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Andrea M. Hussong¹

Hillary A. Langley¹

Jennifer L. Coffman¹

Amy G. Halberstadt²

Philip R. Costanzo³

¹University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill,

²North Carolina State University

³Duke University

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Thank-You Note

I wanted small pierced earrings (gold),
You gave me slippers (gray).
My mother said that she would scold
Unless I wrote to say
How much I like them.

Not much.

-Judith Viorst

The desire to cultivate gratitude in ourselves and others dates back centuries, as is evident in the early writings of Aristotle on virtues (Thomson, 1955), although our understanding of what gratitude means continues to evolve through ongoing scholarly debate and societal discourse (Kapp, 2013; Reiser, 2014). One of the voices in this debate comes from social psychologists affiliated with the Positive Psychology movement who spearheaded research that has shaped our understanding of gratitude in adults. These researchers differentially adopt the view of gratitude as a life orientation (Wood, Froh & Geraghty, 2010), a character, virtue or personality trait (Froh, Sefick & Emmons, 2008), and a mood or emotional state (McCullough, Emmons & Tsang, 2002). Research based on this view shows that adults and adolescents who more strongly endorse gratitude traits also report greater life satisfaction, better health outcomes, and more successful relationships (see Algoe, Haidt & Gable, 2008; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Froh, Kashan, Ozimkowski & Miller, 2009; Wood et al., 2010).

Similar research with children has lagged behind that with adults, although the *Developing Gratitude in Children and Adolescents* volume (Tudge & Freitas, 2016) is one of a handful of recent works demonstrating growing interest in this topic. As with other areas of research, the psychological study of gratitude has largely followed a downward extension model

with the goal of uncovering how early in childhood scientists can replicate findings from adult samples. This approach to understanding gratitude in children aligns with that from the classic descriptive focus of developmental psychology that seeks to identify at what ages a given competency emerges.

More recent approaches to understanding development, like the Developmental Science framework (Cairns & Elder, 2001), eschew age difference findings as an end goal in favor of understanding how a given competency emerges over ontogeny and what form it takes within the system of influences from which that competency might arise. To meet this aim, a Developmental Science approach must more squarely tackle the issues of what gratitude is at its core, how it changes with ontogeny, and how we best capture its elements as they emerge first in a nascent and then in a mature form. In doing so, understanding the Developmental Science of gratitude requires revisiting how we understand the unfolding nature of gratitude and how gratitude relates to other competencies that emerge across development.

In this chapter, we add to this growing body of work by defining gratitude from a Developmental Science perspective with the goal of understanding a key context for cultivating gratitude in children, the parent–child relationship. We place the study of gratitude within a larger socio-emotional developmental framework and draw on research regarding parent emotion socialization to offer and test a model regarding how parents foster the development of gratitude in children. Finally, we discuss potential implications of this work for programs to support parents in fostering gratitude in their children.

A Parent-Centric View of Gratitude in Children

Children as young as six years of age recognize gratitude as different from just expressing manners (i.e., saying thank you; Hussong et al., 2014). But, as expected, they also

have difficulty answering items from widely used gratitude measures that require a broad or long-term perspective (Hussong, 2014). Developmental Science offers a way of understanding the complex, dynamic nature of children's gratitude as related to both the interpersonal context and the interconnected skills and capacities (e.g., perspective taking, empathic understanding) that supports the development of gratitude with maturation. We use this perspective to guide our definition and assessment of gratitude in children. But because we are ultimately interested in helping parents to cultivate gratitude in their children, we also want our understanding of gratitude to take into account the views and goals that parents have relating to their children's gratitude. For this reason, we initiated the Raising Grateful Children (RGC) project by conducting a series of focus groups with parents to learn how they view gratitude in their own children.

We conducted six focus groups that included two to five parents each, with a total of 20 parents (Halberstadt et al., 2016). Thematic analysis revealed that parents think about gratitude in their children with respect to what children already have (e.g., tangible and intangible items like toys as well as love from a family member), what they have been given anew (e.g., a special trip or when someone spent time with them), and what exists in the world around them (e.g., a sunset or birdsong). Like the social psychologists who study gratitude in adults, parents also think about children's gratitude for existential phenomena ranging from a momentary experience to a way of being.

Within the moment, parents described cognitive, emotional and behavioral aspects of gratitude. Cognitive aspects included children's awareness of others' intentions in giving or of their own relative privilege as well as being able to take another's perspective and acknowledge that others' experiences in the world may differ from their own. Indeed some parents noted that

finding the silver lining in an otherwise negative experience is also a component of gratitude. In addition to noting synonyms for gratitude (e.g., thankful), parents noted a wide range of emotional experiences connected to gratitude that involve broad positive emotions (e.g., happy), novelty-related emotions (e.g., positive surprise), social emotions (e.g., feeling connected to others), and having a sense of completeness (e.g., contentment). These cognitive and emotional experiences of gratitude could then be paired with a range of behaviors that parents recognized as expressions of gratitude in their 6- to 9-year-olds, including the use of manners and expressing felt appreciation (Halberstadt et al., 2016).

