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Subjective Well-Being and Gratitude Among South African Adolescents: Exploring Gender and Cultural Differences

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Abstract

Findings on contextual variables related to subjective well-being (SWB) and gratitude among adolescents are inconsistent. This study examined the association between SWB and gratitude among a group of South African adolescents (n = 840) as well as gender and cultural differences in the mean scores on measures of SWB and gratitude. Correlations between SWB and gratitude were in the expected direction. Females showed higher levels of satisfaction with school, friends, and self, compared with males, and also higher levels of negative affect, state, and trait gratitude. Black adolescents were more satisfied in the domains of self and school and showed higher levels of state gratitude. White adolescents experienced higher levels of general life satisfaction and satisfaction with living environment, as well as trait gratitude. Programs to enhance youth well-being could benefit from focusing on specific life domains and affective experience to better address the needs of specific groups of adolescents.

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Positive development during adolescence implies dealing effectively with a wide range of complex bio-psycho-social-cultural changes and challenges (Larson & Tran, 2014). During this life stage, there is an increased risk of developing dysfunctional behaviors, psychological symptoms, and mental illness (Jones, 2013). At the same time, adolescence may also present an opportunity for developing important skills, competencies, and behaviors (Erikson, 1971).

A growing body of research has focused on the investigation and promotion of the positive aspects of adolescence, such as well-being, life satisfaction, and positive emotions, including gratitude (Ouweneel, Le Blanc, & Schaufeli, 2014; Proctor, Linley, & Maltby, 2009). These aspects are important in promoting a positive and adaptive transition to adulthood and to protect from the onset of future psychological disorders (Bartels, 2015; Bono & Froh, 2009). Optimal levels of well-being during adolescence, also referred to as flourishing (Keyes, 2006; Seligman, 2011), have been associated with lowered risk for mental disorders and suicidal behaviors as well as less impaired academic performance (Keyes et al., 2012). Furthermore, optimal functioning during adolescence is associated with higher levels of well-being in adulthood, which, in turn, are protective of both psychological and physical health (Ryff, 2014). However, not only does mental health tend to decline with age, especially from middle to high school, but lack of mental health, well-being, and positive psychological functioning may create conditions of greater vulnerability (González-Carrasco, Casas, Malo, Viñas, & Dinisman, 2017; Ryff, 2014). It is, therefore, important to examine levels of well-being among adolescents in various contexts as well as to identify and strengthen psychological resources through which adolescents' well-being can be protected and promoted. Various perspectives on what constitutes optimal well-being have been put forward (e.g., Huppert & So, 2013; Keyes, 2002; Seligman, 2011), and there is still no consensus about a single definition of well-being. However, one of the most widely researched conceptualizations of well-being is subjective well-being (SWB; Pavot & Diener, 2008, 2013).

SWB

SWB refers to individuals' cognitive and affective evaluation of their lives. In particular, SWB comprises three facets: a general cognitive evaluation of life

as being good (life satisfaction) as well as experiencing more pleasant affect, and less negative affect (NA; Pavot & Diener, 2008, 2013). Life satisfaction can further be understood on two levels: a cognitive judgment of life as a whole (general life satisfaction) and satisfaction with specific domains of life (domain-specific life satisfaction). Within this latter perspective, Huebner (1994) identified several domains of life satisfaction relevant to adolescents, namely, satisfaction with family, friends, school, self, and living conditions. Satisfaction with these domains is context-specific and can provide valuable information on specific areas of adolescents' subjective experiences of life satisfaction (Long & Huebner, 2014). Domain-specific life satisfaction may be useful in identifying which areas of adolescents' lives may need attention in order to promote optimal development.

SWB seems to be related to several positive developmental outcomes among adolescents (Bartels, 2015; Cavallo et al., 2015; Proctor et al., 2009), including better academic performance (Ng, Huebner, & Hills, 2015) and positive relationships (Navarro et al., 2017). Furthermore, SWB is negatively related to psychopathology during adolescence (Bartels, Cacioppo, van Beijsterveldt, & Boomsma, 2013). Given the key role of SWB in positive developmental outcomes, understanding its correlates is important to develop strategies to promote optimal functioning among youth. One such correlate is gratitude.

Gratitude

Gratitude can be conceived in two ways: first, as a trait, being persistently present and second, as a state or an emotion, which may be a transient response to external events (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). In general, gratitude involves an acknowledgment of having benefited from someone else's actions. Through showing this appreciation, individuals recognize others' benevolence (Emmons & Mishra, 2011). However, gratitude can also extend to something larger, such as a Higher Power, for example, God or nature. Wood, Froh, and Geraghty (2010) further proposed that gratitude is a broad life orientation whereby the positive aspects of life are noticed and appreciated.

