

2014

The Relationship Between Simple Pleasures and Trait Gratitude

Megan Shupe

Eastern Washington University

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The Relationship Between Simple Pleasures and Trait Gratitude

A Thesis

Presented To

Eastern Washington University

Cheney, Washington

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Science

Psychology, Clinical Concentration

By

Megan Shupe

Spring 2014

THESIS OF MEGAN SHUPE APPROVED BY

PHILIP WATKINS, Ph.D., Graduate Study Committee

DATE _____

AMANI EL-ALAYLI, Ph.D., Graduate Study Committee

DATE _____

SARAH KELLER, Ph.D., Graduate Study Committee

DATE _____

MASTER'S THESIS

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Abstract

Grateful disposition is associated with positive affect, happiness, high levels of overall well-being and an appreciation of simple pleasures. This study further examined the relationship between simple pleasures and trait gratitude. I hypothesized that people with higher trait gratitude scores would notice more simple pleasures in their lives and feel more gratitude for simple pleasures than less grateful people. I acquired data from 169 undergraduate students at Eastern Washington University. Results suggested that grateful people experienced the same number of simple pleasures as less grateful people but were more grateful for them. This suggests that although grateful people do not encounter simple pleasures more frequently, they do experience more positive affect regarding simple pleasures, particularly simple pleasures that have occurred recently.

Keywords: Gratitude; simple pleasures; positive affect

Table of Contents

1. Abstract.....	pg. iv
2. List of Figures.....	pg. vii
3. List of Appendices.....	pg. viii
4. Introduction	pg. 1
5. Gratitude	pg. 1
6. Simple Pleasures	pg. 5
7. The Current Study and Hypotheses	pg. 9
8. Method.....	pg. 10
9. Research Design.....	pg. 10
10. Participants	pg. 10
11. Materials.....	pg. 11
12. Procedure.....	pg. 14
13. Results	pg. 15
14. Discussion.....	pg. 22
15. References.....	pg. 29
16. Table 1	pg. 13
17. Table 2.....	pg. 20
18. Table 3.....	pg. 21
19. Appendix A.....	pg. 33
20. Appendix B.....	pg. 34

21. Appendix C..... pg. 35

22. Appendix D..... pg. 36

23. Appendix E..... pg. 37

24. Vitae..... pg. 38

List of Tables

Table 1	Descriptive Statistics for Pleasures Recorded for the Last 3 Days and the Last Year
Table 2	Pleasures Recorded for the Last 3 Days Correlation Matrix
Table 3	Pleasures Recorded for the Last Year Correlation Matrix

List of Appendices

- Appendix A. Gratitude, Resentment and Appreciation Test revised short form (GRAT-Short Form)
- Appendix B. Pleasures Free Recall Sheet-Last 3 Days
- Appendix C. Pleasures Free Recall Sheet-Last Year
- Appendix D. Pleasure Rating Scales
- Appendix E. Study Description

The Relationship Between Simple Pleasures and Trait Gratitude

When psychology first emerged as a branch of science in 1879, the main purpose was to study mental illness. In recent years, however, a new field of psychology has emerged with a different purpose. Positive psychology refers to the scientific study of traits and characteristics that enable individuals and communities to thrive. Instead of studying mental illness, positive psychologists examine psychological health and ways to increase this health (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). One topic that has come out of positive psychology is subjective well-being. Research shows that high levels of subjective well-being is related to health benefits and longevity (Diener & Chan, 2011). One characteristic that is related to higher subjective well-being is gratitude (McCullough, Emmons & Tsang, 2002). Although there is a known relationship between subjective well-being and gratitude, there is very little research on why this relationship exists.

The purpose of this research was to examine how trait gratitude affects the number of simple pleasures an individual experiences and how it affects the gratefulness and positive affect an individual feels for simple pleasures he or she experienced. To gain a better understanding of gratitude, simple pleasures, well-being and their relationships, I must examine past research on these topics.

Gratitude

Though gratitude is a fairly new topic of interest in psychology, it has gained more research interest in recent years (Watkins, 2014). Gratitude is described as both an affective state and a trait (McCullough et al., 2002). The

affective state of gratitude is an emotion that a beneficiary experiences when a benefactor provides a benefit for them. Gratitude as an affective state can fluctuate. McCullough and colleagues (2002) argue that trait gratitude is a virtue or characteristic. Gratitude as a trait, or grateful disposition, is defined as a habitual pattern of recognizing and responding gratefully to others' contributions to one's positive experiences and outcomes (McCullough et al., 2002). Thus, those high in trait gratitude have a low threshold for experiencing state gratitude (i.e., they experience gratitude easily and often). Research has also shown that state and trait gratitude are linked, showing that individuals with higher levels of trait gratitude are more likely to experience gratitude on a daily basis (McCullough, Tsang, & Emmons, 2004).

