



What Parents and Children Say When Talking about Children's Gratitude: A Thematic Analysis

Allegra J. Midgette ¹ · Jennifer L. Coffman ² · Andrea M. Hussong ¹

Accepted: 21 December 2021 / Published online: 4 January 2022

© The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Science+Business Media, LLC, part of Springer Nature 2022

Abstract

Parent-child conversations are a widely recognized socializing mechanism, linked to children's developing moral agency, empathy, and emotional competence. Similarly, parent-child conversations about gratitude have been linked to growth in children's gratitude. However, the messages that parents and children exchange in conversations about children's gratitude have yet to be investigated in depth. In the current study, we investigate the types of events that parents discuss with their children during times when they saw displays of children's gratitude and events when the children missed the opportunity to display gratitude, along with the messages that parents and children share during these conversations. The study involved a thematic analysis of the gratitude conversations of 43 parent-child dyads (88% mothers, 77% European American, 51% boys, child $M_{\text{age}} = 10.62$, $SD = 1.15$) living in the United States. Gratitude and missed opportunity events primarily involved situations in which the child had the opportunity to attend an event or to receive a material gift, food, or assistance. Three themes characterized parent and child messages. First, parents suggested that being happy was a sign of being grateful, a way to make others happy, and the goal of benefactors' behavior. Second, parents suggested that children should focus on what they receive rather than on what they did not receive. Finally, children conveyed that they could not always be grateful, but that in several cases they were able to both feel and display their excitement and gratitude. In particular, children reported feeling grateful when they received something they thought was special or enjoyable, unique or unexpected, that they knew would make their parent happy or that they felt lucky to have since others did not have it. Together these findings suggest the importance of future research investigating how children and parents coordinate and prioritize the various elements of gratitude moments in deciding how to be grateful and to socialize children's gratitude.

Keywords Gratitude · Parent-child conversations · Thematic analysis · Moral messages

Highlights

- When talking about gratitude parents often note how the child's gratitude affects them (e.g., makes them feel good).
- Parents encourage children to notice and appreciate what they do have, even if the child does not like some aspect of a situation.
- Children note that they cannot always be grateful.

✉ Allegra J. Midgette
amidgett@tamu.edu

¹ University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute & Department of Psychology and Neuroscience, Chapel Hill, NC, USA

² University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, Greensboro, NC, USA

Although gratitude in adolescents and adults is linked with increased prosociality, well-being, life satisfaction, optimism, and happiness (Dickens, 2019, Froh et al., 2008, Ma et al., 2017), less is known about how gratitude socialization occurs in children to help them reap these benefits as they develop and grow (Hussong et al., 2018). Mechanisms that support children's gratitude include parents' daily scaffolding of gratitude moments (Hussong et al., 2019b), selection of children's activities and environments that value and foster gratitude (Rothenberg et al., 2017), and parent-child conversations about gratitude and even missed

opportunities for experiencing gratitude (Hussong et al., 2019a). Indeed, parent-child conversations are a widely recognized socializing mechanism, linked to children's developing moral agency (Wainryb & Recchia, 2014), empathy (Laible et al., 2013), and emotional competence (Eisenberg et al., 1998, Recchia et al., 2014). However, the messages that parents and children exchange in conversations about children's gratitude have yet to be investigated in depth. In the current study, we investigated what events parents and children discuss when talking about children's gratitude and missed opportunities for gratitude as well as the messages that they share with one another.

Parent-Child Conversations as a Context for Moral Development

Prior work shows that parents care deeply about supporting their children's gratitude development (Halberstadt et al., 2016) and engage in a number of socialization activities to foster children's gratitude (Rothenberg et al., 2017). Among these activities, parent-child conversations are an important context for studying parent socialization of children's gratitude given that parents are often the most consistent and long-term socializing agents in children's lives and that much of parent socialization, in general, occurs through language (Nelson & Fivush, 2019, Vygotsy (1978)).

In particular, studies of parent-child conversations about *past* behavior, or parent-child reminiscing, show that both how parents talk to children and what they say to children is related to how well children remember and interpret past events (Fivush et al., 2006, 2014). To the extent that such conversations provide morally-relevant messages, they serve as a mechanism for children to learn parental values and related actions about what is right and wrong (Fivush et al., 2014, Recchia et al., 2014, Wainryb & Recchia, 2014), including those related to children's gratitude (Langley et al., 2021). Indeed, parent-child conversations about past events may be more beneficial for socialization than in-the-moment conversations because temporal distance may decrease the emotional intensity of events and allow children to more successfully encode parental messages and parents to deliver more proactive, emotionally regulated messages (Laible & Panfile, 2009, Laible & Thompson, 2000, Reese et al., 2007).

Much of this literature has focused on the ways in which parents engage in conversations with their children about past events, described as parental reminiscing style. Results show associations across a variety of developmental outcomes with an elaborative parental style in which parents ask open-ended questions, encourage children to share their thoughts and feelings, link the recalled event with other memories, and provide positive feedback such as praise

(Fivush et al., 2006). For example, parental use of an elaborative reminiscing style has been shown to influence children's autobiographical memory development, narrative skills, early conscience development, theory of mind, and understanding of self and emotion (Fivush, 2019, Fivush et al., 2006, Laible, 2004a, b, Nelson & Fivush, 2019, Reese & Cleveland, 2006).

Much less is known about the content or messages that parents deliver in such conversations. Prior work shows that the use of emotional words and moral messages are linked to children's moral development (Eisenberg et al., 1998, Laible et al., 2019, Recchia et al., 2014, Waldron et al., 2014). Indeed, studies of parent emotion socialization suggest that the content of messages are as important or at least interact with the style in which the message is delivered (Hersh & Hussong, 2009). However, we lack a clear understanding of the messages that parents provide their children, and vice-versa, within gratitude and missed opportunity conversations (Hussong et al., 2018). With this knowledge, we can learn whether *what* is being said in parent-child conversations (i.e., messages) is as important as *how* it is being said (i.e., approaches) in supporting parents' socialization goals regarding fostering children's gratitude.

