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Attention Style and Appreciation: The Differences Between Gratitude and Indebtedness

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science at Virginia Commonwealth University.

By

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Abstract

ATTENTION STYLE AND APPRECIATION: THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GRATITUDE AND INDEBTEDNESS

By Maureen A. Mathews, B.A.

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Science at Virginia Commonwealth University.**

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2007

**Major Director: Jeffrey D. Green
Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology**

Gratitude and indebtedness are construed as separate constructs in recent research. It is hypothesized by this thesis that self-focused attention affects feelings of gratitude and indebtedness. Focusing less attention on the self, thus turning attention resources outward, may allow for the experience of gratitude, whereas focusing inward may create feelings of indebtedness. Two studies examined how focusing one's attention inward may be related to indebtedness, whereas being focused outward may be related to gratitude. A correlational study showed that people who self-focus tend to feel more indebtedness and less gratitude. An experiment was designed to show that manipulating social anxiety, a

specific type of self-focused attention, would increase feelings of indebtedness and decrease feelings of gratitude. However, no significant differences of indebtedness or gratitude were found between the experimental condition and control condition.

Introduction

Gratitude is one of those things that cannot be bought. It must be born with men, or else all the obligations in the world will not create it.

-Edward F. Halifax

You and your friend go out for a lunch date. Without hesitation, your friend pays for the bill. How do you feel about this action and how do you respond? This research proposal differentiates two states and how one would respond to this situation: a grateful state and an indebted state. The thesis of this proposal is that the grateful state is less prone to engage in self-focused attention relative to indebtedness. Attention is focused on aspects of the external environment. This is contrasted with an indebted state, which is more prone to self-focused attention, focusing on one's own thoughts or feelings. These thoughts and feelings include a sense of self-doubt about being able to pay and failure to make a good impression on the benefactor: a social anxiety. Attention is focused on the self as a social being with obligations, and the norms that accompany reciprocity.

Gratitude and indebtedness have been used as synonyms for each other (Kompter, 2004). Both gratitude and indebtedness are words that acknowledge the receipt of a benefit and that repayment to the benefactor is due. Philosophers and sociologists have equated indebtedness and gratitude as the same experience (Mauss, 1925/2002; Greenberg, 1980). However, it is the intention of the proposed experiments to show that

there are significant differences in how these states manifest and affect social behavior. They are, in fact, different styles and different states. There has been a small amount of work to show that gratitude differs from indebtedness and obligation (Watkins, Scheer, & Ovnicek, 2006; Goei & Boster, 2005; Greenberg, 1980). I wish to further advance this differentiation and argue that how we attend to ourselves is a factor that plays a key role in how we appreciate our world. In essence, I wish to show that receiving a benefit is a signal of social acceptance (Leary, 1995).

Creating appreciation: Promotion vs. Prevention focus

Receiving benefits and gifts is something that we all desire, for being a beneficiary of a gift is congruent with our hedonic goals of maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain (Carver & Scheier, 1998). However, how we interpret our benefactor's intentions is partially dependent upon our individual differences in motivational drives and what we desire. Someone who interprets a friend paying for lunch as a warm notion of friendship is more likely to focus on the goodness of the giver (or the gift itself): a promotion or approach focus (Higgins, 2001). A promotion or approach focus is a function of *nurturing* survival needs (Higgins, 1997). An alternate style would interpret this same action as necessitating reciprocal behavior in order to avoid social rejection or isolation: a prevention or avoidance focus (Higgins, 2001). This latter individual sees this as a need to return kindness in order to avoid being seen as someone who cannot meet the expectations of a norm of reciprocity; we want to be seen as upstanding individuals. Gouldner (1960) defined norm of reciprocity as "people should help those who have helped them" and "people should not injure those who help them." Norms are a way to

maintain *security* survival needs in the social environment (Higgins, 1997). Security, in this context, is knowledge that the rules for social conduct remain the same across people and situations. In turn, the focal point of one's attention may result in different emotional, cognitive and motivational responses. In a recent study it was shown that an approach tendency was associated with gratitude, whereas an avoidance tendency was associated with indebtedness (Watkins et al., 2006). Participants endorsed avoidance statements more so than approach statements when presented with a situation of indebtedness rather than gratitude.

Broadening and Building

It has been theorized that when gratitude is the predominant style to receiving a benefit, there is a creation of expansive focus that allows one to imagine creative ways to repay the benefit. As articulated by Fredrickson (2004), gratitude may exhibit characteristics of other positive emotions that "broaden and build" one's cognitive resources. The broaden-and-build theory suggests that positive emotions expand one's cognitive repertoire, whereas negative emotions narrow one's focus onto immediate action tendencies (Fredrickson, 2001). Positive emotions allow for the cultivation of novel ideation and creative problem solving. In terms of gratitude, this may lead to returning a benefit in a more different, personal, and interesting way. In sum, gratitude may promote and create warm, positive interpersonal connections. In contrast, indebtedness may narrow one's focus to the immediate action tendency. The emotional experience of indebtedness may direct a person's focus on to the repayment aspect of receiving a benefit.