Trait gratitude is more long-term and enduring than state gratitude, and those high in trait gratitude tend to dwell on the positive aspects of life (Watkins, 2004). Those high in trait gratitude are also likely to experience happiness when they receive undeserved gifts (Watkins, 2004). Wood, Froh and Geraghty (2010) developed the schematic theory to explain trait gratitude. First, they argued that grateful people have a cognitive lens that determines how they perceive the world (Wood et al., 2010). This lens might make them likely to perceive help as more costly, valuable, and altruistic than less grateful people and thus they place greater value on the helpful action of the helper (Wood et al., 2010). Because they place greater value on the action of the helper, they may be more likely to experience gratitude than less grateful people. The way that they perceive the world may explain the difference between grateful and less grateful people. As

discussed earlier, individuals high in trait gratitude also have a low threshold for grateful emotions (McCullough et al., 2002). This might also relate to the cognitive lens that Wood and colleagues (2010) suggest grateful people have. If an individual has a cognitive bias for seeing acts of help as being valuable to oneself and costly to the other, the individual would likely experience gratitude for even small acts of help from others.

Gratitude has many benefits, as research shows that individuals who are more grateful are happier and healthier than those who are less grateful. The grateful disposition is related to positive affectivity, subjective well-being, life satisfaction, optimism and happiness (McCullough et al., 2002; Watkins, Woodward, Stone & Kolts, 2003; for a review see Watkins, 2014). Additionally, gratitude is negatively correlated with negative affect, anxiety, depression, and physical aggression (McCullough et al., 2002; Watkins et al., 2003). Research has also shown that grateful people's memories have a more positive emotional impact on them than the memories of less grateful people (Watkins, Grimm & Kolts, 2004).

Gratitude also has social benefits. Emmons and Shelton (2002) found evidence that gratitude builds and enhances friendships. They suggest this occurs because people who experience gratitude on a regular basis are likely to feel cared for by others. Additionally, Fredrickson (2004) suggests that gratitude reflects, motivates, and reinforces social actions in both the gift giver and recipient. Roberts (2004) suggests that grateful feelings may make the gift recipient likely to respond to acts of kindness by acknowledging the benefit and

expressing appreciation and thankfulness for these acts. Recent research has provided strong support for these social theories of gratitude. Indeed, gratitude provides significant benefits in relationships (for a reviews, see Watkins, 2014). In sum, research has shown that gratitude is associated with considerable emotional and relational benefits.

Because of the positive benefits gratitude has to offer, researchers have developed gratitude interventions by creating a situation that encourages gratitude. Following gratitude interventions, people feel more optimistic about future events that were to occur in the next week and feel better about their lives as a whole than they do before the gratitude interventions (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Not only can gratitude interventions improve people's outlook of the week, but grateful contemplation can also reduce the physical symptoms people feel, including stress, and can increase long-term well-being (Rash, Matsuba & Prkachin, 2011). In research conducted by Emmons and McCullough (2003), people who participated in daily gratitude exercises experienced fewer physical symptoms and exercised more than those who did not participate in daily gratitude exercises. In this study they had participants list blessings, hassles, or events in their daily lives. They found that there are advantages to focusing on one's blessings, and that these benefits are especially apparent when comparing between the blessings and hassles groups. Although it was less pronounced, Emmons and McCullough also found that the benefits were present when comparing the blessings condition with the life events condition.

It is clear that trait gratitude is a positive characteristic that offers many benefits to those who possess the trait. Gratitude positively impacts people's lives and we should further investigate this topic to better understand *why* grateful people are happier than less grateful people. Research on the relationship between happiness and gratitude could provide insight into happiness and I submit that the appreciation of simple pleasures may be an important part of this relationship.

Simple Pleasures

Research shows that an appreciation of simple pleasures is a component of trait gratitude (Watkins et al., 2003). Watkins and colleagues found this while examining the validity of the Gratitude, Resentment, and Appreciation Test (GRAT) assessment of gratitude (2003). An appreciation of simple pleasures is highly correlated with other components of gratitude, $r = .84$ (Watkins et al., 2003). Watkins and colleagues (2003) define simple pleasures as "those pleasures in life that are readily available to most people" (p. 432). Although they didn't use the term "simple pleasures" in their study, Seidlitz and Diener (1993) conducted research that pertains to this topic about affectivity and how it relates to memory recall. In this study, Seidlitz and Diener (1993) found that happy people recall more positive events than less happy people. In the same study they found that the reason for this finding is that happy people perceive ambiguous events and experiences more positively than less happy people. In other words, happy people were interpreting what most people interpret as neutral events as positive. Based on this, it is clear that perception determines

whether a person experiences an event as neutral or positive. These ambiguous events that happy people perceive as positive events may be simple pleasures. It is possible that unhappy people don't appreciate small pleasant experiences because they are small and perceive them as ambiguous while happy people appreciate these small pleasant experiences and experience them as being positive.

If this is true, perhaps one road to happiness involves noticing and appreciating simple pleasures frequently. Because simple pleasures are by definition common and readily available, people who enjoy and appreciate them are likely to be happier than those who don't. Perhaps enjoying these little events frequently keeps mood elevated, leading to increased overall happiness. This is supported by the research of Diener, Sandvik and Pavot (1991), who found that happiness depends more on the frequency of positive events occurring in one's life rather than the intensity of the positive affect that a positive event causes. They found that happiness depends on the overall amount of time a person experiences positive affect versus the overall amount of time a person experiences negative affect (Diener et al., 1991). If gratitude promotes the appreciation of simple pleasures, perhaps the tendency to appreciate simple, readily available pleasures causes frequent positive affect, which in turn makes grateful people happier than less grateful people.

