

1 **Exploring well-being outcomes at an iconic Chinese LGBT event: A PERMA model** 2 **perspective**

3

4 **Abstract:** The well-being of participants at major destination events has received little
5 empirical attention in the literature. This paper explores LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual,
6 Transgender & other sexual minority) event participants' hedonic and eudaimonic well-being
7 at the iconic Hangzhou Rainbow Marathon (HRM) in China. PERMA (Positive Emotions,
8 Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement) psychological model of human
9 flourishing was adopted to analyze hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. Mixed qualitative
10 methods, in the form of semi-structured in-depth interviews and a focus group, were used to
11 address the research aim. This data was supported by informal personal observations at the
12 marathon site. Distinctions among participants' experiences were identified, resulting in
13 slightly different perceptions of PERMA elements for paraders, volunteers and organizers.
14 Through this role-based perspective, an event specific PERMA model emerged. Implications
15 for event organizers and marketing specialists are provided.

16 **Keywords:** LGBT tourism; pride parade; well-being; PERMA; China.

17

18 **1. Introduction**

19 LGBT (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender & other sexual minority) tourism is a global, yet
20 still relatively under-researched topic (Hahm, Ro, & Olson, 2017; Markwell & Waitt, 2009;
21 Vorobjovas-Pinta & Hardy, 2016). The majority of LGBT tourism, marketing and events
22 studies were conducted in the late 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s, with most published research
23 being conducted in Western countries, notably the United States, United Kingdom, Australia,
24 and Canada. Tourism studies have been typically concerned with levels of expenditure,
25 earnings and travel arrangements of LGBT tourists (Vorobjovas-Pinta & Hardy, 2016). Despite
26 the recent rise in LGBT research in tourism, studies have not included an analysis of the well-
27 being outcomes arising from participating in LGBT events (Binnie & Klesse, 2011; Waitt,
28 Markwell, & Gorman-Murray, 2008). This paper investigates participants' responses to an

29 iconic Chinese LGBT parade and undertakes an in-depth exploration of well-being in event
30 engagement and participation (Getz & Page, 2016). It aims to examine the dynamic
31 development of the hedonic and eudaimonic well-being resulting from participation in this
32 event. Considering the importance of the LGBT community's well-being as well as the cultural
33 and institutional differences between Western and non-Western countries (Vorobjovas-Pinta &
34 Hardy, 2016), this study adds to the current understanding of LGBT's event experiences.

35 Among various LGBT-related events, the annual LGBT pride parades held in major world
36 cities are the most influential events as they generate substantial revenue for the tourism
37 industry. In fact, before the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the sector, the economic value of this
38 market was estimated in excess of US\$ 75 billion per annum in the United States alone (Hahm
39 et al., 2017). The LGBT pride parade is an outdoor event celebrating LGBT social
40 achievements, their legal rights, and a sense of pride (Ammaturo, 2015). A few scholars have
41 explored a range of topics relating to LGBT pride parades, including the parade experience of
42 LGBT participants (Hahm et al., 2017), the space and various roles in the parade (Markwell &
43 Waitt, 2009) and LGBT's rights and social change brought by the parade itself (Davidson &
44 McDonald, 2017; de Jong, 2017; Hartal, 2018). Participants of the LGBT global pride parades
45 are mostly white gay males, well-educated, and middle-class youth (Peterson, Wahlström, &
46 Wennerhag, 2017). Yet, research thus far has largely overlooked Asian countries and their
47 LGBT citizens. It is timely to conduct empirical research in non-Western countries, such as
48 China, to enrich our understanding of this group. China has a large LGBT population, with an
49 estimated size of 30 million (UNDP, 2016); however, it is a relatively conservative country,
50 shaped by long-lasting traditional cultural values which emphasize family and filial piety (Hsu
51 & Huang, 2016). Sexual minorities in China are still sometimes seen to possibly jeopardize
52 family coherence and are thus not well accepted at both family and societal levels. There is
53 discrimination and stigmatization towards the LGBT community (Hua, Yang, & Goldsen,
54 2019). Despite the LGBT pride parade being a celebration of LGBT identity at both collective
55 and individual levels (Hahm et al., 2017; McClendon, 2014), the psychological benefits to the
56 individual of participating in the parade remain unexplored. This study aims to address this
57 knowledge gap.

58 **2. Literature Review**

59 *2.1 LGBT research in tourism and events*

60 The LGBT community has actively engaged in travel-related activities for hundreds of years
61 (Clift & Wilkins, 1995). In the 18th century, upper-class homosexual and well-educated men
62 from Northern Europe took a Grand Tour to the Mediterranean region in search of a warmer
63 climate, exotic cultures and the companionship of men (Vorobjovas-Pinta & Hardy, 2016). This
64 phenomenon was termed as homosexual tourism by Aldrich (1993). It was not until the
65 Stonewall Riots in 1969 (a series of spontaneous, violent demonstrations by members of the
66 LGBT community against a police raid in the United States) that LGBT tourism and events
67 research started to gain greater visibility (Hahm et al., 2017; Hartal, 2018; Vorobjovas-Pinta,
68 2018).