Communal vs. Exchange Relationships

Different relationships elicit different needs and wants in a bidirectional fashion. The type of the relationship and its impact on expressing thanks has been indirectly considered in past psychological literature. Differentiating communal versus exchange relationships may help also to draw conceptual distinctions between gratitude and indebtedness. A communal relationship is based upon fostering each other's needs for the sake of the relationship, rather than maintaining norms of reciprocity. In a communal relationship, a person gives in order to meet the needs of the other person without concern for the return of the benefit (Clark & Mills, 1979). Examples of communal relationships include close friendships and marriages. In contrast, in an exchange relationship, people assume that when a benefit is bestowed, there is an expectation that it will be returned with an equivalent benefit (Clark & Mills, 1979). An example of such would be illustrated by the relationship that one shares with an employer. It may be the case that individuals who do not differentiate gratitude and indebtedness may treat a communal relationship similar to an exchange relationship, thus creating unnecessary tension in the relationship (Holmes, 1981). This unnecessary tension in social exchange could create aversive states, such as self-doubt. Experiencing self-doubt and aversive states may be contributing factors that hinder the development and maintenance of warm, close social bonds. This self-doubt may be a contributor to thinking in a self-focused manner, including the experience of social anxiety.

Gratitude

Gratitude has been defined in convergent, but somewhat different, ways. One

definition that has been used in the psychological literature is that it the emotional acknowledgment that one has been a recipient of a gift (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000). As stated by Adler and Fagley (2004, p. 79), “appreciating something involves noticing and acknowledging its value and meaning and feeling a positive emotional connection to it.” It is also suggest that gratitude is a particular aspect of appreciation and that it encompasses a vulnerability to letting other people help and benefit us (Adler & Fagley, 2004). I assert that both definitions are helpful and contribute to the hypotheses of the proposed experiment. In addition, I would like to recommend that gratitude is other-focused and occurs when one notices and attends to benefits in the environment.

There is evidence that suggests that gratitude may be an important component to overall well-being and prosocial behavior (Watkins et al., 2006; Tsang, 2006). From a grateful disposition, the beneficiary is more willing and happy to return a benefit to the benefactor in the future (Goei & Boster, 2005). Current research on gratitude has shown that gratitude results in more positive affect and future prosocial behavior to the benefactor (Watkins, et al., 2006; Tsang, 2006). Research has shown that trait gratitude is related to positive memory bias (Watkins, Grimm, & Kolts, 2004). In general, gratitude is construed as a positive, moral emotion that is associated with agreeableness and negatively associated with neuroticism (McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001).

Indebtedness

In contrast to gratitude, indebtedness has been defined as a feeling that one *ought* to repay a benefactor for a gift bestowed (Heider, 1958). In this case, the indebted person

may have feelings that the giver wants a returned benefit, whether or not reciprocity is necessary. The conception of the gift is no longer perceived as a gift of altruism, but one that falls along the contours of the norm of reciprocity. In turn, past research has shown that indebtedness invokes aversive feelings (Greenberg & Shapiro, 1971).

Watkins and colleagues (2006) have shown that indebtedness is positively associated with self-conscious emotions such as guilt. These emotions involve a need to repair and maintain interpersonal relationships (Tangney, Miller, Flicker, & Barlow, 1996; Tracy & Robins, 2004). Consequently, indebtedness may lead to motivation for a reparative action. This particular disposition may be contrary to the "broaden and building" theory that one's cognitive resources are directed in a narrow and deliberate fashion: "How am I to pay this person back?" "Can I pay this person back?" "What will happen if I do not repay?" Indebtedness addresses the possibility that we do not always feel good about being the beneficiary of someone's "good deed" and that some individuals may be more prone to this emotion.

Self-focused Attention

How much attention one directs inward may have a distinct relationship with how we give and receive benefits. More succinctly, gratitude and indebtedness may have similar features, but each may be a result of how our attention is guided and how we reason about ourselves and our world.

Attention and consciousness change the ability to experience different emotional responses to a benefit. How one thinks about the self and how one interprets acts of kindness should vary according to one's disposition. In particular, *self-focused attention*

is the deliberate allocation of one's cognitive resources toward one's feelings and thoughts, as opposed to objects and people in the external field (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975). Past literature shows that self-focused attention decreases with a happier mood (Green, Sedikides, Saltzberg, Wood, & Forzano, 2003) and often encompasses a heuristic processing mechanism (Isen, 2000). Gratitude also reflects a positive, happier mood when compared to indebted states (Watkins et al., 2006). The following study investigates as to whether gratitude involves a lesser degree of self-focused attention than a state of indebtedness. For a grateful person, the attention is focused on the benefactor and the benefit, whereas an indebted person may show a tendency to be more focused on being a beneficiary and the consequences of being a beneficiary.

