Outlook Matters C. Communal Spirit of Acceptance D. Harmonious relationships with self and others
Low degree of sense of coherence, level of self-compassion, and degree of mental well-being	Theme 1: The Need to Address Inner Critical Blames Theme 2: The Need for Cognitive Restructuring Theme 3: The Need for Self-Sufficiency Theme 4: The Need for Emotional Regulation	A. Conflict Between You and Yourself. B. Being Trapped in a Vicious Cycle of Irrational Thoughts C. Knowing thyself is the beginning of productive personality development. D. Exercising Control is Necessary.

**Conclusion**

The participants' ability to manage and create a systematic approach in dealing with their stressors is instrumental in how they show care and concern to themselves and vice-versa. Self-compassionate individuals are more adaptive to stress and better cope with problems in the immediate environment. Participants who also reported to have high inclinations towards showing care and concern towards themselves are less likely to experience or endure severe mental health problems. They offer the ability to control internal thought and emotional processes and eventually manage emotions, while those who have a low overall sense of mental well-being signal the need to address inner self-defeating thoughts and the need to take control over themselves and emotional processes.

**Recommendations**

The study results served as baseline data for concerned stakeholders to create mental health initiatives in their respective institutions. The administrators of the Augustinian schools may use the results of this study to prompt offices and units involved in mental health services of their schools to craft and implement relevant mental health for students. As stipulated in the Philippine Mental Health Law, each institution is mandated to create an institutional mental health program to buffer and prevent mental health problems from worsening.

Alongside these recommendations, the present study also introduces a new counseling approach that will help the guidance counselors in the Augustinian schools. They can add this approach to their current resources in providing counseling and psychotherapy services to students.

**Intrapersonal Counseling**

Intrapersonal counseling is grounded on the assumption that the elements of the external environment (incoherent self) play a minute role in the person's journey towards achieving

good mental well-being. The analysis of the internal environment (coherent self) will better aid the individual's journey towards growth.

This counseling approach rests on the principle of the Salutogenic model, which emphasizes growth and journey towards well-being instead of focusing on the pathological aspect. The Salutogenic model recognizes that individuals use internal and external resources to cope with stress. These resources are termed generalized resistance resources (GRR). While the model did not explicitly mention which GRR is enormously influential in an individual's coping, the current counseling approach highlights internal resources as the primary factors that could lead to sound evaluation of overall health.

**Basic Philosophy:** This counseling approach rests on the following premises:

1. The journey to healing takes more of an intrapersonal route than the interpersonal one.
2. Human beings have an internal state of psychological balance to achieve sound mental health.
3. The environments (incoherent and coherent selves) themselves are unnecessary, but our interpretations of these environments matter.
4. Pathologizing is the last resort. When all efforts can no longer fix in the internal scripts, that's where mental health problems come in.

**Key Concepts**

1. The journey to healing takes more of an intrapersonal route than the interpersonal one.

This approach recognizes the individuality of a person. A person is a unified unit or entity comprised of his thoughts, emotions, and personality. When a person encounters destabilizations or is *defined as a state whereby one's coherent self is threatened*, the person has to look for ways to bring back his unified self. Unified self is *defined as the*

*harmony among one's thoughts, emotions, and personality.*

### Signs that a person is in a state of destabilization:

- a. Presence of unwanted thoughts that have no identified origins, leading to cognitive distortions, and resulting to:
- b. Acting in an odd or bizarre behavior which is a reflection of inner tension and may take it its worst form, which is:
- c. Alienation of self by engaging in self-destructive behaviors (vices, self-harm, etc.)

The unified self can only be puzzled back when the individual recognizes that there is a destabilization. When a person acknowledges a destabilization, the person has to engage in healthy thought withdrawal practice or *a technique whereby cognitive distortions are challenged and actively replaced with rational thought patterns*. When one successfully participates in the thought withdrawal practice, he will be able to have a unified self again.