Parent and Child Messages in Gratitude and Missed Opportunity Conversations

Gratitude, a construct of interest in a variety of literatures, has been defined in different ways across research teams and perspectives. Based on prior work, we have focused on how gratitude unfolds in the moment, given that many parents talk about children's gratitude or lack thereof relative to specific events or moments in their lives (Halberstadt et al., 2016). Specifically, we define gratitude as a prosocial socio-emotional process that involves both a cognitive appraisal that something has been given (NOTICE), the recognition that the gift was based on the giver's own goodwill and intention to give rather than on the receiver's efforts (THINK), a resulting emotion of appreciation, joy, or happiness (FEEL), and an accompanying action of expressing appreciation (DO; Hussong et al., 2018).

In their self-reports about how they socialize children's gratitude, parents primarily focus on encouraging their children to say "thank you" and show good manners (arguably more about etiquette and conformity than about gratitude) followed by messages about what children DO (e.g., parent asking "how can you show your appreciation?") to express appreciation (Gleason & Weintraub, 1976, Hussong et al., 2019b). In turn, parents report that children display gratitude more often through expressions of gratitude (or what they DO) rather than by what they notice, think or feel about gratitude moments (Hussong et al., 2019b).

It is not clear, however, whether these parent-reports of gratitude expression messages are consistent with what occurs during actual parent-child conversations. In addition, the messages that parents provide in these conversations that are beyond what children may notice-think-feel-and do remain an area of open inquiry.

Moreover, parental messages about gratitude may differ depending on whether the conversation is focused on grateful versus missed opportunity events. In the only direct study of parent-child conversations about gratitude, parents and children used more positive emotion words than they did in conversations about neutral topics. On the other hand, in missed opportunity events, parents and children used more negative emotion words and parents were more likely to focus on behavioral correction (i.e., addressing inappropriate behavior and how the child should behave in the future; Hussong et al., 2019b, Langley et al., 2021). These differences in emotional valence are consistent with expectations for children to meet parents' behavioral expectations for showing gratitude (in gratitude events) or not (in missed opportunity events) as well as with literature that shows that emotional valence impacts how parent-child conversations occur as well as the impact of these conversations on child outcomes (Lagattuta & Wellman, 2002). However, parents were equally likely to use messages that facilitated gratitude understanding (i.e., describing and defining gratitude and its importance) in both types of conversations (Langley et al., 2021).

Moving beyond observational data and descriptive analyses of how parents approach talking about gratitude, Hussong, Coffman, and Thomas (2019a) created and evaluated an online training program to help parents foster children's gratitude through parent-child gratitude and missed opportunity conversations. In addition to showing changes in the ways in which parents talked about these events, parents who completed the program showed greater use of notice-think-feel-do messages in gratitude conversations 1 month after completing the program as compared to a wait-list control group; however, there were no differences in the use of notice-think-feel-do messages in missed opportunity conversations. Rather, when gratitude notice-think-feel-do messages increased without a corresponding increase in effective communication approaches, parent report of children's gratitude actually decreased (Hussong et al., 2019a).

This work, however, used a limited scheme for categorizing parental messages during parent-child gratitude and missed opportunity conversations and also did not consider what messages the children may be providing. Thus, less is known about whether there are qualitatively distinct differences in the messages that parents who participated in the training versus those who did not participate. Further, the role of children in such conversations is important given that such exchanges are interactional and

that children are actively engaged participants in these conversations (Laible et al., 2013, 2019). As a result, how children respond and the messages they contribute during these conversations are also important factors to consider in the socialization of children's gratitude.

The Present Study

This study allowed for the investigation of the messages that parents and children share with each other when discussing what parents identify as gratitude and missed opportunity events. Given that both conversational styles and gratitude displays differ across cultural groups (Mendonça et al., 2018, Wang & Fivush, 2005), the present study provides a deep dive into the development of children's gratitude by focusing on a rather homogeneous cultural group rather than investigating cultural differences. In the present study, we focus on a mostly European American middle-class sample from the US Southeast. European American mothers in particular, have been found to be relatively high in terms of elaborative reminiscing style (Fivush et al., 2006). In addition, as a relatively privileged sample, European American middle-class parents have reported being concerned about how to prevent their children from being entitled through attempting to cultivate their children's gratitude (Halberstadt et al., 2016). In addition, as this study was exploratory, our sample was selected to have a diversity in terms of parent conversational training and child gratitude characteristics; particularly, our sample included parents who did and did not participate in a training program on conversing about gratitude as well as children who did and did not report growth in daily gratitude moments over a period of a month (Hussong et al., 2019a). Therefore, an investigation into this particular group provides initial insight into the messages that parents and children from this particular cultural group share about gratitude.

To better understand parent-child conversations about gratitude and missed opportunity experiences, we used a qualitative approach to address three key questions. First, what are the types of events that parents consider to be ones in which their child is grateful and ungrateful? Second, what are the messages that parents share with their children about gratitude? And, third, what are the messages that children share with their parents about gratitude? By better understanding these conversational elements, programs to support parents in fostering children's gratitude may be enriched.

Method

This study drew on the Raising Grateful Children dataset that first pioneered parent-child conversations about gratitude

(Hussong et al., 2018). The study began when children were aged 6–8 (wave 1) with a parent-child lab-based assessment. Follow-ups occurred at 18 months (an online parent survey; wave 2) and 3 years (a parent-child lab-based assessment). Immediately following the 3 year follow-up, half of the participants were randomly assigned to complete an online parent training program to foster gratitude in children and the others were in a wait-list control, with both groups completing a lab-based assessment 1 month after the 3 year assessment. The current study focuses on parent-child conversations that we observed in the lab during this final assessment after program completion by half of the sample.

Procedures

Data for the current analysis were collected between March 2017 and May 2018. Parent-child dyads had a 10 min conversation about an event in which parents thought that their child was grateful and an event in which their child missed the opportunity to be grateful. The task was based on procedures previously utilized in the reminiscing literature (Fivush et al., 2006, Haden, 1998, Reese et al., 1993). Separated from their children, parents were asked to choose events that were novel (out of the ordinary), one time, parent-child shared experiences that had happened within the past month. For the gratitude event, parents were asked to select an event “during which you saw some form of gratitude in your child, your child expressed gratitude, or you talked about gratitude with your child.” Examples presented that participants could choose included a time when the child received something, volunteering, or other experiences that they believed fostered gratitude. Parents were also asked to select a missed opportunity event: “an event during which you might have expected to see gratitude in your child, but instead saw ungrateful or maybe even entitled behavior in your child.” Examples presented to participants included an event in which the child did not say “thank you” or did not show appropriate appreciation for a gift they had received. In both events, the focus was on the child’s experiences. After selecting the events, the parent and child reunited to talk about the events as they would in a typical conversation. These conversations were recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis. This study was approved by the UNC-CH IRB (IRB#13-2640). Parents provided consent and children provided assent at the beginning of the testing session.

