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### Neuroticism and Gratitude to God as Self-Regulation: Facet Analysis

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#### Abstract

*Everybody wants to have happiness, not to mention students with neuroticism. They often show negative emotions and unhappiness. Gratitude is an important psychological aspect for human beings as gratitude is needed to enhance resilience, adaptive coping style, problem solving skills, effective responses to stressful stimuli and improving positive affect. This research is held to find the neurotic personality's influence toward gratitude and to find influential facets to gratitude. The data was collected through neurotic personality and gratitude to God questionnaires. The former questionnaire was constructed based on McCrae and Costa theory and the latter one was constructed based on integrated theory of McCullough, Emmons and Tsang and theory from Al Ghazzali. There were 53 students of Psychology Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang participated in this research. The analysis method is regression analysis. The results showed that there is highly significant influence ( $F=7.137, p=0.00$ ) of neurotic personality toward gratitude. The neurotic personality has 48.2 percentage of gratitude. And impulsivity facet is the best predictor to gratitude.*

**Keywords:** Neurotic personality, gratitude to God, facet analysis

#### Introduction

Neurotic personality is part of the personality facets measured by the Big Five Personality. Previous researches found that genetics and environment factors played roles in personality development, such as parents' personality, parents' raising patterns and life experiences[1]. Eventhough personality defined as a relative permanent behavior tendency, some experts agreed that environment played a role in personality development, in certain level. This arguments strengthened by researches findings [2] which found that there was reciprocal influence between big five personality and well-being, in which environment was considered played a role in personality development. For example an individual with neurotic personality who lived in an environment that stimulated negative emotional continuously, will direct individual to internalize negative affects. They will stay away from their social environment, and focused toward themselves and acted carefully while showing negative emotions. Negative life environment can increase their neurotic level.

Neurotic personality has been mostly among girls than boys [3]. Neurotic personality described with anxiety, anger hostility, depression, self-consciousness, impulsivity, and vulnerability [4]. Several previous researches found that high neurotic personality has low subjective well-being [2], unhappiness [5], [6] addictive proneness [7], low resilience [8], low academic achievement and performance [9]. Consequently an individual with high neurotic personality has many negative attributes and is predicted to be likely unhappy with his life [5]. But an individual with neurotic personality has the right to get happiness in their life. The unhappiness in neurotic individuals caused mostly by their negative emotions. The research [10] held to students showed an individual with high neurotic personality often show negative emotions and the emotions lasted for long time but not intensive.

Negative emotions frequency was found to be the strongest predictor in an high neurotic personality. This negative emotions frequency made them see negatively toward

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### Abstract

*Everybody wants to have happiness, not to mention students with neuroticism. They often show negative emotions and unhappiness. Gratitude is an important psychological aspect for human beings as gratitude is needed to enhance resilience, adaptive coping style, problem solving skills, effective responses to stressful stimuli and improving positive affect. This research is held to find the neurotic personality's influence toward gratitude and to find influential facets to gratitude. The data was collected through neurotic personality and gratitude to God questionnaires. The former questionnaire was constructed based on McCrae and Costa theory and the latter one was constructed based on integrated theory of McCullough, Emmons and Tsang and theory from Al Ghazzali. There were 53 students of Psychology Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang participated in this research. The analysis method is regression analysis. The results showed that there is highly significant influence ( $F=7.137$ ;  $p=0.00$ ) of neurotic personality toward gratitude. The neurotic personality has 48.2 percentage of gratitude. And impulsivity facet is the best predictor to gratitude.*

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Neurotic personality has been mostly among girls than boys [3]. Neurotic personality described with anxiety, anger hostility, depression, self-consciousness, impulsivity, and vulnerability [4]. Several previous researches found that high neurotic personality has low subjective well-being [2], unhappiness [5], [6] addictive proneness [7], low resilience [8], low academic achievement and performance [9]. Consequently an individual with high neurotic personality has many negative attributes and is predicted to be likely unhappy with his life [5]. But an individual with neurotic personality has the right to get happiness in their life. The unhappiness in neurotic individuals caused mostly by their negative emotions. The research [10] held to students showed an individual with high neurotic personality often show negative emotions and the emotions lasted for long time but not intensive.

