Abstract

People believe that they are entitled to wellbeing and safety, and their responses to unexpected traumatic events reveal individual differences. Their reactions may vary, from feeling blocked and distressed to feeling proactive towards new growth, depending on personal resources. The goals of the current study were to identify the role of entitlement in predicting posttraumatic growth (PTG) while considering gratitude and hope as mediating personal resources. We used a community-based sample of Israeli adults (N = 182) aged 19 to 78 years (*Mage* = 37.15, *SD* = 11.61) who reported experiencing a traumatic event during the preceding year. The relation of PTG to their sense of entitlement, gratitude, and hope were examined. The results identified a moderated mediation model, demonstrating that the relations between sense of entitlement and PTG were mediated by hope, whereas gratitude moderated the association between the sense of entitlement and hopeful thinking. The theoretical contribution of these findings for an in-depth understanding of PTG are discussed, as well as implications for their interventions.

Key words: Posttraumatic growth, Sense of entitlement, Hope, Gratitude

**Entitlement and posttraumatic growth:**

**Exploring the role of gratitude and hope**

 Across the life span, many individuals experience traumatic events, such as the unexpected death of a relative, a life-threatening disease, or an injury (Benjet, et al., 2016). There is a high prevalence of lifetime exposure to potentially traumatic events, estimated at nearly 70% in community samples (Knipscheer, et al., 2020; Goldstein, et al., 2016; Benjet, et al., 2016). A considerable proportion of the population are exposed to four or more potentially traumatic events during their lives (Atwoli et al., 2013; Benjet, et al., 2016). These traumatic events may have detrimental effects on well-being. Those who undergo, or witness, a traumatic event may experience painful recollections, flashbacks, or recurrent dreams or nightmares, or avoidance of activities or places, to name just a few (APA, 2013). However, these negative consequences are not predestined, and some individuals may experience personal growth, leading to improved functioning and wellbeing (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995). The psychological process of growing from adversity may require drawing on personal resources as well as relying on supportive interpersonal resources (Tedeschi et al., 2018). The goals of this study are to examine the relationship between sense of entitlement and personal growth in the aftermath of a traumatic event, and to look at the roles played by hope and gratitude with respect to that relationship.

**Posttraumatic growth**

 Posttraumatic growth (PTG) refers to positive psychological changes that lead to personal growth after experiencing a trauma. It may occur once the traumatic event is considered as an experience which has significant meaning in one’s overall life experience (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). These positive psychological changes can manifest in enhanced positive self-views, changed perspectives on life, spiritual changes, improved relationships with others, and an increased appreciation of life (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996; Tsai et al., 2016). Additionally, PTG has been recognized as a buffer for negative effects caused by the traumatic event, such as distress and depression (Wu et al., 2019). Wu et al. (2019) found that nearly half of their participants reported moderate-to-high PTG after experiencing a traumatic event. PTG was documented across different samples including, but not limited to, individuals coping with medical conditions such as cancer (e.g., Li et al., 2020; Marziliano, Tuman, & Moyer, 2020; Boyacıoğlu, et al., 2022), or individuals who were exposed to repeated acts of terrorism (Johnson, et al., 2009).

 Prior research has focused attention on the role of personal and interpersonal in predicting PTG, such as coping strategies and social support (Prati & Pietrantoni, 2009; Linley & Joseph, 2004). Beliefs in the right to support and help in terms of the sense of entitlement suggests their relations with PTG.