2. Human beings have an internal state of psychological balance to achieve sound mental health.

This approach believes that there is a state of psychological balance within each individual. This balance is known as *Gleichgewicht*, a *german word directly translated as equilibrium*. This equilibrium has to be maintained most of the time to maintain good mental well-being. Stressors in the immediate environment can threaten this equilibrium. When this equilibrium is threatened, this can lead to destabilizations. There are two ways on how a person can protect his state of psychological balance:

First, the person has to make sure that the immediate environment is conducive for peaceful living; and Second, the person has to filter the information to take in selectively. This phenomenon is called indoctrination, when negatively-rooted information enters and threatens the unified self. Indoctrinations are prerequisites but not necessarily leading to destabilizations. These indoctrinations could be in the form of insults, depreciation, negative evaluations, and others alike. Sources of indoctrinations can be from family members, co-workers, classmates, and any other elements of the immediate individual environment;

3. The environments (incoherent and coherent self) themselves are unnecessary, but the interpretations we have of these environments matter.

In intrapersonal counseling, the term **environments** refer to *the unified self's components*. While the approach focuses more on the intrapersonal workings of healing, this doesn't discount the role of the external environment. However, this is not given high importance in the journey towards recovery. The internal environment is considered to be your coherent self. The part of your unified self that represents your identity from within. One's coherent self encompasses all the internal aspects of one's self. It includes one's ability to communicate with oneself or engage in internal scripts. Internal scripts can either be ideal or non-ideal. *Ideal internal scripts* are those conversations between the person and himself that lead to fruitful behaviors, like producing prudent decisions, advocating for self-care measures, recognizing one's struggles, the hardships of others, and other behaviors of the name nature. *Non-ideal internal scripts* are those conversations that lead to anxiety, depression, and stress. *Non-ideal internal scripts* are produced when there are strong indoctrinations or pressure from the incoherent self.

The **incoherent self**, or the external environment, is an outer extension of the unified self. The incoherent self is termed "incoherent" because it doesn't adhere to maintaining any balance or equilibrium. It perceives worthy information to be taken in by the unified self, regardless of its nature. When the pressure from the incoherent self makes its way to the coherent self as indoctrinations, it threatens the **Gleichgewicht**. This threat may further lead to destabilizations.

However, intrapersonal counseling stresses that its typical for the incoherent self to make its way into the coherent self. As society advances, the pressures and threats from the external environment are also becoming more robust. A great deal of focus is on how the coherent self handles the indoctrinations from the external environment. Individuals who have a very strong sense of unified self may not be shaken or threatened by these pressures. However, when an individual has a weak sense of unified self, he may not be able to engage in ideal internal script with himself properly. This scenario increases the chances of indoctrinations to threaten the inner psychological balance, leading to destabilizations.

4. Pathologizing is the last resort. When all efforts can no longer fix the internal scripts, that's where mental health problems come in.

It is given that intrapersonal counseling recognizes that destabilizations can lead to mental health disorders. However, this approach does not recognize pathologizing as the integral aspect of helping the individual bring back his unified self. This approach recognizes that most non-ideal internal scripts are not beyond saving. Internal mechanisms can also address and turn these non-ideals into ideal ones.

*The ultimate goal of intrapersonal counseling is to bring back the unified self. It addresses destabilizations and prevents indoctrinations from threatening the coherent self.*

### Techniques for Counseling

1. **Thought Withdrawal Practice:** A technique whereby cognitive distortions are challenged and actively replaced with rational thought patterns. This practice lets the counselor and the counselee identify irrational thought patterns and non-ideal internal scripts and replace them with rational ones.
2. **Internal Scripts Rehearsals:** When the counselee presents with non-ideal internal scripts, the counselor will engage clients in rehearsals until he takes in ideal internal scripts.
3. **Examination of External Environment:** The counselor will work with the client to identify factors in the external environment (incoherent self) that lead to layers of indoctrination. When these are identified, they will be addressed one by one.
4. **Mindfulness-Based Filters:** Mindfulness exercise would be beneficial in trying to construct ideal internal scripts. Counselees will be subjected to mindfulness exercises every counseling session.

### The Role of the Counselor

In intrapersonal counseling, the counselor plays a role of a director. As a director, the counselor assists in helping clients identify internal resources which would be instrumental in their journey towards regaining their unified self. The counselor is only an added element that helps set what is needed and what is ideal, but the success of the counseling

still rests on the client's quality of relationship with himself.

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