

A study to explore the relationship between Gratitude in Daily Life and Self Esteem among young adults

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ABSTRACT

Background: Gratitude as expressed by an individual can be seen both as a dispositional trait and even as an emotion. It helps man to see positive life events as more positive and negative life events as seemingly less traumatic. Studies over time have clearly revealed the significance of gratitude to foster life satisfaction, optimism, physical and psychological well-being, etc. These different indicators on the other hand also play a pivotal role in boosting the self-esteem in an individual. This study therefore aims at exploring if there exists any relation between the degree of gratitude carried by an individual and the quantum of self-esteem in the individual.

Methods: The method used was survey. Young adults between the age bands of 18-22 years were randomly chosen for the study. Rosenberg's scale for self-esteem and Gratitude Resentment and Appreciation Test for measuring Gratitude were used as tools.

Results: Results of the present study suggest that there is a significant and positive correlation between self-esteem of a young adult and 2 of the 4 measured aspects of gratitude like 'Simple Appreciation' factor and 'Appreciation for Others' factor. The correlations are however of low strength indicating that these two variables are less influenced by each other and may therefore have other unexamined strong correlates.

Conclusions: Gratitude in daily life and self esteem in young adults may not influence each other. Further studies are needed to explore the relationship between these variables.

Keywords: Gratitude, Self Esteem, Young Adults.

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INTRODUCTION

Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but also the parent of all others. — Cicero

Gratitude is considered as both a state and a dispositional trait. State gratitude is understood as a positive, social emotion experienced when another person freely gives an undeserved act of kindness or generosity [1]. Roberts [2] describes gratitude as an acute, intense, and brief physiological change that co-occurs with feelings of gladness. As a state of the mind, it has also been considered as a complex, higher-level emotion since it requires cognitive sophistication. As a trait, gratitude is understood as a "virtue" or characteristic of people, and can vary in intensity, frequency, and span [3]. People high in gratitude feel more grateful following a positive emotion. They experience gratitude more times per day and across a wider array of life circumstances compared to those lower in gratitude. Gratitude helps people look at the good in life. This enables a positive appraisal of life events. Wood and others [4] proposed the schematic hypothesis, arguing that grateful people have a cognitive "lens" that biases them in how they see the world. Compared to "less grateful" people, grateful people are prone to interpret helpful actions of others as being costlier to

the other, see others as being more altruistic, and to place greater value on their action. This kind of gratefulness aides in building more strong and positive social interactions. Studies across many cultures find evidence that people with a high mark on gratitude also scale high on other traits like life satisfaction, happiness, optimism, hope, and positive affect, while gratitude is also found to be negatively related to anxiety, depression, and negative affect [3]. Watkins, Woodward, Stone, and Kolts [5] found that dispositional gratitude was positively correlated with life satisfaction, positive affect, and happiness, and negatively correlated with depression, negative affect, and physical aggression. In addition, researchers have theorised about the potential societal benefits of gratitude. Like other positive emotions, gratitude is believed to reflect, motivate, and reinforce social actions in both the giver and gift recipient [6]. For the individual, experiences of gratitude may lead to a readiness to respond to acts of kindness by acknowledging the benefit [2] and expressing appreciation and thankfulness for it (Emmons, 2004).

Self-esteem is the degree of respect and acceptance the individual bestows on himself/herself. Many environmental as well as dispositional factors may affect the degree of self-esteem an individual carries. Self-esteem is therefore a variable of self-regard. In addition to the influence of man's inherent traits, certain other environmental factors too play a role in determining the level of self-esteem of an individual. Individuals aged between the span of 18-22, otherwise commonly known, as "young adults" are the easy target to many new life challenges. It is a time when one usually leaves the comfort zone of the family net and faces the real life in the form of higher education, job expectations, relationships, etc. This implies the unsurprising inclined level of stress in battling daily life. These affects may have subsequent consequences and repercussions of the self-esteem of the individual. Therefore, the present study aims to throw light on the influence of gratitude in safeguarding self-esteem of the individual.

Researchers in their study, quoted that, unlike constructs such as optimism, until very recently gratitude has been one of the most unstudied emotions [7], despite having been historically considered essential to normal functioning in philosophical and theological accounts [8]. In recent years a very large body of evidence has emerged suggesting that gratitude is strongly related to all aspects of wellbeing [9].

Graham and Barker [10] presented young participants with videos showing another child successfully completing a task. The participants saw the child in the video being either helped by a teacher, or working independently. It was found that gratitude was experienced in both cases, children who were helped and children who accomplished their task independently. Gratitude in the latter case was explained to have arisen from such sources as appreciation of one's abilities, or of a climate in which such successful work was possible. In both situations, implied boost in Self-Esteem. Similar findings have been reported in adult samples [11] suggesting that gratitude involves more than an interpersonal appreciation of other people's aid.

Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions suggests that gratitude may also help individuals build other durable resources for well-being that may nurture creativity, intrinsic motivation, self-esteem, purposefulness [12] and spark an upward spiral of positive emotions and outcomes. This may explain why grateful people tend to be higher in vitality, optimism, religiousness, spirituality, [3], well-being and relationship quality [13].

Kashdan and others assessed a sample of Vietnam War veterans and reported that gratitude predicted greater daily self-esteem after controlling for post-traumatic-stress severity, and dispositional positive and negative affect [14].

Researchers studied the increase in positive mental health and the enhanced relationship between gratitude in response to aid and well-being as a function of time. Exposure to the gratitude induction seemed to have a linear relationship with time, as reported well-being, including optimism, enhanced self-esteem and life satisfaction, was greater at the 3-week follow-up compared to the immediate post-test [15].

Researchers were specifically interested in studying how inducing gratitude would affect participants' satisfaction with life and self-esteem. The researchers were also interested in the link between gratitude and self-esteem. Results, in concurrence to their assumptions revealed that there is a positive link between gratitude and self-esteem of an individual [16]. Past studies with youth have found gratitude to positively predict self-esteem [15] and self-satisfaction assessed concurrently [17].

Problem Statement

To explore the relation between gratitude in daily life and self-esteem among young adults.

Objectives

- To find if there exist any relation between gratitude and self-esteem among young adults.
- To understand the importance of feeling grateful about life in boosting self-esteem.

Hypothesis

H_(A1)=There is a positive correlation between gratitude and self-esteem among young adults.

H_(A2)=There is a positive relation between self-esteem and being appreciative of others, among young adults.

H_(A3)=There is a positive relation between self-esteem and appreciating the simple things in life, among young adults.

METHODOLOGY

The method used for the study was survey.

Sample

A total of 82 individuals aged between 19-22 years were chosen by random sampling.

Table 1 specifies the Sample Distribution as taken for the present study.

Tools

S- Gratitude Resentment and Appreciation Test (GRAT) for gratitude measure with 16 items. The S-GRAT scale of 16 items is divided into 3 subscales: 'Lack of Sense of Deprivation (LOSD)' factor with 6 items; The 'Simple Appreciation (SA)' factor with 6 items and the 'Appreciation for Others (AO)' factor with 4 items. Watkins et al. were authors of the tool. The scale has been shown to have good internal consistency, factorial validity, construct validity and temporal stability of items (Watkins et al., 2003). The score range for the S-GRAT scale was 0-144.

Rosenberg's evaluation scale for self-esteem with 10 items. Morris Rosenberg was the author of the tool. Internal Consistency was 0.77, minimum coefficient of reproducibility was 0.90. Wide range of studies showed alpha coefficients within the range 0.72-0.87. Test-retest reliability for 2 weeks was found to be 0.85 (Rosenberg M, 1965). The score range for the scale was 0-30.

Procedure

1. Participants within the required age band were chosen by Random Incidental Sampling from 3 different colleges across New Bombay.
2. The researcher provided the participant with the questionnaire, which had the GRAT scale printed on one side and the Rosenberg's scale on the other side.
3. The specific instructions required to fill in each scale were printed on the questionnaire.
4. The researcher however ensured that the instructions were clear by presenting the same orally.
5. It took around 12-15 minutes for each participant to complete the questionnaire.
6. The researcher collected back the questionnaire and thanked the participants.

Table 1 – Sample Distribution

AGE	MALES	FEMALES
19	10	10
20	10	10
21	10	12
22	12	08

RESULTS

The mean and the Standard deviation (N=82) for the tools of the study and the three subscales of the GRAT scale are as given in table 2.

Table 2 – Mean scores and SD

Scale	Mean	SD
Rosenberg's Scale for Self Esteem	17.35365854	3.100664808
GRAT scale	94.35365854	13.34663406
LOSD factor	32.53658537	7.927441201
SA factor	37.63414634	7.72923294
AO factor	24.86585366	4.63417834

Table 3 - Correlation Coefficients and Significance

Correlation factor	R ₍₈₀₎	Significance
Self Esteem and Simple Appreciation factor	0.281	P<0.05
Self Esteem and Appreciation for Others factor	0.231	P<0.05
Self Esteem and Lack Of a Sense of Deprivation factor	-0.11	Ns
Self Esteem and Gratitude	0.192	Ns

DISCUSSION

Self-Esteem is looked as respect and acceptance one bestows on his/her individuality. Rosenberg, 1965 evaluates how a person sees himself/herself and quantitatively measures the degree of self-acceptance. The mean score of the sample on Self Esteem was 17.35 indicating that the average level of self-esteem in the population was high. Gratitude is operationally defined as a sense of feeling thankful about life. As adopted from the existentialists of the humanistic force, gratitude looked at how grateful an individual feels about life and life situations. The mean score of the GRAT scale was 94.35.