Research among early adolescents suggest that gratitude is related to satisfying social relationships and social connectedness (Froh, Yurkewicz, & Kashdan, 2009), pursuing intrinsically rewarding goals, lower levels of materialism (Froh, Emmons, Card, Bono, & Wilson, 2011), as well as more positive affective experiences (Froh et al., 2009). Furthermore, gratitude may motivate adolescents to engage in future benevolent actions (Froh, Bono, & Emmons, 2010). A recent meta-analysis (Renshaw & Olinger Steeves, 2016)

suggested that gratitude is positively correlated to life satisfaction and negatively correlated to distress. Gratitude can be intentionally practiced, and some studies reported that engaging in gratitude activities lead to enhanced SWB in adolescents (Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, 2008; Khanna & Singh, 2016). Although Renshaw and Olinger Steeves (2016) cautioned against the over-enthusiastic implementation of gratitude interventions among youth, it remains an important factor in adolescent well-being.

Finally, it is increasingly acknowledged that sociodemographic and contextual factors, including gender (González-Carrasco et al., 2017) and culture (Diener, Oishi, & Ryan, 2013), are important to understanding SWB and gratitude. This may be particularly true in the case of adolescents (Morgan et al., 2011; Vera et al., 2012). As we will indicate, there are still some inconsistencies and lack of research related to gender and culture in the experience of well-being during adolescence.

Gender Differences in SWB and Gratitude

Numerous studies reported no gender differences in SWB among adults (Pavot & Diener, 2013), but findings among adolescents are inconsistent. For example, Bradshaw, Keung, Rees, and Goswami (2011) reported lower levels of life satisfaction for females in comparison with males, whereas Ash and Huebner (2001) found no gender differences in life satisfaction as a component of SWB. On the contrary, there is some evidence that male adolescents experience higher levels of general life satisfaction than females (Neto, 1993), whereas females experience higher levels of domain-specific satisfaction with friends (Jovanovic & Zuljevic, 2013) and with school (Liu, Mei, Tian, & Huebner, 2015), in comparison with males. However, research on demographic variables and life satisfaction among adolescents are still limited and more studies are needed (Proctor et al., 2009; Yuen & Lee, 2016). As far as the affective component of SWB is concerned, there is strong evidence that female adolescents experience more positive emotions than males (Chaplin & Aldao, 2013), but there is still a lack of knowledge on gender as a contextual variable in the experience of SWB (Vera et al., 2012).

Concerning gratitude, research among adults suggest that women have a more grateful disposition in comparison to men (Kashdan, Mishra, Breen, & Froh, 2009), but no gender differences were found among adolescents (Froh et al., 2009). Generally, research on sociodemographic differences in gratitude among adolescents is lacking, which motivated the implementation of the current study.

Cultural Differences in Life Satisfaction and Gratitude

A large body of research has focused on differences in SWB among and within nations, suggesting that cultural and social factors substantially influence well-being in a complex manner (Diener et al., 2013; Yuen & Lee, 2016). Findings among children and adolescents are rare and inconsistent. Some studies reported that African American adolescents showed higher general life satisfaction than their peers (Haranin, Huebner, & Suldo, 2007). Other studies found opposite results (Terry & Huebner, 1995) or no differences (Huebner, Drane, & Valois, 2000). Comparing American and Korean adolescents, Park and Huebner (2005) reported that Korean adolescents experienced lower life satisfaction. Dinisman and Ben-Arieh (2016) further found relatively high SWB among children from 14 different countries, with sociodemographic variables contributing little to the variance in SWB. In addition, there are limited cross-cultural studies on domain-specific life satisfaction among adolescents. On one of the few studies, Yuen and Lee (2016) examined differences in domain-specific life satisfaction between Chinese and Asian adolescents from different ethnic groups in Hong Kong. They found that a minority group (nonspeaking Asian adolescents) reported higher life satisfaction with friends and school than their mainstream Chinese peers. Moreover, disadvantageous social circumstances were not significantly linked with their self-evaluation of life satisfaction. Yuen and Lee (2016) concluded that life satisfaction is multifaceted and is determined by different factors according to different life stages. It is, therefore, evident that life satisfaction in various life domains should also be examined in understanding adolescent well-being in the multicultural South African context.