Research has also shown that experiencing an extremely positive event can decrease an individual's enjoyment of simple pleasures. Brickman, Coates and Janoff-Bulmann (1978) found that lottery winners experienced simple

pleasures as less pleasurable than people who had not won the lottery (Brickman, Coates & Janoff-Bulmann, 1978). The authors of this study suggested that this result was because after experiencing such an intensely pleasurable event as winning the lottery, the lottery winners had adapted to a higher standard of what is pleasurable (Brickman et al. 1978). Although the lottery winners didn't enjoy simple pleasures as much as those who had not won the lottery, overall levels of happiness did not differ between the two groups (Brickman et al., 1978). This suggests that there are other factors besides enjoyment of simple pleasures that determine an individual's happiness.

As mentioned before, the memories of grateful people have a more positive emotional impact on them than the memories of less grateful people (Watkins et al., 2004). Based on this, it is possible that simple pleasures have a more positive emotional impact on grateful people than they do for less grateful people. Because of this, grateful people might appreciate simple pleasures more and experience more gratitude for simple pleasures in their lives than less grateful people.

One important question that must be asked when studying gratitude and happiness is whether or not it is possible to determine causality. Does gratitude enhance well-being or does well-being enhance gratitude? It is very likely that this relationship is bidirectional. The success of gratitude interventions increasing well-being suggests that, at least, gratitude does enhance well-being (Wood et al., 2010). Another important question is whether gratitude promotes the appreciation of simple pleasures or the appreciation of simple pleasures enhances gratitude?

The schematic hypothesis proposed by Wood and colleagues (2010) suggests that grateful people have a cognitive lens that determines how they perceive the world, suggesting that gratitude is what promotes the appreciation of simple pleasures. Wood, Maltby, Stewart, Linley, and Joseph, (2008) conducted a study where they had participants read vignettes and determine how grateful they would feel if they experienced the vignette situations. They found that how an individual perceives cost (for the benefactor), value, and altruism explained over 80% of variance among participants' ratings of how grateful they would feel (Wood et al., 2008). Additionally, researchers found that grateful people perceived the situation as higher in cost, value and altruism than less grateful people. This supports the schematic hypothesis, suggesting that perception is the largest determining factor of gratitude and also indicates that gratitude promotes the appreciation of simple pleasures. The gratitude schema provides useful direction for understanding how gratitude might promote the appreciation of simple pleasures.

There is very little research on simple pleasures and their relationship to trait gratitude and well-being. It could be very valuable to gain insight on this topic because of the practical implications of the results. If we discover more about the relationship between gratitude and simple pleasures, we might be able to create an intervention for enhancing the appreciation of simple pleasures to improve people's overall well-being. Another reason to investigate this relationship is to learn more about how grateful people differ from less grateful people. This could potentially also give us insight into how happy people differ from less happy

people, and why grateful people are happier than less grateful people. In order for this to become a reality, we need to find out if grateful people notice more simple pleasures than less grateful people, and if they appreciate simple pleasures more than less grateful people.

The Current Study

Participants in this study were first asked to complete the short form of the GRAT (Thomas & Watkins, 2003; Watkins et al., 2003) assessment of trait gratitude. Next, to examine simple pleasures I allowed three minutes for participants to list things that went well in the last three days and then three minutes to list things that went well in the last year. Included in the directions was the instruction that the items they listed could be large or small. Participants were also asked to categorize each event as a “simple,” “moderate,” or “spectacular” pleasure. I hypothesized that individuals who scored higher on trait gratitude would remember and list more simple pleasures for the last three days than those who scored lower on trait gratitude. I also hypothesized that relative to less grateful participants, grateful individuals would list more simple pleasures relative to moderate and spectacular pleasures when looking at both the last 3 days and the last year. Additionally, I asked participants to go back and rate the emotional impact each event had, both when it happened (past emotional impact), and now thinking back on it (present emotional impact). I also asked them to rate how grateful they were for each event they listed when it happened (past gratitude) and how grateful they are now thinking back on it (present gratitude). I hypothesized that grateful participants would experience more gratitude (both

past and present) and experience more positive affect regarding simple pleasures than less grateful participants.

Method

Research Design

To answer my research question, I used a correlational design. Correlation coefficients were obtained for the relationships between trait gratitude and the number of simple pleasures recalled (both in the last 3 days and the last year), the sum of the number of moderate and spectacular pleasures recalled (both in the last 3 days and the last year), gratitude felt for all events when they happened (past gratitude), gratitude felt for all events at the time of the study (present gratitude), emotional impact of the event when it occurred (past emotional impact) and emotional impact of the event at the time of the study (present emotional impact). This study was reviewed and approved by the Internal Review Board of Eastern Washington University.

Participants

We collected data from 169 Eastern Washington State University undergraduate students, who participated in exchange for partial course credit or extra credit. Fifty-seven (33.7%) participants were male, 109 (64.5%) were female and 3 (1.8%) did not disclose their gender. One-hundred four (61.5%) participants were Caucasian/White, 12 (7.1%) were Hispanic, 9 (5.3%) were African American, 5 (3%) were Asian and 5 (3%) were Native American, and 35 (20.1%) participants did not report their race/ethnicity. Thirty-three (19.5%) participants were Freshmen in college, 23 (13.6%) were Sophomores, 55

(32.5%) were Juniors and 49 (29%) were Seniors, and 9 (5.3%) participants did not report their class level.