Participant Selection and Characteristics

In an attempt to capture variability in conversational messages, we selected 22 dyads where children showed growth in self-reported gratitude from program baseline (wave 3) to the 1 month post-test and 21 dyads where children showed

no growth (i.e., negative change score in gratitude moments report). Moreover, 46% of dyads in which children showed growth in gratitude, versus 38% of dyads in which children did not show growth in gratitude, were in the online training program (described here Hussong et al., 2019a). By enhancing sample diversity according to changes in gratitude program participation, we were able to obtain a broader range of potential messages parents and children were providing when talking about gratitude.

Of the 43 parent-child dyads analyzed in this study, the majority of participating parents were mothers (88% mothers, all cisgender, one did not report) and married (83%, one did not report). The majority of parents (77%) were European American, 7% identified as White Latinx, 3% identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, 7% identified as Asian American, 5% identified as Other, and 3% did not report. Moreover, family income ranged from \$30,000–200,000 or above the previous year (63% made between \$80,000–159,999). In addition, 5% had completed some college or university coursework, 26% completed college, 10% completed some graduate school or professional school, and 60% of parents had received a graduate or professional degree.

The majority (75%) of parents reported following a religious tradition or spiritual practice (e.g., Jewish, Buddhist, Baptist, Catholic, Methodist, Quaker). The average parent age was 40.40 years ($N = 42$, $SD = 5.67$, range 29–54). The average age for participating children was 10.62 years ($SD = 1.15$, range 8–13). Children were evenly divided by gender (51% male, one participant was transgender).

Analytic Plan

First, parent-selected grateful and missed opportunity events were analyzed for both types of event and actors involved in the event. For actors, we categorized who were described as the benefactors in each grateful and missed opportunity event. Actor types were categorized based on their relationship to the child (e.g., mother, parents, siblings). For type of event, events were characterized by what the parent described the child to have received (e.g., food or assistance), or what behavior the child displayed that the parent indicated that they found praiseworthy and a sign of gratitude (e.g., “that is how I knew you were grateful”) or one in which the child was seen as engaging in challenging behavior and what the parent preferred they should have done instead.

In order to investigate the content of the gratitude conversations, we employed a thematic analytical approach that allowed for the systematic investigation of novel patterns of conversational messages, shared meanings, and experiences in the data (Braun and Clarke (2006)). Following procedures

described by Boyatzis (1998), a team of three coders and the first author read and re-read all of the 43 transcripts and then collaboratively developed a codebook. The codebook contained the name of each code, a definition, and examples taken from the transcripts. Codes were created and applied to each transcript and then were added to or modified in the codebook as each additional transcript was read—until no new codes were needed after the reading of additional transcripts. After all transcripts had been read, coded, discussed, and the codebook finalized, two coders independently re-read and coded 30% of the transcripts ($N = 13$) to establish reliability. Final agreement between the two coders was 86.8%. Agreement was calculated based on total agreement divided by total number of codes that coders applied to all thirteen transcripts. Disagreement during the establishment of coder agreement was resolved through discussion in weekly meetings which included the first author. After agreement was established, and the team discussed all disagreements, each of the two coders coded the remaining transcripts. A third coder reviewed and double checked the remaining 30 transcripts that had been coded independently and any discrepancies were discussed as a group with the first author. Any questions or challenges were discussed in group meetings with the first author. (For final codebook please contact the first author).

Thematic analysis focused on the three guiding research questions. Analysis was conducted separately for parents' and children's coded responses (i.e., all parental code frequencies analyzed together; all children code frequencies analyzed together). Themes were created based on the frequency and co-occurrence of codes (e.g., "child happiness" co-occurring frequently with "parent feels good") as well as the context of how the codes were used in the transcript. For instance, the theme of "if you are happy then show it," was developed as a result of the analysis of the co-occurrence between the code "gratitude as excitement" and the code "gratitude makes the parent feel good," both which were high in frequency across transcripts.

Results

Parent-Identified Gratitude and Missed Opportunity Events

As directed, parents often opened the conversation by talking about times when their children were grateful. We characterized these events in terms of "to whom" and "for what" the child showed gratitude. Out of the 43 conversations, 24 involved gratitude towards mothers, ten involved gratitude toward both parents, eight involved other family members (e.g., father, sister, grandparents), and one involved non-family members (e.g., family friend).

These gratitude events often involved a situation in which children were given an opportunity to attend an *event* (e.g., leadership summit, going to the movies, camping, vacation, attend a birthday party), offered a material *gift* (e.g., birthday present, a card, Xbox), provided with *food* (e.g., dinner, snacks, doughnuts, milkshake), or received *assistance* (e.g., given a ride, taken shopping). Other gratitude events that parents discussed included those in which children engaged in *prosocial* actions, such as volunteering in the community (e.g., food pantry), serving their parents (e.g., making dinner for them), giving up a desirable object to someone else (e.g., gave younger child the backpack color they preferred), giving a sibling a gift (e.g., buying sister ring pop with the money they were given), showing love to a grandparent (e.g., calling them), and helping cleaning up without being asked. In addition, *other* events that parents discussed included children appreciating that they were allowed to stay up late, being well-behaved during a trip, receiving a compliment, and enjoying spending time with their mother on Mother's Day.

Missed opportunity events often involved a situation in which children were described as acting entitled or ungrateful by complaining, asking for more of something, or not doing what was expected of them when presented with an opportunity to attend an *activity* or *event* (e.g., breakfast with family friends, a sleepover with a friend, getting a chance to go on vacation, attending girl scouts). Other situations included those in which children received opportunities to eat *food* (e.g., a meal, pizza, candy, snack), were provided with *assistance* (e.g., helping with homework, helping with an assignment, parent doing things for the child), or received *material gifts* (e.g., received shoes but thought they were cheap). In addition, other events discussed by parents included ones in which the child did not engage in *helpful* behaviors or *chores* (e.g., not putting their backpack away when asked, helping clean up after dinner, or helping their mother pack).