69 LGBT tourism and event research topics are diverse yet start to attract attention from the
70 scholarship discussing the typology of various events and tourism activities (Backman, 2018;
71 Robles, Galvão, & Pereira, 2015). Studies have focused on the use of LGBT tourism spaces in
72 large cities like San Francisco (Boyd, 2011), Manchester (Pritchard, Morgan, & Sedgley, 2002),
73 and Sydney (de Jong, 2017). There are also studies on the use of LGBT facilities such as gay
74 bars (Pritchard, Morgan, & Sedgley, 1998), gay and lesbian cafés (Blichfeldt, Chor, & Milan,
75 2013), and specialized hotel resorts (Vorobjovas-Pinta, 2018). The tourism spaces form safe
76 havens for LGBT communities to express themselves freely (Blichfeldt et al., 2013; Boyd,
77 2011; Vorobjovas-Pinta, 2018). The function of these tourism spaces differs among groups of
78 different sexual orientations and gender identity. For example, Poria (2006) discovered that the
79 tourist experience of a lesbian may differ from a gay male tourist due to contrasting perceptions
80 of those popular spaces. Transgender tourists have also been found to perceive some well-
81 recognized LGBT spaces as threatening (Olson & Reddy-Best, 2019). It appears the nature of
82 space has a major impact on the tourism experience of LGBT people. Despite the negative
83 experiences occurring in some of these spaces, identity building and strengthening of bonds
84 were identified as key positive outcomes from being in such spaces. The literature shows that
85 attempts to successfully construct or reinforce one's identity of being a member of the LGBT

86 community in non-habitual environments served as an essential motivation for LGBT people
87 to travel (Herek, 1984; Hughes, 1997; Pritchard et al., 1998). The acceptance of LGBT identity
88 also plays an important role in on-site behavior and tourism demand for LGBT spaces
89 (Therkelsen, Blichfeldt, Chor, & Ballegaard, 2013).

90 In addition to space and identity studies, the consumption patterns of LGBT tourists have been
91 extensively studied. For example, Coon (2012), Melián-González, Moreno-Gil, and Araña
92 (2011) and Weeden, Lester, and Jarvis (2016) explored how disposable income, educational
93 background, travel frequency, and consumption patterns of LGBT people influence their
94 tourism experience. Motivations that drive LGBT tourists to visit destinations worldwide have
95 been examined by various researchers and include: engaging in social and sexual encounters
96 (Clift & Forrest, 1999; Hughes & Deutsch, 2010; Vorobjovas-Pinta, 2018), escaping
97 heterosexual oppressive environments of habitual residences (Hughes, 2002; Pritchard &
98 Morgan, 2000), seeking a safe and comfortable holiday atmosphere (Casey, 2009; Vincke, &
99 van Heeringen, 2004) and experiencing specific cultures and events (Browne, 2009; Hahm et
100 al., 2017).

101 Apart from research specifically targeting tourists and LGBT spaces, LGBT parades have also
102 gained some popularity among tourism and events researchers (de Jong, 2017; Markwell &
103 Waitt, 2009; Waitt et al., 2008). These intensively marketed events contribute to the political
104 visibility of the LGBT community but also generate substantial revenue for the destination
105 (Ammaturo, 2015). As previously mentioned, among scant research concerning this issue,
106 representative topics include LGBT parade participants' experience (Hahm et al., 2017), the
107 space and its role in a parade (Markwell & Waitt, 2009), and investigations about LGBT's
108 rights and social change brought by the parade per se (Davidson & McDonald, 2017; de Jong,
109 2017; Hartal, 2018). Examination of these studies suggested that participants of LGBT pride
110 parades are mostly white gay men – they are typically well-educated, middle strata youth, and
111 rich in political resources (Peterson et al., 2017).

112 Despite the studies discussed so far, by and large, LGBT events have attracted little research
113 attention. It has been suggested that LGBT events create safe spaces for identity construction,

114 dissolve boundaries among heteronormative communities and LGBT communities, and
115 counter marginalisation and stigmatisation (Lewis & Markwell, 2021; Ong, Lewis, &
116 Vorobjovas-Pinta, 2020; Vorobjovas-Pinta & Hardy, 2021). However, psychological well-
117 being outcomes of LGBT event experiences are still underexplored. There is also a general
118 dearth of research about LGBT event experiences, as perceived by Asian gay men.

119 Wong and Tolkach (2017) took the first step by examining factors influencing Asian gay men's
120 travel decisions and their classification of gay attractions. More recently, Ong and Goh (2018)
121 conducted a case study of a prominent LGBT event in Singapore, entitled Pink Dot, that serves
122 as an agent of promoting social change. The authors pointed out that the voices of Asian LGBT
123 event attendees have not been heard (Ong & Goh, 2018). In China, due to deep-rooted cultural
124 values and other factors (e.g., one-child policy, stigmas associated with AIDS) (Hua et al., 2019;
125 Kim, 2012; Levine, 2013), research with LGBT communities is rare. It is vital to understand
126 whether priori research insights from the Western world readily explain Eastern contexts,
127 especially Chinese contexts, considering the size and the relevance of China (Manalastas,
128 Ojanen, Torre, Ratanashevorn, Hong, Kumaresan, & Veeramuthu, 2017; Ong et al., 2020).

129 Finally, although human rights are at the centre of LGBT events research (Ford & Markwell,
130 2017), there is a lack of literature focusing on events' positive impacts on individual
131 participants. Studies have addressed social problems faced by the LGBT population (Lamond,
132 2018). Research has also explored a sense of belonging and identity (Anwar McHenry, 2009;
133 Hudson, 2015) in LGBT events but not hedonic and eudaimonic well-being of different LGBT
134 event stakeholders.

135 *2.2 Positive psychology and the PERMA model*

136 A positive psychology approach was adopted to explore hedonic and eudaimonic well-being
137 outcomes derived from participating in a Chinese LGBT event, as it was the most appropriate
138 theoretical approach. Positive psychology, a study of well-being, has been defined as an area
139 of investigation in psychology that examines what makes life worth living (Seligman &
140 Csikzentmihalyi, 2000). Although positive psychology has predominantly Western roots in
141 humanistic psychology, there is now an active Chinese positive psychology research

142 community which recognizes uniquely Chinese cultural and political contexts (Wong, 2016).
143 Positive psychologists in China and elsewhere conceptualize well-being in two ways. A
144 hedonic interpretation of well-being is where well-being is conceived as a subjective feeling
145 that encompasses people's positive emotional states (Haybron, 2000). It is the experience of
146 pleasure as opposed to the experience of meaning (Veenhoven, 2003). On the contrary, an
147 eudaimonic conception of well-being is about realizing one's life value and a sense of purpose.
148 It is not about the experience of pleasure but the experience of meaning which can include
149 overcoming hardship, failure, and misfortune (Veenhoven, 2003).