Parents clearly noted that their young children did not necessarily show evidence of each of these three components of gratitude consistently. Rather, parents seemed to believe that their children would “grow into” more mature forms of gratitude in a way that builds connections among these cognitions, emotions and behaviors. For example, one parent noted:

In terms of just trying to define it [gratitude], is it the awareness versus the emotion, but I think they're very much connected. I mean, because I think part of emotion is being aware. It's the awareness that can then foster the feelings of safety and warmth, which then kind of elicit certain behaviors. (Halberstadt et al., 2016, p. 443)

The results of the focus groups reflect aspects of gratitude that are also described in the adult literature where gratitude is most often conceptualized as a trait (Wood, Maltby, Stewart, & Joseph, 2008). But parents also recognized that gratitude is an emergent competency in children, consistent with recent developmental studies that identify pre-requisite capacities in early childhood that lay the foundation for later gratitude in older children and adolescents (Halberstadt, et al., 2016; Nelson et al., 2013). In this vein, parents described children's gratitude

experiences as stories or emotional processes that unfold over sometimes brief periods of time in the context of social exchange.

In the RGC project, we incorporated work on children's gratitude from each of these sources (the adult literature on gratitude, our parent focus groups, and the emerging literature on developmental competencies), with the goal of capturing the components of gratitude that emerge over development and are targets of parents' socialization efforts. We defined gratitude as a cognitively-mediated, socio-emotional process that results in a sense of appreciation, happiness, or joy due to the appraisal of having received something, not due to personal effort but to a benefactor's free and unrestricted intentions to give (See Figure 1; Hussong et al., 2016). To experience gratitude, we posit that children must be aware that something has been received (step 1), connect that awareness with positive affect (step 2), and attribute that positive affect to a view of the benefactors' behavior as intentional and freely chosen (step 3). We expect that the positive affect that children feel about what they receive and the attributions they make about their benefactors together help them make meaning of what they have received in a manner that can engender the experience of gratitude. The result of this process may then include behaviors that express appreciation (step 4).

Reflecting our core interest in studying the development of gratitude, we view this process as emergent, appearing as antecedent immature "proto-gratitude" experiences in young children that become more complex and fully formed with maturation. As a result, we conceptualize the development of gratitude as the integration of key steps of this process over time and recognize that although adults may experience all steps in this process, children's gratitude may initially involve only some steps in this process (e.g., recognizing and being joyful about something received but without attributions about the givers' intentions).

The capacity for gratitude may also intersect with other important developmental competencies, like an emerging theory of mind. It may well be that interpersonally exchanged sentiments (like gratitude) are important bridges to the ramifications of theory of mind in early to middle childhood. Indeed, felt gratitude (as we define it) requires at least a rudimentary understanding that benign intentions reside in the minds of those who benefit us. Regardless, we hypothesize that the development of gratitude thus involves the emergence and connection of these four steps within the gratitude experience over time, leading to a deeper and richer emotional experience that facilitates social engagement and moral action. To build capacity to assess gratitude viewed from this perspective, the RGC team developed a battery of measures of children's gratitude that crossed modality (observation, parent-report, child-report), format (survey, scenarios, tasks), and time period (daily diary reports, in the moment, stable trait).

The RGC Parent Socialization Model of Children's Gratitude

To define the strategies that parents employ to cultivate gratitude in their children, we draw upon classic work on parent emotion socialization. We identified four ways in which parents socialize children's emotions, including parental modeling, parents' reactions to children's emotional expressions, parent-child discussions, and parents' selection of experiences for children with the intent of meeting parents' socialization goals (see Figure 2; Eisenberg, Cumberland, & Spinrad, 1998a; Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Cumberland, 1998b). First, according to social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), *parental modeling* is a potentially salient mechanism through which children learn about the benefits and consequences of a behavior. Consistent with this mechanism, previous studies suggest that parents' gratitude is associated with that of their children (Hoy, Suldo, & Mendez, 2013) and our own work supports this finding (Rothenberg et al., 2016).