Negative emotions frequency was found to be the strongest predictor in an high neurotic personality. This negative emotions frequency made them see negatively toward

life events so they were unhappy [2]. The negative emotions also played roles in their behavior as they were narrow-minded toward life [11]. Negative emotions are influential when young people explore themselves in their environment. Students are late adolescence and they are searching and establish their self-identity [12]. High neurotic students are afraid to explore their social environment. They are often anxious and likely to alert to any threatening stimuli such as an aversive emotional stimuli, negative feedback. They also show low self-esteem when perceiving their conflicting relationship with others and have low interpersonal relationship quality compared with emotionally stable people (low neuroticism). Low self-esteem individual are also sensitive to social cues they receive and have closed interpersonal relationship [13]. Consequently high neurotic individual tend to withdraw from their social environment, and they have diffusion identity. They show low motivation to explore and lack of commitment [14]. Negative emotion make them rigid in their interaction with their environment. Previous researches found that religion has causal relationship with self-control. Religious people have higher level of self-control than non-religious [15]. Islam teaches life ethics such as some values to its followers, and this values are written in the holy book Al Qur'an and As Sunnah.

The values are then internalized and become beliefs which then used as standard of behavior [16]. This beliefs created religious beliefs system that helps automatic self-regulation according to cognitive function of awareness. Self-regulation helps individuals' intention to act effectively, and facilitates his emotion regulation and creates meanings of life. Religiosity and spirituality can improve gratitude and gratitude improves individuals religiosity and spirituality [5]. Gratitude to God is a value taught in Islam and its function is for self-regulation. This is suitable to the opinion [17] that gratitude is one of passive or automatic self-regulation that is to control reflective desires. It is reflective as self-regulation depends on the values learned or internalized.

Today, researches on gratitude mostly based on gratitude from humans, such as research by [18] and there are still few researches about gratitude from God, such research by [19], [20], [21]. They did research on gratitude based on Christian. This research try to integrate gratitude from psychological perspective and Islamic religion. Gratitude to God is the value taught in Islam. Gratitude is an affect or positive emotion that includes pleasantness, proud, hopefulness and happiness as they get luck from God as the main cause of all lucks. An individual with high gratitude is likely to see his environment positively as the environment is not caused by human behaviors but from moral agent behavioral intention that is God or anyone with the highest power [20], [22]. This positive affect is created as people are able to interpret positively or have positive preconception to God about bad and good events he had. They are able to happily accept anything happen to them as they are sure that behind the events there was a lesson to learn [22]. They feel that they have moral obligation to gratitude to God as the medium of luck [19].

The research held by [21], [23], found that gratitude is part of spirituality and religious commitment and spirituality commitment. Religious commitment and spirituality help gratitude development in an individual, as he can positively perceive bad and good events as given by God. Gratitude help people to have high resilience [23], have adaptive coping, problem solving, effectively respond to stressful stimuli [24] and improve positive affect. An individual with high gratitude, tend to be proud, hopeful, inspired and excitement [11].

Gratitude helps to build and maintain supportive interpersonal relationship. The research held to young people found that gratitude has positive correlation with academic achievement, with the activity young people interested, and high social integration [25]. Gratitude is from environment, taught by parents, teachers, religion figures, organizations and religion institutions. Researches findings showed that luck

improves gratitude, optimism, and life satisfaction so it also lessens negative affects. Consequently, gratitude can be improved through learning in daily life [26].

The research done by [27] to students, found that gratitude has negative correlation with neuroticism. Young people with high gratitude have low neuroticism. They are likely to think positively about themselves and their environment. This positive view enables them to have positive emotion. Mereka are happy, secured and enjoy self-exploration to their environment [14]. This is suitable to the research held by [28] that found that ones with high life satisfaction tend to have positive affect, optimism and low depressed and show higher gratitude. They are likely to be happy, more optimistic, satisfied with life and bit anxious and depressed. They have positive perception toward their environment.

People with high neuroticism are often anxious. Their anxiety caused by their negative interpretation about daily life events, as threatening or even perceive more negatively toward real events [8]. They are also easy to be mad and hostile toward themselves and others [4] and have problematic relationship with others and low quality of social relationship [29]. The research held by [30] showed that self-regulation minimalizes neurotic individual's distress. When their behavior is not consistent with their standard, they will change it to the standard value. By doing so, they are likely to have emotional stability, not overly sensitive toward threats, tolerance, and do evaluation toward threats, and are successful in stressful environment [29].