**Sense of entitlement**

 Sense of entitlement refers to the subjective perception that a person deserves their needs—such as help, services and resources—to be met (Żemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2017). Sense of entitlement as a personality characteristic reflects the belief that individuals have rights and privileges relating to positive outcomes (Campbell et al., 2004; Grubbs & Exline, 2016). The conceptualization of this multidimensional construct highlights its maladaptive and adaptive aspects. It can be both detrimental and beneficial to well-being and relationships (Candel & Turliuc, 2017), as it can lead to both functional and frustration consequences (e.g., Neville & Fisk, 2018). Past research suggests that individuals with a high sense of entitlement expect to receive help, services, and resources to meet their needs (Żemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2017). As such, sense of entitlement may lead to proactive coping and positive outcomes. However, it may also be considered as related to viewing outcomes as unfair or unsatisfactory, and cause frustration and anger. Thus, sense of entitlement may lead to adaptive coping with hardships, particularly with traumatic events. Alternatively, individuals with high sense of entitlement may show non-adaptive behaviors when there is a large gap between the expected help and its availability (Golann & Darling-Aduana, 2020). The aim of the current study is to examine the link between sense of entitlement and PTG.

In order to further examine outcomes from traumatic experiences, we explored the role of two personal resources, hope and gratitude, reflecting future expectations and past experiences, respectively (Emmons, Froh, & Rose, 2019; Snyder, 2002).

**Hope**

Hope enables individuals to set valued goals, identify the means to achieve these goals, and summon the drive and personal energy to achieve them (Snyder, 2002). Hope theory emphasizes a persistent, cross-situational, dispositional, goal-directed cognitive set. Snyder defines hope as a set of beliefs that involves two relatively distinct ways of thinking about a goal: agentic thinking and pathways thinking. Agentic thoughts relate to success in reaching goals, whereas pathways thoughts are about one’s effectiveness when pursuing different means to obtain goals (Schaffer, et al., 2022; Shorey et al., 2002).

High levels of hope have been associated with positive outcomes in various domains, such as academics, work, athletics, and health (Gallagher & Lopez, 2018; Moss-Pech, Southward & Cheavens, 2021). Increased hope is also related to happiness, perceived control, psychological adjustment, and well-being (Feldman & Snyder, 2005; Snyder, Rand, & Sigmon, 2002). Individuals with a high level of hope are more likely to find meaning in adversity (Feldman, 2005), as hope is coupled with a sense of meaning in life (Feldman et al., [2009](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/jcop.22490#jcop22490-bib-0018)), suggesting a powerful link between hope and growth after a traumatic event. Previous studies on the relations of hope and PTG revealed its mediating role between negative emotions such as depression or stress and PTG (Di Corrado, et al., 2022; Heidarzadeh, Dadkhah, & Gholchin, 2016); as well as between social support and PTG (Zhou, Wu, & Zhen, 2018).

**Gratitude**

 Defined as the appreciative functioning that involves appraisals of benefits and support (Rusk et al., 2016), gratitude is the adaptive behavior of recognizing and responding to the assistance of others that helps one to achieve positive outcomes (Lim, [2010](https://link-springer-com.ezprimo1.runi.ac.il/article/10.1007/s10943-021-01213-w#ref-CR22)). Gratitude involves awareness and acknowledgement of the value and meaning of positive events, behaviors, or objects, as well as feelings of an emotional constructive connection to them (Adler & Fagley, 2005). Gratitude reflects both a state and a trait (Skrzelinska & Ferreira, 2020). State gratitude is an attribution-dependent, affective-cognitive state. It is based on the appraisal of a positive outcome and the recognition of its external source. Trait gratitude represents a broader life orientation towards noticing and being grateful for various positive aspects of the world.
 State and trait gratitude are considered beneficial for both physical and mental health (Emmons et al., 2019) and are predictive of well-being (Kardas, et al., 2019). Individuals with a grateful perspective on life are likely to experience positive emotions (McCullough et al., 2002), and demonstrate prosocial behaviors (Wood et al., 2010). Gratitude contributes to happiness and optimism, and is associated with satisfaction in relationships and in life (Noh & Shin [2008](https://link-springer-com.ezprimo1.runi.ac.il/article/10.1007/s10943-021-01213-w#ref-CR27)).
 Highly grateful individuals tend to appreciate everyday events and to cope effectively with traumatic events ([Fredrickson, 2004](https://www-frontiersin-org.ezprimo1.runi.ac.il/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02665/full#B14); [McCullough et al., 2002](https://www-frontiersin-org.ezprimo1.runi.ac.il/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02665/full#B29)). Thus, gratitude may constitute a predictive factor for PTG, while moderating the negative impact that different risk and traumatic factors have on PTG (Kim & Bae, 2019; Lin, et al., 2022; [Vieselmeyer, Holguin, & Mezulis, 2017](https://www-frontiersin-org.ezprimo1.runi.ac.il/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02665/full#B47)).