Despite the interest in cultural variations of SWB, most existing research focused on differences between Western and Eastern cultures (e.g., Park & Huebner, 2005; Wirtz, Chiu, Diener, & Oishi, 2009). In the South African context, research on SWB has mainly focused on adults (e.g., Wissing & Temane, 2013), neglecting children and adolescents. In one of the few studies, Savahl et al. (2015) found relatively high levels of SWB among a group of 12-year-old South African children but cautioned that the findings were in contrast to objective indicators of their well-being as many South African children are exposed to adverse circumstances such as poverty, violence, and abuse. In addition, there is a lack of research on adolescents' domain-specific well-being in the South African context. Given the complex sociopolitical realities, which form part of their developmental milieu, further investigation on SWB among South African adolescents is warranted.

Concerning gratitude, cross-cultural research suggests that the experience and expression thereof are influenced by cultural variables. In particular, collectivistic cultures tend to be more grateful (Diener et al., 2013), compared with individualistic cultures, but most research focused on differences between Western and Asian cultures (e.g., Layous, Lee, Choi, & Lyubomirsky, 2013). There seems to be a lack of knowledge regarding the expression and experience of gratitude in African cultures in general and adolescents specifically. Following Hofstede's (2011) model, African cultures can be viewed as more collectivistic in nature, whereas Western cultures are individualistic. In South Africa, Black adolescents are considered to belong to a collectivistic culture and White adolescents to an individualistic culture (Adams, Van de Vijver, & De Bruin, 2012). Accordingly, it can be expected that Black adolescents may be more grateful than their White peers.

Furthermore, although van Schalkwyk and Wissing (2010) identified gratitude as one of several variables associated with well-being in a large sample of South African adolescents, the finding was based on qualitative data, indicating a need for quantitative research on gratitude in this age group in the South African context. Given the importance of SWB and gratitude to positive psychological functioning and optimal development among adolescents, it is evident that more research is needed on their prevalence and interrelationships among South African youth.

The Current Study

This study aimed to investigate SWB and gratitude as facets of well-being among a group of South African adolescents. To this end, we addressed three broad research questions:

1. **Research Question 1:** What are the levels of and the association between SWB and gratitude among South African adolescents?
2. **Research Question 2:** Are there significant gender differences in SWB and gratitude among South African adolescents?
3. **Research Question 3:** Are there significant differences in SWB and gratitude between adolescents from Black and White South African population groups?

We expected SWB and gratitude to be strongly correlated, with positive correlations between all measures with the exception of NA, where we expected a negative correlation. Due to inconsistent findings regarding SWB, gratitude, and gender differences, we did not set specific hypotheses. In terms of cross-cultural research on SWB, we also did not set a hypothesis due to

mixed results. However, we expected that Black adolescents, viewed as belonging to a collectivistic culture, would show higher levels of gratitude in comparison with White adolescents, viewed as belonging to an individualistic culture.

Method

Participants

Adolescents (N = 840) attending three high schools in Johannesburg were obtained through purposive sampling. The majority (435, 52%) of the participants was female, and there were 405 males. Ages ranged between 14 and 18 years with a mean of 16 years (SD = .91). With regard to population group, most participants were Black African (n = 475, 57%) followed by White (Caucasian; n = 236, 28%), Indian (n = 67, 8%), and Colored (mixed ethnicity; n = 62, 7%) participants.

The whole sample was used to examine gender differences, but only Black and White participants were included to examine cultural differences. Although Indian and Colored groups could also be considered as belonging to a collectivistic culture, they show distinct ethnic identities (Adams et al., 2012), which need to be considered in interpreting findings. Because there also was a relatively small number of Indian and Colored participants in the sample, we, therefore, decided not to include them in the analyses on cultural differences.

Procedure

The Higher Degrees Committee of the Faculty of Humanities and the Gauteng Department of Basic Education respectively approved the research. Participation was voluntary and followed once parents gave written informed consent. The adolescents also provided assent to participate in the study, and confidentiality and anonymity were upheld. The questionnaires were administered during school hours by the third author.

Measures

Demographic questionnaire. The demographic questionnaire included questions concerning participants' age, gender, and population group.

Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS). The SWLS (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) measures personal judgment of global life satisfaction (Diener

et al., 1985) with five items. Participants respond on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The total score is calculated summing the scores of the five items, with the higher scores representing higher levels of life satisfaction. Scores above 21 indicate more satisfaction than dissatisfaction with life, a score of 20 represents a neutral point, and scores below 19 suggest dissatisfaction with life (Pavot & Diener, 2008). The SWLS demonstrated adequate reliability and validity in several studies among adolescents (e.g., Neto, 1993), including a South African adolescent sample (van Schalkwyk & Wissing, 2010). This study yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .79.

Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS). The MSLSS (Huebner, 1994) measures various domains of youth's satisfaction with life (family, friends, school, self, and environment) with a 40-item scale. Participants should state their satisfaction with each domain on a 6-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). A total score is calculated adding the 40 items using reverse scoring for negatively worded items and dividing the total by 40. Domain scores are calculated by adding the scores of their corresponding items, using reverse scoring for negatively worded items, and dividing the total by the number of items included in each domain. Scores may range from 1 to 6. Previous studies reported adequate reliability, internal validity, and convergent validity (Gilman, Huebner, & Laughlin, 2000; Jovanovic & Zuljevic, 2013). In this study, the following Cronbach's alpha coefficients were found: .88 for the family domain, .84 for the friends domain, .85 for the school domain, .78 for the self-domain, and .80 for the living environment domain. Only the domain-specific scores were used in this study.

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule for Children (PANAS-C). The PANAS-C (Laurent et al., 1999) evaluates levels of positive affect (PA) and NA in school-aged children (Hughes & Kendall, 2009) and adolescents (Suldo et al., 2009). The scale consists of 30 adjectives related to an affective state representing either PA or NA. Specifically, 15 items represent dimensions of PA and the other 15 represent the dimensions of NA (Laurent et al., 1999). Participants have to indicate how often they have experienced a feeling over the past 2 weeks on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*very slightly or not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*). For example, feelings include "proud" and "excited" (PA) or "afraid" and "nervous" (NA).

Higher scores on either affective dimension (PA or NA) reflect higher levels of the affective dimension experienced. Studies reported satisfactory reliability coefficients ranging from .75 to .91 for PA and 88 to .94 for NA (Laurent

et al., 1999; Suldo et al., 2009). A South African study implementing the adult version among adolescents reported reliability coefficients of .72 (PA) and.73 (NA; Getz, Chamorrow-Premuzik, Roy, & Devroop, 2012). Convergent and discriminant validity were established with measures of depression ($r = -.55$ for PA and $r = .60$ for NA) as well as with measures of anxiety ($r = -.30$ for PA and $r = .68$ for NA; Laurent et al., 1999). The current study yielded alpha coefficients of .87 for both PA and NA.

Gratitude Adjective Checklist (GAC). The GAC (McCullough et al., 2002) measures gratitude as a trait or as a state with three items requesting participants to rate how much they have felt grateful, thankful, and appreciative on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*). They may answer considering two different time periods: a longer time (e.g., the past few weeks) for measuring gratitude as a trait (Froh, Emmons, et al., 2011), whereas shorter periods (e.g., since yesterday) for assessing gratitude as a state (Froh et al., 2009). In this study, the GAC was used to measure gratitude as a state. The total score consists of an addition of the three items' scores and may range between 3 and 15, with higher scores indicating higher state gratitude. The GAC showed good internal consistency as well as convergent validity with measures of life satisfaction and PA (Froh, Fan, et al., 2011; Froh et al., 2009). This study yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .77.

The Gratitude Questionnaire–Six-Item Form (GQ-6). The GQ-6 (McCullough et al., 2002) investigates gratitude as a trait considering its frequency, span, and intensity. Participants respond to six items on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Sample items include, "I have so much to be thankful for" and "I am grateful to a wide variety of people." The scores of the six items are added to calculate a total score, using reverse scoring for Items 3 and 6. Higher scores indicate higher levels of gratitude. Psychometric properties for the GQ-6 were satisfactory (Froh, Fan, et al., 2011) among early adolescents. In this study, a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .65 was found, which is questionable for research purposes and implies that findings should be interpreted cautiously.

Data Analyses

Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha coefficients, correlation coefficients, and *t* tests for independent samples were used to analyze the data, and the level of significance was set at $p \leq 0.05$. The Statistical Package for the Social

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics.

Measure	*n*	*M*	*SD*	Skewness	Kurtosis
SWLS	837	23.29	6.28	−.45	−.29
MSLSS family	834	4.39	1.20	−.84	.25
MSLSS friends	834	5.05	0.89	−1.81	4.63
MSLSS school	834	4.12	1.08	−.46	−.26
MSLSS self	833	4.98	0.83	−1.44	2.82
MSLSS living	828	3.95	1.08	−.34	−.46
PANAS PA	804	55.6	11.67	−1.19	2.21
PANAS NA	807	32.56	11.23	.65	.13
GAC	834	11.51	2.83	−.90	.50
GQ-6	834	32.40	5.57	−.78	.88

Note. SWLS = Satisfaction With Life Scale; MSLSS = Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale; PANAS PA = Positive and Negative Affect Schedule–positive affect; PANAS NA = Positive and Negative Affect Schedule–negative affect; GAC = Gratitude Adjective Checklist; GQ-6 = Gratitude Questionnaire–Six-Item Form.

