

Gratitude, Life Satisfaction, and Well-Being: Unpacking the Power of Positive Emotions and Optimism in Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

The current study investigates the connection between gratitude and life satisfaction, focusing on the role of positive emotions as a mediator and optimism as a moderator. Based on established theories, including Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory, the results suggest that gratitude is strongly associated with life satisfaction, largely by fostering positive emotions such as joy, contentment, and hope. Satisfaction with life scale, Positive and Negative Affect schedule, Life Orientation Test revised and gratitude questionnaire was utilized in the present study. Additionally, the study reveals that optimism enhances the impact of gratitude, further boosting life satisfaction. These findings contribute to the expanding field of positive psychology, highlighting how gratitude, positive emotions, and optimism interact to improve well-being. While the study has some limitations, such as the use of self-reported data and a cross-sectional design, it offers valuable insights and sets the stage for future research. Future studies could delve deeper into these relationships across diverse cultural settings and explore ways to cultivate gratitude and optimism through interventions to enhance life satisfaction.



Introduction

Gratitude

Gratitude the simple act of recognizing and appreciating the good things in life has a profound impact on our mental, emotional, and physical well-being. Research consistently shows that

practicing gratitude can boost happiness, reduce stress, and strengthen relationships, making it a powerful tool for living a more fulfilling life.

Something as small as writing in a gratitude journal or sending a heartfelt thank-you note can make a significant difference in mental health. Studies have found that people who actively practice gratitude experience less anxiety and depression and report greater overall life satisfaction (Ducasse et al., 2023). Even small daily exercises, like jotting down "Three Good Things" that happened, have been linked to long-term mood improvements and a decrease in depressive symptoms (Simon-Thomas, 2023).

Gratitude isn't just good for the mind—it benefits the body too. Research shows that regularly feeling and expressing gratitude can help calm the nervous system, lower blood pressure, and activate the body's relaxation response. For instance, heart failure patients who kept gratitude journals showed better heart-rate variability, a sign of improved cardiovascular health (Simon-Thomas, 2023). People who practice gratitude also tend to sleep better and make healthier lifestyle choices, like eating well and staying active (UCLA Health, 2023).

Beyond personal well-being, gratitude strengthens our relationships. When we express appreciation, we not only make others feel valued, but we also build deeper emotional connections. Studies show that gratitude increases empathy and reduces aggression, leading to more positive and meaningful interactions (Grant et al., 2023). This is especially important in close relationships, where small gestures of appreciation can go a long way in fostering love and connection.

Gratitude also acts as a buffer during tough times. People who adopt a grateful mindset are often more resilient, able to find hope even in adversity. Instead of dwelling on challenges, they focus on the good, which helps them cope with stress and worry more effectively (Wood et al., 2010). This shift in perspective can be incredibly powerful in overcoming life's difficulties.

The connection between gratitude and happiness is well established. Studies have repeatedly found that people who practice gratitude feel more satisfied with their lives, experience higher self-esteem, and find greater meaning (Park & Seligman, 2023). While researchers are still exploring the exact mechanisms behind this link, the evidence is clear: gratitude makes life better. The good news? Practicing gratitude doesn't require a huge time commitment. Just 15 minutes a day for six weeks can create lasting improvements in mental wellness and a more positive outlook on life (UCLA Health, 2023). Over time, these small habits can lead to a powerful shift in how we see the world.

At its core, gratitude is a simple yet transformative practice. By making it a part of our daily lives, we can nurture our mental health, build stronger relationships, and embrace a deeper sense of joy and fulfillment. It's a reminder that even in the busiest or most challenging moments, there's always something to be thankful for.

Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction plays a huge role in our overall well-being it's how we evaluate the quality of our lives based on our experiences, achievements, and whether things are going the way we hoped. It affects everything from our mental health to our relationships, making it a key focus not just for individuals but also for policymakers trying to improve public well-being (Veenhoven, 1996).

Interestingly, research shows a strong connection between life satisfaction and physical health. A large study with nearly 13,000 participants found that people who felt more satisfied with their lives also reported better physical health, less chronic pain, and a more positive perception of their overall health (Steptoe et al., 2021). This suggests that improving life satisfaction isn't just about feeling happier it could have real effects on our bodies too.

