

# The Diversity of Love Journal

## Emotions Associated With Gratitude

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Article published on [April 8, 2023](#) by [Victor Karandashev](#)

Retrieved from: <https://love-diversity.org/emotions-associated-with-gratitude/>

We can characterize gratitude as the grateful attitudes toward other people and life. Gratitude also involves several situational emotions when we experience gratitude for what other people and life give to us. We can experience several positive emotions when we are grateful, thankful, and appreciative to someone for something.

## What Is the Lived Experience of Gratitude?

Researchers from Sofia University in California, USA, Patty Hlava and John Elfers conducted a qualitative study to investigate the ways in which individuals experience gratitude throughout their lives. The authors also investigated the advantages of practicing and expressing gratitude, both for relationships with others and personal emotions.

What does **it mean for people to be grateful for their lives**, and how do they **feel gratitude in their somatic feelings**? How does **gratitude benefit our relationships**, and how does **it change our relationships with others**?

## How Emotional Is the Lived Experience of Gratitude?

In this qualitative study, the authors explored the individual narratives of the lived emotional experience of gratitude. Some descriptions identified the feelings elicited by a specific event. The other descriptions identified the generalized descriptions that people reminisce over in a wide range of examples (Hlava & Elfers, 2014).

## **The Gratitude Emotions of Acceptance, Comfort, and Security**

Many participants in their narratives expressed emotions of acceptance of themselves and of the world associated with a sense of rightness or completeness. They also described feelings of comfort and security.

*I can just be in the world and not in conflict with it. (Jennifer)*

*Yeah, I felt real grounded, and centered, and refreshed. (Mimi)*

*There is this thread of deep contentment that runs like an underground river through everything. (Albert)*

*I'm grateful because there's that unconditional love and that safety and security, which makes me feel strong and powerful. (Melanie)*  
(Hlava & Elfers, 2014, p. 447).

## **The Gratitude Emotions of Being Blessed**

Participants described the feelings of being fortunate, lucky, and blessed as a common theme. It was a sense of personal worth and the value of the self in relation to others. This experience of gratitude, however, was not associated with feelings of guilt or indebtedness for the benefit.

Some participants recognized their responsibility to give back in response to the gift. They feel a desire to act on that responsibility.

*A sense of being blessed and of savoring every little moment. (Sue)*

*I don't know if I'm going to be able to be worthy of their faith in me. (Louise)*

*I just remember feeling so overwhelmed with feeling blessed and feeling just joyful, feeling just fortunate. (Betty) I get really excited, and I literally feel giddy. Then I feel lucky, and then I feel humbled. Then I feel like I should share it. (Melanie)*  
(Hlava & Elfers, 2014, p. 447).

## **The Gratitude Emotions of Joy**

Participants described the positive emotion-experience of gratitude in terms of the pleasant sensations of euphoria, joy, and happiness.

*A wonderful state of euphoria; pleasurable sensations, both mental and physical; happiness of memories. (Doris)*  
*I was smiling, on top of my feeling a sense of joy in my face, and then a welling up in my eyes. (Betty)*  
*I feel lighter and definitely happier. Gratitude is like sunshine. (Sarita) Then I was just really happy. I thought I was like Disneyland happy. (Link)*  
(Hlava & Elfers, 2014, p. 447).

## **The Gratitude Emotions of Love**

The experience of love frequently expresses gratitude. Both love and gratitude are highly relational emotions, and both embody a broad affective range of feelings and contexts. Participants expressed the sentiments of love in a variety of ways, such as by loving another, loving oneself, being loved, and feeling grateful for being loved. The sentiments of love were also felt as being accepted, supported, protected, and understood.

*Overwhelming love, I would say. In love with them, and feeling loved by them. (Betty)*  
*I feel love. (pause) It's kind of funny; because I think love and gratitude are almost like twins. You don't have to love someone*

*you're grateful to, but it certainly seems to enhance gratitude and a lot of times if I'm grateful, really, I'm feeling loved. (Nancy)*  
*How grateful I was to have been involved and been a part of such a wonderful and loving family. I really was overcome with just a feeling of gratefulness and almost to the point where it brought me to tears. (Lou)*  
[\(Hlava & Elfers, 2014, p. 448\).](#)

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