Previous research has explained that high self-focused attention is related to the “ought self.” The “ought self” is defined by a sense of duty, responsibility or obligation (Carver, Lawrence, & Scheier, 1999). This concept is also linked to Higgins’ (1997) theory of self-regulation and survival needs of security. Self-doubt and social anxiety can be perceived as self-discrepancy or “ought” states. An indebted person feels that there is a necessity to pay in order to avoid any aversive consequences. In this case, it may be the desire to not be seen as an unappreciative person. There is a drive to avoid feeling bad.

Theoretically, indebtedness is more related to self-conscious emotional tendencies, such as guilt. A self conscious emotion involves self-awareness, socialized needs, and contains cognitive complexity (Tracy & Robins, 2004). It may be the case that indebtedness is a result of feeling self-conscious emotions.

Self-consciousness has been divided into three distinct subcategories: private

self-consciousness, public self-consciousness, and social anxiety (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975). This definition and the accompanying scale have been used successfully in social psychological research (Fenigstein, 1987). The first is the construct of private self-consciousness (PrSC) developed by Fenigstein et al. (1975). PrSC represents a particular version of self-awareness that is it "refers to the dispositional tendency of focus attention on private and covert aspects of oneself" (Franzoi, Davis, & Young, 1985, p. 1584). It imparts a desire to understand the self and to understand internally what is happening in regards to thoughts, feelings and actions.

The nature of private self-consciousness has two underlying factors of self-reflectiveness and internal state awareness. Self-reflectiveness pertains to the self-consciousness that is a self-ruminating state, whereas internal state awareness is more of a philosophical, detached state (Trapnell & Campbell, 1999). Ruminative style, or self-reflectiveness, has been associated with more negative and depressive dispositions, as well as neuroticism (Nolen-Hoeksema, Morrow, & Frederickson, 1993; Trapnell & Campbell, 1999). This style of private self-consciousness is seen as a chronic reiteration of past experiences. Internal state awareness is related to characteristics such as openness to experience (Trapnell & Campbell, 1999). This style is more directly related to perceiving the self as an object, or an objective awareness of the self. In terms of processing emotions and thoughts in an exchange situation, individual differences may dictate as to how a person delves inward, whether with a more ruminative style as opposed to a reflective style. It seems that an indebted person may ruminate more about social exchanges and interactions.

Public self-consciousness (PbSC) involves an acknowledgment that what others think, feel and act will influence how one assesses the self (Carver & Scheier, 1987). PbSc addresses motivations and goals to meet and exceed social obligations or expectations. To a person high on trait PbSc, it matters what others think about his or her person. This entails placing high value on other people's opinions and judgments. Some have argued that this distinction is unnecessary (Wicklund & Gullwitzer, 1987), whereas others contend that this is crucial to differentiating different types of self-referent processes; one which does *not* consider others in the given context (private) and one which heavily weighs contextual and social variables (public) (Carver & Scheier, 1987; Fenigstein et al., 1975). For the purposes of this study, the distinction holds some importance. Feelings of indebtedness may direct one's inner feelings toward how others think about them, thus indicating that indebtedness may be related to public self awareness.

The third category of self-consciousness is social anxiety. The social anxiety factor is defined as "discomfort in the presence of others" (Fenigstein et al., 1975, p. 523). Social anxiety can be thought of as both a trait and state of self-doubt. Based on past research relating a positive relationship of agreeableness and a negative relationship of neuroticism to gratitude (McCullough et al., 2001), it seems that gratitude may be negatively related to the social anxiety subscale. Grateful people should, as theory suggest, enjoy approaching and interacting with other people. People who are more apt to feel indebted, however, may show social anxiety. In general, giving or receiving benefits and favors involves competent social interaction. People who are socially

anxious do not feel comfortable in a social exchange, and therefore may have more aversive or indebted interpretations of social exchanges.

Also, past research has shown that socially anxious people base judgments on a limited processing of the environment (Perowne & Mansell, 2002). Thus, it may be the case that if you cannot attend to the environment, you are less likely to appreciate it. Also, due to self-presentation mechanisms, social anxiety dampens a person's ability to approach and create communication and social bonds, where it heightens the necessity to withdraw and avoid social interaction (Schlenker & Leary, 1985). Being in a state of social anxiety may also cause one to not experience grateful emotion.

In the first study (Study 1) of this proposal, the objective was to show that trait gratitude and indebtedness correlate in opposite directions with measures of self-focused attention.

Hypothesis 1: I hypothesized that gratitude and indebtedness would correlate negatively, replicating previous findings (Watkins et. al., 2006).

Hypothesis 2: I hypothesized that gratitude would show a low or negative correlation with public self-consciousness. In contrast, public self-consciousness would correlate positively with indebtedness.

Hypothesis 3: I predicted that measures of gratitude would correlate negatively with the social anxiety subscale, whereas indebtedness will correlate positively with social anxiety.