Materials

Participants were provided with a packet containing everything they needed to complete for my study. To assess trait gratitude, I used the Gratitude, Resentment, and Appreciation Test revised short form (See Appendix A) created by Thomas and Watkins (GRAT-short form; 2003). Research shows that this test is a reliable and valid measure of trait gratitude (Watkins et al., 2003). The GRAT-short form examines three specific factors: A lack of a sense of deprivation, an appreciation for simple pleasures, and an appreciation for others. This assessment contains statements like, "life has been good to me," and "every Fall I really enjoy watching the leaves change colors." Participants were provided a 9 point Likert scale ranging from 1, "I strongly disagree" to 9, "I strongly agree" and they provided a value for each statement. The GRAT-short form (Thomas & Watkins, 2003) is a 16 item scale and the responses range from 1 to 9. Means, standard deviations and Chronbach's Alpha are provided in Table 1.

The participants were also provided with space in the packet to record and rate life events. They were provided with a sheet to record life events from the last 3 days (See Appendix B) and a sheet to record life events from the last year (See Appendix C). These sheets had about 30 lines with a small space to write a brief description of each event. To the right of these lines were spaces to rate each event on four different factors: Past emotional impact (labeled "Past E"), present emotional impact ("Present E"), past gratitude ("Past G") and present

gratitude (“Present G”). Included in the packet were the scales participants used to rate the past and present emotional impact and past and present gratitude of each of their listed events (See Appendix D). The scale that was provided for participants to assess both past and present emotional impact was a 9 point likert scale ranging from 1, “very negative effect” to 9, “very positive effect” with 5, “no effect at all” in the middle assigned. The scale that was provided for participants to assess both past and present gratitude was a 9 point likert scale ranging from 1, “no gratitude” to 9, “extreme gratitude” with 5, “moderate gratitude” in the middle. A number of well-being questionnaires and a spirituality questionnaire that do not directly relate to the purpose of this study were also included in the packet. Lastly, the packet included a demographic questionnaire.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Pleasures Recorded for the Last 3 Days and the Last Year

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Last 3 Days			Last Year		
		<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. GRAT	.834	168	114.04	15.17	168	114.04	15.17
2. Total Number of Simple Pleasures	---	169	4.34	3.18	169	2.38	2.58
3. Total Number of Moderate and Spectacular Pleasures	---	169	3.04	2.46	169	7.40	3.40
4. Present G for Simple Pleasures	---	145	6.33	1.77	120	6.98	1.60
5. Present G for Moderate and Spectacular Pleasures	---	134	7.40	1.45	156	7.72	1.05
6. Past G for Simple Pleasures	---	148	6.49	1.51	120	6.85	1.59
7. Past G for Moderate and Spectacular Pleasures	---	137	7.41	1.38	157	7.82	1.04
8. Present E for Simple Pleasures	---	149	6.56	1.15	121	6.87	1.20
9. Present E for Moderate and Spectacular Pleasures	---	138	7.41	1.16	158	7.59	1.03
10. Past E for Simple Pleasures	---	149	6.88	1.08	121	7.11	1.15
11. Past E for Moderate and Spectacular Pleasures	---	138	7.68	1.01	158	7.90	.90

Procedure

The study was administered to groups in various psychology classes with instructor permission. First, participants were provided with the study description and were informed that participation in the study indicated their consent (See Appendix E). Next, participants in this study were given 5 minutes to complete the Gratitude, Resentment, and Appreciation Test revised short form (GRAT-short form; Watkins & Tomas, 2003) assessment of trait gratitude.

Next, to examine simple pleasures, I allowed three minutes for participants to list things that went well in the last three days and then three minutes to list things that went well in the last year. I included in my instructions that the events they list can be large or small to make it clear that they do not have to be exceptional. I asked participants to list events from the past year so that we can compare the types of pleasures they reported both for the past 3 days and the past year.

After listing events for both the last three days and last year, I asked participants to go back and rate their recalled events on several factors. First, they were asked to categorize each event as to whether it was a “simple,” “moderate,” or “spectacular,” and were provided with definitions to use to categorize their listed events. I defined a “simple pleasure” as “a common experience that is readily available to most people and could be experienced on a daily basis, though it may not be.” I defined “spectacular pleasures” as “more uncommon experiences that you enjoy but cannot participate in on a daily basis, such as a vacation or an expensive concert.” Lastly, I defined a “moderate

pleasure” as “any other enjoyable experiences that do not fit the description as either a simple or spectacular pleasure.”

Participants then rated the emotional impact each event had both when it happened (past emotional impact) and the emotional impact the event had on them thinking back on it at the time of participation in my study (present emotional impact). I also asked them to rate how grateful they were for each event they listed, both at the time of the event and at the time of testing, thinking back on the event. After explaining the instructions for rating their events, participants were asked to finish the rest of the packet at their own pace. I also administered the GQ-6 (McCullough et al., 2002) assessment of gratitude.

Results

Preliminary Analysis

Because I wanted to compare the way more grateful and less grateful people experience simple pleasures in comparison to how they experience all other types of pleasures, I combined the scores for moderate and spectacular pleasures on all domains.

Tests of Hypotheses

A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed between all variables to assess the relationship between trait gratitude and simple pleasures. Items from the GRAT were summed and used as the measure trait gratitude. The Watson-Williams test was used to test for potential differences between correlations within each domain and significance was determined using a two-tailed test of significance. Means and standard deviations of the trait gratitude measure, total

number of simple and moderate and spectacular pleasures recorded, gratitude felt for events, and the emotional impact of events are found on Table 1.

