The Relationships between Gratitude, Appreciation, Psychological Well-being and Religiosity
An Empirical Study with Turkish Sample

Gülüşan Göcen

Introduction

Gratitude and appreciation have been characterized as the “forgotten factors” in happiness research (McCullough, Emmons & Tsang, 2002; Emmons, 2009). As such, many studies focusing solely on the negative aspects in psychology have been criticized (Snyder & Lopez, 2002; Lazarus, 2003; Held, 2004; Pawelski, 2008; Miller, 2008; Fernandez-Rios, Cornes, 2009; Schneider 2011). For example, Fredrickson (2001) has pointed out that research emphasizing the cure and prevention of pathological issues typically focuses on the suffering experiences of persons rather than the experiences of well-being in individuals. With the continued prevalence of the positive psychology movement, gratitude and well-being have also become a focus for mainstream psychological research (e.g., Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Gable & Haidt, 2000; Watkins et al., 2003; Fredrickson et al., 2003; Bono & McCullough, 2006; Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006).

Considerable current empirical works indicate the relationship between gratitude and well-being (e.g., Emmons, McCullough, 2003; Duckworth, Steen & Seligman, 2005; Kashdan, Uswatt & Julian, 2006; Wood, Joseph & Linley, 2007a; Wood, Maltby, Stewart, Linley & Joseph, 2008a). Some of these studies have been carried out in clinical samples (Duckworth, Steen & Seligman, 2005), student (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006) and adult samples (Seligman, Park, Steen & Peterson, 2005). Much of the present psychological research into gratitude has focused on the nature of individual differences in gratitude, and the consequences of being a more or less grateful person (Wood, Joseph & Linley, 2007a).

Prior to scientific research, religious and philosophical traditions have dealt with gratitude as an integral part of well-being, religiosity and spirituality.

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Recent studies have indicated that religiosity can provide a motivating feature in human beings to be grateful (e.g., Emmons & Crumpler, 2000; Harpman, 2004). Therefore, those who regularly attend religious services and rituals are more likely to have a greater sense of gratitude through the majority of their lives (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Emmons & Kneezel, 2005; Krause, 2006).

**What is Gratitude?**

Gratitude is a common concept within intellectual history. However, it is relatively new in the history of psychology. Indeed, gratitude is a universal part of the human being (McCullough & Tsang, 2004). There are several ways to conceptualize gratitude, as it has been variously described as an emotion, an attitude, a moral virtue, a habit, a personality trait, and a coping response (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). It is also defined as maintaining events and situations of life that were characterized by positive thinking (Scheier & Carver, 1985; Peterson, 2000; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Emmons (2004: 554) brilliantly defines gratitude as “a sense of thankfulness and joy in response to receiving a gift whether the gift is a tangible benefit from a specific other or a moment of peaceful bliss evoked by natural beauty”. This occasion emerges from a situation when a person has intentionally given to or taken something from someone (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000; McCullough & Tsang, 2004). Thus, gratitude is defined as another-oriented emotion, attitude, habit, and personality trait. Agreeing with this conception, Tsang (2006: 139) defines gratitude as “a positive emotional reaction to the receipt of a benefit that is perceived to have resulted from the good intentions of another”. Gratitude and appreciation may serve as a way to live a more satisfying and meaningful life and as a way of contributing for others (Kashdan et al., 2006). The definition of gratitude given by Peterson and Seligman (2003) considers gratitude as a character strength belonging to the so-called “transcendental virtues” with important benefits for both the individual and the society. On the other hand, McCullough et al. (2001) conceptualize gratitude as an affect, which guides people’s cognitions and behaviors in the moral domain, by arguing that gratitude has three moral functions. It is (a) a benefit detector and both (b) a reinforcer and (c) a motivator of prosocial behavior.

Generally gratitude is comprised of appreciation, thankfulness, and a sense of wonder (Emmons & Shelton, 2002; Emmons, 2009). However, some researchers accept gratitude as a component of appreciation (Adler & Fagley, 2005). Appreciation is defined as being aware of feelings and being grateful, and can also be expressed internally or externally (Arrien, 2011). The definition of appreciation in common dictionaries include “the act of estimating the qualities of things according to their true worth”; “grateful recognition”; “sensitive