Interestingly, parents had more difficulty raising missed opportunities in these conversations, with three parent-child dyads not discussing the event and one in which the child disagreed and the parent changed their mind. Out of the remaining 39 missed opportunity conversations, 25 described events that involved the mother, five involved the father, two involved both parents, two involved the whole family, and the remainder involved non-family members (e.g., family friends).

Parent Messages Across Gratitude and Missed Opportunity Conversations

Parent theme 1: if you are grateful, then you show it

One of the most common themes in facilitating conversations about gratitude was that children's happiness was both

the goal of benefactors' (including parents') generosity, expected as a result of the features of the situation, as well as the key signal that children were indeed grateful. Parents primarily presented gratitude as what children do and involved saying thank you and/or showing and feeling excitement or happiness. For instance, when a child directly asked 'what is gratitude', their mother said "It-it's thanks, like to show thanks for something." In addition, parents often described having a good time and displaying happiness and enjoyment as signs that children were grateful. These were most evident in describing grateful events.

Mom [M]: ... I mean I think *honestly I think you showed them your, your gratitude more by your smiles.* And by, you know, *having a good time.* It sounds like you were totally- you were really engaged with them.

M: And um like you're really awesome about *getting super excited* about stuff that's given to you and being like *sincerely thankful* for things you know um so I was kinda like uhh um so the one I picked was that when we gave you your 3D printer *you were super happy and excited and grateful.*

M: You do. So um how do you see the difference between saying thank you and being grateful?

Child [C]: Saying thank you is kinda like a program. You just say it cause you basically have to

M: (nods) It is politeness.

C: Yeah. But like when, when you're like (makes excited noise) you know it shows you're actually sincere about it.

The gift behind the gift Parents often connected their expectations for children's happiness and gratitude to the uniqueness of the situation as well as the *effort* that they or the benefactor exerted to create the opportunity. As one father noted, "Um, it seemed like you really appreciated just having the opportunity to do that and recognizing that it's not something that, you know, every kid gets to do." This message was evident in both grateful and missed opportunity event descriptions. Other examples of such messages include the following:

C: It was good to have donuts for breakfast.

M: That's right. Is it something we do all the time?

C: No.

M: No, that was pretty special right?

M: ...But, you know, the adults, we took turns cooking meals, for all the kids, and you know, and that kind of thing. And [name] made cookies, and we took, you know, we took you to the-we tried to get you out and take you to different things. So, um, *a lot of adults worked hard to make that trip enjoyable.* It was a vacation for us to, but a lot of the times too, we were you know, doing a lot of work too-to make it run smoothly.

M: Um, so that was one time when I think you maybe missed an opportunity (pause) to *show that you're happy* that I was allowing you to make (pause) a *special occasion* and allow you to play when you're usually not supposed to. Right?

Gratitude makes others feel good A related parental message was that children's displays of gratitude through happiness and excitement made the benefactor happy and/or was the reason for their benefactors' actions. For instance, a mother noted, "I wanted you to um acknowledge—hope that you would acknowledge that that's uhh takes effort on our part to make that happen for you, you know. But we want to...cause we want you to have a good time and enjoy yourself right?" In over half of the gratitude event conversations, parents noted how the child's gratitude and happiness made the *parent feel good.*

M: But we were both very, very impressed and it meant so much to us. Um how you handled yourself, how you got through being nervous, how much fun you had, the friends you made, and you said it several times how happy you were when you were gone. Um that made us feel really good um with the *sacrifices* that we had to make to get you there *we felt really good that you had a good time and you had fun.*

M: Okay. So I appreciate that you recognize that that was something we didn't have to do for you. But we

did it for you. Cuz- You gotta realize that for both mommy and grandma that it *makes us happy to make you happy!*

Conversely, when the child was described as not showing gratitude or happiness, parents described feeling negatively, including hurt and sad. For instance, one mother noted, “But you didn’t say thank you for lunch out or for all the time that we put into building force fields. *That kind of made me feel sad.*” Similarly, another mother explained, “...*I was a little hurt that you didn’t show that you were grateful that I put all of this work into it for you.*”

Gratitude and further generosity Parents also discussed that being grateful has other benefits for children, including fostering further generosity. One principal message was that when gratitude is displayed, the benefactor would be more likely to give to the child again. For example:

M: So knowing that it made you feel so good that you wanted to call her especially to thank her, do you think *next time she’d be more likely or less likely to do things?*

C: More likely?

M: That’s right! Cuz you (points at child) showed her gratefulness. Cuz you showed her how important it was to you. And what it meant to you. Does that make sense?

M: Right, so when you are grateful for the things that you have and the things that you get to do, what happens?

C: You get uh to do more stuff.

M: You get to do more stuff, or you know when you ask things right? *People are more inclined to do that.*

M: If I saw the parents come in with their kids, and their kids are a little snots and just take stuff from me and don’t say anything. I think, well, that’s not a very nice kid. That’s not a very nice family. *Trust me, they think very highly of you and are going to be warm to you if you say thank you. They’ll think what a sweet, what a nice kid.*

Summary These parental messages (i.e., the gift behind the gift; gratitude makes others feel good; and gratitude as fostering further generosity) each contributed to the overall message that if you are grateful then you show it through your happiness and excitement. These messages work together, to describe gratitude as both what we notice and think about the gifts we receive (the gifts behind the gift) but also what we do to express gratitude (through our happiness and excitement) and how that gratitude connects us to the larger social world (by making others happy and engendering further generosity).

Parent theme 2: appreciate what you do have

A second parental theme in gratitude and missed opportunity conversations is that children should be grateful for what they have rather than focus on what they want, expect, or don’t have. For instance, a mother noted that “...people who are just always grateful and don’t feel entitled and understand the *importance of being glad for what you do have and not fussing over what you don’t have.*” This message was most common in missed opportunity conversations in which parents noted that children can still be grateful even though something may happen that the child may not want. Some examples include the following:

M: ...you just gave me you know gave us s-some grief about it and repeatedly told us how unhappy you were about that you weren’t flying home with the cousins and daddy and I were a little frustrated with that because we felt like we had just you know done this amazing trip and that *you were focused on the you know 5 h trip home or whatever.*

M: Having a little more time is always nice with our friends but umm I think if we focus too much on the things that could have been or should have been sometimes we miss the feel good parts about the time you did get to spend with him, right?