**The current study**

 The current study focuses on the sense of entitlement as a predictive factor of positive outcomes to traumatic experiences (PTG). In addition, hope and gratitude are proposed as personal resources that represent future and past perspectives on life. Early studies examined the relationships between hope and gratitude to positive outcomes separately. Hope mediates the relationship between stress and PTG, whereas gratitude moderates the relationship between stressful experiences and PTG (Vieselmeyer, Holguin, & Mezulis, 2017). Since a mediating variable explains the process through which two variables are related, we propose hope—which introduces a future perspective—as the mediating factor between sense of entitlement and PTG. Gratitude, in contrast, represents positive past experiences, and may moderate the strength of the relationship between people’s beliefs in their rights and their hopeful expectations.

Accordingly, we hypothesized that:

(H1) Sense of entitlement, hope, and gratitude will all be positively associated with PTG.

(H2) Hope will mediate the relationship between sense of entitlement and PTG.

(H3) Gratitude will moderate the association between sense of entitlement and hope.

**Method**

**Participants and procedure**

The study consisted of 182[[1]](#footnote-1) participants (146 women and 36 men) with ages ranging from 19 to 78 years (*M* = 37.15, *SD* = 11.61). There was no significant difference in age between men and women. We recruited Israeli adults residing in Lod, a Jewish-Muslim "mixed city" (Yacobi, 2009) located in the central district of Israel. The city is characterized by relatively low socio-economic status (ranked 4/10 in the country) and its citizens are subjected to constant and high levels of stress.

We included only participants who reported experiencing a significant traumatic event that affected their life during the previous year. Participants reported personal (e.g., COVID-19, severe health problems, major surgery, academic challenge and stress, sexual abuse, economic distress), familial (e.g., death in the close family, conflicts with family members, divorce, children with disabilities) and interpersonal (riots in the city, exposure to aggressive behavior at work or in the street (traumatic events. The impact of the traumatic events varied from *low* (1) to *very high* (9), *M*=8.51, *SD*=1.89, with most (76.3%) of the participants reporting a high impact (7-9 scores). Gender comparisons revealed a significant difference, (t (180) = 2.21, p<.05) with women reporting higher levels of impact (*M*=8.66, *SD* = 1.81) than men (*M*=7.89, *SD*=2.11). There was a positive association between age and the impact of the traumatic event (r (n=182) = .23, p<.01).

Participants were recruited via an appeal advertisement posted on social media platforms (e.g., Facebook groups) and distributed by municipal SMS distribution. The survey was administered online via Qualtrics.[[2]](#footnote-2) The participants did not receive any compensation for their participation. Prior to participation, participants signed a consent form that explained that their responses would be anonymous and provided contact information for the lead researcher.

Three hundred seventy Israeli adults took filled in the study. Out of the 254 participants who completed the questionnaire, we removed six responses, following an IP address check, due to the suspicion that they were filled out by the same users. We also excluded participants who did not indicate that they were influenced by a traumatic event and those with missing data. Thus, the final sample included 182 participants (See Table 1).

**Measures**

*Sense of entitlement.* The Entitlement Questionnaire—Short Form was used to assess participants’ beliefs regarding their sense of entitlement (Żemojtel-Piotrowska et al. 2017). This scale consists of 15 items ranked on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). In the current study, only the active sense of entitlement subscale (5 items) was included, which is based on enhancing self-interest and self-reliance in achieving life goals (e.g., “I deserve the best”). For the current study, a Cronbach's α reliability of 0.71 was obtained.