A second way that parents provide emotion socialization experiences for children is through their responses to children's own emotional expressions. Consistent with this hypothesis, parents' reactions to their children's distress predict both negative and positive outcomes in children, with more supportive and facilitative responses usually increasing social competence and more punitive and restrictive responses increasing risk for both internalizing and externalizing symptomatology (Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Smith, 2004; although see moderation in these associations by age and social context in Castro, Halberstadt, & Garrett-Peters, 2016; Mirabile, Oertwig, & Halberstadt, 2016). However, this body of work is specific to children's distress. Little work has focused on parent reactions to positive emotions and no studies are specific to children's gratitude. Conversely, the cultivation of gratitude may also occur in how parents respond to their children's negative emotions linked to demanding or entitled behavior. Behavioral management strategies based on learning theory have long supported the utility of consistent positive and negative reinforcement for children to shape a wide range of both prosocial and deviant behaviors (McMahon & Forehand, 2010). Within this model, we may expect a decrease in expressions of gratitude to the extent that parents respond to children's demanding and entitled behaviors with positive reinforcement (e.g., "giving in" to repeated and increasingly negative demands). Thus, our second parent socialization mechanism involves how *parents respond both to children's expressions of gratitude and to the opportunities to express gratitude that children miss or respond to with entitlement.*

Third, parents may also socialize the development of gratitude through discussions they have with their children (e.g., Dunn, Bretherton, & Munn, 1987; Laible & Thompson, 2000). Through these *parent-child discussions*, parents may raise children's awareness regarding what they have, help children recognize their positive affect in reaction to receiving something, make

attributions regarding their benefactors' actions, and support children in finding ways to express appreciation. A unique body of research bearing on the way in which parent-child discussions may shape gratitude comes from the literature on parent-child reminiscing and the development of autobiographical memory in children (Fivush, Haden, & Reese, 2006; Fivush & Wang, 2005). Parents may socialize gratitude as they reminisce with their children about events in their lives, using these conversations as an avenue for teaching children about values, attitudes and appropriate emotional responses to experiences in the world around them. Through conversations about shared experiences, parents help children to identify what is important, create an explanation for why things happen, gain an understanding about what those events mean, and remember the salient aspects of these events. The existing literature on the development of autobiographical memory suggests that the way in which mothers and children talk about the past has implications for children's developing understanding of self, others, and emotions (Fivush & Wang, 2005). Moreover, the types of details that children remember about these events shape their interpretation of the past and expectations for the future, thereby reinforcing values and attitudes held by the parent and internalized by the child. To the extent that parents emphasize expressions and feelings of gratitude with their children as they reminisce about shared events, we anticipate that children will show greater expressions of gratitude.

Fourth, parents may socialize emotion through the physical settings in which they place their children (a strategy termed "niche selection;" Eisenberg et al., 1998b; Fredrickson, 1998; Rothenberg et al., 2016). These contexts provide opportunities for children to have experiences that reflect parents' values concerning what is important for children's socio-emotional development. *Niche-selection* has been infrequently studied in the developmental literature, except cross-culturally (see for example, Halberstadt & Lozada, 2011; Keller & Otto, 2009),

although findings from our study indicate that having goals to select children's activities that promote gratitude and choosing activities in accordance with those goals in part explains the link between parents' and children's gratitude (Rothenberg et al., 2016).

We launched the RGC project to test this parent socialization model of children's gratitude using our process model to define children's gratitude as well as adapted trait measures of gratitude that are broadly used in the literature.

Findings from the RGC Project

Following the focus group study, the second phase of the RGC project involved a longitudinal study of 101 parent-child dyads (for details see Hussong et al., 2016). At this time, data are available on our baseline assessment only and thus we limit our reported findings to those that examine cross-sectional and short-term longitudinal associations among the four parent socialization mechanisms (modeling, niche selection, parent reactions to children's gratitude and missed opportunities, and parent-child discussions) and children's gratitude.

Children in the RGC project were 6-9 years old ($M = 7.4$) and 52% female. Among parents, 85% were mothers and they self-identified as predominantly European American (81%). Participating families were economically diverse (15% reported an annual income of less than \$50,000 whereas 63% reported \$100,000 or more), although in general they represent highly educated, middle to upper middle class parents. At baseline, these parent-child dyads completed a lab-based assessment followed by a seven-day online parental diary and a one month follow-up online parental survey. During the lab visit, we administered three observational tasks to parent-child dyads and asked parents to complete a computerized survey while children completed an interviewer-administered battery in a separate room. Online daily diaries were administered via Qualtrics beginning the day after the baseline assessment. Participant retention throughout the

study was high; 89% of parents completed all seven daily diaries and 96% completed at least five for a total of 682 observations.