150 It is generally established that both hedonic (e.g., positive emotions) and eudaimonic (e.g.,
151 meaning) well-being elements need to be considered in interpreting well-being (Ryan & Deci,
152 2001), as different tourism and event experiences create different outcomes (Nawijn & Filep,
153 2016). Considering the different schools of well-being research, Seligman (2011) proposed a
154 PERMA theory of well-being, which integrates both hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives.
155 PERMA is an acronym for positive emotions (P) which is a clear hedonic element, and four
156 predominantly eudaimonic elements of engagement (E), relationships (R), meaning (M), and
157 achievement (A). In this framework, positive emotions are what we feel - pleasure, rapture,
158 ecstasy, warmth, and comfort (Seligman, 2011). Engagement refers to the experience that
159 occurs when one immerses oneself into an absorbing activity. The concept of relationship is
160 about an individual's connection with other people, including their community and society.
161 Meaning is a subjective judgment about things that one believes are bigger than oneself and
162 contribute to a sense of purpose in life, while achievement is a personal accomplishment.

163 PERMA has been previously used to study well-being outcomes in tourism and events
164 contexts. For instance, Saunders, Laing, and Weiler (2014), using a qualitative study, explored
165 the transformative changes that participants made to their life after joining a long-distance walk
166 in a natural environment and linked the outcomes with five elements of the PERMA model.
167 The PERMA model has also been applied to study adventure tourist experiences (Filep & Klint,
168 2013), as well as in the study of dark event experiences by Laing and Frost (2017a). Importantly
169 for this study, the applicability of using PERMA to study Chinese visitors' well-being was
170 established by Huang, Pearce, Wu and Wang (2019) when examining Chinese religious tourists,

171 showing that they conceptualized their well-being broadly in line with the PERMA dimensions.
172 This study thus uses the PERMA framework as the guiding model to answer the following key
173 research question: How does an LGBT event affect LGBT participants' hedonic and
174 eudaimonic well-being?

175

176 **3. Research Context**

177 To explore how an LGBT event affects participants' hedonic and eudaimonic well-being,
178 Hangzhou Rainbow Marathon (hereafter, HRM), one of the earliest and biggest LGBT parades
179 in China, was the chosen research context. This event has been held annually in Hangzhou, a
180 major city in eastern China, since 2012. HRM has significant influence and appeal to the LGBT
181 community in China partly because of its host city. Hangzhou is a tourism destination, known
182 for its picturesque landscapes (e.g., the UNESCO World Heritage-listed West Lake) and rich
183 heritage (e.g., the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Grand Canal and Archaeological Ruins of
184 Liangzhu Ancient City) (Wang & Bramwell, 2012; Wu & Wall, 2017).

185 The organizers of HRM, staff from an LGBT NGO named Sunflower Bloom, could not host
186 the LGBT event publicly. So HRM was organized as part of the annual Hangzhou Marathon
187 (HM), a mainstream sporting event. The Hangzhou Marathon (HM) was founded in 1987 and
188 is one of the oldest marathons in Hangzhou, China. It is endorsed by the Chinese government
189 and is part of AIMS (Association of International Marathons and Distance Races). The
190 marathon follows a 7-kilometre route along the shores of West Lake. Paraders of HRM register
191 as regular athletes of HM and participate as runners. HRM volunteers register as the logistics
192 support team for HRM but also participate as runners. Unlike volunteers and organizers (staff
193 at Sunflower Bloom), paraders do not have any duties beyond participating in the race. Figure
194 1 shows images of HRM from the year 2018 to showcase the event.



196 **Figure 1.** Images of HRM participants in 2018 (Source: Sunflower Bloom’s official website,
197 used with permission)

198

199 **4. Methodology**

200 A qualitative approach, involving a focus group and 12 semi-structured in-depth interviews,
201 was adopted to gain an authentic insight from HRM participants and to investigate their well-
202 being on a deeper level. This data was supplemented by informal personal observations. It was
203 understood that rich, qualitative, individual insights were needed to better understand the HRM
204 experience. This approach allowed researchers to discern distinct experiences of event
205 participants, which in turn led to the development of the LGBT event-specific PERMA model.
206 All research was undertaken in Chinese, which is the native language for the participants and
207 the first two authors.

208 As the study explored LGBT-related issues in China, it embraced the calls for Asian research
209 perspectives, such as those informed by Khoo-Lattimore and Mura (2016) and Mura and Khoo-
210 Lattimore (2018). The Asian research perspective asserts an emic stance of Asian researchers
211 and this familiarity has enabled access to this hard-to-reach community. As in other research
212 contexts involving marginalised communities (Prasetyo, Filep & Carr, 2021), there was a focus
213 on relational accountability where the methodological approach (in this case the format of
214 interview and focus groups questions) was tailored to reflect the values and culture of research
215 participants. Researching sexual minority groups can be sensitive, as these groups often face
216 social judgments, intense social pressures, and internalised homophobia. For any sensitive
217 studies of this nature, Vorobjovas-Pinta and Robards (2017) stress the need to consider

218 researchers' positionalities. It is thus necessary to disclose the authors' backgrounds and
219 examine how they might have shaped the research process. The lead author identifies as a gay
220 Chinese male and is a frequent participant of HRM. The remaining authors have heterosexual
221 sexual orientations, however, they have familiarity with the relevant research topics. The
222 second author is a female Chinese researcher who has examined Asian tourism phenomena
223 from emic perspectives, specialising in Chinese tourist behaviours. The third and fourth authors
224 were born in parts of South-Eastern and Central Europe respectively, however they have been
225 based in Hong Kong and have combined expertise in Asia-Pacific tourism, positive psychology
226 and event studies which assisted with the theoretical development of the paper.