Neurotic individuals tend to have high self-consciousness and they are shy or vulnerable to feel ashamed. In general they are sensitive to ridicule or mockery and innuendo as they often feel inferior with others [4]. They tend to withdraw from others and are careful in their interaction with social environment. Gratitude helps them feel being loved and accepted by others so it lessens the internal risks such as depression and anxiety and external risks such as abuse [28]. On the other way, low gratitude individuals have negative emotions, so they perceive the environment as the source of anxiety or threats [19].

High neuroticism individuals tend to be impulsive. This impulsivity makes them unable to appropriately control desires, wants, drives and behavior. The research findings showed that high impulsive neuroticism individuals are difficult to avoid temptation and delay gratifications [8]. Consequently, they have low self-control as they have strong drive and negative emotions [4]. They tend to have low emotional intelligent, so they are difficult to do emotion regulation, and have low motivation and interpersonal skill [8]. Gratitude to God helps them do automatically self-regulation based on internal religion cognition, so they can very well handle their behavior [15].

High neuroticism individuals tend to be distressed, caused by avoidance focused coping they tend to use [29] and distracting [8]. They often avoid threatening stimulus that make them more distressed [30]. They are vulnerable to cognitive failure, then to reject, and have lot of wants, self-criticism, and have many approach strategies. Their ineffective coping strategies when facing stressful situations make them vulnerable to negative emotions [8]. When a problem is not solved with appropriate solutions consequently negative emotions will constantly show and make a circle. This is the reason why they often have negative emotions [15]. Gratitude to God helps people to be happy as they perceive their daily life positively. Their happiness motivate them and enable them to pay more attention to others and their environment. They are comfortable enough to explore their relationship with others and environment. They have high commitment and willingness to deep self exploration to their chosen identity. When they study in universities, they explore to find if their choice of major study is right and suitable to their needs and if the universities are the good ones. This help them to have stability in career path in the future [14]. They will join extracurricular activities in their spare time in the universities. They will choose activity that is suitable to their interest, and will be able to achieve self-identity.



Based on the above explanation, this research is held to find the influence of neurotic personality toward gratitude. Besides this research is also to find dominant facets of neuroticism toward gratitude. The findings are useful for positive emotions development in neuroticism individuals through gratitude to God as self-regulation. This information is also useful for elders, counsellors and therapists in helping neuroticism students. So, students' potentialities can be developed optimally.

Based on the research goals, the hypothesis of this research are:

1. Neuroticism influences gratitude
2. Facet anxiety, anger-hostility, depression, self-consciousness, impulsivity and vulnerability are predictors of gratitude.

## Methods

### 1.1 Participants

The subjects of this research were 53 Islam students of Department of Psychology of the University Muhammadiyah Malang. They were 18-25 years old, and 34 female (64.2 percent) and 19 male (35.8 percent).

### 1.2 Measures

#### 1.2.1 Neurotic Personality Questionnaire

Neurotic personality was measured with a questionnaire which was arranged based on the theory [4]. There were 6 facet neurotic personality: anxiety, anger-hostility, depression, self-consciousness, impulsivity, and vulnerability. Using 5-point Likert Scale from 1 (Very insuitable) to 5 (very suitable). *Neurotic Personality Questionnaire* has good internal consistency ( $\alpha = .973$ )

#### 1.2.2 Gratitude Questionnaire.

Gratitude was measured with a questionnaire which was arranged based on the theory [19]. There were three facet of gratitude: *grateful*, *thankful* and *appreciate*. The arrangement of this questionnaire was integrated to gratitude in Islam as mentioned by [22]. Using 5-point Likert Scale from 1 (Very insuitable) to 5 (very suitable). Gratitude Questionnaire has good internal consistency ( $\alpha = .867$ )

### 1.3 Statistical analysis

The data analysis used in this research is multiple regression analysis [32].

## Results and Discussion

### 3.1 Results

The multiple regression analysis showed there was a very significant influence ( $F=7.137$ ;  $p=.000$ ) of neurotic personality toward gratitude, as described in the following table:

Table 1. Multiple Regression

Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	Model Sig.
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Regression	2824.666	6	470.778	7.137	0.000
Residual	3034.353	46	65.964		
Total	5859.019	52			

The effective contribution of neurotic personality toward gratitude from the highest to the lowest were impulsivity (42.1%), depression (24.2%), self-countiousness (23.3%), vulnerability (20.0%), anxiety (19.6%) dan anger-hostility (14.6%). The details are following in the tabel 2.