Parent Modeling and Niche Selection

There are many reasons why grateful parents may raise grateful children. Social learning theory suggests that one of the most fundamental ways to socialize behavior in children is through modeling the desired behavior. We anticipate that this mechanism will hold for gratitude much as it does for many other forms of prosocial behavior (helping, empathy; e.g., Farrant, Devine, Mayberry, & Fletcher, 2012). Consistent with this expectation, Hoy, Suldo, and Mendez (2013) provide indirect evidence for this mechanism by showing that fourth- and fifth-grade children's gratitude self-ratings were moderately correlated with the self-ratings of their mothers (but not fathers). However, modeling is only one of many reasons why parent and child traits such as gratitude may be correlated.

To advance this line of inquiry, Rothenberg et al. (2016) examined the association between parents' and children's self-ratings of trait gratitude in the RGC Project and whether niche selection was one emotion-socialization mechanism that may at least partially account for an association between parent and child gratitude. In this study, we defined niche selection as comprised of both the goals parents have for the activities they select with or for their children (e.g., "to provide your child with opportunities to develop a sense of gratitude for other people" or "to teach your child how to express gratitude") as well as the actual activities in which their children engage (e.g., "setting up dinners or social events with other families who show gratitude often," "choosing a school for your child that values or teaches about the practice of gratitude," or "participating in clubs or groups that engage in social service actions"). To the extent that parents select activities for their children with at least part of the goal being to cultivate gratitude

in their children, parents demonstrate stronger niche selection goals. These goals capture broader parenting aspirations and may reflect an approach to parenting that transcends the competing demands that parents must reconcile to select activities for their children. The extent to which these parenting goals impact child behavior, however, may depend on how much children actually participate in the activities that parents select for them (and in many cases with them) with the goal of cultivating children's gratitude. We posited that more grateful parents would hold stronger goals to foster children's gratitude through niche selection and would in turn actually follow through on those goals by increasing their children's opportunities for cultivating gratitude by participating in gratitude-enriching activities, resulting in more frequent gratitude expressions in children.

We created parent-report measures to assess these two dimensions of niche selection (goals and activities) and tested whether these indicators of niche selection mediated the relation between parent and child gratitude using a series of structural equation models. Results demonstrated that parents who more strongly endorsed gratitude traits in themselves also reported more frequent displays of gratitude in their children using a daily diary measure. Moreover, parents' gratitude was positively associated with stronger endorsement of niche selection goals, which in turn increased the likelihood that children would participate in what parents' perceived as gratitude-enriching activities and niches. And, consistent with expectations, this pathway partially mediated the link between parents' and children's gratitude. These findings provide preliminary support for two ways in which parents may cultivate gratitude in their children; namely modeling and niche selection.

Parent Reactions to Children's Missed Opportunities for Gratitude

Parents in the RGC focus group study were quick to convey their frustration when their children missed opportunities to express gratitude, particularly when children instead demonstrated entitlement or assumption about what they were owed. Examples as reported in Halberstadt et al. (2016) include the following:

“My husband plays with our kids so much; I mean, he plays with them all the time. I can't believe how much; I don't see anyone else play with their kids as much as my husband does, which I think is a great thing. [But my child] is like, ‘Daddy never plays with me.’ I flipped out.”

“Sulking if you don't get it or... feeling sorry for herself if she doesn't have this or that... even in singular moments, it just gets under my skin immediately.”

“The kids have friends, same age, who live in a giant house and their parents don't work, and they have everything - all this stuff, right? And so it comes up when they go there. Like, ‘Why don't we...’ or whatever it is. And I react badly. ‘You guys have so much, you know. You don't even know how much you have.’”

These quotes demonstrate the ways that parents respond to a number of different responses children may have in lieu of gratitude. Thematic analysis of our focus groups indicated that many parents view entitlement and assumption as “opposites” of gratitude. Perhaps for this reason, interest in gratitude as a potential “antidote” to children’s entitlement is a popular theme on social media (Kapp, 2013; Reiser, 2014). If a parenting goal is to reduce entitlement and assumption through the cultivation of gratitude – a goal that was endorsed as “very important or one of my most important reasons” by 67% of RGC parents – then we anticipate that how parents respond to their children’s displays of entitlement in contexts where gratitude is another option also represents a socialization opportunity for cultivating gratitude.

To assess whether parents' reactions to missed opportunities for gratitude in children are related to children's gratitude behavior more generally, we developed the *Parents' Reactions to Incidents of Children's Entitlement* (PRICE) scale in the style of the Coping with Children's Negative Emotions Scale (CCNES; Fabes, Eisenberg, & Bernzweig, 1990; Fabes, Poulin, Eisenberg, & Madden-Derdich, 2002). In this scenario-based measure, parents indicate the extent to which they experience different responses to their children's behavior in four types of situations that involve a lack of recognition of having received something (e.g., the child does not express appreciation after sharing in a special event with the parent), assumption (e.g., the child does not help with dinner preparations but assumes others will do so), desire and wanting (e.g., the child throws a fit in a store when a parent does not purchase a desired item), and social comparison (e.g., the child argues that it is not fair that others have more toys than the child does). The six responses that parents might have to these scenarios include blaming themselves for their children's lack of gratitude (self-blame), adopting a hands-off attitude and waiting for children to mature into gratitude (let it be), experiencing and expressing distress over their children's ungrateful behaviors (distress), punishing children for their entitled behavior (punish), giving into children's demands to receive, buy or have something they want (give in), and taking the opportunity to teach the child a lesson or instruct the child about more appropriate grateful responses (instruct).