Sciences (SPSS; PASW Statistics 22, Release Version 22.0.0) was used for analyses.

Results

Table 1 reflects the descriptive statistics for all measures.

The Relationship Between SWB and Gratitude

Gratitude was strongly associated with SWB, as evident from Table 2. In particular, both state and trait gratitude were significantly and positively correlated to all of the life satisfaction measures as well as PA, and negatively correlated with NA.

Gender Differences in SWB

Six *t* tests for independent samples were conducted to examine gender differences in general and domain-specific life satisfaction. The results are indicated in Table 3. No differences emerged between male and females regarding general life satisfaction, whereas differences emerged in specific life domains. Particularly, females reported higher scores in MSLSS friends ($t = -3.988$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .02$), school ($t = -3.670$, $p = .000$, $\eta^2 = .02$), and

Table 2. Correlation Matrix for All Measures.

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.	GAC	—									
2.	GQ-6	.38**	—								
3.	SWLS	.35**	.49**	—							
4.	MSLSS family	.29**	.43**	.50**	—						
5.	MSLSS friends	.19**	.38**	.29**	.35**	—					
6.	MSLSS school	.28**	.38**	.32**	.34**	.34**	—				
7.	MSLSS self	.23**	.37**	.35**	.41**	.51**	.43**	—			
8.	MSLSS living	.19**	.35**	.42**	.47**	.32**	.26**	.28**	—		
9.	PANAS PA	.34**	.41**	.42**	.35**	.35**	.35**	.52**	.31**	—	
10.	PANAS NA	−.10**	−.23**	−.35**	−.28**	−.25**	−.25**	−.30**	−.39**	−.20**	—

Note. GAC = Gratitude Adjective Checklist; GQ-6 = Gratitude Questionnaire–Six-Item Form; SWLS = Satisfaction With Life Scale; MSLSS = Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale; PANAS PA = Positive and Negative Affect Schedule–positive affect; PANAS NA = Positive and Negative Affect Schedule–negative affect.

**$p \leq .01$, two-tailed.

Table 3. Significance of Differences in SWB and Gratitude Between Male and Female Adolescents.

	Male (n = 405)	Female (n = 435)			
Measure	M (SD)	M (SD)	t	p	η^2
SWLS	23.49 (6.19)	23.11 (6.37)	.871	.38	—
MSLSS family	4.35 (1.22)	4.44 (1.19)	−1.130	.26	—
MSLSS friends	4.92 (0.94)	5.17 (0.83)	−3.988	.000	0.02
MSLSS school	3.98 (1.10)	4.25 (1.04)	−3.670	.000	0.02
MSLSS self	4.92 (0.93)	5.04 (0.73)	−1.930	.05	0.004
MSLSS living	3.93 (1.06)	3.96 (1.11)	−.404	.69	—
PANAS PA	55.70 (12.42)	55.4 2 (10.98)	.346	.73	—
PANAS NA	30.29 (10.72)	34.59 (11.31)	−5.513	.000	0.04
GAC	11.27 (2.77)	11.74 (2.87)	−2.375	.02	0.006
GQ-6	31.70 (5.69)	33.05 (5.38)	−3.543	.000	0.02

Note. SWB = subjective well-being; SWLS = Satisfaction With Life Scale; MSLSS = Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale; PANAS PA = Positive and Negative Affect Schedule–positive affect; PANAS NA = Positive and Negative Affect Schedule–negative affect; GAC = Gratitude Adjective Checklist; GQ-6 = Gratitude Questionnaire–Six-Item Form.
*$p \leq .05$.

self ($t = -1.93$, $p = .05$, $\eta^2 = .004$), compared with male adolescents. However, the magnitude of these differences was small.

Gender Differences in Gratitude

Two t tests for independent samples were implemented to examine possible differences in state and trait gratitude among male and female adolescents, as represented in Table 3.

Female adolescents reported higher scores both in state gratitude ($t = -2.375$, $p = .018$) and in trait gratitude ($t = -3.543$, $p = .000$). The magnitude

Table 4. Significance of Differences in SWB and Gratitude Between Black and White Adolescents.

