



Appreciation uniquely predicts life satisfaction above demographics, the Big 5 personality factors, and gratitude

N.S. Fagley*

GSAPP, Rutgers University, 152 Frelinghuysen Rd., Piscataway, NJ 08854, USA

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ABSTRACT

This research was the first to examine whether appreciation explains variance in life satisfaction after controlling for gender, age, ethnicity, the Big 5 personality factors, and gratitude. Participants ($N = 243$) completed the Satisfaction with Life Scale, Big 5 Inventory, GQ-6 gratitude measure, and Appreciation Scale, including subscales measuring “have” focus, awe, ritual, present moment, self/social comparison, gratitude, loss/adversity, and interpersonal appreciation. Appreciation made a significant unique contribution (11% of the variance, $p < .001$) to life satisfaction, controlling for demographic variables, the Big 5 personality factors, and gratitude. This is consistent with the theoretical stance that appreciation is more than just gratitude or the Big 5 personality factors and is important in its own right for life satisfaction.

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1. Introduction

Some people savor good times with friends, are grateful for the sacrifices others make for them, and appreciate positive aspects of their environment. Yet others fail to notice these things, taking positive outcomes, experiences, or circumstances for granted. These latter individuals may focus on negative events, conflictual interactions, and discouraging outcomes, and they might simply react with entitlement to positive events and experiences. As these observations suggest, there are individual differences in appreciation, and research has demonstrated these differences are related to important outcomes such as life satisfaction (LS) and positive affect (e.g., Adler & Fagley, 2005; Tucker, 2007). In this article, the relation between appreciation and LS is examined more closely.

1.1. Appreciation and life satisfaction

LS is the cognitive component of subjective wellbeing (SWB); positive and negative affect comprise the affective component. LS is a conscious appraisal of the quality of one's life (Pavot & Diener, 1993). Adler and Fagley (2005) demonstrated that appreciation was related to LS and positive affect, even after controlling for optimism, emotional self-awareness, and spirituality.

Adler and Fagley (2005) defined appreciation as “acknowledging the value and meaning of something—an event, a person, a behavior, an object—and feeling a positive emotional connection to it” (p. 81; see also Adler, 2002). Therefore appreciation involves both cognition and affect. Appreciation is viewed as a higher-order construct having eight aspects (lower-order components), which contribute to SWB. Each aspect may involve different processes and/or mechanisms and be related differentially to components of SWB and other outcomes. Consequently using the framework of the eight aspects and maintaining these distinctions may facilitate developing interventions to increase appreciation, and ultimately SWB, and bring clarity to planning and interpreting research on fostering SWB. The eight aspects of appreciation can be remembered by the acronym: HARPS-GLI (see Table 1). Next I discuss each aspect, to promote understanding possible targets for interventions and how each may foster SWB.

The first aspect of appreciation, “have” focus, is focusing on what one has rather than lacks. What one has includes material possessions and also such things as one's health or opportunities. The awe aspect of appreciation refers to feeling a deep emotional, spiritual, or transcendental connection to something—a stunning vista, a forest of Redwoods, or birth of a baby. The ritual aspect represents performing acts to foster appreciation. Rituals provide cues to help people notice and value the good in their lives, counteracting hedonic adaptation in which people habituate to their circumstances (Brickman, Coates, & Janoff-Bulman, 1978; Sheldon

* Tel.: +1 732 745 8771; fax: +1 848 445 4888.

E-mail address: fagley@rci.rutgers.edu

Table 1
The eight aspects of appreciation: HARPS-GLI.

Aspect	Brief description and typical item
Have focus	Focusing on what one has (rather than lacks) and valuing it. "I count my blessings for what I have in this world."
Awe	Feeling awe/wonder, a sense of transcendent connection, to nature, beauty, or life itself. "When I see natural beauty like Niagara Falls, I feel like a child who is awestruck."
Ritual	Engaging in rituals to foster appreciation. "I perform rituals (i.e., pray or say grace before a meal) that remind me to be appreciative." ^a
Present moment	Engaging in mindful awareness of the present moment. "I notice things like the first flowers of spring."
Self/social comparison	Using self/social comparison to foster appreciation. "I reflect on the worst times in my life to help me realize how fortunate I am now"
Gratitude	Feeling gratitude to others for help, gifts, or benefits. "I acknowledge when people go out of their way for me."
Loss/adversity	Using experiences of loss/adversity to foster appreciation. "Thinking about dying reminds me to live every day to the fullest."
Interpersonal	Noticing and valuing the contribution that relationships make to one's life and well-being, and expressing it. "I let others know how much I appreciate them."

^a The last six words were inadvertently omitted from this item in Table 5 of Adler and Fagley (2005).