Although these messages were often offered as corrections to children’s behavior, some parents shared that they understood the child’s disappointment but still encouraged children to be grateful for what they did receive.

M: That’s good it umm it’s good that you’re thinking through those emotions when you’re feeling disappointed or frustrated because you’re right *you still had a good time with your friend umm even though you weren’t able to go to the park you still had time to play with him outside and spend some time together.*

M: I understand that you wanted to do it with (person's name), but I felt and it's interesting, because once we were here talking about the grateful thing, once I put it in that context, I guess what it was, I didn't feel like you were being grateful. I kept saying I'm gonna take you...we're going to go get the stuff and you couldn't take that at face value. *Oh, I should be grateful that I'm getting to get it at all...*

Fortunate A related message was that the children were lucky to have what they did receive, whether it was the gift of time or a material possession. Parents noted that despite the negative aspect of the event (e.g., parent preventing them from getting more) what children did receive was something unexpected or special that they were fortunate to have received.

M: I know, well also you got a piece of candy and then and then *you just kept asking for more* after I said we should just have one...So, um, I know it's hard because candy's delicious but I guess that was the only time I could – that was the most recent time I could think of where *there was something you didn't expect to get and then you got it.*

M: Well good, we just need to talk about those happy things about it, alright because I know you felt sad to say goodbye to the old one but, and I totally understand that and at the same time, we have to remember that we should be grateful that we can afford to rent a violin and you to take violin lessons because *you are really lucky and fortunate that to you can do that.*

In comparison To highlight the value of what the children had received, some parents encouraged them to use a comparative perspective. Parents suggested an overall attention and attitudinal shift in which children should notice what they had and be grateful since others did not have the same opportunities and experiences.

M: But if you're able to look and see things that people have done for you and things *that you have and experiences and opportunities that you have that other people don't and so you don't take them for granted* then it really reframes how you look at life and you're much more likely to have a happier life. It's about having a positive outlook; you know?

M: Yeah. I think so too. So, I think it's nice if—it would be nice if we could remember that you know.. when he's not with us. That um.. *see ourselves sometimes through other people's eyes, you know that uh, we have uhh we are really lucky and have a—have a great life you know?* Umm it's kind of important to remember that living in the moment.

Perspective taking In addition to encouraging children to show their gratitude, and highlighting that they should be grateful for what they had, several parents included other-oriented prosocial messages that were often connected to how children should develop and display gratitude. In these messages, parents encouraged children to think about events and situations from the perspective and needs of others. At times these events were about children's kind actions that made parents happy or met their needs, something that parents noted made them feel happy and grateful. In other words, parents shared how children's prosocial actions could make others feel grateful as well.

M: I'm thinking how awesome is it though that you have these moments where you think outside of yourself and what's happening.

M: Well that day I felt like my fr- my heart felt so full and *I was so happy because you thought about me and you thought to do this nice gesture for me uhh without expecting anything in return and you were just doing it I feel because you love me to show to show me that you love me-*

C: And I feel like I actually do and I want to do it every year

Thankful for the little and everyday things Parents also encouraged children to be grateful for everyday events that can go unnoticed. While most parents discussed “special” events, some focused on everyday acts of care and service (e.g., household labor), both as a source of the children's own appreciation and as a way for children to show their gratitude to others.

M: (laughs) oh so we might have to work on gratitude with the household stuff maybe right yeah yeah that's what I noticed yeah cause then I feel like oh gosh I do a lot of stuff but maybe it doesn't get noticed or then people just expect it right.

Father [F]: ... But I think we gonna be mindful.... About what we do and uh um even for daily- um everyday things, we should find a lot of things to be grateful- to be thankful.

M: So, is it reasonable to expect that after somebody cooks you a nice meal or does something nice *that you show that you are grateful for that*—

C: —yeah—

M: —by helping to clean up?

C: Yes.

Summary These parental messages focused on what children notice and how they think about events for which they could be grateful in their lives, with the ultimate goal of encouraging children to be grateful for what they have. As with the first theme, these messages work together to describe how and why children should appreciate what they do have, including by realizing their own good fortune, comparing themselves to less fortunate others, taking the perspective of others, and noticing the gift of everyday or little things.

Child messages about gratitude

The primary theme to emerge in children's messages within parent-children conversations about gratitude and missed opportunities was that *Children Can't Always Be Happy and Grateful for what they Get*. Whereas children were generally receptive to parental messages (i.e., said okay), children often provided explanations for what prevented them from being grateful during the missed opportunity events identified by their parents. In general, these reasons included that children sometimes viewed these events differently from their parents and recalled different elements as more salient. For instance, one child noted: "It was just that me, me and [name] were having a lot of fun passing and kicking and I wanted a little more time with him, it would have been nice to have a little more time." Children gave three primary reasons for what prevented them from experiencing gratitude in those, mostly missed opportunity, moments.

Unwanted context Children explained that rather than feeling grateful or happy, they sometimes felt frustrated by being prevented from getting what they wanted or in the way they wanted to get it (e.g., not soon enough, or not for long

enough). In other words, aspects of the situation made it hard for them to enjoy the positive components of the experience.

M: It was because right that minute, right then is when you wanted to go get stuff for your slime. You were like so—

C: —cuz you guys said *like an hour before that we would do it later.... I got angry because it seemed like we weren't going to do anything* because they were sitting at the table talking and that made me frustrated because I was really excited about making slime.

F: Well it kind of changed because yeah yeah you when we were discussing the trip to New Orleans you didn't- your first reaction before we went on the trip was you didn't want to do it you would rather go on a Disney cruise or—

C: No. I didn't want to go because we would stay there for 2 days.

...I still think we should have stayed another day.

C: Yeah, that was just too many people for me.

M: I see. What about my effort?

C: I did like that effort, um, thank you for that effort. *I just- didn't want ice-cream with that crowd.*

Therefore, underlying many children's responses was that parents were not actually giving the child what they wanted, but instead doing what the parent thought the child would want or what the parent themselves wanted.

Child is tired In other situations, children described that their own emotional and physical state, such as that of being *tired*, prevented them from being able to appreciate what was given to them and to experience gratitude.