	Black (n = 469)	White (n = 236)			
Measure	M (SD)	M (SD)	t	p	η^2
SWLS	22.69 (6.19)	24.70 (6.16)	−4.081	.000	.02
MSLSS family	4.41 (1.63)	4.43 (1.27)	−.267	.80	—
MSLSS friends	5.04 (0.86)	5.15 (0.84)	−1.697	.09	—
MSLSS school	4.37 (0.96)	3.73 (1.16)	7.337	.000	.07
MSLSS self	5.13 (0.74)	4.75 (0.85)	5.930	.000	.05
MSLSS living	3.85 (1.13)	4.10 (0.99)	−3.055	.002	.01
PANAS PA	56.09 (11.47)	55.77 (10.92)	.353	.72	—
PANAS NA	32.20 (10.87)	33.47 (12.32)	−1.318	.19	—
GAC	11.69 (2.94)	11.16 (2.71)	2.310	.02	.007
GQ-6	32.13 (5.33)	32.98 (5.62)	−1.977	.05	.005

Note. SWB = subjective well-being; SWLS = Satisfaction With Life Scale; MSLSS = Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale; PANAS PA Positive and Negative Affect Schedule–positive affect; PANAS NA = Positive and Negative Affect Schedule–negative affect; GAC = Gratitude Adjective Checklist; GQ-6 = Gratitude Questionnaire–Six-Item Form.
*$p \leq .05$.

of difference in state gratitude was very small ($\eta^2 = .006$) while small ($\eta^2 = .02$) for trait gratitude.

Differences in Life Satisfaction Between Black and White Adolescents

We implemented six t tests for independent samples to examine differences in global and domain-specific life satisfaction between the two population groups. As can be seen from Table 4, White adolescents reported significantly higher levels of general life satisfaction ($t = -4.081$, $p = .000$) and

domain-specific satisfaction with living conditions ($t = -3.055$, $p = .002$) but lower levels of satisfaction with school ($t = 7.337$, $p = .000$) and self ($t = 5.930$, $p = .000$) compared with Black adolescents. The practical significance of differences was moderate only for MLSS school ($\eta^2 = .07$), and small for the other measures, with η^2 ranging from .01 to .05.

Two *t* tests for independent samples were conducted to compare Black and White adolescents' levels of PA and NA, in order to examine differences on the affective component of SWB. There were no statistically significant differences between the two groups, as presented in Table 4.

Differences in Gratitude Between Black and White Adolescents

Two independent sample *t* tests were conducted to examine differences in gratitude between Black and White adolescents. Table 4 indicates that Black adolescents reported higher levels of state gratitude ($t = 2.310$, $p = .021$) and lower levels of trait gratitude ($t = -1.977$, $p = .048$) in comparison with White adolescents. The magnitude of these differences was very small ($\eta^2 = .005$ and .007, respectively).

Discussion

This study examined the association between life satisfaction and gratitude, as well as gender and cultural differences among South African adolescents. The results indicate that they are relatively satisfied with life, as indicated by the mean score on the SWLS (Pavot & Diener, 2008), showing a similar trend to findings among South African children (Savahl et al., 2015). The adolescents also reported relatively high levels of state and trait gratitude, with mean scores above midpoint, which are comparable with existing research (e.g., Froh, Fan, et al., 2011). Consistent with previous studies (Froh, Emmons, et al., 2011; Froh, Fan, et al., 2011; Froh et al., 2009; Jiang, Sun, Liu, & Pan, 2016), there were statistically significant correlations between SWB and gratitude in the expected directions. The strongest was a positive correlation between PA and satisfaction with self, followed by positive correlations between satisfaction with friends and satisfaction with self, as well as general life satisfaction and trait gratitude. The pattern supports findings on the association between positive interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships (Morgan et al., 2011; Williams & Anthony, 2015) as well as gratitude (Froh et al., 2009, Froh, Emmons et al., 2011) and SWB. By implication, policies and programs to enhance youth well-being could consider these interrelationships in developing interventions. However, as Renshaw and

Olinger Steeves (2016) reported, more research regarding the effectiveness of gratitude interventions to promote well-being is warranted.

Gender differences emerged for only some facets of SWB but for both state and trait gratitude. In accordance with previous research (Gilman & Huebner, 2003; Goswami, 2014; Haranin et al., 2007), there were no significant differences in general life satisfaction among female and male adolescents. It therefore seems that, as shown in research among adults (e.g., Pavot & Diener, 2013), girls' and boys' cognitive judgment of life as a whole is similar. This lends further support to findings suggesting that the contribution of gender to life satisfaction, in general, is small (e.g., Goswami, 2014). Similarly, no gender differences were found for the domains of satisfaction with family and living environment, in accordance with earlier findings (Huebner et al., 2000). Mean scores were at midpoint or higher, suggesting that male and female adolescents are relatively satisfied with these life domains. This is important as healthy relationships with parents create opportunities for social support and future optimal development during adolescence (Weitzman & Wegner, 2015).