227 Being an LGBT member allowed the first author to gain cultural proximity to the event
228 participants. Personal connections with HRM participants and staff at the Sunflower Bloom
229 organisation helped to build trust in the study. Through these personal connections, a
230 purposeful sampling approach was adopted (Olson & Reddy-Best, 2019), via a snowball
231 sampling technique. This non-probability sampling technique allowed the first author to select
232 a small group of close contacts from Sunflower Bloom who then selected other participants.
233 This sampling technique unavoidably narrowed the focus to one limited group, however, it
234 ensured that all research participants were willing to share information, comfortable with the
235 topic and closely involved in HRM.

236 Regarding the research design, the first author conducted all the data collection. He stopped
237 participant recruitment when no new and valuable information emerged from the focus group
238 and interviews, i.e., the point of data saturation was reached. During all stages of data collection,
239 he identified his sexual orientation and position as a researcher at the local university. The
240 second author analysed the data with the first author, ensuring congruence in the findings. The
241 third and fourth authors were not directly involved in data collection, however, they assisted
242 the first author with the theoretical development of the paper. They further contributed to paper
243 structure and wrote some sections of the manuscript.

244 As the first author participated in the HRM, he also conducted personal observations during
245 the marathon. Close attention was paid to the HRM participants' interactions with other LGBT

246 members. Verbal behaviours and body language of the race participants were documented and
247 then manually noted in the first author’s digital diary. Crucial moments before the run, photos
248 during the race and after the run were recorded. The whole observation process was non-
249 intrusive. The first author tried to keep a balanced role as both an observer and a researcher.
250 Being a gay man provided him with an advantage when these observations commenced. Data
251 yielded from the personal observations were insightful, however, it mostly helped confirm data
252 from the focus group and interviews; the entire observation process was relatively informal. As
253 such, observational data is not reported here. The following section reports on the findings from
254 the focus group and the interviews.

255 *4.1 Focus group*

256 Focus groups serve well in elucidating opinions associated with complex topics such as studies
257 of LGBT issues, because “awareness of shared experiences between group members may
258 encourage discussion of difficult and sensitive issues” (Frith, 2000, p. 282). Four participants
259 identified as female, three identified as male, and one did not identify as either male or female.
260 All were in their 20s, university-educated or undertaking university education. All of them
261 experienced the HRM, as paraders (P-07, P-08, P-09, P-10) and some as volunteers (V-04, V-
262 05, V-06, V-07). The focus group was held in early January 2019 in Sunflower Bloom’s offices
263 as all participants were familiar and comfortable with this environment.

264 The first author, and two social workers from the organizer, who are familiar with the LGBT
265 community and the HRM, served as the focus group coordinators. A warming up session was
266 carried out initially. The lead author introduced the research project and the ethical research
267 guidelines for the focus group. A set of probing questions, such as “How many times have you
268 signed up for the HRM?” and “Can you please tell us about your previous experience of the
269 HRM?” were asked to prompt participants’ memories about their previous experience. This
270 was followed by research-related questions based on PERMA such as “What does participation
271 in the HRM mean to you? What adjectives can be used to describe the experience? What did
272 the HRM offer to you?” (See Appendix A) The focus group lasted for approximately three
273 hours. It was voice-recorded with informants’ consent and then transcribed verbatim.

274 *4.2 Semi-structured interviews*

275 Semi-structured interviews were then carried out in late January 2019, immediately after the
 276 focus group, to generate more in-depth data about participant experiences in the HRM. In total,
 277 twelve interviews were conducted. Prior to the interviews, participants were handed an
 278 information sheet to ensure they were fully aware of the research purpose and protocols, and a
 279 written consent was also obtained from each interviewee.

280 The interview started with general questions about the informant’s role in the HRM, and
 281 reasons for participation. It was followed with questions guided by the PERMA framework.
 282 Representative questions included: “What has been the most meaningful aspect of your
 283 participation in this event?”; “How did the HRM feel for you? Any examples?”; “Please briefly
 284 describe your participation in the HRM” (See Appendix B) The interviews lasted 40 minutes
 285 on average and were dependent on the amount of information interviewees wanted to share.
 286 All interviews were voice-recorded with informants’ permission.

287 **Table 1.**
 288 Demographic Profile of Interviewees

Interviewee	Age	Gender	Sexual Orientation	Roles	Duties
P-01	28	Male	Gay	Parader	
P-02	21	Gender Queer	Queer	Parader	
P-03	25	Female	Questioning	Parader	Running the designated route
P-04	20	Female	Lesbian	Parader	
P-05	19	Female	Questioning	Parader	
P-06	21	Male	Gay	Parader	
V-01	21	Female	Gay	Volunteer	Serving as logistics staff and guides for participants during the HRM
V-02	22	Female	Bisexual	Volunteer	
V-03	25	Female	Bisexual	Volunteer	

O-01	30	Female	Bisexual	Organizer	Making plans,
O-02	30	Male	Gay	Organizer	coordinating and monitoring
O-03	35	Female	Lesbian	Organizer	the HRM