Another fascinating aspect is how life satisfaction changes over time. Studies suggest that for most of adulthood, it remains relatively stable, but after the age of 70, it tends to decline (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2008). This drop is often linked to health problems and social isolation, which are more common in older age. Recognizing these trends can help us create better support systems to maintain happiness and well-being as people get older.

Social and economic factors also shape how satisfied people feel with their lives. Higher income and education levels are often linked to greater life satisfaction, likely because they provide access to more opportunities and security (Diener et al., 2018). At the same time, strong social connections—friends, family, and community—are just as important, if not more. Having meaningful relationships can significantly boost well-being, reinforcing the need to cultivate supportive social environments.

Fortunately, there are ways to actively improve life satisfaction. Studies have shown that simple practices like gratitude journaling and engaging in positive psychology exercises can make a real difference (Seligman et al., 2005). These small changes don't just provide a temporary mood boost they can have lasting effects on overall happiness. Making these practices part of daily life could be a game-changer for many.

Culture also shapes the way people perceive life satisfaction. Different societies emphasize different aspects of well-being some prioritize family and community bonds, while others focus on personal achievement (Diener & Suh, 2000). Understanding these cultural differences helps explain why life satisfaction can vary widely across the world.

With technology becoming such a big part of our daily lives, its impact on life satisfaction is another growing area of interest. While staying digitally connected can strengthen relationships and offer new opportunities, too much screen time especially social media can sometimes lead to feelings of isolation or self-doubt (Twenge et al., 2019). Striking a balance between online and real-world interactions is key to maintaining a healthy level of life satisfaction. Ultimately, life satisfaction is shaped by a mix of health, relationships, financial security, social connections, culture, and even technology use. As we learn more about what influences happiness, it becomes increasingly clear that both individuals and policymakers have a role to play in fostering environments that support greater life satisfaction. Small, intentional changes whether at a personal or societal level can lead to significant improvements in overall well-being.

Positive Emotions

Positive emotions are more than just feel-good moments; they are fundamental to our overall well-being and resilience. Emotions like joy, gratitude, love, and hope have a significant impact on both our mental and physical health. These emotions help us build stronger connections with others and deepen our sense of happiness. By understanding the power of positive emotions, we can improve our mental health and nurture our ability to flourish in life.

Barbara Fredrickson's *Broaden-and-Build Theory* helps us grasp why positive emotions are so important. According to Fredrickson, these emotions expand our thinking and encourage us to explore new ideas and behaviors. For example, joy can make us playful, and interest can spark curiosity. Over time, these experiences build personal resources such as better social connections, intellectual growth, and emotional resilience.

Positive emotions also provide a protective buffer against stress. Research by Tugade and colleagues (2004) showed that people who regularly experience positive emotions cope better with stress, bounce back from tough situations more quickly, and maintain their mental health. Additionally, writing about positive experiences can actually improve our physical health, boosting immune function and reducing illness (Burton & King, 2004).

The connection between positive emotions and physical health is well-supported. People who experience more positive emotions tend to have lower blood pressure, better cardiovascular health, and stronger immune systems (Kok et al., 2013). These findings suggest that cultivating positivity can promote a longer, healthier life.

Our social relationships also thrive when we embrace positive emotions. When we express gratitude, love, or appreciation, we foster empathy and kindness, which in turn strengthens our connections with others. These supportive networks are essential for mental health and happiness. Feeling socially supported during challenging times can make all the difference.

Additionally, the more positive emotions we experience, the greater our life satisfaction. People who regularly experience joy, hope, and love report higher happiness levels and a deeper sense of fulfillment (Diener et al., 2018). Practices like mindfulness meditation and gratitude journaling can help increase the frequency of these emotions and lead to a more rewarding life (Kiken et al., 2017). Positive emotions don't just benefit individuals they also help communities thrive. In times of crisis, communities that emphasize positive emotional expression tend to recover more effectively (Stellar et al., 2015). This collective resilience shows the importance of fostering environments where positivity can flourish.