Parents completed the PRICE at baseline, yielding 90 items that assess each of the six reactions that parents report in reaction to each of 15 scenarios. A series of exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses yielded a set of six coherent factors that largely corresponded to the hypothesized factor structure with high reliability (Cronbach's alphas of .80 to .94).

We posited that these six parental reactions to children's ungrateful behavior would predict child gratitude (as reported by parents and children on a summary score of gratitude survey measures). Out of these six responses, two were correlated with children's gratitude. Parents who responded to children's missed opportunities for gratitude by giving in to children's demands ($r = -.23, p < .05$) or by expressing their own distress ($r = -.23, p < .05$) had children with lower levels of gratitude. Some responses to children's ungrateful behavior were also associated with children's gratitude but parents' own gratitude traits moderated this relation. Regressions for these response styles showed that parental gratitude significantly moderated the associations between children's gratitude and parental distress (in addition to the main effect) and parent punishment. Probing of these interactions indicated that each of these parental reactions was unrelated to children's gratitude in families where parents reported relatively lower levels of gratitude in themselves. However, for parents who report higher levels of gratitude in themselves, each of these parental reactions was positively associated with children's gratitude. In other words, children were more grateful when their grateful parents reacted negatively (by punishing the child or expressing their own distress) to children's missed opportunities for gratitude but these same negative reactions in parents who were relatively lower on gratitude themselves were unrelated to children's gratitude. Some of these negative reactions to children's missed opportunities for gratitude, however, were associated with other areas of children's functioning. Notably, parental self-blame, distress, and punishment reactions to children's missed opportunities for gratitude were each associated with greater parent-reported internalizing and externalizing symptoms in children and these associations were not moderated by levels of parents' own gratitude.

In sum, our findings suggest that at least for families in this sociocultural group, parents who “give in” to their children’s entitlement tended to have children with lower gratitude. Other negative parental responses to these missed opportunities (distress and self-blame) were associated with higher gratitude in children but only for families with more grateful parents. These findings could suggest that expressing strong displeasure when children show entitled behavior can help promote gratitude in children but only when parents themselves model and perhaps infuse their parenting with gratitude. These differences in parent reactions to children’s entitlement may reflect differences in the parenting goals of grateful parents. However, there may be a cost for strong personal reactions to missed opportunities for gratitude in children, as regardless of parents’ own gratitude, strong negative reactions (self-blame, distress, and punishment) were also associated with higher rates of parent-reported internalizing and externalizing symptomatology in children. These findings underscore the need to balance multiple parenting goals in selecting optimal ways to socialize gratitude in children. It is also important to acknowledge that parental socialization is not a one-way street and it is unclear whether these findings reflect evocative effects (i.e., children’s entitlement among typically grateful children evokes negative reactions in grateful parents), socialization effects (i.e., parents’ negative reactions to children’s entitlement foster children’s gratitude in the future), or dynamic effects that intertwine these evocative and socialization mechanisms.

Parent–Child Discussions about Gratitude and Missed Opportunities

In conversations about shared past experiences, parents help children remember the salient aspects of prior events, identify what is important, create an explanation for why things happen in the world, and gain an understanding about what those events mean for the self and others (e.g., Fivush et al., 2006). The critical role of parent–child conversations – both as events

unfold and reminiscing after a shared experience – has been demonstrated in a number of developmental domains that include cognitive skills (e.g., memory, problem solving, language) and socioemotional outcomes (e.g., understanding emotions, attachment status) in children (see Fivush et al., 2006 for a review). Although no prior research has examined the way in which parents talk to their children about gratitude, we expect that parent–child conversations about previous instances of children’s gratitude-related behavior may be one mechanism through which children begin to understand and experience gratitude. Indeed, parents likely use conversations with their children as a way to scaffold and promote their children’s understanding of complex emotions and situations, such as those that involve gratitude, with the hope that practice leads to children’s understanding and proficiency.