289 *4.4 Data analysis*

290 Both deductive and inductive approaches of thematic analysis were applied to address the
 291 critical research questions. At the deductive coding stage, well-established PERMA elements,
 292 namely, Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement, were
 293 utilized as structural guidance for the coding process. Following a set of procedures, including
 294 familiarizing with the data, generating codes, synthesizing codes into themes, reviewing
 295 themes, defining and redefining themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the data pattern was identified.
 296 At the inductive stage, a more thorough and iterative process was employed to explore each
 297 theme's novel aspects, manifested by informants' specific experience. Esfehiani and Walters'
 298 (2018) procedure for cross-language thematic analysis was adopted to ensure further credibility
 299 of the findings. The first author and a trained research assistant coded the text independently
 300 and then compared the codes. Before being integrated into themes, codes were firstly translated
 301 into English by the first author, then checked by the second author, and finally translated back
 302 to Chinese by the research assistant who was proficient in English to compare with the original
 303 text. At the end of this phase, codes were integrated into themes in English by the first author
 304 that were then grouped under the PERMA categories (positive emotions, engagement,
 305 relationships, meaning, and achievement). This process ensured that trustworthiness and
 306 familiarity with the text was gained, enhancing the credibility of the translations.

307 **5. Findings**

308 The PERMA model was used to organise the findings of the study. Participants had a primarily
 309 positive attitude towards the HRM. In general, participation in the HRM made participants feel
 310 both physically and mentally well. Analysis of the data revealed that the PERMA framework
 311 served as a powerful tool to document and interpret hedonic and eudaimonic well-being
 312 outcomes. According to participants' role and duties in the HRM, their well-being experience
 313 was found to be diverse.

314 *5.1 Positive Emotions*

315 Positive human emotions encompass feelings of love, interest, joy, and contentment (Seligman,
316 2011). All research participants, irrespective of their role, experienced positive emotions during
317 the HRM. Illustrative quotes for each emotion are shown in the following discussion.

318 5.1.1 Interest

319 Evidence of the positive emotion of interest was found across the three roles, but especially
320 amongst paraders and volunteers. For most paraders and volunteers who simply enjoyed
321 themselves in the HRM, strong interest in this event was generated before the HRM with
322 positive expectations. Those interests included a preference for running, having fun with other
323 community members and exploring new things.

324 *It was my first HRM. Before actually laying my feet on the ground, I was very interested in this*
325 *event. I was curious about what will happen along the way. The whole thing just made me*
326 *excited. (P-01)*

327 *I never participated in the HRM until this time. I just thought it could be an opportunity to*
328 *experience new things and find out more about Sunflower Bloom because I did not have the*
329 *chance before. (P-05)*

330 Organizers expressed interest in marketing aspects related to the race, especially slogan
331 development.

332 *I'm so curious about reactions from society when they see and hear our latest HRM slogan. (0-*
333 *02)*

334 5.1.2 Joy

335 Nearly all participants reported that they experienced a sense of joy. Typically, the emotion of
336 joy was evoked by collective togetherness and intense slogan shouting during the parade.

337 *When our members gathered, we shouted slogans together. At that moment, I felt that I was*
338 *accepted and approved by society. I can't say that I was proud, but I was absolutely joyful and*
339 *had a sense of belonging. (P-08)*

340 5.1.3 Contentment

341 Contentment was the most dominant positive emotion. Nearly all participants, regardless of
342 their role in the HRM, were content with the event. Paraders and volunteers reported feelings
343 of contentment straight after the race, and organizers felt a sense of relief as they looked

344 forward to the next HRM.

345 *I was content. It's exactly what I expected. (P-05)*

346 *I had a good time in the HRM this year. And this event has already become a home away from*
347 *home for me because it was basically the same group of people who have always insisted on*
348 *doing this thing. It gave me a feeling of contentment and safety. (V-03)*

349 5.1.4 Love

350 The emotion of love, a sense of companionship and intimacy towards others, was frequently
351 raised by volunteers and organizers. These two groups emphasized love for the broader LGBT
352 community when they highlighted the value of this event. The following quote from the
353 founder of the HRM confirmed this assertion:

354 *Back in 2012 (the first year of HRM), we had few participants and we knew them personally.*
355 *After years of development, the HRM has gained its positive reputation among the LGBT*
356 *community and we had hundreds of applicants in recent years. HRM became an excellent*
357 *platform for the community to communicate, to share, to voice, and to love self and others.*
358 *Watching them celebrate who they are is one of the best things in my life. (O-01)*

359 In addition, there was evidence of romantic, intimate, love expressed by some paraders:

360 *I met some new friends by attending the HRM. I also met my boyfriend, who I get on very well*
361 *with. The outcomes from the HRM were great. But at first, I was a little worried that someone*
362 *would know me. (P-06)*

363 5.2 Engagement

364 Engagement, another PERMA dimension studied, is defined as a state of deep involvement and
365 sensitivity to context (Seligman, 2011). The organizers were naturally engaged in the planning
366 stages but were not as engaged in the actual race. Volunteers functioned as intermediaries
367 between paraders and organizers. Their responsibilities were not as substantial as for the
368 organizers so that they could parade with the paraders while providing assistance. Paraders
369 were more isolated from various organizing tasks as they were fully engaged in the HRM race
370 and immersed themselves into a liberating atmosphere. A majority of paraders reported a high
371 level of engagement. Volunteers and organizers kept updating each other about the situation
372 through phone calls to ensure their safety while paraders simply focused on having fun. Typical

373 comments by paraders included the following:

374 *I was very much immersed during the HRM. It felt like everyone around me started to glow.*

375 *The mountains and the lake which I saw every day were not the same. I felt like I was in another*
376 *world. (P-10)*