Hypothesis 4: I predicted that trait gratitude would be negatively correlated with ruminative self-consciousness. Ruminative self-consciousness is the aspect of private

self-consciousness that is constantly rehashing and re-evaluating one's own feelings and behaviors. The ruminative style has been associated with negative moods, such as neuroticism and depression (Nolen-Hoeksema, et al., 1993). In contrast, gratitude has shown to be associated with a boost in positive mood and general sense of well-being (McCullough et al., 2004).

Method

Participants

Participants were 164 undergraduate students who volunteered to take part in the research in partial fulfillment of a course option. Participants signed up via an electronic research board.

The sample consisted of 34 African Americans, 22 Asian Americans, 94 Caucasians, three Hispanics, and 10 participants self-identified as “other.” There were 116 females and 47 males participating in this study, with a mean age of 20.64 ($SD = 3.51$). One participant did not complete the demographic information form.

Procedure

After completing the consent form, participants filled out a battery of self-report measures in a single, 45 minute session. Between one and 20 individuals participated in each session.

Measures

Appreciation and gratitude. The short version of Gratitude, Resentment, and Appreciation Test (short GRAT) is a 16 item measure of trait gratitude. The short GRAT contains three subscales: sense of abundance, simple appreciation, and appreciation for others. The sense of abundance items are statements such as “I think it is important to appreciate every day that you are alive.” This scale taps into feelings that one has enough benefits in life and doesn’t feel entitled to benefits. Simple appreciation items, such as

“Every spring, I really enjoy seeing the flowers bloom,” tap into awareness of benefits in mundane, every-day living. Statements assessing appreciation of others, “I couldn’t have gotten where I am today without the help of many people”, assesses the appreciation of social bonds and the respect for interdependence. Participants rated these items on a scale of 1 (“I strongly disagree”) to 9 (“I strongly agree”). This scale contains adequate validity and internal consistency (Thomas & Watkins, 2003). A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted and the results were good; the scale loaded appropriately into the three defined factors. In this study, reliability was good ($\alpha = .85$). The individual subscales also had acceptable reliability, each with an alpha value over .70.

Gratitude. The Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6) is a questionnaire developed by McCullough and colleagues (2001). The GQ-6 is a 6 item scale that assesses dispositional gratitude. Participants rate these items using a scale that ranges from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”). An example of one of the GQ-6 items is “I have so much in my life to be thankful for.” Two items are reversed scored to account for response bias. The internal reliability of the GQ-6 ranges from .82 to .87 and it has been positively correlated with satisfaction with life, optimism, and prosocial behavior. It is negatively related to depression, anxiety and materialism. For this study, the reliability of this scale was adequate, ($\alpha = .74$).

Indebtedness. The Indebtedness Scale was originally developed by Greenberg (1980). However, this scale did not have good reliability. Thus, this version is a recently validated version (Watkins, Elster, Maleki, & McLeod, 2005) that shows better psychometric properties. Reliability was high in the present sample ($\alpha = .89$). Participants rate the items on a scale of -3 (strongly disagree) to +3 (strongly agree).

Examples of such statements are “One should return favors from a friend as quickly as possible in order to preserve the friendship” and “Often I have trouble enjoying gifts from others because I’m concerned about what I will give them in return.”

Self-focused attention. The Self-Consciousness Scale (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975) historically is a very popular trait measure in social psychological research (Fenigstein, 1987). This scale contains three subscales, two of which will be analyzed for the purposes of this study. Public self-consciousness scale addresses the “chronic awareness and concern over the self as a social stimulus” (Trapnell & Campbell, 1999, p. 289). Each item is rated on a scale of 0 (extremely uncharacteristic) to 4 (extremely characteristic). An example of such is “I’m concerned about my style of doing things.” For this study, the reliability of this scale was adequate, ($\alpha = .72$). Social anxiety is the third subscale with items such as “Large groups make me nervous.” The reliability of this scale in this study was good ($\alpha = .80$).

Type of private self-consciousness. This construct will be assessed using the Rumination-Reflection Questionnaire (Trapnell & Campbell, 1999). This particular measure differentiates private self-consciousness into two styles: ruminative and reflective styles. This is termed as the subcategory of self-consciousness that is linked to a depressed mood and chronic re-evaluation of the self (e.g., “Often I’m playing back over in my mind how I acted in past situations” and “My attention is often focused on aspects of myself I wish I’d stop thinking about”). The reflective style is meant to address that facet of private self-consciousness that is inquisitive and intellectual (e.g., “People often say I’m a “deep”, introspective type of person” and “I love to meditate on the nature and meaning of things”). The two scales only moderately correlate with each

other, suggesting they are separate constructs (Trapnell & Campbell, 1999). For the purposes of this study, the rumination scale is the only result reported. The reliability of this measure was good ($\alpha = .85$).

Demographic Information. The demographic information form asked the participant to indicate gender, age, race, and year in college.

Results

A correlation analysis was performed. The following table shows the results.