Trait Gratitude and Total Number of Pleasures Recorded (Last 3 Days)

There was no significant correlation between trait gratitude and the total number of simple pleasures recorded for the last 3 days, $r(168) = .09, p = .263$. Trait gratitude and the total number of moderate and spectacular pleasures recorded for the last 3 days were significantly correlated, $r(168) = .27, p < .001$ (see Table 3). There was no significant difference between the two correlation coefficients, $t(166) = -1.61, p = .109$. These findings were inconsistent with my hypotheses and indeed were in the opposite direction of my predictions.

Trait Gratitude and Present Gratitude for Recorded Events (Last 3 Days)

There was a significant correlation between trait gratitude and gratitude felt at the time of the study for the event that happened in the past (present gratitude) for simple pleasures recorded for the last 3 days, $r(145) = .22, p = .008$ (see table 2). There was no significant correlation between trait gratitude and present gratitude for moderate and spectacular pleasures recorded for the last 3 days, $r(134) = .16, p = .063$. These correlations were not significantly different from each other, $t(122) = 1.32, p = .189$. These results were inconsistent with my hypotheses because I predicted that grateful participants would experience significantly more gratitude for simple pleasures and didn't expect to see a relationship between trait gratitude and moderate and spectacular pleasures.

Trait Gratitude and Past Gratitude for Recorded Events (Last 3 Days)

There was a significant correlation between trait gratitude and gratitude felt at the time of the event (past gratitude) for simple pleasures recorded for the last 3 days, $r(148) = .26, p = .001$. I also found a significant correlation between trait gratitude and past gratitude felt for moderate and spectacular pleasures recorded for the last 3 days, $r(137) = .18, p = .041$. There was no significant difference between the two correlation coefficients, $t(125) = 1.68, p = .095$. These results offer mixed support for my hypotheses because I expected to find a relationship between trait gratitude and past gratitude felt for simple pleasures but did not expect to find this relationship between trait gratitude and past gratitude felt for moderate and spectacular pleasures. I expected to find this because I hypothesized that a difference between grateful and less grateful people rests in how they experience simple pleasures rather than how they experience moderate and spectacular pleasures.

Trait Gratitude and Present Emotional Impact for Events (Last 3 Days)

There was a significant correlation between trait gratitude and emotional impact felt now for the event that happened in the past (present emotional impact) of simple pleasures recorded for the last 3 days, $r(149) = .22, p = .008$. There was no significant relationship between trait gratitude and present emotional impact for moderate and spectacular pleasures recorded for the last 3 days, $r(138) = .13, p = .129$. There was no significant difference between the two correlation coefficients, $t(126) = 1.3, p = .183$. These findings were consistent with my hypothesis that grateful people would experience more positive affect regarding simple pleasures than less grateful people.

Trait Gratitude and Past Emotional Impact for Events (Last 3 Days)

There was a significant correlation between trait gratitude and emotional impact at the time the event occurred (past emotional impact) of simple pleasures recorded for the last 3 days, $r(149) = .21, p = .011$. Trait gratitude and past emotional impact of moderate and spectacular pleasures recorded for the last 3 days were also significantly correlated, $r(138) = .19, p = .022$. There was no significant difference between the two correlation coefficients, $t(126) = .20, p = .843$. I did predict that grateful people would experience more positive affect regarding simple pleasures, but did not expect to see this relationship regarding moderate and spectacular pleasures because I predicted that the difference between grateful and less grateful people rests in how they experience simple pleasures.

Trait Gratitude and Total Number of Pleasures Recorded (Last Year)

There was not a significant correlation between trait gratitude and the total number of simple pleasures recorded for the last year, $r(168) = -.01, p = .988$. There was, however, a significant correlation between trait gratitude and the total number of moderate and spectacular pleasures recorded for the last year, $r(168) = .21, p = .007$. There was no significant difference between the two correlation coefficients, $t(166) = -1.79, p = .075$.

Trait Gratitude and Present Emotional Impact for Events (Last Year)

Additionally, there was a significant correlation between trait gratitude and present emotional impact of simple pleasures recorded for the last year, $r(121) = .20, p = .028$. There was also a significant correlation between gratitude and

present emotional impact of moderate and spectacular pleasures recorded for the last year, $(r, 158) = .16, p = .049$.

Table 2
Pleasures Recorded for the Last 3 Days Correlation Matrix

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. GRAT-Short Form	—										
2. Total Simple Pleasures	.09	—									
3. Total Moderate and Spectacular Pleasures	.27**	-.15	—								
4. Present Gratitude (S.P.)	.22**	.06	.14	—							
5. Present Gratitude (M.S.P.)	.16	.07	.18*	.48**	—						
6. Past Gratitude (S.P.)	.26**	-.01	.15	.72**	.34**	—					
7. Past Gratitude (M.S.P.)	.18*	.11	.12	.28**	.69**	.38**	—				
8. Present Emotional Impact (S.P.)	.22**	.13	-.06	.72**	.30**	.46**	.17	—			
9. Present Emotional Impact (M.S.P.)	.13	.09	-.09	.28**	.75**	.15	.48**	.33**	—		
10. Past Emotional Impact (S.P.)	.21*	.13	-.06	.40**	.12	.56**	.25**	.56**	.08	—	
11. Past Emotional Impact (M.S.P.)	.19*	.18*	.10	.10	.50**	.21**	.69**	.11	.60**	.28**	—

* p < .05, **p < .01. S.P.=Simple Pleasures, M.S.P.=Moderate ad Spectacular Pleasures.