Appreciation for Others: is a subset of the GRAT scale. It measures how an individual admires and feels thankful about the presence of others in their life. It accounts for individuals 'perception of how the 'others' in their life have played a vital role in moulding their lives. Simple Appreciation assesses how an individual feels thankful about the little things in life. It looks at aspects of living that are abstract in nature. For e.g. being grateful for all blessings in life, being grateful for each new moment we breathe, etc.

Lack of a Sense of Deprivations the negative quotient of the assessment. It seeks to gauge the perception of 'being less' in life by an individual. LOSD also assesses how the individual looks at life events to have affected him/her positively or negatively. As recorded above, finding from the present study estimates a low positive correlation between Self Esteem and the Simple Appreciation factor. The correlation coefficient was 0.281, $p<0.05$ There is also a low positive correlation between Self-Esteem and Appreciation for Others factor. The correlation coefficient was 0.231, $p<0.05$. This shows that there is a relation of low strength between the two variables in both the cases, indicating the role of many other factors that may determine gratitude in one's life and the individual's self-esteem. The present study has also obtained two low insignificant correlations between SE and LOSD factor and SE and overall Gratitude.

These findings altogether lead to assume that self-esteem and gratitude are probably two independently operating functions in the human psyche. There is probably very less interaction between the two variables. This is in contradiction to the existing research base which states that there exist a relation between Self Esteem and Well-being that includes Gratitude.

This further leads to two possible explanations –

1. The relation between self Esteem and well being is probably impacted majorly by aspects of well being other than gratitude.
2. The results obtained in the present study might be specific to the context of the present sample. In either case, further probing or research evidence is required to validate these assumptions.

Ancillary Findings

The investigator of the present study observed that female participants generally seemed to be more curious to know whether gratitude is overt as a trait or as a state of emotion. This was seen when female participants generally asked more clarifications about the items in the GRAT scale when asked for feedbacks about participating in the survey. They were also keen to understand other benefits about being grateful in life. The investigator gave brief explanations with reference to the studies from the literature review, as discussed above after the participant completed the questionnaire.

On the other hand, male participants showed outwardly expressed to possess a healthy Self-Esteem. Many of the male participants explicitly declared, 'I am happy about who I am' when probed about the feedback they had about participating in the survey.

Interestingly though, there is no significant difference in the scores obtained by male and female participants. Mean score for male participants in the Rosenberg's scale and the GRAT scale was 15.53 and 95.47 respectively. For female participants, the mean scores were 15.5 and 98.6 respectively.

This shows that though there probably exists a difference in how the both genders perceive gratitude and Self-Esteem, the two manifests independently in both genders. This indicates that Self-Esteem and Gratitude are probably seen in both male and female participants irrespective of the other.

CONCLUSION

With reference to the hypothesis and the results obtained in the present study, it can be concluded that,

1. There is a low positive but significant correlation between Self-Esteem and the Simple Appreciation factor of the GRAT scale and hence, alternate hypothesis is retained.
2. There is a low positive but significant correlation between Self-Esteem and the Appreciation for Others factor of the GRAT scale, and hence, hypothesis is retained.
3. There is an insignificant low positive correlation between Self-Esteem and the overall measure of Gratitude hence, the alternate hypothesis is rejected.

The study was conducted with the aim to find out whether being grateful in life about life events; role of others and other daily aspects gives an edge to individuals for maintaining a healthy self-esteem. From the present study, we find that there is little of such added advantage in life. These two variables probably function independently in life and play a vital role in life sustenance by interacting with many other factors.

Limitations of the study

1. All participants of the current study belonged to the middle class Socio-Economic Status. Therefore, the sample lacked a representation from the extreme SESs.
2. Small sample size of 82 makes it difficult to extrapolate the results to the population mass.
3. Lack of standardised controls for the environment in which the survey was conducted. Participants answered the questionnaire in situations favourable to them. (e.g. In classrooms, college foyers, canteens, etc)

Suggestions for further studies

The present study has come out with both significant and insignificant results, both pertaining to low correlation coefficients. Therefore, further studies in this sphere could be to find the reliability of the nature of the correlations. Studies could also explore gender-based differences that exist (if any).

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