377 *When I finally stepped onto the route, I found a new self. I became part of this whole community*
378 *and I felt transformed. I started to express myself publicly regardless of others' opinions and*
379 *to shout the slogans that I thought I would never shout out of my mouth. I was completely into*
380 *it. (P-08)*

381 Volunteers reported medium levels of engagement. For most, volunteering was a new
382 experience. Their duty of guiding paraders and helping organizers did not allow them to fully
383 immerse themselves into the race, as is evident from the following comment:

384 *I participated in the HRM a few times before, and I helped to plan the HRM this year and was*
385 *very engaged in preparing for the event. However, I found it very hard to focus on the activities*
386 *during the marathon as I was worried about security issues. I had to pay attention to the*
387 *environment from time to time when I was running in case any incident emerged. So my*
388 *experience was definitely not the same as that of other participants. (V-03)*

389 This finding, however, does not apply to HRM organizers. The interviewed organizers were
390 involved from the event's concept stages to its on-site management stages. Their substantial
391 commitment to the planning of the event however did not create a high sense of engagement
392 which means that they were not absorbed in the experience of racing as much as other
393 participants. Thus, their level of engagement was deemed low.

394 *5.3 Relationships*

395 Enhancing existing relationships, as well as extending networks, are established motivations
396 for traveling, leisure and event participation (Pearce, 2011). This study revealed that
397 participating in the HRM helped participants satisfy their relationship needs. Once again,
398 differences between groups were identified.

399 Paraders formed relationships from a micro perspective which emphasizes individual
400 relationships because the HRM was considered as an ideal platform to socialize. Most LBGT
401 participants, who are not able to get involved in the LGBT community on a daily basis, take

402 the opportunity to utilize this safe and welcoming space to develop friendships and romantic
403 relationships. This finding is consistent with previous studies about the value of LGBT spaces
404 (e.g., hotels, gay bars) (Hughes, 1997; Poria, 2016). One of the paraders stated,
405 *After joining this event, I know a lot of people in the LGBT community. And I'm sure I'll be*
406 *more connected with them. (P-04)*

407 However, volunteers prioritized relationships from a meso or a community-based perspective.
408 They highlighted that they were happy and excited to meet friends whom they had known for
409 years but extending personal relationships was not their ultimate goal. Unlike the newly joined
410 paraders, they considered the success of HRM as a signal of the enhanced coherence of the
411 LGBT community in Hangzhou. Some volunteers stated,

412 *I was obviously aware of the fact that we have done something really helpful in the community.*
413 *Everyone should have the courage to become more confident or to be more at ease. (V-03)*

414 *I am thrilled to see more and more people get involved in the HRM. It expands our community.*
415 *(V-02)*

416 Compared with paraders and volunteers, organizers envisaged a bigger picture, with more
417 emphasis on relationships with the wider society and the media. In their opinion, the HRM
418 offered a platform to highlight the LGBT community's visibility, to advocate for deserved
419 rights and to call for social support.

420 *During the time of hosting the HRM, we made efforts to establish rapport with all kinds of*
421 *media outlets. One journalist even made a documentary for us! Because we strive for something*
422 *meaningful, the relationship with the outside world is vital. (O-02)*

423 5.4 Meaning

424 Meaning refers to seeking the purpose of life (Newman, Tay, & Diener, 2013). This study
425 revealed three levels of meaning. Personal meaning (characterized by self-development) was
426 broadly pursued by paraders. They reported on their self-development while seeking
427 acceptance from other LGBT members.

428 *This event offered me a chance to be my true self, to engage with the LGBT fellows, but also*
429 *enhanced my ambitions. It encouraged me to contribute my knowledge of this neglected group*
430 *of people who struggle to get recognition. After immersing myself to be a part of this fabulous*
431 *parade, I thought of Oscar Wilde's words. 'We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking*

432 *at the stars. ' (V-06).*

433 Unlike paraders, volunteers committed time and effort to this non-profit event to help improve
434 the visibility of the Chinese LGBT community, to foster a meaningful and prosperous collective
435 identity, and offer a safe enclave away from long-existing shame and stigma.

436 *I did not think I have to give myself an answer about who I am and who I should become. It
437 doesn't matter. You can embrace the fact that you have always been changing. (V-02)*

438 Lastly, for organizers the perceptions of meaning were again different. The broader societal
439 meaning of hosting, running and promoting the HRM was revealed. This involved being able
440 to speak out for stigmatized individuals and to initiate further public discussions in the
441 broader society.

442 *Let everyone know that even if you don't join the HRM, you could still feel this energy. Our
443 purpose was not trying to get everyone out of the closet. We were just holding events for those
444 who have not yet come out. Let them feel this power and be encouraged to become a better self.
445 (O-02)*

446 *5.5 Achievement*

447 The final well-being pillar was achievement. It is argued that “achievement is often pursued
448 for its own sake, even when it brings no positive emotion, no meaning, and nothing in the way
449 of positive relationships” (Seligman, 2011, p. 24). In the HRM, three forms of achievement -
450 self-focused achievement, altruistic achievement and holistic achievement that stresses
451 integration into a broader society - were observed. Individual achievement includes confirming
452 and enhancing self-identity, and providing answers to self-related questions, such as “Who am
453 I?” and “Who do I want to become?” It was frequently highlighted by paraders.

454 *Don't be ashamed of being a sexual minority. I don't think this is something that should be
455 hidden. This identity did not define who I am. (P-07)*

456 Altruistic achievement was, however, more prevalent among volunteers, especially those who
457 had participated many times. They experienced true altruism (Paraskevaidis & Andriotis, 2017),
458 that is, altruism about sacrificing time and energy without any expectation or motivation for
459 reciprocity to bring benefits to others.