Table 3
Pleasures Recorded for the Last Year Correlation Matrix

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. GRAT-Short Form	—										
2. Total Simple Pleasures	-.01	—									
3. Total Moderate and Spectacular Pleasures	.21**	-.18*	—								
4. Present Gratitude (S.P.)	.04	.03	-.02	—							
5. Present Gratitude (M.S.P.)	.05	-.07	.05	.62**	—						
6. Past Gratitude (S.P.)	.10	.03	-.01	.63**	.43**	—					
7. Past Gratitude (M.S.P.)	.14	-.17	.12	.32**	.60**	.62**	—				
8. Present Emotional Impact (S.P.)	.20*	.12	.03	.64**	.47**	.38**	.25**	—			
9. Present Emotional Impact (M.S.P.)	.16*	-.04	-.16*	.30**	.57**	.11	.32**	.61**	—		
10. Past Emotional Impact (S.P.)	.06	.05	-.01	.48**	.35**	.72**	.47**	.48**	.12	—	
11. Past Emotional Impact (M.S.P.)	.15	-.12	.11	.16	.44**	.37**	.72**	.18	.29**	.47**	—

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$. S.P.=Simple Pleasures, M.S.P.=Moderate and Spectacular Pleasures

Discussion

I hypothesized that individuals who scored higher on trait gratitude would remember and list more simple pleasures in the last three days than those who scored lower on trait gratitude. I did not find a significant relationship between trait gratitude and total number of simple pleasures recorded for the last 3 days. I did, however, find a significant positive relationship between trait gratitude and total number of moderate and spectacular pleasures recorded for the last 3 days. This same pattern was found when examining events that were recorded for the last year. These results were contrary to my hypotheses.

One possible explanation for these findings is that grateful people may be labeling their pleasures differently than less grateful people. Perhaps grateful people perceive events that might be considered simple pleasures to the average person as being moderate or spectacular pleasures and labeled their events as such. If this did occur, it would be expected that grateful people would record more moderate and spectacular pleasures than less grateful individuals. Another possibility is that rather than experiencing more simple pleasures than less grateful people, grateful people enjoy simple pleasures more. It seems likely that simple pleasures—almost by definition—should be experienced at the same rate regardless of individual differences in trait gratitude. More than likely, recording enjoyable events from the last three days is not prone to memory biases, thus it makes sense that gratitude was not correlated with number of simple pleasures recalled, although this was not what I originally expected. It is more likely that grateful people are not happier because they experience more simple pleasures,

but more so because they enjoy them more than less grateful individuals. It is possible that grateful and less grateful people have the same number of opportunities to experience simple pleasures, but grateful people enjoy them more and experience more positive affect because they experience and perceive the world differently than less grateful people.

I also predicted that grateful participants would experience more gratitude (both past and present) for simple pleasures than less grateful participants. There was a significant positive correlation between trait gratitude and both past and present gratitude felt for simple pleasures that occurred in the last 3 days. I predicted that I would see this relationship because by definition, grateful people experience more gratitude than less grateful people. Research also supports that an appreciation for simple pleasures is a component of trait gratitude (Watkins et al., 2004). I did not find a significant relationship between trait gratitude and present gratitude felt for moderate and spectacular pleasures recorded for the last 3 days. I also did not find a relationship between trait gratitude and past or present gratitude felt for both types of events occurring in the last year. This suggests that grateful people experience simple pleasures differently than less grateful people do but experience moderate and spectacular pleasures in a similar way to less grateful people. Perhaps grateful people are happier than less grateful people because they enjoy small pleasures, which happen frequently and enjoying these common pleasures frequently keeps their mood elevated on a daily basis. Because grateful people and less grateful people experience moderate and spectacular pleasures in the same way, it is unlikely that the way

grateful people experience moderate and spectacular pleasures explains why they are happier than less grateful people. Grateful people experienced more gratitude than less grateful people at the time of the event but this relationship is not present when comparing how grateful they are after the event occurs when looking back on it.

There were significant positive correlations between trait gratitude and past and present emotional impact for simple pleasures experienced in the last 3 days. There was also a significant positive correlation between trait gratitude and past emotional impact of moderate and spectacular pleasures experienced during the last 3 days. There was no significant relationship between trait gratitude and present emotional impact for moderate and spectacular pleasures experienced during the last 3 days. There were significant positive correlations between trait gratitude and present emotional impact for both simple pleasures and moderate and spectacular pleasures. There was no significant relationship between trait gratitude and past emotional impact for simple or moderate and spectacular pleasures recorded for the last year. Grateful people experience more present positive emotional impact than less grateful people for both simple and moderate and spectacular pleasures that they experienced in the last year. This suggests that when thinking about the past, it impacts grateful individuals in the present more positively than less grateful people. This is supported by the findings of Watkins and colleagues (2004) who found that the memories of grateful people have a more positive emotional impact on them than the memories of less grateful people. Perhaps grateful people are happier than less

grateful people because the past impacts them more positively, and they experience more positive affect when reflecting on the past.