Table 1
Correlation Matrix of Gratitude, Indebtedness, and Self-focused Attention

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
ShortGRAT	---								
SoAbund	.80**	---							
Simple	.79**	.36**	---						
SocApp	.70**	.34**	.51**	---					
GQ-6	.68**	.56**	.49**	.53**	---				
Indebt	-.36**	-.44**	-.16*	-.15^	-.29**	---			
SocAx	-.24**	-.29**	-.16*	-.03	-.15^	.32**	---		
PbSc	-.15^	-.19*	-.05	-.05	-.09	.27**	.37**	---	
Rum	-.19*	-.38**	-.02	.05	-.09	.32**	.37**	.47**	---

* indicates $p < .05$

** indicates $p < .01$

^ indicates marginal significance, $p < .10$

1 = Short Gratitude, Resentment, and Appreciation Test, 2 = Subscale of ShGRAT, Sense of Abundance, 3 = Subscale of ShGRAT, Simple Pleasures, 4 = Subscale of ShGRAT, Social Appreciation, 5 = Gratitude Questionnaire, 6 = Indebtedness Scale, 7 = Social Anxiety Scale, 8 = Public Self-Consciousness Scale, 9 = Rumination Scale

The first hypothesis was confirmed and was found to be consistent with previous findings (Watkins, et. al., 2006). The short GRAT was negatively correlated with indebtedness ($r = -.36, p < .001$). The GQ-6 was also negatively correlated with indebtedness ($r = -.29, p < .001$). This suggests that there is a negative relationship

between gratitude and indebtedness. Furthermore, this also indicates that gratitude and indebtedness are different constructs.

The second hypothesis was also confirmed with the correlations derived from the short GRAT. The short GRAT showed a marginal, negative correlation to public self-consciousness ($r = -.15, p < .07$). Also, indebtedness was positively correlated with public self-consciousness ($r = .27, p < .001$). This suggests that public awareness of the self is different for those who experience gratitude as opposed to indebtedness.

The third hypothesis of this study was also supported. The short GRAT had a significant negative correlation with the social anxiety scale ($r = -.24, p < .003$). In addition, the GQ-6 also had a marginal, negative correlation with social anxiety ($r = -.15, p < .07$). Indebtedness was positively correlated with social anxiety ($r = .32, p < .001$). This indicates that feeling grateful is less likely to occur when one feels socially anxious.

The fourth hypothesis of this study was also supported. The short GRAT was negatively correlated with rumination ($r = -.19, p < .02$). Indebtedness was positively correlated with rumination ($r = .32, p < .001$). This indicates that gratitude may have a negative relationship with ruminative thought, whereas indebtedness may accompany ruminative self-consciousness.

A limitation of this study is that the GQ-6 did not have similar significant correlations that the short GRAT did. Part of this may be explained by the fact that the short GRAT is distinctly a trait measure, lending a significant contribution to a correlational design. The GQ-6 has been successfully used as a measure to assess trait gratitude as well as to assess one's daily emotional state (see McCullough, et. al., 2004

for an example). Further research should examine this discrepancy. Experimental studies may shed some light on this incongruent finding.

Discussion

In general, the findings of the study conducted were found to support the contention that gratitude and indebtedness are different dispositions. These emotions differ in how they manifest in self-focused processes. It may be the case that feeling obliged may be related to increased self-focused attention. In contrast, experiencing gratitude or having the grateful trait may be related to not turning inward, but rather turning awareness outward and reflecting on the benefits one has in life. In general, gratitude is negatively related to self-focused processes, whereas indebtedness has a positive relationship to self-focused processes.

Indebtedness seems to be related more to the ruminative private world, whereas gratitude is not. It may be the case that the feeling of indebtedness prompts a person to think about how to repay exchanges, which may lead a person to treat received benefits as exchanges (exchange relationship), rather than benefits (communal relationships). A grateful person may show better accuracy at assessing relationships and can tell the difference between exchange and communal relationships.

This study also suggests that indebtedness is related to narrowing one's focus on the self. In contrast, this study suggests that gratitude does not involve the narrowing of attention to the self. This lends support to Fredrickson's Broaden-and-Build Theory (2001) in that positive emotions expand our cognitive reservoir, whereas negative emotions narrow and focus our responses on specific action tendencies.

In addition, in this study the strongest self-focus aspect delineating the difference between gratitude and indebtedness is social anxiety. Not only was gratitude negatively associated with social anxiety, but there was a positive correlation between indebtedness and social anxiety. This strengthens the idea that gratitude and indebtedness are different dispositions in relation to the self. It also gives pause to the idea of the moral barometer argument made by McCullough and colleagues. Is it possible that feeling an excess of indebtedness is a sign of a different type of moral barometer, created by a different set of social experiences? Social anxiety may be linked to indebtedness in that a state of social anxiety is focused on presenting one's self in a manner that it is non-confrontational and avoidant (Schlenker & Leary, 1985). Therefore, a socially anxious person may take note of norms of reciprocity more deeply than a non-socially anxious person.