*Gratitude. The* Gratitude Questionnaire– 6 (*GQ-6) is* a six-item measure of feeling grateful across situations. (e.g., “I have so much in life to be thankful for”) using a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) (McCullough et al., 2002). For the current study a Cronbach's α reliability of 0.81 was obtained.

*Hope.* A Hebrew adaptation (Lackaye & Margalit, 2006) of the State Hope Scale (SHS) (Snyder, 2002) was used to assess levels of hopeful thinking. The scale includes six items ranked on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*always*), and includes items such as "I can achieve most of my goals" and "Even when others want to give up, I know I can find ways to solve the problem”.  Cronbach’s α reliability for the scale in the current study was 0.86.

*Post traumatic growth*. The short Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI-SF, Cann et al., 2010) was used to assess PTG. (e.g., Cann, et al., 2010; Achepohl, et al., 2022). Prior to the administration of this measure, participants were asked to recall an event that caused them significant emotional stress during the previous year. They were asked to describe this traumatic event and to rate its impact (i.e., “to what degree did you feel that the event affected you”) on 10-point scale ranging from 1 (*very low*) to 10 (*to a large extent*). The participants marked 0 if they had not experienced a traumatic event within the previous year. These participants were not included in the study. Then, the participants were asked to complete the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory, which consists of 10 items (e.g., “I changed my priorities about what is important in life”) ranked on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*to a large extent*)[[3]](#footnote-3). Cronbach’s α reliability for the scale in the current study was 0.84.

*Demographics*. Participants responded to several demographic items, including age, gender, level of education, and marital status.

**Results**
*Preliminary Analysis*

To examine H1, Pearson correlations between the research variables were performed (see Table 2). The results confirmed that, as expected, hope was positively associated with sense of entitlement, gratitude, and PTG. In addition, gratitude and PTG were positively associated with sense of entitlement. The remaining associations were not significant.

*Moderated mediation*

To examine H2 and H3, a moderated mediation model was performed using the PROCESS macro in SPSS version 28 (Hayes, 2013, 2018) to estimate the direct and indirect effects of sense of entitlement on PTG through hope as moderated by gratitude (Hayes, 2013; Model 7; see Figure 1).  Specifically, the association between entitlement and PTG was examined, as was the interaction between gratitude and hope, with stronger associations between entitlement and hope at higher levels of gratitude. The significance of the direct and indirect effects was evaluated with 5000 bootstraps samples to create bias-corrected confidence intervals (CIs; 95%). In this analysis, sense of entitlement was the independent variable (IV), PTG was the dependent variable (DV), hope served as the mediator, and gratitude was the moderator. Participants’ age and gender were controlled for. Regression coefficients are presented in Figure 1. As predicted, sense of entitlement was positively related to PTG, *B* = 0.19, *SE* = 0.08, 95%CI [0.0407, 0.3530], and to hope, *B* = 0.25, *SE* = 0.0550 95%CI [0.1456, 0.3627]. In addition, hope was positively related to PTG, *B* = 0.26, *SE* = 0.0896, 95%CI [0.0777, 0.4313]. Gratitude moderated the relationships between entitlement and hope. A simple slopes analysis revealed that stronger positive association between entitlement and hope was found for the medium and high levels of gratitude, but this association was not significant at low levels of gratitude (see Figure 2). Finally, the index of moderated mediation was found to be significant, *B* = 0.12, *SE* = 0.05, 95%CI [0.0202, 0.2184], thus confirming the moderated mediation model.

**Discussion**

In the present study, we sought to examine the links between sense of entitlement and PTG, as well as the factors that might explain this relationship. In order to do so, we conducted a correlational study by using a community-based sample, drawn from a population at risk of experiencing potentially traumatic events.