M: Really? But you know why I chose it? Cause you didn't say anything, you didn't say like, "Oh..."

C: *I was tired after my tennis. ...Yeah but I was like, yeah I wasn't feeling that great after I was out in the heat so that might have been why I was kind of like a little down and tired and not as thankful.*

Everyday In some cases, during missed opportunity event discussions, children explained that they had received something that they did not feel warranted gratitude because it was mundane, expected, or not very expensive.

C: –If I didn't it's probably because together it was less than \$15.

M: That is not a good reason to not be thankful.

M: Yeah so how did you feel about me putting like helping you out with that favor?

C: Happy.

M: Yeah but then what you just didn't wanna tell me?

C: *I'm just used to you doing stuff for me.*

C: You guys used to not do anything so I got in the habit of leaving my shoes downstairs, but now you're telling me like I have to do it and I usually forget it just kind of like I throw it down I don't even, I'm not aware of like how you guys have to clean up after my messes and stuff... it doesn't take that long

F: No but it doesn't take that long for you either, correct?

C: Yeah.

F: So why should we? You don't think we have to clean up after ourselves and don't you feel that you should have to clean up after yourself?

C: *...I am a kid, that's kind of the job of the parent.*

Why grateful: desired On the other hand, similar to the first theme of parental messages, most children explained that they were able to feel grateful when their parent/benefactor provided them with something that they wanted, enjoyed, and were excited about. For instance, in both examples below, the children noted how they were given food that their parent knew their child really wanted:

C: I mean, I spend like 7 h in school and then an extra 2 h for rehearsals. And *it's just like all I need is a good chocolate bar* (M laughs). And when you're there with a chocolate bar I'm like "Oh my god —

M: –I know.

C: –"how did you read my mind?"

M: And you thanked me vociferously for doing that.

C: Ooooh, the dinner was certainly salubrious. We're using big words now.

M: So what's your-what what are your thoughts about that?

C: Um yeah I was just really like, you had went out of your way and taken your time to uh, make me and [cousin's name] *my favorite breakfast*. And we didn't exactly help either.

Other less frequently offered reasons presented by children for their grateful behavior reflected parental messages described in prior themes, including the uniqueness or unexpected nature of the situation (as suggested by the above examples), wanting to make the parent happy, and how lucky they were in comparison to others:

M: But um I know that you were really happy and grateful that you got to spend time with your friends and you told as much—

C: I haven't really gotten to like see them all summer so it...it is nice.

C: I wasn't even expecting a card and so that's why

C: –after pouting for a little while, it was at the store. I just thought well, not everyone gets Friday treats because I remember when I used—cause sometimes I go home with my friends on Friday, when I used to do that in elementary school I think every once in a while. Um and they didn't do Friday treats. They just went home and watched TV or something.

Summary Children shared that several factors, such as receiving something in a condition that they considered not ideal, not particularly wanting what they had received, being tired, or considering what was received as expected, prevented them from experiencing gratitude. On the other hand, children agreed with parental characterization of events for which they were grateful. Children noted that in the cases where they received something special and that they enjoyed, that was unique or unexpected, which they were lucky to have what others did not have, or that they knew would make the parent happy, they were able to feel and display their excitement and gratitude.

Thematic Differences by Program Participation

Although not the focus of this paper, we did see evidence of the influence of the training program in parent-child conversations in these qualitative results. In particular, parents who underwent training in conversational strategies were twice as likely to report the positive feelings that the child's gratitude evoked (i.e., the child's gratitude made the parent feel good). Moreover, across events, parents who did not take part in the program were more likely to describe gratitude as involving saying thank you. On the other hand, parents from the program were more likely to go beyond describing gratitude as saying thank you to mentioning that the grateful event involved the benefactor's actions, that were not required but freely offered, that the event was special, and that the child was lucky to have received what they had received. Moreover, those who were not in the program were more likely to suggest that the missed opportunity was not a major issue and that the child's feelings and behavior was understandable.

Discussion

The aim of the present study was to investigate the messages present in parent-child conversations about their experiences of children's gratitude. Our analysis revealed that parents often chose special events and opportunities for both situations in which children were believed to have been grateful and situations that children were seen as having missed an opportunity to be grateful. Three primary themes were present in parent-child conversations about gratitude: (1) happiness as an indicator that the child is grateful, and the reason for a benefactor's actions; (2) children should appreciate what they do have rather than what they wish had happened instead; and (3) children noting that they can't always be grateful for what they do receive. The fact that the majority of parental messages focused on the child feeling happy in gratitude events, while in missed opportunity events the majority of messages focused on encouraging children to ignore the sources of unhappiness that prevented them from feeling grateful, and that children responded with messages indicating that they can't always be happy or grateful, has important implications for future research and interventions on socialization of children's gratitude.

Parental Messages in Light of Past Research

Many parental messages are consistent with and can help further inform current models on parent socialization of children's gratitude (Hussong et al., 2018). In this study, parents mostly emphasized messages regarding the FEEL aspects of gratitude moments. For instance, in gratitude events, parents often noted how children "felt" happy or excited. In response, children noted that they couldn't always be happy when they did receive something. Both parents and children engaged in messages regarding the child's emotional state, and how their display (DO) or how they felt was read as being grateful. In keeping with the moral socialization literature, parents also noted the emotional consequences of the child's behavior on others as well as described how others in the situation were feeling or intending to do (Laible & Murphy, 2014). In particular, parents often highlighted how the parent intended for the child to feel happy, and that child's happiness resulted in the parent feeling good.

However, an emphasis on the FEEL part of gratitude, may explain why children reported that their lack of happiness and excitement prevented them from displaying gratitude in events that parents reported that they missed the opportunity to be grateful. An emphasis on the FEEL aspects of gratitude, as both the source for gratitude display and goal of the benefactor's behavior, may potentially

inform children's decision that if they don't feel happiness from what they receive, then the other components of gratitude (e.g., thinking about the intentions) are not as important. Future research should investigate whether parental messages that emphasize the feel aspects of gratitude versus other messages (e.g., NOTICE and THINK about why they did it), are more or less associated with children's gratitude growth and behaviors. Considering that some scholars note that for gratitude to be a virtue it requires that it "be practiced habitually and consistently," and children are noting that they can't always feel grateful, it may be that socialization that focuses on NOTICE or THINK rather than FEEL, may engender a more habitual form of gratitude expression (Merçon-Vargas et al., 2018, p.6).