In Study 2, I propose that increasing social anxiety will result in higher self-reported indebtedness. Also, I predict that if a person is made to feel socially anxious, they will endorse lower self-reported gratitude. In general, the nature of self-doubt will cloud the ability to engage in appreciation. Therefore, feeling socially vulnerable could prevent individuals from feeling the positive aspects of receiving a benefit.

Method

Participants

Participants were introduction to psychology students who volunteered to take part in the research for extra course credit. The description of the study was posted on a sign-up board. There was a cover story told the participants that they would be asked to participate in a study examining an interview technique for job applicants.

Design and Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: social anxiety or control group. After being exposed to either the manipulation or the control condition, participants filled out a survey packet. Participants worked alone with the researcher on this experiment, so one person at a time experienced the protocol.

All participants completed the same writing task. This technique was adapted from a recent study conducted that manipulated self-evaluation (Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, in press). The research assistant instructed as follows:

“You will be taking part in a study that examines how people explain their qualifications for employment positions. This is an important topic because research has shown that performance in job interviews is highly correlated with whether or not applicants are offered the position. In addition, research shows that how well people perform in mock job interview situations like this one is highly predictive of how well they typically perform in a real life job interview. We are conducting this experiment to see if a new method of assessing job qualifications provides valid information about potential employees. What do you consider to be qualifications that you have to become a full-time research assistant in the psychology department? For the next five minutes, write about these qualifications.”

The control group completed this exercise and then filled out a packet of surveys

consisting of state measures of social anxiety, gratitude, indebtedness and mood (see Appendix).

The experimental group was given additional instructions. The participants in the experimental condition were told that after they have completed the written portion, they would have to give an oral presentation about their job qualifications to a group of three individuals: two Psi Chi student members and one graduate student. The instructions were as follows:

“After you have explained your qualifications in writing, you will present what you have written to a group of psychology students in Room XXX, which is down the hall. Two of these individuals are members of the Psi Chi honor society (an honor society for psychology majors) and one graduate student of the psychology department. These people will evaluate your presentation for three factors: content, clarity and style. The purpose of the part of the experiment is for us to determine whether these three factors provide a valid measure of employee qualifications. After you have completed the presentation, the group will share with you their evaluation on these three factors.”

After the written portion was completed, the participants were told that they were to fill out a few surveys while they wait for the group evaluators to arrive. The research assistant informed the participant that she would escort them to the presentation room when the group arrives. However, there was no such group of evaluators.

After the participant completed the survey packet, they were thanked, debriefed, and excused from the study.

Measures

The manipulation check measure was a measure of state social anxiety and public self-consciousness. Public self-consciousness was measured to help rule out alternative explanations about the manipulation. After the manipulation check, participants filled out two state gratitude measures, and an indebtedness measure. These questionnaires are

the instruments that were used for Study 1, only they have been slightly altered to read as statements about the participants' current state, as opposed to their personality or traits. An example of this is "My current feeling is that it is important to enjoy the simple things in life."

In addition, the Positive Affect and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) was added to assess whether positive or negative affect varies between conditions. It has high validity and reliability over time (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). The scale contains two independent factors: positive and negative affect. Positive descriptors are items such as "excitement" and "strong." Examples of negative descriptors are "guilty" and "anger." This measure is based on a scale ranging from 1 (very slightly or not at all) to 5 (extremely).

Hypotheses

I predicted that the social anxiety group will have significantly higher indebtedness scores than the control group. I predicted that the social anxiety group will have significantly lower gratitude scores than the control group.

Results

Descriptive statistics. The sample consisted of 38 males and 55 females. The average age of the sample was 20.17. There were 27 African Americans, 11 Asian Americans, 45 European Americans and 4 Hispanics in the sample. In addition, six participants reported that they were “Other” on the demographics page, for a total of 93 participants.

Manipulation check. An independent groups *t*-test was conducted to see if there were significant differences in social anxiety between the control and experimental group. The result was significant, $t(89) = -3.11, p < .002$. The experimental condition ($M = 1.79$) reported significantly higher social anxiety than the control condition ($M = 1.23$). This suggests that the manipulation of social anxiety in the experimental condition was successful.

An independent groups *t*-test was performed to see if there were significant differences in public self-consciousness between the control and experimental group. The result was not significant, $t(91) = -.995, p < .32$. The experimental condition ($M = 1.85$) did not report significantly higher levels of public self-consciousness than the control condition ($M = 1.69$).

Gratitude and indebtedness. An independent groups *t*-test was performed to see if those in the social anxiety condition reported significantly less gratitude (as measured by the short GRAT) than the control group. The finding was not significant, $t(91) = .88, p < .42$. The participants exposed to the social anxiety manipulation ($M = 6.45$) did not

report significantly lower levels of gratitude than the control participants ($M = 6.62$).

This finding was similar for the additional measure of gratitude (GQ-6), $t(91) = 0.55, p < .58$. The participants in the social anxiety condition ($M = 5.94$) did not report less gratitude on the GQ-6 scale than the control condition ($M = 6.05$).