Our results confirmed the proposed relationship between sense of entitlement and PTG, as well as the mediation by hope. The results suggest that individuals with high sense of entitlement, who feel more deserving of positive help and support in times of need (Campbell et al., 2004; Grubbs & Exline, 2016), may experience higher levels of hope. Thus, their beliefs in their rights may support their ability to identify the goals they value and the means to achieve these goals, and to summon the drive to accomplish them (Snyder, 2002) which, in turn, may lead to increased personal growth. These results demonstrate that belief in the personal rights to positive outcomes, even following stressful and traumatic times, may empower future expectations, in terms of defining goals and acknowledging the ability to move forward towards a positive future. Since hopeful thinking has been related to the positive and proactive aspects, it may lead to higher levels of PTG. By focusing on the mediating role of hope, we introduced the future perspectives embodied with coping with a potentially traumatic event. Thus, the ability to plan future goal—and to maintain a belief that such goals are attainable—can transform the potentially traumatic event into personal growth.

As was previously noted, gratitude moderated the strength of the relationship between entitlement and hopeful thinking. Surprisingly, while medium and higher levels of gratitude had an important moderating role in this relationship, low levels of gratitude did not have a significant role. Therefore, it can be expected that sense of entitlement may predict hope, leading to higher growth, but also that this process will be affected by the ability to positively evaluate what was received in the past. Thus, the connection between beliefs in the personal right to positive outcomes, together with the ability to be grateful and appreciative regarding what has been already established, promotes individuals’ power to overcome their trauma.

 Our findings support previous studies that presented links between PTG and hope or PTG and gratitude (e.g., Heidarzadeh, et al., 2016; Lin, et al., 2022). The current study expands this understanding by focusing on the interactional role of these two factors in the conceptualization of the PTG construct. Additionally, our focus on the role of the sense of entitlement in predicting PTG, which has not been previously examined, has a unique conceptual importance with implications for interventions. The emphasis on privileges and rights has been often considered as a negative trend of the current culture and younger generations and has been viewed as leading to negative outcomes. Our results do not support this view, but rather emphasize the more beneficial, benevolent aspects of entitlement, encouraging individuals to act upon what they believe is right for them. This aspect may provide an explanation for the ability to overcome trauma and strive for growth and development.

In addition, the results of the study lead us to propose that individuals with a higher sense of entitlement may be more inclined to seek out help when experiencing a potentially traumatic event. This assumption is further strengthened by previous studies suggesting that PTG is connected to coping strategies, such as social support (Prati & Pietrantoni, 2009; Linley & Joseph, 2004), which are known to alleviate stress reactions after stressful life events (Cohen & Syme, 1985), which can in turn foster PTG. Future studies could further explore the mediating roles of various social supports.

 Given the high probability of experiencing potentially traumatic events during our lives (e.g., Cardoso, et al., 2020; Knipscheer, et al., 2020), this study yields some valuable insights in terms of clinical implications. Considering the complexity and multidimensional characteristics of PTG, intervention programs that aim to improve individuals’ ability to cope with stressful events could consider an awareness of entitlement, hope, and gratitude. As sense of entitlement, gratitude, and hope can be induced or bolstered (e.g., Feldman, 2015; Redford & Ratliff, 2018; Zitek & Vincent, 2015), strengthening these beliefs may benefit individuals in times of stress. Therefore, elevating individuals’ expectations of receiving help, services, and resources to meet their needs, while simultaneously empowering their appraisals of benefits and support and installing hope language, may aid them in overcoming obstacles that arise during times of adversity. Our findings indicate that PTG may be achieved by distinct constructs and their interplay. Hence, future interventions have to encourage participants to employ diverse sets of beliefs in order to increase their ability to grow and rediscover meanings in their lives.