Previous research on parent–child reminiscing about past events have included events that are emotionally positive (e.g., shared experiences that involved happiness or excitement), negative (e.g., injury resulting in an ER visit, losing a sporting event), or traumatic (e.g., enduring a natural disaster such as a hurricane or tornado). Across studies that examine these types of events, it is clear that the ways parents structure conversations and provide information to their children is a function of the emotional valence of the topic under discussion (Wareham & Salmon, 2006). How parents structure these conversations and discuss emotions is, in turn, related to children’s autobiographical memories for these events (Fivush et al., 2006). Previous theorists suggest that the differences in communication strategies that parents use when discussing past positive versus negative experiences may be due to different parent goals for these conversations (Kulkofsky & Koh, 2009). For example, research on parent–child reminiscing about positive events suggests that parents typically have the goal of fostering social connection and a positive bond with their children, whereas research on more emotionally

negative, or even traumatic, events reveals that parents may be more concerned with discussing antecedents and consequences of past events as a way of helping children cope with a traumatic experience.

In socializing gratitude, parents likely talk to and reminisce with their children about gratitude and missed opportunities for gratitude, and we expect that they have different goals in these two conversational contexts. Following from reminiscing studies of positively- and negatively-valenced events, we anticipated that parents would structure conversations about previous instances of children's gratitude differently than they would conversations about children's missed opportunities for gratitude. We also expected that the content of these conversations would differ in terms of the discussion of emotions and gratitude-specific messages. Based on the reminiscing literature and likely differences in the structure and content of these conversations, we also expected to see differences in children's recall across these two conversational contexts.

In the RGC study, parents and children discussed two past events that were related to gratitude: a time during which the parent observed the child display appropriate gratitude behavior (gratitude event) and a time during which the parent had expected or hoped to see some form of gratitude in the child but did not (missed opportunity for gratitude event). Transcripts of conversations were coded for aspects of an elaborative reminiscing style as well as emotion- and gratitude-specific content. An elaborative reminiscing style is a form of structuring conversations associated with better recall that includes asking more open-ended questions and fewer yes-no questions, making associations between the event under discussion and children's prior knowledge or previous experiences, and confirming children's contributions to the conversations.

Results revealed that parents differed in their use of aspects of an elaborative style and in their provision of emotion- and gratitude-specific content in the two conversations. When compared to their performance in the missed-opportunity conversation, parents in the gratitude event provided significantly more open-ended questions and confirmations of their children's contributions to the conversation and significantly fewer associations linking the event under discussion to other experiences or prior knowledge. Additionally, parents provided more positive emotion words and gratitude-related definitions in the gratitude event and more negative emotion words and gratitude-relevant lessons/messages in the missed-opportunity event. Children did not differ in the number of details they recalled across the events; however, there were differences in children's use of emotion words such that they articulated more positive emotion words in the gratitude event and more negative emotion words in the missed-opportunity event. Finally, the way that parents structured the conversations (e.g., utilizing aspects of an elaborative reminiscing style) and provided emotion and gratitude content was positively associated with children's recall in both events (r s ranging from .28-.55). We posit that the different conversational strategies that parents employ in the gratitude and missed-opportunity conversations are not only associated with children's memory for those experiences, but are also related to children's developing understanding of gratitude, as parents work to help children better understand the complex emotion of gratitude.

Day-to-Day Scaffolding through Multiple Parent Socialization Mechanisms

In the RGC study, we assessed mechanisms of parent socialization globally (niche selection and reactions to missed opportunities), in a single occasion (that is taken as an indicator of typical parent-child discussions), or as inferred processes based on parents' traits (modeling). Because we posit that parent socialization of children's gratitude often happens in a series of moments over

time that may include a variety of socialization mechanisms, we also assessed these same socialization processes and children's gratitude through a daily diary measure that was repeated over seven consecutive days.

The day-to-day use of these socialization strategies when used in tandem may serve to scaffold children's gratitude experiences as parents elect in any given interaction to display gratitude in front of children (modeling), to positively respond to children's displays of gratitude (parent reactions to children's gratitude), to talk with their children about gratitude-related experiences (parent-child discussions), and to select activities for children designed to foster gratitude (niche selection). Parents completed a ten-item scale that assessed each of these dimensions of daily gratitude socialization on each of seven days.

Using a multi-level modeling analysis, we tested whether parents who used these gratitude socialization strategies more often over the seven days reported greater gratitude in their children (a between-person comparison) as well as whether parents reported greater gratitude than usual for their child on days when the parent used more socialization strategies than he or she did on average over the seven day reporting period (a within-person comparison; Hussong et al., 2016). These analyses allowed us to assess if the overall use of more socialization strategies identified who among children were more likely to experience gratitude as well as when children were more likely to do so.