& Lyubormirsky, 2006). Admittedly, there is a tension between adopting a ritual (an habitual practice) and avoiding rote behavior/taking things for granted. Rituals may be frequent, such as giving thanks before eating, or less often such as celebrating the first snowfall, sacrificing for Lent, or annual fasting. *Shared* rituals can also foster a sense of connection to others. The present moment aspect of appreciation is engaging in mindful awareness of the "here and now," one's surroundings and their positive qualities. Awe and present moment appear connected with savoring (Bryant & Veroff, 2007). The self/social comparison aspect of appreciation is using comparison to others or one's past to promote appreciating the positive aspects of one's life. For example, I may appreciate my current job because it is better than my previous job (self-comparison), or because it is better than my friend's job (social comparison). A large body of theory and research has addressed when, and to whom, one compares oneself and its effects (see e.g., Suls & Wheeler, 2000). The gratitude aspect of appreciation refers to noticing a benefit received (gifts, perceived efforts, sacrifices/actions on one's behalf) and feeling grateful to someone for it. It is a positive emotion directed to a benefactor for some perceived, intentional benefit. The loss/adversity aspect of appreciation is using one's perceived losses, experiences of adversity, or close calls to promote appreciating the positive aspects of one's life. Janoff-Bulman and Berger (2000) observed that trauma survivors often experience increased appreciation, likely due to using the trauma experience as a new reference point which imbues previously ordinary events, relationships, or conditions with heightened value. And finally, the eighth aspect, interpersonal appreciation, is valuing the people in one's life and the contribution that relationships make to one's life and well-being and expressing that. This differs from feeling grateful *to* someone for a benefit or gift. It is being grateful *for* someone. Focusing attention on the conceptual framework of appreciation, including clarifying the relation between gratitude and appreciation, may promote research on more aspects of appreciation and clarify existing research which has tended to label everything gratitude, regardless of which aspect was targeted. Furthermore, it may be useful when developing interventions to influence LS or other outcomes.

Although some have interpreted Wood, Maltby, Stewart, and Joseph (2008) as indicating that gratitude and appreciation are merely different labels for the same construct, a close reading of

that paper reveals otherwise. As they recommended the conceptualization of gratitude be expanded to include the other seven aspects of appreciation, they were acknowledging that appreciation is a broader construct. This was clarified in a subsequent paper (i.e., Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010) in which they argued for eight aspects of "gratitude." Rather than change the definition of gratitude to encompass the eight aspects of appreciation, it makes more sense to preserve the term *gratitude* for gratitude, as traditionally defined as grateful emotion directed toward a benefactor for perceived benefits (Fredrickson, 2004; Wood, Joseph, & Maltby, 2008). Using a different term for the higher-order, broader construct should promote clarity, and *appreciation* seems an appropriate term. Lambert, Graham, and Fincham (2009) also argued another term was needed for the broader construct but suggested "generalized gratitude." So it appears possible and desirable to distinguish between gratitude and appreciation, as gratitude is only one of eight aspects of appreciation and each may foster SWB.

1.2. How appreciation may promote SWB

Watkins, Woodward, Stone, and Kolts (2003) offered a multi-component view of gratitude that maps onto five aspects of appreciation. They described "sense of abundance" and not feeling deprived (much like "have" focus), "appreciation of simple pleasures" (capturing awe and present moment), and appreciation of the "contribution of others" to one's well-being (capturing interpersonal appreciation and gratitude) (Watkins et al., 2003, p. 449). Watkins et al. (2003) suggested possible mechanisms by which this multicomponent gratitude/appreciation might promote SWB. They speculated it may (a) enhance "experience of positive events" (b) enhance "adaptive coping to negative events" (c) enhance "encoding and retrieval of positive events" (d) enhance "one's social network," and (e) prevent or mitigate depression (p. 449).

Additionally, by renewing valuing of what one has, appreciation may decrease materialism (Polak & McCullough, 2006) and prevent/decrease hedonic adaptation, leading to increased positive affect and LS. It is normative to habituate to conditions, whatever they may be. This likely helped humans cope with challenging conditions in our evolutionary past when humans struggled to meet basic needs and survive. They habituated to harsh conditions. Even today it may help people cope with hardship. But for many people in modern society, it robs them of happiness because they habituate to the *good* aspects of their lives. Good circumstances, experiences, and relationships are taken for granted. So although people may improve their relationships or standard of living, they are not more satisfied, especially when change is gradual. Yet even when change is sudden and dramatic, like falling in love or winning the lottery, eventually one habituates, and the new "way it is" is taken for granted (Brickman et al., 1978). This is the hedonic treadmill (Sheldon & Lyubormirsky, 2006). Appreciation can function as a counter-force. Grateful/appreciative people may be less likely to habituate to positive circumstances (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002). If people, spontaneously or through training, use cues such as rituals or experiences of adversity to remind themselves to appreciate the positive aspects of their lives, then wellbeing may be increased. Fredrickson (2004) also discussed how gratitude may promote wellbeing. She argued that, in line with her broaden-and-build theory of positive emotion, gratitude builds "personal and social resources," including "skills for loving and showing appreciation," and interpersonal relationships (Fredrickson, 2004, p. 152).

1.3. Research on appreciation and SWB

Research has demonstrated a connection between appreciation and SWB (e.g., Adler & Fagley, 2005; McCullough et al., 2002;

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