460 *Participants will consciously or unconsciously evaluate the benefits of participating in the
461 HRM. Enhancing their perceived benefits is a big motivator for us. ...Their personal growth is*

462 *what supports us to do this constantly. (O-01)*

463 Lastly, for the organizers, achievement was more holistic in nature. They stressed the
464 achievement of being more visible and gaining exposure in the media through the HRM, which
465 in turn, facilitated the normalization processes of LGBT communities in China.

466 *Firstly, it gives us exposure, in other words, visibility, not only in social media but in other*
467 *mainstream media such as newspapers. Moreover, I may think that although this event has*
468 *become a regular one, I still care about what can we bring to this community by hosting this*
469 *event and whether it actually brings the hope we need to our community. (O-02)*

470 *The HRM is not only about a small group of people right now. If the HRM brings happiness to*
471 *everyone in it, I think the goal of hosting this event has been achieved. (O-01)*

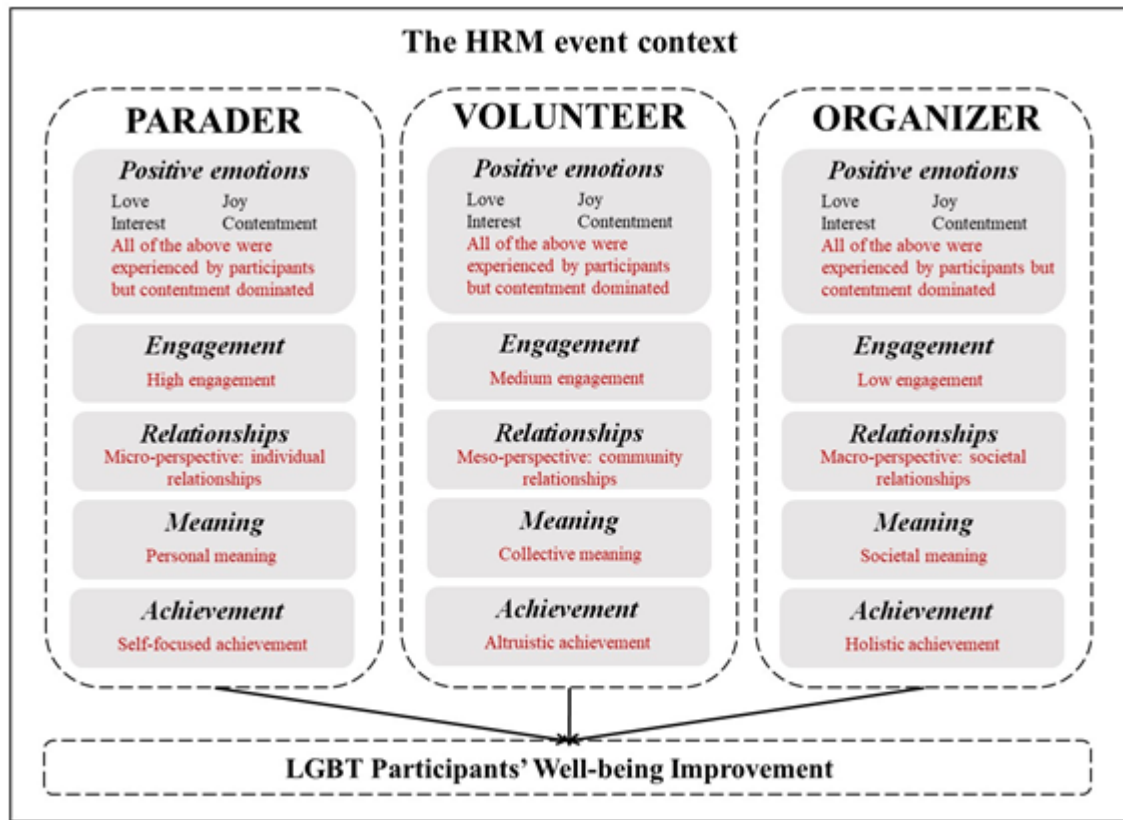
472

473 **6. Discussion and Conclusion**

474 The findings of this research allow for an extension of the original PERMA framework. A
475 role-based perspective was incorporated into the original PERMA framework (Seligman,
476 2011), resulting in an event-specific PERMA model. As shown in Figure 2, differences in
477 event participants' roles resulted in slightly different well-being outcomes based on the five
478 elements of the original framework. Previous research featuring the PERMA framework in
479 the tourism and events field treated the sample as a homogenous group in the way the sample
480 perceives the five PERMA dimensions (Coghlan, 2015; Doyle, Filo, Lock, Funk, &
481 McDonald, 2016; Doyle, Filo, Thomson, & Kunkel, 2021; Filep, Volic, & Lee, 2015; Laing
482 & Frost, 2017b).

483 This study highlighted the necessity of taking the dynamic and multifaceted nature of events
484 into account and treating research participants as a heterogeneous group. Figure 2 revealed
485 multi-leveled well-being outcomes, at the individual level, LGBT community level, and
486 broader, societal level for the meaning and relationships dimensions. All three groups of
487 participants garnered distinct levels of achievement from the HRM. Paraders highlighted self-
488 focused achievement while volunteers saw the HRM as an opportunity for altruistic
489 achievement – as a way to positively influence and help others. Organizers assessed their
490 achievements at a more holistic level which encompassed individual development,

491 community bonds but also fostered social movements. For engagement, distinctions exist in
 492 the intensity of the reported engagement levels (high, medium, low). Finally, findings
 493 illustrated that positive emotions were dynamic and fluid. However, the four core emotions of
 494 interest, joy, contentment and love were all experienced although contentment appeared to be
 495 the dominant emotion for all roles.
 496



498 **Figure 2.** Event-specific PERMA model
 499

500 Overall, the adopted qualitative research design offered not only insights about the HRM but
 501 also opportunities to communicate with this hard-to-reach community in China (Vorobjovas-
 502 Pinta, 2017). It allowed the research team to enter the LGBT space and hear their voices
 503 accordingly. This research challenged the normative heterosexual nature in tourism and events
 504 research by involving sexual minority perspectives. Wei (2018) claimed that there is a shift in
 505 the research of LGBT communities in that more LGBT researchers are beginning to shift from
 506 detached outsiders to caring insiders. The research embraced this new perspective by

507 addressing issues that have been unintentionally omitted in previous research.