In contrast, female adolescents were more satisfied with the life domains of friends, school, and self, compared with males, as also reported by Huebner and colleagues (2000). Satisfaction with school seems to be a predictor of life satisfaction as well as PA and NA for early adolescent boys (Vera et al., 2012). This suggests that it may be important to consider ways to improve adolescent males' satisfaction with schooling in view of the possible long-term effect on academic performance and well-being (Keyes et al., 2012). However, the mean scores for both groups were above midpoint and the effect sizes were small, so caution should be maintained in interpreting the findings.

For the affective component of SWB, females experienced more NA than males, which supports existing research among adolescents. Chaplin and Aldao's (2013) meta-analysis concluded that girls are more inclined to show internalizing emotions such as anxiety and sadness than boys. However, their study also found that girls expressed more positive emotions, while we found no significant difference in the experience of PA. It is important to point out that expression and experience of affect may not be synonymous and that the PANAS, used in our study, does not measure the behavioral component of affect. In keeping with research among adults showing higher levels of NA among females (Joshanloo & Bakhshi, 2016; Nolen-Hoeksema & Rusting, 2003), the current findings point to a possible risk for female adolescents to develop psychological distress and experience decreased well-being as they move into adulthood.

Concerning gratitude, girls demonstrated higher levels of both state and trait gratitude, compared with boys. Supporting research among adults (Kashdan et al., 2009), the current findings indicate that adolescent females experience gratitude more frequently than males. Given the importance of gratitude in experiencing well-being, for example, through strengthening interpersonal relationships, boys may be at a disadvantage for developing and maintaining well-being due to the lower levels of gratitude they tend to experience and express. This finding needs further investigation, as gratitude interventions may also have to be adjusted in accordance with gender. However, the effect sizes were again small, suggesting that the practical significance of the findings may be limited. In addition, the low alpha coefficient for the GQ-6, measuring trait gratitude, may limit meaningful conclusions regarding gender differences.

The third aim of this study was to examine differences in SWB and gratitude between Black and White adolescents. There were significant differences in some aspects of SWB between the two groups. First, Black adolescents were more satisfied with school and with self. Regarding satisfaction with school, the magnitude of difference in scores between the two groups was moderate, which necessitates further examination. In terms of response categories, Black adolescents were more likely to indicate that they "agree" that they were satisfied with school, whereas White adolescents seemed to "mildly agree." Previous research found that Chinese adolescents were more satisfied with school than American and Irish adolescents, whereas Korean adolescents scored the lowest of these four groups (Gilman et al., 2008). This suggests that differences in satisfaction with school may not be explained by individualism–collectivism and that other contextual or psychosocial factors should be considered. The schools included in the current study were located in suburban, middle-class neighborhoods, which predominantly served White adolescents before 1994 but which are now racially integrated. These schools are also considered to be functioning better than schools in less advantaged areas (Spaull, 2015) and are often attended by learners from the latter areas (de Kadt, Norris, Fleisch, Richter, & Alvanides, 2014). It is possible that Black adolescents are more satisfied with school because of perceiving it as better than alternative options previously accessible to them. However, this explanation remains speculative, as we did not investigate these aspects. In terms of well-being, school connectedness, which could be considered a related concept, may also be important to understand the difference in scores between these two groups. Lack of school connectedness could be a risk factor in developing behaviors such as substance abuse and suicide ideation (Govender et al., 2013) as well as other externalizing behaviors (Haranin et al., 2007; Loukas, Cance, & Batanova, 2016) and therefore, decreased well-being. It is

important to identify and address possible causal factors related to both population groups' satisfaction with school in order to facilitate well-being and optimal development during this important life stage.

Findings on cross-cultural differences in the self-domain of life satisfaction are limited. Gilman et al. (2008) reported higher scores for American and Irish adolescents, compared with Chinese and Korean adolescents. In terms of the individualism–collectivism framework, these could be seen as higher scores for adolescents belonging to individualistic cultures. This is in contrast to our findings, which could partly be explained by cross-cultural research on self-esteem. Becker et al. (2014) found that adolescents' positive self-evaluations are derived from benefiting others in societies, which value the welfare of the group. This may also be true for Black adolescents, viewed as belonging to a collectivistic culture. Alternately, White adolescents, being more individualistic, may develop self-evaluations based on perceived social status (Becker et al., 2014) through upward social comparison amplified by social media use (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015), which could lead to lower levels of satisfaction with self. Put differently, Black adolescents may score higher on the domain of satisfaction with self as their self-evaluations are less focused on their individual status. The effect size was small, but approaching a moderate level, which suggests that the difference between the two groups may be practically significant. Considering that satisfaction with self could predict internalizing behavior problems such as anxiety and depression (Haranin et al., 2007), it is possible that White adolescents may be more prone to psychological distress if levels of life satisfaction in this domain are low. Further research is needed to understand how self-evaluations and satisfaction with self may differentially impact the well-being trajectories of Black and White adolescents.