Controlling for the amount of daily contact parents had with their children, results revealed a significant between-person effect such that parents who reported more frequent use of socialization strategies over the week also reported that their children showed more gratitude over that week. In addition, a significant within-person effect also emerged, though opposite in direction to that predicted. Namely, parents reported less frequent displays of gratitude in their

children on days when parents used more frequent socialization strategies. Because these associations are essentially cross-sectional, however, directionality is unclear. We anticipate that these findings actually suggest that parents increase their use of socialization strategies on days when they perceive that their children need the extra support; that is, on days when their children display less gratitude. And this strategy in turn may work; that is, parents who use more frequent socialization strategies have more grateful children over time. Perhaps surprisingly, these associations did not differ as a function of children's age, gender or overall socio-emotional functioning.

To better understand the focus of parents' daily use of these socialization strategies, we created crude subscales of our ten items that assessed different strategy foci that correspond to the four components of gratitude in our process model (i.e., awareness, attributions, emotions, and behaviors). For example, items that assess children's awareness ask parents to report the number of times that day that they point out to their children receipt of something from others whereas items assessing attributions ask parents how many times they have asked their children why someone gave them something. By averaging responses to these items over the 7-day reporting period, we created scales that we subjected to a series of *t*-tests to determine what parents focus on the most in scaffolding children's gratitude experiences (Hussong, 2014). Results indicated that most parents spend more of their socialization efforts on encouraging gratitude behaviors (on average 85% of parents did so at least once a day) as compared to helping children to become more aware of what they have or have received (50%), cultivating gratitude-related attributions about what they receive (54%), and recognizing the positive emotions that go along with having received something (35%). In addition, only half (52%) of parents reported that they encouraged their children's gratitude behaviors in ways that went

beyond ‘good manners.’

These findings suggest that gratitude socialization is a daily experience, that the day-to-day scaffolding of children’s gratitude may be a successful strategy, and that most parents focus on only one aspect of the gratitude experience in children (i.e., expressing appreciation in ways consistent with good manners) and far fewer focus on increasing children’s awareness, ability to make gratitude-inducing attributions, and gratitude consistent emotions.

Implications of Findings for Program Development

We cautiously offer suggestions for program development based on the findings from the Raising Grateful Project with the caveat that these findings are cross-sectional in nature and were evaluated in a single sociocultural group with many privileged families (see O’Brien et al., this volume, for findings from a more diverse sample). We eagerly await replication of these findings, extension of the results within prospective designs, and expansion of the basic ideas to consider parent socialization of gratitude in diverse sociocultural contexts given the likely salient nature of context and culture in these socialization processes. With those caveats, we offer the following considerations for program development and future research.

First, support for each of the four parent socialization mechanisms in our proposed model provides evidence that parental modeling, niche selection, discussions with children about gratitude, and reactions to children’s missed opportunities to express gratitude are all potential targets for programs that support parents in fostering children’s gratitude. Indeed, our findings suggest that parents’ own practice of gratitude may not only directly impact children’s gratitude (through modeling) but also increase the likelihood that parents will adopt and enact niche selection goals for gratitude socialization and that parents’ negative reactions to their children’s missed opportunities for gratitude will be effective. As such, we anticipate that although these

mechanisms interact with one another, it is perhaps parents' own gratitude that is a key component of how effective other gratitude socialization practices may be with children. This hypothesis bears further evaluation in future research.

Second, our findings suggest not only which socialization mechanisms may be a focus of programming but also an avenue for supporting those mechanisms. Namely, parents appear eager for support for or scaffolding of specific skills for the socialization of gratitude. For example, parents often struggled in their discussions with their children when they were asked to talk about times when their children were ungrateful. Some parents did not acknowledge those times when children did express appreciation or gratitude-related thoughts and feelings, and thus they missed an opportunity to positively reinforce, celebrate, and shape these aspects of gratitude in their children. Thus, programs that focus on parental skill building may also be a promising avenue for helping parents to foster gratitude in their children.

Third, additional targets for programming are drawn from parents' reports of how often they engage in each of the four components of gratitude as conceptualized in our project. Parents' day-to-day efforts to socialize gratitude primarily focused on teaching manners and this is the aspect of gratitude that children are most likely to demonstrate. Parents are less likely to spend time socializing children on the other parts of the gratitude process. If parents consider gratitude within a process model, they may be able to think about additional opportunities to foster gratitude in their children that focus on increasing children's awareness, feelings and thoughts about what they have or have received as well as about their benefactors. Others have noted the importance of awareness and attributions as part of gratitude (Froh et al., 2014) and we posit that expanding the focus of parental socialization from showing appreciation to encompassing the experiences of thinking and feeling in a grateful manner may be key for

children to more fully experience the benefits of gratitude across ontogeny. Moreover, when parents view gratitude as emerging over development, they may be more patient when children fall short of the mark. This possibility is an additional important focus for future research.