Often paired with the FEEL messages (e.g., you were happy), were messages regarding the gift-behind-the-gift, that suggested recognizing that the gift was as a result of the "costly, intentional, or voluntary action of another person" (McCullough et al. (2008), p.281). In particular, parents encouraged children to THINK about the fact that it took effort for the benefactor to provide them with the gift or opportunity. In addition, parents often noted that what was received was special or unique in some way. In other words, in addition to encouraging reflections on another's actions, parents also focused on highlighting the value of the gift. This is in keeping with research that has found that individuals are more likely to report being grateful if they find what they have received to be valuable or well-liked (Algoe et al., 2008, Tesser et al., 1968).

As suggested in prior literature (e.g., Gottlieb & Froh, 2019, Halberstadt et al., 2016), another way in which parents highlighted the value of what children received was through downward social comparison, where the child was presented as being lucky and having a privilege that others did not possess. However, children's messages that the everyday nature of some gifts and opportunities prevented them from being grateful, suggests that emphasizing the unique and special nature of the gift may encourage children to be potentially dismissive of everyday gifts. It may be the case that everyday actions taken by benefactors may be seen as less valuable, costly, or requiring effort precisely because they occur frequently. Future research should consider whether parental messages that encourage noticing the value and effort required of mundane versus special gifts and actions are associated with differences in what children will report being grateful for receiving in their day-to-day lives.

Moreover, in keeping with the prior literature (e.g., "moral reinforcer" McCullough et al., 2001), parents noted that children's gratitude display would encourage further kind actions from their benefactors. However, some such messages also presented gratitude as instrumental (i.e., if you want \$100 again, say thank you). It may be that parents

who emphasize gratitude as a means or tool by which to further self-benefit, rather than as a form of reciprocity and/or a natural consequence of the benefactor's prosocial behavior, may have children who display a different type of gratitude expression. For instance, investigation into types of parental messages may help explain differences in children's rates of verbal expression versus connective gratitude (Baumgarten-Tramer, 1938, Mendonça et al., 2018), or engaging in gratitude because it's expected (manners) or intrinsic (Layous & Lyubomirsky, 2014).

Our analysis of the messages shared in parent-child conversations about gratitude points to several important considerations for future research. Our findings suggest that (1) a child's tiredness, (2) the fact that sometimes parents place children in situations where the goal is not always the child's happiness, and (3) the larger context in which the child receives something may not be up to their expectations, among other factors, contribute to variations in children's gratitude moments. Our findings imply that even in situations where children could be grateful, there are often non-positive aspects to the situation (e.g., child is tired, or they don't want to be there in the first place), suggesting the importance of investigating receipt of benefits and gratitude moments within context. In particular, future research should consider investigating how children learn to be grateful in the context of balancing "the good with the bad," or the benefits and negatives of the event, rather than as a direct response to positive and beneficial gifts. The present study found that parents tended to focus on FEEL and THINK messages when describing and evaluating gratitude events and NOTICE messages when describing missed opportunity events. Future research should further investigate how parental frequency in types of messages about gratitude, the events that they believe should invoke gratitude, and children's gratitude development are interconnected. In addition, this study also found that parents who participated in a training program to support children's gratitude development, which was found to be associated with changes in children's gratitude (Hussong et al., 2019a), were more likely to express messages that focused on gratitude beyond saying "thank you." Future studies should consider investigating whether specific parental practices, (e.g., encouraging connective rather than verbal gratitude) is associated with differences and/or changes in children's gratitude display. Finally, parents who did not participate in the program were more likely to report finding children's feelings understandable during the missed opportunity event. Future interventions and training should potentially encourage parents to consider and validate children's feelings in both missed opportunity and gratitude events.

While providing greater insight into the types of messages that parents and children share about gratitude, the

present study had a few limitations. First, the study was limited to a primarily privileged, majority European American sample. Future research should investigate parent and child messages about gratitude across cultural communities and social classes. For example, Guatemalan youth were found to be more likely to describe gratitude as motivating them to do better and improve themselves based on what they had been given (Poelker et al., 2017), whereas American youth were more likely to emphasize the benefits they received from the interaction (Poelker et al., 2016). Moreover, other studies have suggested cultural differences in how gratitude is expressed (Mendonça et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2015). Second, the study was limited to an analysis of one parent-child conversation of each type (missed opportunity and grateful event). Future research should investigate parent-child conversations about gratitude across time and in various settings (e.g., dinner table, car, etc.). Moreover, the events that were analyzed were chosen by the parents in this sample rather than the children. Future studies should investigate potential agreement and disagreement in the events that children report being grateful and that parents perceive to be ones in which children were grateful or missed the opportunity to be grateful. Finally, considering that parents' gratitude has been shown to be consistently associated with children's gratitude (Hoy et al., 2013, Rothenberg et al., 2017), future investigations should turn to conversations about in what types of events do children perceive their parents to be grateful or have missed the opportunity to be grateful as well.

Conclusion

The present study found that parents and children provided many messages regarding why and how children were grateful or missed the opportunity to be grateful. Messages included noting that the happiness and joy that the child felt and displayed both indicated they were grateful, and also was the motivating force for the benefactor's behavior. Moreover, parents encouraged children to be grateful in missed opportunity events, by engaging in downward social comparison, as well as through other means, such as emphasizing that the child should notice that they did receive a benefit, even if it was not packaged or presented in the way that they wanted. On the other hand, children presented pragmatic reasons for why they could not always be grateful, noting that their tiredness, along with other factors prevented them from being able to be grateful. Together, these findings suggest both the importance of considering the various elements present in events in which children are encouraged to be grateful, and the importance of future research investigating how children and parents coordinate and prioritize the various elements

of gratitude moments (NOTICE-THINK-FEEL-DO) in deciding how to both be grateful and to socialize children's gratitude.

Data Availability

De-identified data are available from the last author upon request.

Author Contributions All authors contributed to the study conception, design, and analysis. Writing of first draft: Allegra Midgette. All authors commented on and edited subsequent versions of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Funding Funding for this project was provided by the Expanding the Science and Practice of Gratitude Project run by UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center in partnership with UC Davis and by the John Templeton Foundation for earlier waves of data collection. The writing of this manuscript was supported in part by a postdoctoral fellowship provided by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (T32-HD007376) to the first author through the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest The authors declare no competing interest.