Table 2. The contribution of neurotic personality facet toward gratitude

Neurotic Personality	r	R Square	Persentase
Anxiety	-.443	0.196	19.6%
Anger-hostility	-.382	0.146	14.6%
Depression	-.492	0.242	24.2%
Self-Countiousness	-.483	0.233	23.3%
Impulsivity	-.649	0.421	42.1%
Vulnerability	-.447	0.200	20.0%

### 3.2 Discussion

The findings showed that there was neurotic personality influence to gratitude to God. The neurotic personality contributes as much as 48.2 percentage. A neurotic individual tends to have negative emotion [10]. The negative emotions hindered the individual to appropriately assess and responds to his environment. Consequently, his adaptation to his environment is not flexible enough. According to broaden-and-built theory from [33] about negative emotions, the individual focus and behavior would be narrow because of negative emotions.

Positive emotions tend to create many alternatives of individual's behavior. High gratitude to God individual tends to think positively and khusnudzon to Allah about any life events experienced particularly the unpleasant events, they will tend to be happy in his life [22]. Positive emotions helps him facilitate and develop self-regulation [34]. Gratitude to God functions as self-regulation that works authomatically through religious belief system that has been internalized [15] so they have positive emotions. This helps them widen their minds and helps them to think flexible and creative and facilitate coping stress [24]. Self regulation helps them to own better psychological adjustment, to have better interpersonal relationship, better academic performance and achievement [35].

The research findings also showed that facet impulsivity is the best predictor of gratitude. Impulsivity is defined as very strong desire and want to get something and this is hard to control and without further thinking [4]. An individual with low level neuroticism tend to have higher gratitude. They tend to use religious cognitive to respond to their environment. They tend to think before acting. They try to monitor the behavior. When their behavior is not matched with their internalized standard values, they will change it and direct the behavior to their standard [15]. Low level neuroticism individual will have high self-regulation and he tend to think before act. They tend to think what will happen to him, try to realize and accept perceived threatening life events [30]. Consequently, gratitude functions as self-regulation that works authomatically and their behaviors are controlled.

On the other hand, high level neuroticism individual has gratitude or low self-regulation so he is vulnerable to act impulsively. This impulsive behavior is quickened by his negative emotions [36] that makes him has narrow minds and behaviors [33]. This is suitable to the research [37] that found that facet urgency is the best predictor of impulsivity. Urgency is the tendency of an individual with strong drive to behave and

this frequently happens when his emotion is negative. Consequently, they often fail to regulate his emotion, and unable to control the desire of their behavior. This high impulsivity makes them depressed, anxious, and acts overindulging and they will later feel sorry [36]. So, high level neuroticism individual has low self-regulation and unable to control his behavior.

Depression has the second biggest contribution to gratitude. Depression is an individual's disposition to feel sadness, hopeless and loneliness. He often feels guilty and has low self esteem [4]. High gratitude individual is low depressed. He feels happy with his life as he thinks positively and is not apprehensive (*khusnudzon*) to life events especially threatening ones. They believe that God is behind all daily events he experiences, so he can deeply feel the greatness of God. When they are inferior, anxious or depressed, gratitude helps them make a balance perspective about memories of anything God has given to him. They are satisfied and happy with his life and become humble [38]. Gratitude helps to improve positive emotions as psychological and social resource, so they are healthy and adaptive [11].

Self-countiousness has the thirth biggest contribution to gratitude. Self-countiousness is the individual's tendency to be feel ashamed [4]. High gratitude individual has high Self-countiousness and about others. They are likely to monitor themselves and others. The awareness when evaluate others will improve Self-countiousness. When they are Self-countiousness they are comparing their behavior with their standard. They evaluate and consider their behavior based on internalized religious belief system. They tend to behave to get reward, short term and long term so they are happy and find meaning of life [15]. The research findings showed that daily religious activity (example: prayer) helps to promote self-monitoring, so they have high self-awareness. This is improving gratitude [39].

Vulnerability has the fourth biggest contribution to gratitude. Vulnerability is the individual's inability to deal appropriately with stress so he is easily hurt, panic in urgency situation, break down, and depends on others' help [4]. High gratitude to God individual believe that life is well managed, they are optimistic toward unpleasant life events. They are sure that unpleasant life events bring rewards [35]. They enjoy when they are suffering. They have different ways to cope with life difficulties. They are quick in accepting reality about life challenge in the future. They focusing more on active coping with productive efforts. They show few signs of distracted from goal they want to achieve [35].