An analysis was also conducted to see if those in social anxiety condition would report higher levels of indebtedness as compared to the experimental condition. This finding was also not significant, $t(85) = -1.00, p < .32$. This indicates that participants exposed to the social anxiety manipulation ($M = .42$) did not feel significantly more indebtedness than the control participants ($M = .20$).

Discussion

In Study 2, the manipulation of social anxiety resulted in significantly higher levels of social anxiety in the experimental group than the control group. However, contrary to hypotheses, the experimental group did not report significantly less gratitude or more indebtedness than the control group. The pattern of means was in the predicted direction for both gratitude measures and the indebtedness measure; however, these differences were not statistically significant. This may be an implication that the theoretical tenets of this thesis need revising or that the methods used in Study 2 might need to be improved upon to capture what may be a relatively small effect size.

One factor that may play into the general insignificant findings was whether or not the manipulation was truly effective for all participants. In other words, it may be the case that some of the participants did not take the cover story seriously. This may lead to a weakness of the effect of the social anxiety manipulation on gratitude and indebtedness. For example, was this manipulation more powerful for psychology majors as opposed to non psychology majors? Further studies should be improved to examine the participant's perception of the seriousness of the study and whether or not the participants felt that the task was relevant to them.

Another consideration is that it may have been helpful to have pre-test measures in Study 2. It could be the case that people who are high on social anxiety in general may feel socially anxious in many situations, including the control condition of this

experiment. The opposite may also be true. People who are very low on trait social anxiety may not feel very anxious in the experimental condition. A pre/post design might allow for experimenters to use trait social anxiety as an additional factor (or covariate) in the study. This type of design may lead to possible intriguing interactions between dispositional (within subject social anxiety) and situational variables (between subjects social anxiety).

In light of the issues that may be hindering significant effects for Study 2, it may be useful to re-design the study to include a gift giving condition in addition to a self-focus condition. The gift itself may make the self-focusing more salient, and thus more powerful effects may be detected. It may be hypothesized that gift giving from a stranger may elicit an exchange relationship for those in the social anxiety condition, and thus a heightened sense of indebtedness and a lowered sense of gratitude.

Finally, it may also be wise to attempt to manipulate other-focused attention. If participants are made to focus on the gift itself, does self-focus decrease and gratitude increase? This type of manipulation may lead to intriguing results that will coincide with the original theory posited by this thesis. When we focus on our benefactor or the gift, we may be more inclined to experience gratitude rather than indebtedness. A future study may want to manipulate other-focused attention and self-focused attention within the same design. A between subjects design with three levels of the attention factor (other-focus, self-focus, and control) may support the proposed theory. I predict that other-focused attention would significantly increase feelings of gratitude and decrease feelings of indebtedness when compared to both the self-focused group and the control

group. The self-focus group will report significantly lower feelings of gratitude and increased feelings of indebtedness as compared to the control group.

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Appendices

SOCIAL ANXIETY & PUBLIC SELF CONSCIOUSNESS

For each of the following statements, please indicate how you feel **RIGHT NOW** by circling one of the scale categories to the right of each statement. Use the scale as shown below.

	0 extremely uncharacteristic	1 uncharacteristic	2 somewhat characteristic	3 characteristic	4 extremely characteristic
1. I'm concerned about my style of doing things.	0	1	2	3	4
2. Right now, it would take me sometime to overcome my shyness in a new situation.	0	1	2	3	4
3. I'm concerned about the way I am presenting myself.	0	1	2	3	4
4. I would have trouble working if someone was watching me.	0	1	2	3	4
5. I feel embarrassed.	0	1	2	3	4
6. I feel self-conscious about the way I look.	0	1	2	3	4
7. Right now, I would find it hard to talk to a stranger.	0	1	2	3	4
8. I am worried about making a good impression.	0	1	2	3	4
9. I feel anxious to speak in front of a group.	0	1	2	3	4

	0 extremely uncharacteristic	1 uncharacteristic	2 somewhat characteristic	3 characteristic	4 extremely characteristic
10. I wish I could look at myself in a mirror.	0	1	2	3	4
11. I feel concerned about what other people think of me.	0	1	2	3	4
12. Right now, I feel aware of my appearance.	0	1	2	3	4
13. A large group of people would make me nervous.	0	1	2	3	4

GRATITUDE, RESENTMENT & APPRECIATION TEST

Please respond to the following statements by choosing the number that best represents your **CURRENT** feelings. Please use the scale provided below, and please choose one number for each statement, 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 think I couldn't have gotten where I am today without the help of many people.

_____ 2. I feel that life is good to me.

_____ 3. My current feeling is that there isn't enough to go around and I don't get my share.

_____ 4. As I reflect, I am overwhelmed at the beauty of nature.

_____ 5. Although I feel good about my accomplishments, I find myself reflecting on how others have contributed to my accomplishments.