**Limitations and suggestions for future research**

 These findings should be considered in light of the following limitations. First, while PTG is usually measured following a traumatic event (Wu et al., 2019), we employed a retrospective measurement asking the participants to recall an event that caused them significant emotional stress. The reliance on retrospective reports raises the possibility of misrepresentation of the reported event and its consequences. In order to reduce this risk, we instructed the participants to focus on an event that took place during the preceding year and to evaluate its long-term impact. Future studies should compare immediate outcomes after traumatic events with the measurements of memories.

 A second limitation of the current study is related to the nature of the potentially traumatic events. The participants in this study reported a range of quite different traumatic events. Additionally, in this study we relied on the participants' subjective and intuitive understanding and rating of traumatic events and their severity, as these may be directly related to their accounts of PTG. Additional limitations concern sampling constraints, such as uneven recruitment of men and women and the use of a single community (with a high prevalence of traumatic events), and the use of self-report questionnaires. Future studies should focus on larger, more heterogenous samples and include in-depth interviews to understand the different paths of personal growth after experiencing a trauma.

 Without ignoring these limitations, the findings from the current study shed light on the importance of sense of entitlement, gratitude, and hope in the promotion of PTG in individuals experiencing stressful events. In addition to the theoretical contribution, these findings can inform future interventions and preventive programs, targeting the promotion of growth following traumatic events, while appreciating the complexity and multidimensional impacts of risk situation, and calling for a consideration of individual differences while pursuing wellbeing.

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Table 1. Demographic Information

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **N = 182** |  |  |
|   |   | Frequency | Percent |
| Gender | Male | 36 | 19.8 |
|   | Female | 146 | 80.2 |
|   |   |  |  |
| Age category | 19 - 29 | 50 | 27.5 |
|   | 30 - 39 | 64 | 35.2 |
|   | 40 - 49 | 40 | 22.0 |
|   | 50 - 59  | 19 | 10.4 |
|   | 60 - 69 | 7 | 3.8 |
|   | 70 - 79 | 2 | 1.1 |
| Level of education | Primary school | 1 | 0.5 |
|   | High school | 38 | 20.9 |
|   | Above high school | 21 | 11.5 |
|   | Bachelor's degree or equivalent | 75 | 41.2 |
|   | Master's degree | 27 | 14.8 |
|   | Doctoral degree | 3 | 1.6 |
|   | Certificate studies | 10 | 5.5 |
|   | Other | 7 | 3.8 |
| Marital status | Married  | 126 | 69.2 |
|   | Single | 34 | 18.7 |
|   | Divorced | 12 | 6.6 |
|   | In relationship | 10 | 5.5 |

Table 2. Means, SDs and correlations of the main variables.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Mean (SD) | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 1. Sense of entitlement  | 4.48 (.87) | .282\*\*  | -.015 | .254\*\* |
| 2. Hope  | 4.11 (.76) | - | .451\*\* | .257\*\* |
| 3. Gratitude | 5.52 (1.14) |  | - | .284\*\* |
| 4. PTG  | 4.17 (.94) |  |  | - |

*Note:* \**p < .05,* \*\* *p* < .01



Figure 1. Path model with path coefficients

Note. Dotted paths present nonsignificant relationships at the 0.05 level. \*P < 0.05, \*\*P < 0.01.

Figure 2. A simple slopes analysis of the interaction effect (sense of entitlement × gratitude) on hope.

1. We computed an a priori power analysis using G\*Power3 (Faul, ErdfelderBuchner, & Lang, 2009) for Linear multiple regression (fixed model, R square increase), including 3 predictors (a power of 80% and an alpha value of .05). As this is the first study to investigate this hypothesis, we were not able to base the expected strength of the effect sizes on previous findings. We therefore anticipated a small to medium effect size of f = .15 for all the investigated hypothesis, and the analysis suggested a sample size of 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. We are grateful to Sapir Vaturi and Emilia Kodish for their help in collecting the data. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The original measurement was scaled a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 0 to 5, but we modified the labels to 1 to 6 in order to make it compatible with the other measurements. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)