Overall, the findings of my study were inconclusive because many of the results obtained contradicted other results obtained. It appears that the difference between grateful and less grateful people rests not in the number of simple pleasures they experience but rather in the way in which they experience simple pleasures.

According to Watkins and colleagues (2003), there are 3 main components to gratitude: a sense of abundance, an appreciation of others and an appreciation for simple pleasures. My research supports this theory of gratitude and expands on it. Specifically, rather than seeking out or noticing more simple pleasures than less grateful people, grateful people enjoy simple pleasures more and experience more positive affect due to simple pleasures than less grateful people do. It is important to also remember that grateful people are happier than less grateful people (McCullough et al., 2002).

Perhaps grateful people, who are also happy people, are happy because they take more pleasure in common and mundane experiences than less grateful people. These experiences are readily available to most people, but it is possible that the important difference between those who are happy and those who are not is in how they perceive these common experiences, which in turn affects how much positive affect they experience due to each event. My research suggests that grateful people enjoy simple pleasures more and experience more positive affect due to simple pleasures than less grateful people do, and perhaps

experiencing more positive affectivity due to simple pleasures on a daily basis greatly influences how happy a person is. More research on this topic would be beneficial to better understand the relationship between gratitude and simple pleasures. For example, having objective raters judge the positivity of their recollections might provide valuable information about the differences in the way grateful and less grateful people experience and perceive the world.

One limitation of my study might have been a priming effect. The first questionnaire I administered to participants was the GRAT-short form (Watkins et al., 2004), which includes questions like, “I think it’s important to enjoy the simple things in life,” and “Every Fall I really enjoy watching the leaves change colors.” These questions may have primed participants to think about simple pleasures possibly causing less grateful people to list more simple pleasures than they would have if they had not taken the GRAT-short form first. To better understand the relationship between gratitude and simple pleasures, it would be beneficial to conduct a study similar to this one but by changing the order of the questionnaires, or even administering the trait gratitude measures in a separate session.

Another limitation of my study is that all of my measures were self-report measures that were fairly face valid. This is problematic because when using self-report measures, researchers are relying on their participants’ perception of themselves, which is by definition biased. Gratitude is also a socially desirable quality to possess, and as such can exacerbate biases when participants are reporting information about themselves.

Building onto the results that I obtained, further research should be conducted involving this topic. An experiment examining the cognitive lens that grateful people see the world through would provide insight into the differences between grateful and less grateful individuals. This could be done with an experiment in which participants must label various events regardless of having experienced them or not. Specifically, researchers could provide participants with brief descriptions of common events that range from being not pleasurable or slightly pleasurable to extremely pleasurable. Participants would be provided with definitions of “simple,” “moderate,” and “spectacular” pleasures and asked to rate each event as one of these 3 types of pleasures. If they were also administered a gratitude measure, researchers could examine differences in how grateful and less grateful people rate different types of events, particularly common ones. Examining these differences could also help explain how and why grateful people are happier than less grateful people.

This research has many practical implications because one of the biggest questions for humanity is how to be happy. Past research has shown that one way to enhance happiness and well-being is through gratitude (for a review, see Watkins, 2014). Because of this, examining the way in which grateful people are happier than less grateful people can help us better understand important differences between happy and unhappy people. My study suggests that simple pleasures have a unique relationship with gratitude. Although more research is needed to clear up this relationship, my results suggest that although grateful people do not encounter simple pleasures more frequently, they do experience

more positive affect regarding simple pleasures, particularly simple pleasures that have occurred recently. Perhaps one road to happiness is taking the extra time to notice and feel grateful for life's simple pleasures.

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Appendix A GRAT- Short Form

Opinion Questionnaire

Please provide your honest feelings and beliefs about the following statements which relate to you. There are no right or wrong answers to these statements. We would like to know how much you feel these statements are true or not true of you. Please try to indicate your true feelings and beliefs, as opposed to what you would like to believe. Respond to the following statements by circling the number that best represents your real feelings. Please use the scale provided below, and please choose one number for each statement (i.e. don't circle the space between two numbers), and record your choice in the blank preceding each statement.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
I strongly disagree		I disagree somewhat		I feel neutral about the statement		I mostly agree with the statement		I strongly agree with the statement

- _____ 1. I couldn't have gotten where I am today without the help of many people.
- _____ 2. Life has been good to me.
- _____ 3. There never seems to be enough to go around and I never seem to get my share.
- _____ 4. Oftentimes I have been overwhelmed at the beauty of nature.
- _____ 5. Although I think it's important to feel good about your accomplishments, I think that it's also important to remember how others have contributed to my accomplishments.
- _____ 6. I really don't think that I've gotten all the good things that I deserve in life.
- _____ 7. Every Fall I really enjoy watching the leaves change colors.
- _____ 8. Although I'm basically in control of my life, I can't help but think about all those who have supported me and helped me along the way.
- _____ 9. I think that it's important to "Stop and smell the roses."
- _____ 10. More bad things have happened to me in my life than I deserve.
- _____ 11. Because of what I've gone through in my life, I really feel like the world owes me something.
- _____ 12. I think that it's important to pause often to "count my blessings."
- _____ 13. I think it's important to enjoy the simple things in life.
- _____ 14. I feel deeply appreciative for the things others have done for me in my life.
- _____ 15. For some reason I never seem to get the advantages that others get.
- _____ 16. I think it's important to appreciate each day that you are alive.