In conclusion, positive emotions are integral to our mental and physical well-being, the strength of our relationships, and our ability to navigate life's challenges. By nurturing these feelings, we can improve not only our own lives but also contribute to the flourishing of those around us.

Optimism

Optimism is the belief that good things are on the horizon. It's a mindset that shapes how we see the world, how we deal with challenges, and ultimately, how we experience life. Optimistic people tend to see setbacks as temporary and solvable, which helps them bounce back from difficulties and take proactive steps to improve their situations (Scheier & Carver, 1985). Over the years, researchers have explored the power of optimism, uncovering its deep connection to mental health, physical well-being, and relationships.

Having an optimistic outlook can make a real difference in mental health. Studies show that people who expect positive outcomes are less likely to struggle with depression and anxiety (Carver et al., 2010). This is partly because optimists tend to use healthier coping strategies when faced with stress they reframe tough situations as opportunities to grow, making it easier to manage life's ups and downs (Tugade et al., 2004). In fact, optimism has been linked to greater life satisfaction and

happiness, suggesting that having a hopeful perspective can lead to a richer, more fulfilling life (Diener et al., 2018).

But the benefits of optimism go beyond mental well-being; they extend to physical health too. Research has found that optimistic individuals are more likely to take care of themselves by exercising regularly, eating well, and engaging in other healthy habits (Seligman et al., 2005). More than that, optimism is associated with better heart health and lower risks of chronic illnesses (Boehm & Kubzansky, 2012). For example, one study found that optimists had a significantly lower chance of developing heart disease compared to those with a more pessimistic outlook (Boehm et al., 2011). This connection between optimism and physical health highlights how our mindset can influence our overall well-being.

Optimism is also a powerful tool when dealing with adversity. Rather than avoiding problems or feeling helpless, optimists tend to tackle challenges head-on, using problem-solving strategies to find a way forward (Scheier & Carver, 1992). In difficult times—whether it's a personal loss, a financial setback, or a natural disaster—optimistic people are more likely to reach out for support and find ways to adapt (Stellar et al., 2015).

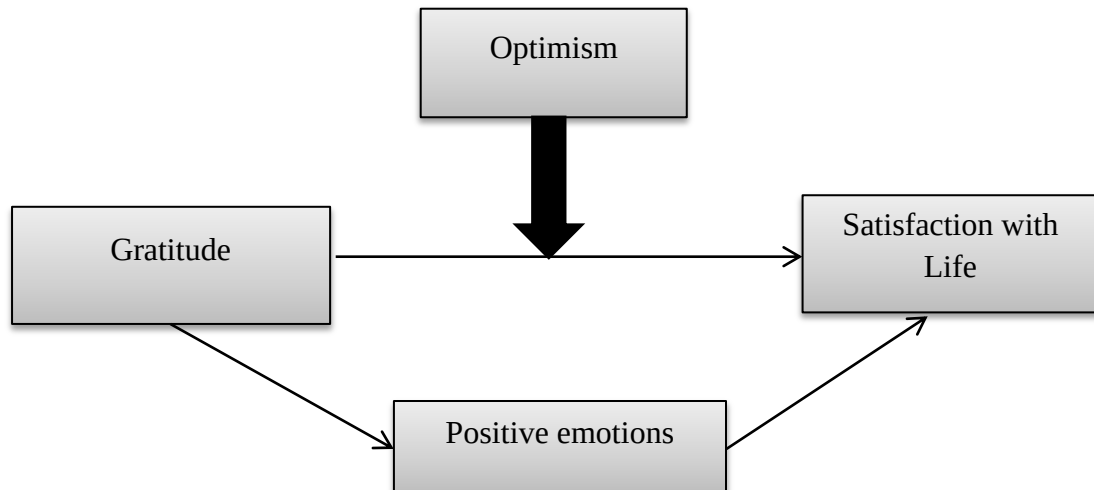
Beyond personal resilience, optimism also strengthens social relationships. People who maintain a positive outlook tend to be more socially engaged, forming deeper connections with others (Carver et al., 2010). Their optimism attracts support and companionship, creating strong networks that provide emotional and practical help during tough times. These connections, in turn, reinforce their positive outlook, creating a cycle of support and encouragement.

