

The Pursuit of Happiness: How Prioritizing Positivity Impacts Our Well-Being



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Introduction

Is there a “right” or “wrong” way to pursue happiness? Research has shown that prioritizing time to engage in activities that cultivate positive emotions are more effective in improving well-being while excessively valuing happiness may backfire. Expressing gratitude has been found to be a method of cultivating positive emotions in oneself and others. We predict that people who prioritize positivity will engage in more other-praising behaviors, which will further predict well-being.

Methodology

Participants:

The analytic sample consisted of 227 participants ranging from 35 to 64 years old ($M = 48.5$, $SD = 8.87$) from an archival dataset collected for a larger study.¹ Participants were mostly female (61.9%) and were asked about their primary racial/ethnic identity (White=77.9%, Black or African American=16.8%, Asian=4.9%, American Indian or Alaskan Native=0.4%). Participants were recruited using community posted flyers, Craigslist, and informational e-mail postings on UNC Research Studies Listserv.

Measures:

- *Prioritizing Positivity Scale*² – measured on a 9-point scale (1=*disagree strongly*, 9=*agree strongly*) including “A priority for me is experiencing happiness in everyday life.”
- *Gratitude*³ – measured on a 5-point scale (1=*no or one minor statement of praise for benefactor’s action*, 5=*Excellent expression of benefactor’s praiseworthiness, including elaboration on the praiseworthy features of the benefactor’s actions and many generalize the behavior of the benefactor and certainly warm smiles and direct eye contact while making the praising statements.*)
- *Satisfaction with Life Scale*⁴ – measured on a 7-point scale (1=*strongly disagree*, 7=*strongly agree*) including “If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.”
- *Purpose in Life Test*⁵ – measured on a 7-point scale (1=*not at all*, 7=*extremely*) including “My personal existence is very purposeful and meaningful.”
- *UCLA Loneliness Scale*⁶ – measured on a 4-point scale (1=*never*, 4=*often*) including “How often do you feel close to people?” These items were reverse-scored.