Please stop.

Please wait for the experimenter to instruct you to turn the page.

Appendix D Pleasures Rating Scales

Now we would like you to go back to the memories that you wrote down on the previous pages and we would like you to rate them in several ways. Please carefully tear this page out of your packet and use it to rate them memories that you have recorded. Please remember to rate both of your recall pages.

TPE: First, we would like you to rate the type of experience this was for you. We would like you to judge whether each event was a **simple pleasure** (“simple”), a **moderate pleasure** (“moderate”), or a **spectacular pleasure** (“spectacular”). A **simple pleasure** is a common experience that is readily available to most people and could be experienced on a daily basis, though they may not be. Simple pleasures can be experienced in all realms of daily life such as with social interactions, recreational activities, and in nature. They are common experiences that you happen to enjoy, and if the event fits this description write “simple” in the TPE column next to that event. **Spectacular pleasures** are more uncommon experiences that you enjoy but cannot participate in on a daily basis such as a vacation or an expensive concert. If an event fits this description, put “spectacular” next to that event in the TPE column. Any other enjoyable experiences that do not fit the description of either a simple or a spectacular pleasure would be defined as a **moderate pleasure**, and you would write “moderate” in the TPE column next to these events. Simply write one of these words in the TPE column representing what kind of event or experience this was for you (“simple”, “moderate”, or “spectacular”).

Then we would like you to rate the past and present emotional impact of each memory.

Past E: In the “past” column we would like you to try and remember how much **emotional impact the event had on you at the time you experienced it**. Please use the scale below and enter the number that best represents the emotional impact of this event when you originally experienced it.

EMOTIONAL IMPACT SCALE

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
very negative effect	strong negative effect	moderate negative effect	slight negative effect	no effect at all	slight positive effect	moderate positive effect	strong positive effect	very positive effect

Present E: In the “present” column we would like you to rate each the emotional impact of each memory on you now. Simply ask yourself **“How does recalling this memory now affect me” and put your rating in the “present effect” column**. Again, use the emotional impact scale to put a number that best represents the emotional impact that this memory has on you now.

EMOTIONAL IMPACT SCALE

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
very negative effect	strong negative effect	moderate negative effect	slight negative effect	no effect at all	slight positive effect	moderate positive effect	strong positive effect	very positive effect

PAST G: In the column labeled “Past G” we would like you to rate how grateful you felt for each life event you listed **you at the time you experienced it**, using the scale below:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
No gratitude		Slight gratitude		Moderate gratitude		Strong gratitude		Extreme gratitude

Present G: In the column labeled “Present G” we would like you to rate **how grateful you now feel** for each event, using the scale below. Simply ask yourself, **“How grateful do I feel now for this event?”**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
No gratitude		Slight gratitude		Moderate gratitude		Strong gratitude		Extreme gratitude

Appendix E Study Description

This study should take you about 30 to 50 minutes to complete. In this study you will be anonymous, meaning that there will be no way we will be able to connect your responses to your identity. You will be filling out several paper and pencil questionnaires on which we will ask you about various pleasurable events and you will be asked to indicate your agreement or disagreement with items such as “Life has been good to me.” Additionally, you will be asked to list pleasurable events in your life and rate the impact they had on you when they occurred and the impact they have now. You will also be asked about feelings you have had over the last couple of weeks. You will receive class credit for your participation, but please remember that participation is voluntary, and there are other ways for you to obtain credit other than research participation. You may withdraw from this study without explanation at any time prior to submitting your packet of data and you may omit any question you prefer not to answer. Participation in this study indicates your consent. Information collected from this study will be used for thesis research. Do you have any questions about this study? If so, please contact Megan Shupe at megan.j.bono@gmail.com.

If you have any concerns about your rights as a participant in this research or any complaints you wish to make, you may contact Ruth Galm, Human Protections Administrator at Eastern Washington University (509-359-7971) <rgalm@ewu.edu>.

Vitae

Megan J. Shupe
(509) 554 0745
mjbshweet@aol.com

1229 W Riverside Avenue Apt B
Spokane, WA 99201

Education

Master of Science in Clinical Psychology June 2014
Eastern Washington University

Bachelor of Science in Psychology May 2011
Washington State University

Associate in Arts and Science
Columbia Basin College June 2009

Clinical Experience

Children's Home Society April 2013-May 2014
Intern Spokane Valley, WA

- Provide counseling to a consistent caseload of approximately 8 clients, ages 4-18 with a variety of presenting problems including anxiety, depression, academic problems, and behavioral problems.
- Develop and implement measurable therapy goals
- Co-facilitate groups:
 - Socialization groups (ages 5-8 and 7-10)
 - Artistic expression group (ages 12-15)
 - Anxiety and depression group (ages 8-11)
- Use Cognitive Behavior Therapy, Interpersonal Therapy, and Play Therapy
- Work with caregivers and other members of clients' family units
- Consult with other important individuals in clients' lives including teachers, doctors, CPS, and previous counselors.

Obtained skills: Professional counseling experience, experience working with children and families, experience facilitating groups, professional paperwork experience.

Research Experience

Master's Thesis Project January 2012-Present

- The Relationship Between Simple Pleasures and Trait Gratitude
- Thesis Chair: Phillip C. Watkins, Ph.D.