Psychologists have different theories about where optimism comes from. Some believe it's a personality trait something you're born with (Scheier & Carver, 1985). Others argue that optimism can be learned by challenging negative thought patterns and training the mind to see the bright side (Seligman, 1991). The good news? Even if someone isn't naturally optimistic, they can develop a more hopeful perspective with practice. Culture also plays a role in shaping optimism. Research suggests that societal values influence how people interpret life events and their expectations for the future (Diener & Suh, 2000). For example, collectivist cultures that emphasize community support may foster a more optimistic mindset in their members. Understanding these cultural differences can help create approaches that promote optimism across different groups.

At its core, optimism is a powerful force that affects every aspect of life. It strengthens resilience, improves coping strategies, encourages healthier habits, and deepens relationships. As researchers continue to explore what fuels optimism and how to cultivate it, one thing remains clear: embracing a positive outlook can lead to a happier, healthier, and more fulfilling life.

Conceptual Model

The model of current study incorporates of an independent variable (Gratitude) and dependent variable (Satisfaction with life) along with a mediator (Positive emotions) and moderator (Optimism).



Objectives

1. To investigate the association of among gratitude and satisfaction in life among adults.
2. To examine the impact of gratitude on satisfaction in life among adults.
3. To investigate the mediating role of positive emotions between gratitude and satisfaction in life among adults.
4. To investigate the moderating role of optimism between gratitude satisfaction in life among adults.

Hypotheses

Gratitude is positively associated to satisfaction in life among adults.

1. Gratitude has a significant impact on satisfaction in life among adults.
2. Positive emotions mediate the relationship between gratitude satisfaction in life among adults.
3. Optimism moderates the relationship between gratitude satisfaction in life among adults.

Instruments

Satisfaction with Life Scale

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) is developed by Diener et al. (1985). This 5-item scale measures overall life satisfaction using a Likert-type response format ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). It evaluates an individual's cognitive assessment of their life satisfaction. The SWLS has demonstrated strong reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values typically exceeding 0.87 (Diener et al., 1985).

Gratitude Questionnaire

Gratitude Questionnaire-Six Item Form (GQ-6) is created by McCullough et al. (2002). This 6-item scale assesses an individual's tendency to experience gratitude. Responses are measured on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The GQ-6 is designed to evaluate how frequently individuals recognize and appreciate positive aspects of life. It has shown good reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of approximately 0.82 (McCullough et al., 2002).

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) is developed by Watson et al. (1988). This 20-item scale measures both positive and negative emotions. Participants rate their emotional experiences using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (very slightly or not at all) to 5 (extremely). PANAS assesses the frequency of various emotional states over a specific timeframe, with the reliability of the positive affect subscale typically ranging from 0.86 to 0.90 (Watson et al., 1988).

Life Orientation Test-Revised

Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R) is designed by Scheier and Carver (1985). This 10-item scale measures optimism and pessimism using a Likert-type format ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). It assesses individual differences in generalized optimism. The LOT-R has demonstrated strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.78 to 0.93 (Scheier & Carver, 1985).

These psychological scales are widely used in research and practice, offering reliable tools for assessing life satisfaction, gratitude, emotional experiences, and optimism.

Results

Table 1: Descriptive properties of the sample (N=300)

Sample Data		n	%
Age			
	18-25	270	90
	26-31	30	10
Gender			
	Men	100	33.3
	Women	200	66.6
Education			
	Graduate	110	36.6
	Under-graduate	190	63.3
Family system			
	Joint	150	50
	Nuclear	150	50
Residency			
	Urban	140	46.6
	Rural	160	53.3
Mental Illness			
	Yes	60	20
	No	240	80
Socioeconomic status			
	Lower class	25	8.3
	Middle class	250	83.3
	Upper class	25	8.3

Note: The demographic data presented in the table reflect the characteristics of the study participants.