In contrast, White adolescents were more satisfied with life in general, in comparison with their Black peers, similar to findings by Terry and Huebner (1995) and more recently by Knies, Nandi, and Platt (2016). This may be due to the fact that Black adolescents may set goals that are difficult to attain in the context of ongoing socioeconomic disparities (Hofer & Chasiotis, 2003), resulting in lower levels of life satisfaction. Because life satisfaction is an important indicator of general adolescent well-being, Black adolescents may be at risk for experiencing lower levels of well-being. Similarly, White adolescents were more satisfied with their living environment than Black adolescents, although the practical significance may be small in magnitude. Research among adults suggested that objective living conditions will influence subjective experiences of quality of life (Veenhoven, 2015) and that individuals from collectivistic countries may be less satisfied with their living conditions (Biswas-Diener & Diener, 2001). Gilman et al. (2008) reported

similar findings among adolescents from Western and Eastern contexts. However, lower levels of satisfaction with living conditions among Black adolescents may also reflect socioeconomic disparities as previously suggested (Hofer & Chasiotis, 2003). By implication, Black adolescents from impoverished backgrounds are likely to experience lower satisfaction with living environment, possibly leading to lower levels of well-being than White adolescents. Given that dissatisfaction with living environment also seems to predict both externalizing and internalizing behaviors among adolescents (Haranin et al., 2007; Lyons, Huebner, & Hills, 2016), it underscores the importance of further investigations of these relationships in future studies. Furthermore, it amplifies the need for policies and programs to address persisting socioeconomic inequalities.

In terms of gratitude, Black adolescents scored significantly higher on state gratitude, in comparison with White adolescents. The pattern was reversed for trait gratitude, with White adolescents scoring significantly higher than Black adolescents. In other words, Black adolescents may be more likely to express and experience gratitude in the moment and may, therefore, be more likely to experience well-being as result thereof. Conversely, White adolescents may be more likely to develop gratitude as a general dispositional trait. This finding was surprising as existing research suggest that individuals from collectivistic cultures may be more likely to express and experience gratitude (Diener et al., 2013). One possible explanation lies in the earlier socioeconomic deprivation of Black South Africans, which may have resulted in a stronger focus on materialism for these adolescents (Guse & Jesse, 2014), and consequently, less gratitude (Froh, Emmons, et al., 2011). However, given the low value of coefficient alpha for the scale measuring trait gratitude, the finding could be due to measurement error rather than statistically significant differences between the two groups.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Despite promising preliminary findings, there were some limitations to the study. It was cross-sectional in nature and only included adolescents attending school in a specific socioeconomic area. Most of the differences showed small to very small practical significance, and measurement error may have contributed to some of the results. Furthermore, as Colored and Indian participants groups were excluded in the cross-cultural comparison, the study provides limited information on differences in well-being in the multicultural South African context.

However, our findings raise important questions for future research. In particular, more research is needed on the mechanisms of SWB and positive

psychological functioning among South African adolescents. For example, does socioeconomic status moderate the relationship between satisfaction with school and satisfaction with life? Are there differences between urban and rural adolescents in this regard? What is the trajectory of satisfaction with self among Black and White adolescents? How can cultural differences in satisfaction with school be understood? In terms of gratitude, it is important to examine the psychometric properties of gratitude measures to ensure their validity in the South African context. Finally, a research approach which includes more comprehensive conceptualizations of well-being, for example, the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011) and eudaimonic well-being (Ryff, 2014), could yield valuable information about the dynamics of gratitude during adolescence.

Conclusion

This study supported existing research that SWB and gratitude are positively associated and also found gender and cultural differences in these facets. Although South African adolescents seem to experience relatively high levels of SWB and gratitude, the most prominent finding was that Black adolescents were more satisfied with school than White adolescents, but more research is needed to understand the underlying dynamics related to this difference. The study contributed to knowledge on cross-cultural and gender differences in SWB and gratitude by extending research to the multicultural South African context.

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