Fourth, an important consideration for parenting programs, whether they focus on gratitude or other developmental outcomes, is the need to include the whole child and family context. There are many ways in which the balancing act that is parenting may need to be built into program development. Notably, gratitude is generally studied in isolation from other prosocial outcomes. It is worth considering whether or not parents model, niche-select, correct, or share perspectives regarding gratitude that are commensurate with the ways they do these things in other domains related to the cultivation of goodness in their children. Being a grateful child or a grateful adult is one component of a complex system of prosocial aspects of being.

Fifth, to consider the interplay among socialization mechanisms for gratitude, a whole-child approach will allow us to address potential trade-offs that parents make in selecting socialization strategies for their children. Just as studies of gratitude rarely consider other prosocial outcomes, research that examines potential negative implications of these socialization strategies on health-risk behaviors is also clearly needed. The finding that parents' negative reactions to children's missed opportunities for gratitude are actually associated with greater gratitude in children of grateful parents but also with greater symptomatology for all children underscores this point. Increasing awareness without instilling unproductive guilt and shame is a challenge for parents engaged in gratitude socialization that many parents in our focus groups recognized.

A closely related point is that parents balance many goals regarding what they want for their children. Although in the abstract many highly-endorsed parenting goals may seem to co-

exist (e.g., having happy children, having healthy children, having successful children, and having grateful children), these goals may well collide in the discrete day-to-day decisions that parents make and in the situations they navigate with their children. One goal that is particularly worth considering within many segments of American culture is the trade-off between fostering academic success or “merit” on the one hand (often attached to self-focused socialization strategies) and gratitude on the other (often attached to other-focused socialization strategies). Indeed, one important aspect of the sense of entitlement that might blind children to gratitude is the issue of “merit.” Navigating these decisions points may well be confusing to parents – particularly those who resemble our highly educated sample – and they may create clear parenting dilemmas. For this reason, the resolution and awareness of this kind of socialization dilemma could serve as a component of program development in parent interventions. Perhaps, seeing the socialization of achievement as the provision of a social “good” (i.e., contributing to society) might enhance the compatibility of gratitude socialization and the nurturing of “merit” in our children.

In closing, each of these implications of our findings for program development suggests important areas for future research that can provide confidence in the way forward. Helping parents think about gratitude within the complex web of goals that they have for children across many domains is a daunting task but one that has high potential pay-off. Research with adolescents and adults suggests that gratitude is associated with a number of positive health and social outcomes. Perhaps most importantly, a more grateful citizenship may have important social implications for civic engagement, concern with social justice, appreciation of the natural world, and environmentally-responsible action. We hope that Developmental Science research can join the many forces that seek to cultivate gratitude in children to these ends.

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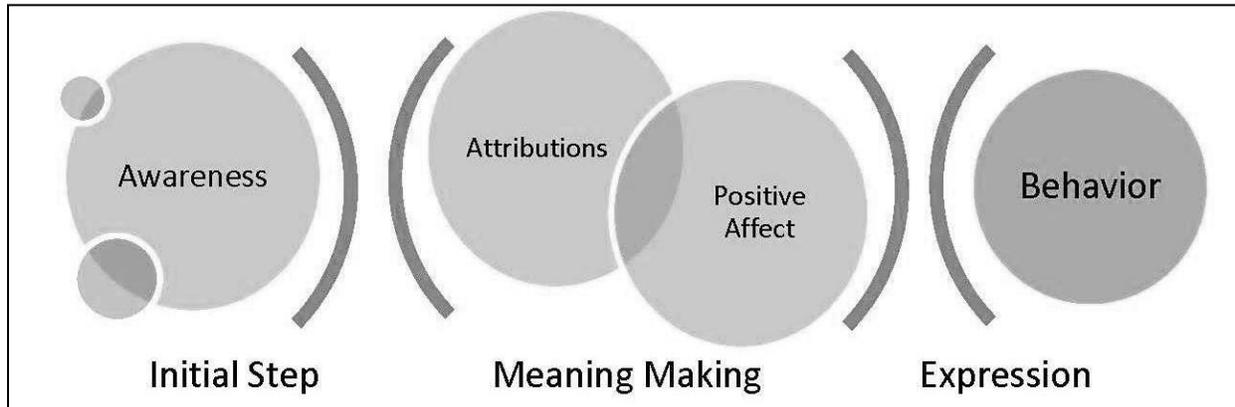
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Figure 1. A Process Model of Children's Gratitude



Note: Figure first published in Hussong et al. (under review).

Figure 2. Parent Socialization Mechanisms for Children's Gratitude