The sample consisted of 300 respondents, including both men and women, primarily aged between 18–25 and 26–31 years. Participants' education levels were categorized as undergraduate and graduate. Regarding mental health, 20% of respondents reported having a mental illness, while 80% did not. Financial status was classified into middle, lower, and upper classes. Additionally, data on family structure (joint or nuclear) and residency (urban or rural) are available in the data file.

Table 2: Psychometric Properties of all instruments (N=300)

<i>Scales</i>	<i>k</i>	<i>α</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range		<i>Skew</i>	<i>Kurt</i>
					Actual	Potential		
SWLS	5	.89	46.30	14.16	5-60	5-35	.46	.74
GQ	6	.88	64.49	16.55	6-66	6-42	.36	.12
PANAS	20	.79	16.33	5.42	20-124	20-100	.34	.31
LOTR	10	.84	37.07	12.60	10-70	10-50	.42	.49

Note: SWLS= Satisfaction with life Scale, GQ= Gratitude Questionnaire, PANAS= Positive and Negative Affect Schedule, LOTR= Life Orientation Test Revised

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics and alpha reliability coefficients for all the measures used in this study. The reliability of the scales is well within an acceptable range, with alpha coefficients ranging from .79 to .89. Additionally, normality assumptions have been assessed, with skewness and kurtosis values falling between -3 and +3, indicating that the data follows a normal distribution (George & Mallery, 2010). The table also differentiates between the potential range, which represents the minimum and maximum scores defined by each scale, and the actual range, which reflects the scores observed in this study.

Table 3: Correlation matrix between SWL, GQ, PANAS and LOTR

	Variables	1	2	3	4
1.	SWL	-			
2.	GQ	.56**	-		
3.	PANAS	.78**	.38**	-	
4.	LOTR	.94**	.49**	.72**	-

Note: SWLS= Satisfaction with life Scale, GQ= Gratitude Questionnaire, PANAS= Positive and Negative Affect Schedule, LOTR= Life Orientation Test Revised

The table outlines the Pearson correlation coefficients across four variables. Gratitude is substantially positively interrelated with SWL, PANAS and LOTR. GQ is positively associated with all other variables showing that as gratitude increases, positive emotions, satisfaction with life and optimism. All relationships are significant at the $p < 0.01$ level.

Table 4: Regression Coefficients of Independent Variables on Dependent Variable (Satisfaction with Life)

Variables	B	SE	t	p	95%CL
Constant	91.56***	3.96	30.78	.00	84.15-96.72
PANAS	.56***	.08	10.24	.00	.76 - .98
LOTR	.72***	.09	9.52	.00	.45 -.97
GQ	.89***	.16	7.43	.00	.62 – 1.12

Note: N=300; *** $p < .05$ SWLS= Satisfaction with life Scale, GQ= Gratitude Questionnaire, PANAS= Positive and Negative Affect Schedule, LOTR= Life Orientation Test Revised

The table presents the results of a regression analysis examining the predictors of the outcome variable. The constant is statistically significant. Gratitude emerges as a strong predictor of life satisfaction, while positive emotions also show a substantial positive effect. Additionally, optimism demonstrates a significant positive association, suggesting that higher levels of optimism correspond to higher scores on the outcome variable. All predictors are statistically significant at the $p < 0.001$ level, with 95% confidence intervals.

Table 5: Mediating role of positive emotions between gratitude and satisfaction with life

Variables	R^2	β	SE	t	95%CI	
					LL	UL
Total effect	.25	.58***	.07	10.33	.76	1.12
Direct effect						
GQ-PE		.29***	.03	11.36	.27	.39
PE-SWL		.39***	.19	3.89	.69	1.22
GQ-SWL		.48***	.09	8.56	.67	2.37
Indirect effect						
GQ-PE-SWL	.49	.13			.34	.78

Note: SWLS= Satisfaction with life Scale, GQ= Gratitude Questionnaire, PANAS= Positive and Negative Affect Schedule, LOTR= Life Orientation Test Revised

Table 5 presents findings from a mediation analysis exploring how gratitude influences life satisfaction through positive emotions. This analysis specifically examines the mediating role of positive emotions in this relationship. The results suggest that positive emotions significantly shape the link between gratitude and life satisfaction. The direct effect ($\beta = .29$, $p < .001$) is notably smaller than the total effect ($\beta = .58$, $p < .001$). Additionally, the upper and lower bounds of the indirect effect lie in the same direction, indicating the presence of partial mediation between gratitude and life satisfaction.

