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## Savoring Life, Past and Present: Explaining What Hope and Gratitude Share in Common

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Peterson and Seligman (in press) recently referred to the cluster of traits including hope, optimism, and future mindedness as “Velcro™” constructs because they seem to be correlated with so many other psychological constructs that are relevant to health and subjective well-being. In the target article, Snyder’s review of the research on hope only confirms Peterson and Seligman’s assertion. Snyder cited studies showing that academic and athletic performance, health-relevant knowledge and prevention efforts, perceived health and adjustment to health problems, and tolerance to physical pain are all higher in people who report high levels of hope. Snyder also noted that hope is positively related to self-report measures of psychological adjustment and positive affect.

Why does hope appear to be so adaptive? In the target article, Snyder posits a variety of mechanisms, but one in particular strikes me as particularly worthy of comment. Snyder noted that hopeful people differ from hopeless people in the very nature of their goal pursuits. When presented with goals that require effort to achieve, hopeful people experience anticipation, zest, or other positive emotions, whereas hopeless people experience anxiety, lethargy, or other negative emotions. Hopeful people also differ from hopeless people in how they understand the stress that accompanies goal pursuit. Whereas hopeful people typically appraise goal pursuits—even very arduous ones—as challenges that are accompanied by a pleasant hedonic tone, hopeless people appraise them as threats that are

accompanied by an unpleasant hedonic tone. Therefore, hopeful people not only seem to enjoy the psychosocial benefits that come from their increased likelihood of obtaining their goals, but they also seem to enjoy the very act of striving for goals to be realized in the future much more than do hopeless people.

With this observation in mind, it may not be overstating things to say that hopeful people savor the very act of pursuing their goals. In the target article, Snyder’s review leads me to think that hopeful people may be particularly attentive to the fact that the very pursuit of goals in itself brings meaning and purpose to their lives, and that these pursuits themselves—irrespective of whether the goals themselves are reached—should be savored rather than simply endured. This propensity to relish the very steps on the road to accomplishing one’s goals is a sort of mindfulness that imbues goal pursuits—irrespective of whether those goals are ever realized—with meaning of their own.

Whatever the exact nature of this cognitive habit that I refer to here as mindfulness (and I have no doubt that others have already studied it, although probably by another name), I believe it is characteristic of some other important traits that are gaining scholarly interest as the field of *positive psychology* grows. Mindfulness awareness may explain why some people are generous and others are stingy. It might explain why some seek to serve other people whereas others seem more focused on serving themselves. After all, we do refer to a

kind and generous person as “considerate”—literally, one who considers others. One trait in particular that seems also to be undergirded by a similar mindful attentiveness (and one that I hold up as an exemplar for this hypothesized cognitive process) is gratitude, which my colleagues and I have been exploring for the past few years. Following the lead of scholars from Seneca, to Adam Smith, to Georg Simmel, we have come to view gratitude in its most prototypical form as a cognitive-affective response to the recognition that one has been the beneficiary (or, in some cases, only the intended beneficiary) of someone else’s good will (McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001).

Like hope, one of the key psychological processes governing gratitude may be a mindful awareness—specifically, awareness of how one’s very life is held together through the benevolent actions of other people. Grateful people, on recalling a positive outcome in their lives, are mindful of the causal agents (namely other people, but also, for some, God or a higher power) who have acted in ways that benefitted them. Some grateful people attend largely to the fact that they have benefitted from the sacrifices of their parents or caretakers. Others may be mindful of gifts they have received from God or a higher power. Still others may be aware, as Simmel (1950) pointed out, that they live in a society in which they benefit from many services, innovations, institutions, and even works of art that people whom they have never even met have made available for them to use and enjoy.

Grateful people attend to the benefits in their lives, and are mindful that these benefits did not come out of nowhere. Therefore, perhaps not surprisingly, the dispositionally grateful people among samples of university students and nonstudents tend to be slightly higher in conventional religious beliefs and behaviors (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002). More important, they also score higher on nonconventional measures of spirituality, including measures that assess their sense of connectedness to nature, other people, and the universe as a whole. I think these correlations are important because they point to the ability of grateful people to pay attention to the ways in which their lives are connected to other events and activities occurring in the social, natural, and (for some people) supernatural world.

The awareness that most good things in life come from someone or something may cause grateful people to enjoy the good things in their lives even more than if they gave no thought to how they came to obtain these good things. The resulting contentment with what they have may help grateful people to resist the urge to acquire more and more to be happy. Gratitude may also chase out envy and resentment about the good things that other people have (Roberts, in press). In fact, we have found in empirical work that gratitude is negatively correlated with materialistic values and with envy (McCullough et al., 2002). Like hope, the disposition to-

ward gratitude is also correlated positively with many measures of psychological well-being (McCullough et al., 2002), including positive affectivity, vitality, subjective happiness, and satisfaction with life. Conversely, it is correlated negatively with negative affectivity, anxiety, and depression. Therefore, perhaps gratitude is also a Velcro™ construct.