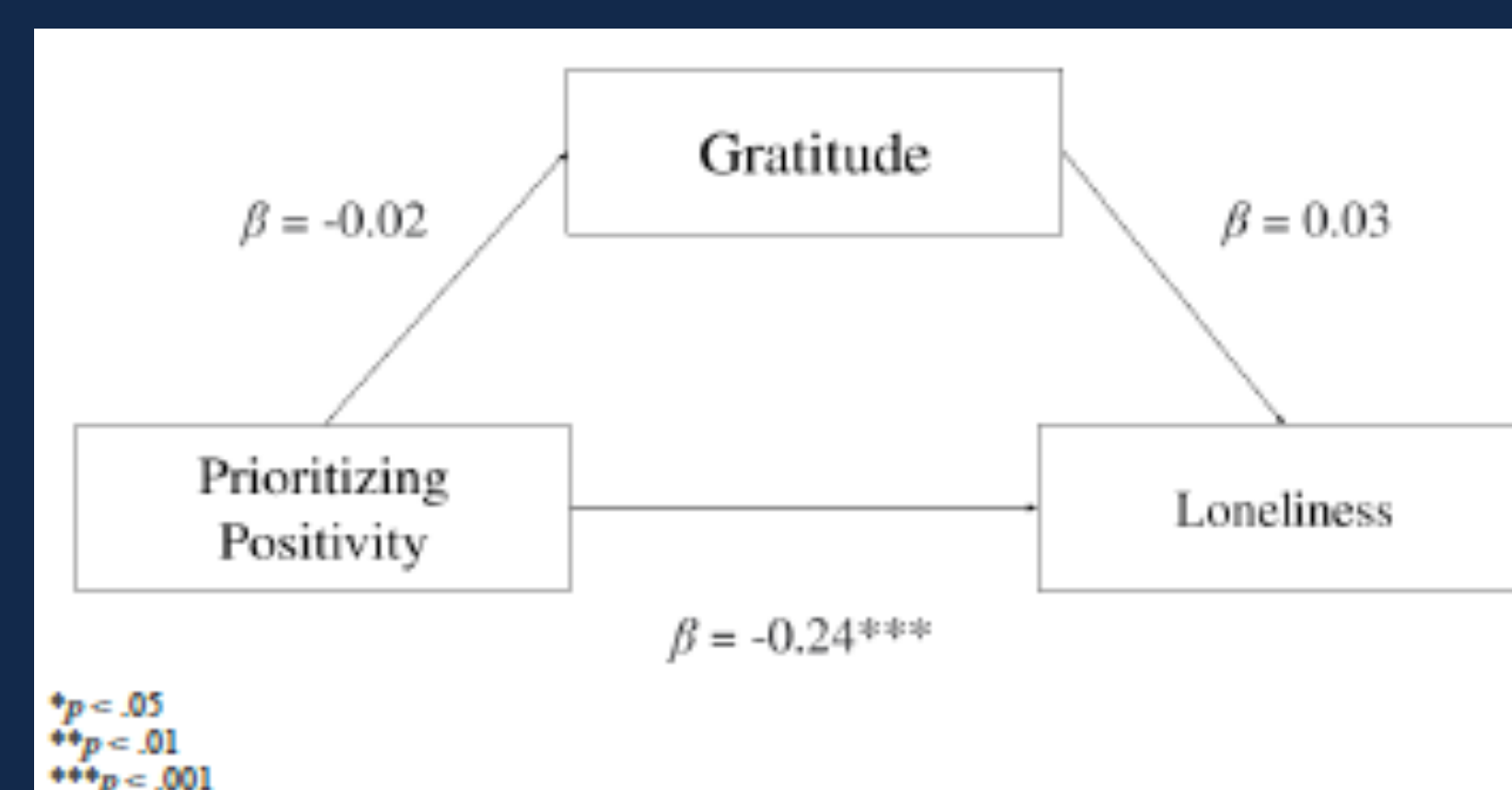
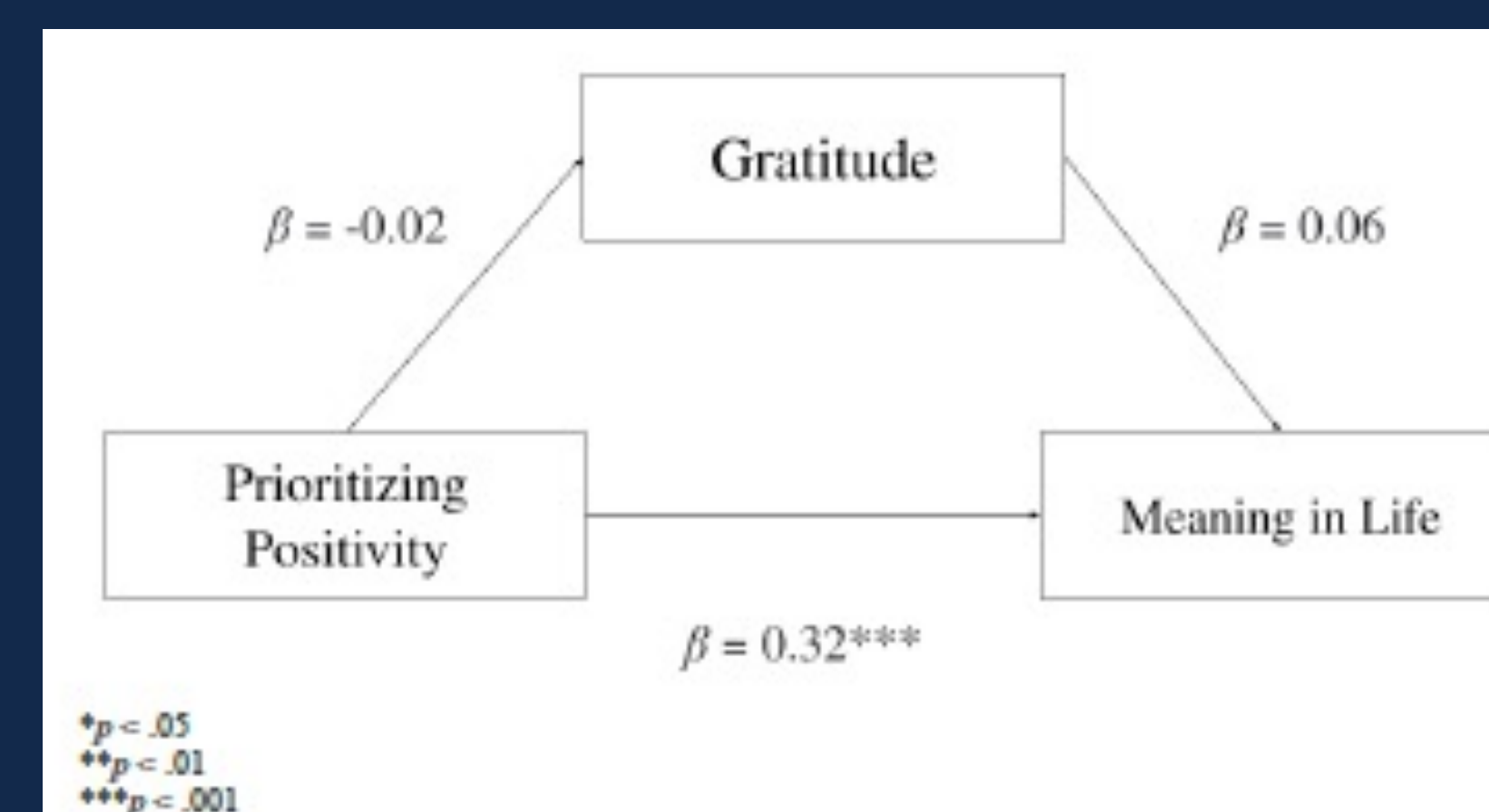
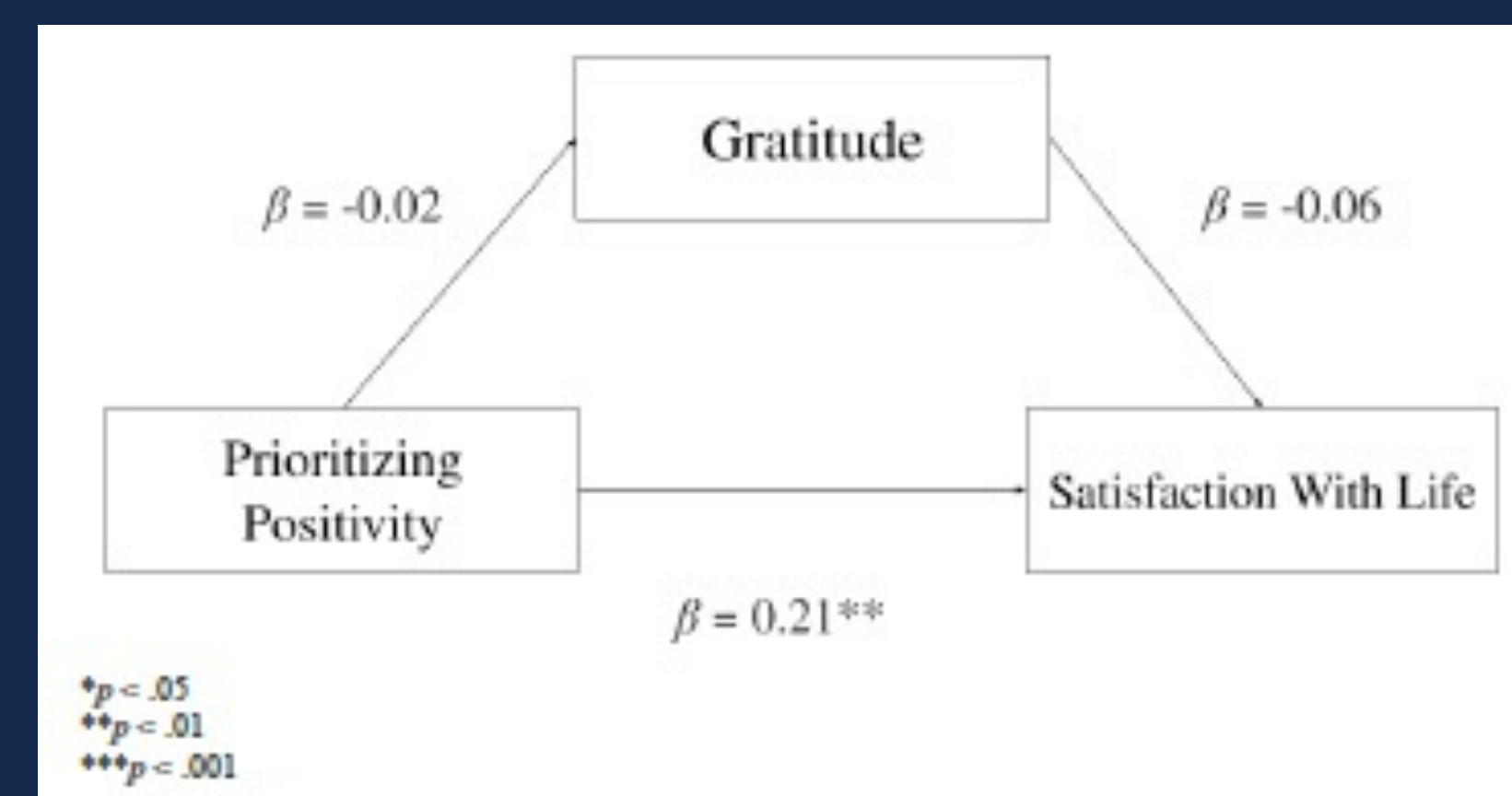
Results

Correlations Between Prioritizing Positivity, Gratitude, and Well-Being Measures.

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Prioritizing Positivity	—				
2. Meaning in Life	0.318***	—			
3. Loneliness	-0.276***	-0.385***	—		
4. Satisfaction with Life	0.210**	0.493***	-0.369***	—	
5. Gratitude	-0.025	0.058	0.015	-0.059	—

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

Prioritizing positivity was found to predict higher levels of meaning in life and satisfaction in life, as well as lower levels of loneliness.



Other-praising behaviors were found to not explain the association between prioritizing positivity and well-being measures

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Prioritizing positivity will predict higher levels of meaning in life and satisfaction in life, as well as lower levels of loneliness.

Hypothesis 2: The associations between prioritizing positivity and the outcomes in Hypothesis 1 can be explained by other-praising behaviors.

Discussion

The current study highlights the importance of prioritizing positivity, or intentionally making decisions in daily life that would maximize the likelihood of experiencing positive emotions, without the need to constantly maintain desired levels of happiness. People who prioritize positivity do not necessarily engage in expressing gratitude, as measured in this study, in order to achieve well-being. Future research can explore what behaviors people tend to engage in more often and investigate whether the association between prioritizing positivity and well-being is more social or non-social.

References

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