Table 6: Moderating role of optimism between gratitude and satisfaction with life

variables	Beta	95%CI	
		LL	UL
Constant	121.45	112.6	129.23
GQ	2.43	3.25	4.50
LOTR	.22	.75	1.12
GQ*LOTR	.04	.01	.05
R^2	.35		
ΔR^2	.09		

Note: GQ= Gratitude Questionnaire, PANAS= Positive and Negative Affect Schedule, LOTR= Life Orientation Test Revised

Table 6 shows that optimism moderates the link between gratitude and psychological well-being. While optimism alone does also have a significant direct effect on satisfaction with life, but it plays a more protective role when combined with gratitude. The model explains 35% of the variance in satisfaction with life, with the interaction contributing an additional 9%, highlighting optimism as a protective factor for satisfaction with life.

Discussion

This study examined how gratitude influences life satisfaction, focusing on the role of positive emotions as a mediator and optimism as a moderator. The results showed a strong positive link between gratitude and life satisfaction, which is consistent with previous research emphasizing the importance of gratitude for overall well-being (Emmons & Mishra, 2011; Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010). People who are more grateful tend to experience greater life satisfaction, likely because they focus on the positive aspects of life instead of dwelling on negativity.

The study also confirmed that positive emotions play a mediating role in this relationship. According to Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory, positive emotions help individuals lead more fulfilling lives by reinforcing the benefits of gratitude. When people feel grateful, they're more likely to experience emotions like joy, contentment, and hope, all of which further boost their life satisfaction. This aligns with recent research showing that positive emotions are a key psychological factor linking gratitude to well-being (Disabato et al., 2017).

Furthermore, optimism was found to moderate the link between gratitude and life satisfaction, suggesting that individuals with a higher level of optimism benefit more from practicing gratitude. Optimism helps individuals maintain a positive outlook, enhancing the effects of gratitude by allowing them to interpret life events more constructively (Carver, Scheier, & Segerstrom, 2010). This supports earlier studies showing that optimism can amplify the positive psychological impact of gratitude, leading to greater life satisfaction (Datu & King, 2016).

The reliability of the measurement tools used in this study was well-established, lending credibility to the findings. Overall, the study contributes to the growing field of positive psychology by showing how gratitude, positive emotions, and optimism work together to shape well-being. Future research could explore these relationships further in different cultural settings and investigate potential interventions to enhance gratitude and optimism in order to boost life satisfaction.

Conclusion

To sum up, this study underscores the important role gratitude plays in boosting life satisfaction, with positive emotions acting as a bridge and optimism as a key factor that strengthens this connection. The results suggest that people who regularly practice gratitude tend to feel more satisfied with their lives, as they focus on the positive and experience an increase in positive emotions. Moreover, those with a more optimistic outlook seem to benefit even more from gratitude, as optimism helps them maintain a constructive perspective on life, further amplifying the positive effects. These findings support existing research and deepen our understanding of how gratitude, positive emotions, and optimism work together to enhance overall well-being. Looking ahead, future research could explore these relationships in different cultural settings and examine ways to cultivate gratitude and optimism through interventions to boost life satisfaction.

Suggestions and Limitations

Although this study offers important insights into the connection between gratitude, positive emotions, and life satisfaction, there are a few limitations worth noting. Firstly, the sample may not fully represent a range of cultural or demographic groups, which limits how broadly the results can be applied. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of biases, such as social desirability or inaccurate self-reflection. Moreover, the cross-sectional nature of the

study means we cannot make definitive conclusions about cause-and-effect relationships, as it only provides a snapshot of the variables at one point in time. Future research could overcome these limitations by including a more diverse sample, adopting a longitudinal approach to explore causality, and using objective measures to improve the accuracy and validity of the findings.

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