508

509 In addition to theoretical and methodological contributions, this study presents some practical,
510 marketing implications, similar to those outlined by Doyle et al. (2016), resulting from their
511 use of PERMA in spectator sports. They mention the development of specific mobile
512 applications grounded in the PERMA model and creative social media programs. These
513 initiatives, targeted at paraders, would create opportunities for them to establish closer ties with
514 each other and offer a way to better connect and strengthen relationships, improve positive
515 emotions, and a sense of engagement in the event. For the LGBT community, especially
516 paraders, benefits of joining joint activities, such as this one, will also help some of them who
517 are not supported in their daily life to validate their identity and learn from each other.
518 Considering the mostly positive outcomes, similar LGBT events could be encouraged (as soon
519 as it is safe to do so following the COVID-19 pandemic which is affecting the global events
520 industry at the time of writing this paper). It has been established that marketing and promoting
521 LGBT events is an important aspect of overall destination marketing and image enhancement
522 of a destination as a whole (Hahm et al., 2017). In the short to medium term, future LGBT
523 rights claiming event organizers will however need to enforce social distancing requirements
524 at LGBT events through capacity limits and by facilitating dynamic movements and avoiding
525 static elements. The dynamic movement requirement should not be a major challenge for HRM
526 due to the nature of the event which involves frequent physical activity.

527

528 While it is hoped that this paper makes various contributions, the study also has some
529 limitations. First, the transgender community was not included in the current study, as it was
530 difficult to access. Future research assessing LGBT tourism and events' behaviors of
531 transgender individuals is needed. Second, questions such as, how long the well-being
532 influence lasts or if eudaimonic components of well-being (like meaning or achievement) are
533 more enduring remain unanswered. The temporal distinction for the eudaimonic elements is
534 not captured this time due to the fact that it requires continued follow-up examination of the
535 informants. In the future, complex, longitudinal, cross-cultural studies could examine the

536 duration of well-being event outcomes. Third, the sample size of this qualitative study is modest.
537 Future research could take advantage of well-established scales such as the PERMA Profiler
538 (Butler & Kern, 2016) to empirically examine associations between different elements. Despite
539 the outlined limitations, it is hoped that this paper moves the discussion of LGBT event
540 experiences forward and advances current thinking on the use of the PERMA model in a novel
541 context. Interestingly, different sexual orientation groups were not found to have very different
542 perceptions of the event, which contradicts previous LGBT tourism and events research
543 findings (Poria, 2016). One plausible explanation for this difference lies in the development
544 stage of the Chinese LGBT community, especially in terms of claiming rights. In light of the
545 increased global awareness of claiming rights and considering the attention to well-being as a
546 result of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is apparent that much more research is needed on this
547 topic in the future.

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767 **Appendix A. Questions for the focus group**

- 768 1) How many times have you signed up for the HRM?
769 2) Can you please tell us about your previous experience of the HRM?
770 3) Why did you want to join in this kind of event? Could you discuss it with the group?
771 4) In your experience, did you sense some outcomes from the HRM that you have
772 participated in before? Are they good or bad? Or they can be both? Could you talk
773 about it more with others?
774 5) What did participating in the HRM mean to you?
775 6) What adjectives can be used to describe the experience?
776 7) What did the HRM offer to you?
777 8) How was your relationships with other participants?
778 9) Did you think the HRM improves your well-being in some ways? Could you discuss
779 them with your group members?
780

781 **Appendix B. Interview protocol for semi-structured interviews**

782 **General Questions:**

- 783 1) How did you learn about this activity?
784 2) Were you familiar with the LGBT community before joining the event?
785 3) Please briefly describe your participation in the HRM

786 **PERMA specific Questions:**

787 **Engagement**

- 788 1) How did you get involved? What did you mainly do in the HRM?
789 2) The organizers organized many activities. Did you think you enjoy yourself in these
790 activities?
791 3) How did the HRM feel for you? Any examples?
792 4) Did you feel you are using your strengths, talents, or interests in the HRM?

793 **Relationships**

- 794 1) Did you meet anyone you could talk to during the HRM? Anyone in particular?
795 2) What kind of things did you talk about?
796 3) In addition to other participants, what else did you feel connected to?
797 4) Did you feel like you know yourself better by participating in the HRM?

798 **Meaning**

- 799 1) Has participating in the HRM, meeting different people, and learning more about
800 yourself positively impacted your life?
801 2) What has been the most meaningful aspect of your participation in this event?
802 3) Did these meanings have any positive impact on your life?

803 **Achievement**

- 804 1) What did you gain from this event? From social and individual perspectives?
805 2) Has this event changed your way of thinking or interacting with things?

806 **Positive Emotions**

- 807 1) How did you think about the HRM before, during, and after you participated in it?
808 Which adjectives accurately describe your state?
809 2) How did these positive emotions (if any) affect your life?
810 3) Could you recall an incident that impressed you most during the HRM?

- 811 **Demographic Questions:**
- 812 1) What is your gender?
- 813 2) What is your sexual orientation?
- 814 3) How old are you?
- 815 4) What is your education level?
- 816 5) What is your occupation now?
- 817

818 **Number of words exclusive of abstract and references: 6,676**