_____ 6. At the moment, I really don't think that I've gotten all the good things that I deserve in life.

_____ 7. I really enjoy watching the leaves change colors.

_____ 8. Although right now I feel 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. My current feeling is that I think it's important to "Stop and smell the roses."

_____ 10. It seems that 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 now feel like the world owes me something.

_____ 12. I think that it's important to pause and "count my blessings."

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

- _____ 13. My current feeling is that 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. At the moment, I don't have the advantages that others get.
- _____ 16. I think it's important to appreciate each day that you are alive.

GRATITUDE QUESTIONNAIRE

Using the scale below as a guide, write a number beside each statement to indicate how much you agree with it **RIGHT NOW**.

- 1 = strongly disagree
- 2 = disagree
- 3 = slightly disagree
- 4 = neutral
- 5 = slightly agree
- 6 = agree
- 7 = strongly agree

- ___ 1. I have so much in my life to be thankful for.
- ___ 2. If I had to list everything that I felt grateful for, it would be a very long list.
- ___ 3. As I look at the world, I don't see much to be grateful for.
- ___ 4. I am grateful for a wide variety of people.
- ___ 5. As I get older I find myself more able to appreciate the people, events, and situations that have been part of my life history.
- ___ 6. Long amounts of time can go by before I feel grateful to something or someone.

INDEBTEDNESS SCALE

Please indicate your response to the following items by circling the number that best represents your agreement or disagreement **RIGHT NOW**.

	Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree
1. If a friend did me a favor right now, I would make sure to repay them as quickly as possible.	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3
2. Owing someone a favor makes me uncomfortable.	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3
3. I would not borrow money from a friend unless it was absolutely necessary.	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3
4. Asking for another's help gives them power over your life.	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3
5. Never a borrower or a lender be.	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3
6. I'd be embarrassed if someone had to remind me of a debt I owed them.	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3
7. As a rule, I don't accept a favor if I can't return the favor.	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3
8. If someone paid for my dinner or invited me to eat at their place right now, I would feel obligated to buy them dinner the next time or to invite them to eat at my place.	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3
9. I would be very upset if I discovered that I had forgotten to return something I borrowed.	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3
10. If someone went out of their way to help me right now, I feel as though I should do more for them than merely return the favor.	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3
11. When someone does me a favor it often bothers me because I immediately wonder how I will repay them.	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3
12. I like to make sure I don't owe anybody anything.	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3
13. I find myself worrying about whether I have repaid all the favors I have received.	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3
14. When someone gives me something or provides a favor to me, I usually feel somewhat uncomfortable at first.	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3
15. Right now, I'd rather do things myself than have someone help me because I wouldn't like feeling obligated to return their favor.	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3
16. Right now I wouldn't receive a gift very well.	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3
17. If someone bought me an expensive gift, I would worry a lot about whether I would be able to repay them.	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3
18. In good friendships you should make sure that you pay back all the favors you have received from your friend.	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3
19. If someone does me a favor, I usually try to pay them back as soon as possible.	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3
20. I would be uncomfortable right now if someone surprised me with a large or expensive gift.	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3
21. At this moment, being able to repay a favor or gift would bring me great relief.	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3
22. I would have trouble enjoying gifts from others right now because I would be concerned about what I would give them in return.	-3	-2	-1	1	2	3

PANAS

This scale consists of a number of words that describe different feelings and emotions. Read each item and then circle the appropriate number next to that word. Indicate to what extent you feel this way right now, that is, at the present moment. Use the following scale provided to record your answers.

1 = very slightly or not at all
 2 = a little
 3 = moderately
 4 = quite a bit
 5 = extremely

1. Interested	1	2	3	4	5
2. Disinterested	1	2	3	4	5
3. Excited	1	2	3	4	5
4. Upset	1	2	3	4	5
5. Strong	1	2	3	4	5
6. Guilty	1	2	3	4	5
7. Scared	1	2	3	4	5
8. Hostile	1	2	3	4	5
9. Enthusiastic	1	2	3	4	5
10. Proud	1	2	3	4	5
11. Irritable	1	2	3	4	5
12. Alert	1	2	3	4	5
13. Ashamed	1	2	3	4	5
14. Inspired	1	2	3	4	5
15. Nervous	1	2	3	4	5

1 = very slightly or not at all

2 = a little

3 = moderately

4 = quite a bit

5 = extremely

16. Determined	1	2	3	4	5
17. Attentive	1	2	3	4	5
18. Jittery	1	2	3	4	5
19. Active	1	2	3	4	5
20. Afraid	1	2	3	4	5

Vita

I was born in Auburn, New York on April 29, 1975. I have lived in New York, New Jersey, Washington state, and now Virginia. I originally planned on being a restaurateur. I spent most of my youth working and training in the restaurant business. I had a change of heart in my mid-twenties and now I prefer a cushy desk chair to a sweaty kitchen, at least most of the time. I live with my partner, Colleen, and two cats, Emily and Jupiter, who are both lovable but for entirely different reasons.