Anxiety is neuroticism personality facet that influence gratitude. Anxiety is the tendency to have sensibility, nervous, and tense. He is easily to worry and think of causes that make them feel guilty [4]. High gratitude to God individual believe that God arranges everything in this world include himself and they believe that God gives the best for him. When their behavior is matched with his internalized values standard, they do not worry with their life. *Khusnudzon* to God to God helps them feel happy to do self-exploration to his environment. They feel gratitude intensively toward positive events, feel easy to fill his daily life. They also are lucky and have wider life environment that they are grateful for, given to them everytime, example: family, work, friends, health etc [40].

High level neuroticism individual tends to be anxious about something that threatens him that is potential or very useful. He tends to avoid to monitoring, so his assessment become more negative and makes him more distressed [30]. Negative evaluation hinders him from an ability to be aware about God bless given to him, so his gratitude to God is low. He is unhappy as he is unable to think positively and *khusnudzon* to life events especially the threatening ones. He is unsure if there are lessons to learned behind any events for him [22] for both life in the world and after life [35]. This is supported by opinion [16] that values and religious doctrines able to lessens anxiety and guilt.



Anger-hostility is the neurotic personality facet that has lowest contribution to gratitude. Anger-hostility is the tendency to be easily angry and grumpy [4]. Low religious individual will be angry when he gets disaster in his life, but religion gives him several lucks for those who believe in it [16]. High gratitude individual tends to think positively toward any life events to life events especially the threatening ones. He is sure that unpleasant life events is a bless from God. They also believe that behind any unpleasant life events bring rewards and this motivates them to find the secret behind the events. This believe motivates them to change himself to continuously *khusnudzon* with God's plan to him. So, they are not angry to God or others and are heartfelt to accept the events. This positive emotions is power to help him doing self-regulation [15].

The findings of this research also showed that gratitude is also influenced by thankful facet, that give the biggest contribution (Mean= 39.41 percentage) to gratitude. Thankful is the ability to deliver thankfulness by the luck receiver for everything given or done by others to him [19]. This expression to God for any bless given is delivered verbally or through his behavior, improves gratitude. This is suitable to the research by [39] that found that prayer improves gratitude. Praying, dzikir and other religious rituals are kinds of thankful expression to God and this helps them feel happy or improve their gratitude. They believe that God will give more bless when they can be thankful as (QS. Ibrahim [14]: 7).

Low neurotic personality adolescence tend to have high gratitude and self-regulation. They believe that many bless have been given to them by God both pleasant and unpleasant life events. They think positively and *khusnudzon* to any events in their life. They are happy, optimistic with their life and high motivated for self-development as their expression of thankful to God. Their behavior is well selected and they are committed to any activity related to thankfulness. When their behavior is not matched with his internalized values standard, they will change the behavior. They are more flexibly adjusted to the environment so they can optimally develop themselves.

On the other hand low gratitude adolescence tend to be unable to think positively about God's bless given to them. They have negative perspective about their daily life. They tend to be anxious, angry, depressed and overly sensitive in their interpersonal relationships and vulnerable to stressors. They are unhappy with life and lack of commitment to studies, others, and any effort to self-development and future career.

### 3.3 Limitation

This research has several limitations. First, the subjects are few and not representing all Islam students of Department of Psychology UMM. Second, the gratitude questionnaire arranged by researcher is better correlated with equal questionnaires in order to get high validity and reliability. Third, this research is simple as there are only two variables, example: related to forgiveness variable, spirituality and religiosity.

## 2. Conclusions

Neurotic personality influences gratitude to God. Gratitude to God is a kind of self-regulation that functions automatically or reflective to control desires or wants. Internalized gratitude values helps one in self-regulation, as it has been his standard of behavior. Impulsivity is a facet of Neurotic personality that gives the biggest contribution or the best predictor of gratitude. Impulsivity is the strong desire to act uncontrollably together with negative affect.

As the impulsive behavior is inconsistent with the behavior standard, one will change himself and direct his behavior matched with the standard, so he can be happy or have positive emotion. Positive emotion can lessen anxiety, anger hostility,

depression, high self conscientiousness, impulsive behavior and stress vulnerability. Positive emotion helps him think widely so it helps him to do self-exploration in his environment with secure, vitality, hopes and so he can achieve self-identity.

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