The capacity for mindful awareness of the potential meaningfulness of one’s life circumstances may also explain the robust links between hope and gratitude. In our work with a sample of 238 undergraduate students (McCullough et al., 2002, Study 1), the disposition toward gratitude was reliably linked with dispositional hope, as measured with Snyder et al.’s (1991) measure. Our six-item measure of the disposition toward gratitude was correlated with Snyder’s (1991) agency subscale at  $r = .67$  (after correcting for measurement error with structural equation modeling,  $p < .01$ ), and was correlated with the pathways subscale at  $r = .42$  (again, after correcting for measurement error,  $p < .01$ ). Indeed, the agency subscale of Snyder et al.’s Hope Scale is the strongest correlate of the disposition toward gratitude that we have seen to date. Incidentally, we also found the agency and pathways subscales were also correlated significantly, albeit much more modestly, with the mean from up to four informant ratings of our 238 participants’ dispositions toward gratitude ( $r_s = .21$  and  $.18$ , respectively,  $p_s < .05$ ).

I had expected that these gratitude–hope correlations could be explained largely in terms of superordinate personality factors, such as those in the Big Five taxonomy. However, controlling for the major Big Five correlates of our measure of the disposition toward gratitude (extraversion–positive affect, neuroticism–negative affect, and agreeableness) had only modest effects on the correlations between hope and gratitude. Even when we controlled for a measure of socially desirable responding, the correlations between gratitude and the hope subscales remained substantial. Therefore, the disposition toward gratitude and hope—particularly as measured through the agency subscale—seem to be correlated strongly and in a way that cannot be explained entirely through appealing to their correlations with the Big Five or response artifacts like socially desirable self-presentation characteristics.

Perhaps the characteristic that explains why hopeful people also tend to be grateful is the mindful attentiveness I have described herein. Grateful and hopeful people may both possess the cognitive habit of savoring their life circumstances, appreciating fully the good circumstances that come their way in the past and the meaningfulness of the goal pursuits they undertake in the present. Perhaps this cognitive habit I am positing also helps to explain in part how constructs like hope and gratitude gain their associations with measures of health and well-being: Insofar as viewing one’s life as meaningful because one has a deeply valued set of goals to

pursue leads to improved hedonic tone and satisfaction with life, it is easy to imagine how improved health and well-being might result. Similarly, insofar as perceiving the good things in one's life as the result of the intentional benevolence of another person or persons makes those benefits even more enjoyable, it is easy to imagine how one might be happier and healthier as a result.

Obviously, much of daily life occurs without conscious control and without a second thought. Nonetheless, some people may stop periodically to savor their lives, thereby (perhaps) extracting meaning and purpose from what they are doing or what is happening to them. This capacity for mindful attentiveness and the resulting ability to make positive meaning—from goal pursuits, from the benefits we receive in life, and other life activities and events—may be useful terrain to explore in future work not only on hope and gratitude, but also on other positive psychological traits and virtues as well.

### Notes

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## Turning Hope Thoughts Into Goal-Directed Behavior

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A large amount of research amply supports C. R. Snyder's (2000) hope theory. People who momentarily or chronically believe that they energetically pursue and attain their goals, who see themselves as being pretty successful in general, and believe in a past that has prepared them well for the future, do well in their academic and interpersonal life as well as in achieving physical and mental health. This is particularly true for people who also believe that they have access to many ways to get out of a jam and around any kind of problem, and who can think of many ways to reach their goals.

The theory refers to the first type of beliefs as agency-related hope thoughts, whereas the second type of beliefs are called pathways-related hope thoughts. High agency-related and pathways-related hope thoughts create emotional orientations (e.g., friendliness, happiness, interest) that are conducive to goal attainment. Moreover, barriers and hindrances (i.e.,

stressors) are seen as challenges that need to be overcome or circumvented. People who entertain such beliefs chronically or in a given situation (i.e., high-hope persons) thus differ in their goal pursuits from people who lack such beliefs (i.e., low-hope persons). Low-hope individuals experience negative emotions during goal setting and goal implementation, and they are burdened with self-critical rumination and off-task cognition. Impediments are experienced as stressors and not as challenges, and thus goal pursuit is quickly derailed.

There is no doubt that both agency-related and pathways-related hope thoughts affect goal attainment. The question remains, however, when and how hope thoughts unfold their influence on behavior. In our view, agency-related hope thoughts play a prominent role in setting binding goals that facilitate determined goal pursuit and goal attainment, whereas path-