Consent to Participate Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study. In addition, for participating children informed consent was obtained from legal guardians.

Consent to Publish The authors affirm that human research participants provided informed consent for publication of their data.

Ethics Approval This study was performed in line with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Approval was granted by the Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Chapel.

Publisher's note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

References

- Algoe, S. B., Haidt, J., & Gable, S. L. (2008). Beyond reciprocity: Gratitude and relationships in everyday life. *Emotion*, 8(3), 425–429.
- Baumgarten-Tramer, F. (1938). "Gratefulness" in children and young people. *The Pedagogical Seminary and Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 53(1), 53–66.
- Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Thematic analysis: Coding as a process for transforming qualitative information*. Sage.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.
- Dickens, L. R. (2019). Gratitude interventions: meta-analytic support for numerous personal benefits, with caveats. In L.E. Van Zyl & S.Sr. Rothmann (Eds.), *Positive psychological intervention design and protocols for multi-cultural contexts* (pp. 127–147). Springer International Publishing.

- Eisenberg, N., Cumberland, A., & Spinrad, T. L. (1998). Parental socialization of emotion. *Psychological Inquiry*, 9(4), 241–273. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327965pli0904_1.
- Fivush, R., & Haden, C. A. (Eds.). (2003). *Autobiographical memory and the construction of a narrative self: Developmental and cultural perspectives*. Psychology Press.
- Fivush, R., Haden, C. A., & Reese, E. (2006). Elaborating on elaborations: Role of maternal reminiscing style in cognitive and socioemotional development. *Child Development*, 77(6), 1568–1588. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2006.00960.x>.
- Fivush, R., Merrill, N., & Marin, K. (2014). Voice and power: Constructing moral agency through personal and intergenerational narratives. In C. Wainryb & H. E. Recchia (Eds.), *Talking about right and wrong: Parent-child conversations as contexts for moral development* (pp. 270–297). Cambridge University Press.
- Fivush, R. (2019). Sociocultural developmental approaches to autobiographical memory. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 33(4), 489–497. <https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.3512>.
- Froh, J. J., Sefick, W. J., & Emmons, R. A. (2008). Counting blessings in early adolescents: An experimental study of gratitude and subjective well-being. *Journal of School Psychology*, 46(2), 213–233. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2007.03.005>.
- Froh, J. J., Yurkewicz, C., & Kashdan, T. B. (2009). Gratitude and subjective well-being in early adolescence: Examining gender differences. *Journal of Adolescence*, 32(3), 633–650. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2008.06.006>.
- Gleason, J. B., & Weintraub, S. (1976). The acquisition of routines in child language. *Language in Society*, 5(2), 129–136. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0047404500006977>.
- Gottlieb, R., & Froh, J. (2019). Gratitude and happiness in adolescents: A qualitative analysis. In Sifton, N. R. (Ed.), *Scientific concepts behind happiness, kindness, and empathy in contemporary society* (pp. 1–19). IGI Global.
- Haden, C. A. (1998). Reminiscing with different children: Relating maternal stylistic consistency and sibling similarity in talk about the past. *Developmental Psychology*, 34(1), 99–114. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.34.1.99>.
- Halberstadt, A. G., Langley, H. A., Hussong, A. M., Rothenberg, W. A., Coffman, J. L., Mokrova, I., & Costanzo, P. R. (2016). Parents' understanding of gratitude in children: A thematic analysis. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 36, 439–451. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2016.01.014>.
- Hersh, M. A., & Hussong, A. M. (2009). The association between observed parental emotion socialization and adolescent self-medication. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 37(4), 493–506. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10802-008-9291-z>.
- Hoy, B. D., Suldo, S. M., & Mendez, L. R. (2013). Links between parents' and children's levels of gratitude, life satisfaction, and hope. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 14(4), 1343–1361.
- Hussong, A. M., Langley, H. A., Coffman, J. L., Halberstadt, A. G., & Costanzo, P. R. (2018). Parent socialization of children's gratitude. In J. Tudge & L. Freitas (Eds.), *Developing gratitude* (pp. 199–219). Cambridge University Press.
- Hussong, A. M., Coffman, J. L., & Thomas, T. E. (2019a). Gratitude conversations: An experimental trial of an online parenting tool. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 15(2), 267–277. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2019.1610484>.
- Hussong, A. M., Langley, H. A., Rothenberg, W. A., Coffman, J. L., Halberstadt, A. G., Costanzo, P. R., & Mokrova, I. (2019b). Raising grateful children one day at a time. *Applied Developmental Science*, 23(4), 371–384. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2018.1441713>.
- Hussong, A. M., Langley, H. A., Thomas, T. E., Coffman, J. L., Halberstadt, A. G., Costanzo, P. R., & Rothenberg, W. A. (2019c). Measuring gratitude in children. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 14(5), 563–575. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2018.1497692>.
- Lagattuta, K. H., & Wellman, H. M. (2002). Differences in early parent-child conversations about negative versus positive emotions: implications for the development of psychological understanding. *Developmental Psychology*, 38(4), 564–580. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.38.4.564>.
- Laible, D., & Thompson, R. (2000). Mother-child discourse, attachment security, shared positive affect, and early conscience development. *Child Development*, 71(5), 1424–1440. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8624.00237>.
- Laible, D. J. (2004a). Mother-child discourse in two contexts: Links with child temperament, attachment security, and socioemotional competence. *Developmental Psychology*, 40(6), 979–992. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.40.6.979>.
- Laible, D. J. (2004b). Mother-child discourse surrounding a child's past behavior at 30 months: Links to emotional understanding and early conscience development. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 50(2), 159–180. <https://doi.org/10.1353/mpq.2004.0013>.
- Laible, D., & Panfile, T. (2009). Mother-child reminiscing in the context of secure attachment relationships. In J. Quas & R. Fivush (Eds.), *Emotion and memory in development: Biological, cognitive, and social considerations* (pp. 166–195). Oxford University Press.
- Laible, D., Panfile Murphy, T., & Augustine, M. (2013). Constructing emotional and relational understanding: The role of mother-child reminiscing about negatively valenced events. *Social Development*, 22(2), 300–318. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sode.12022>.
- Laible, D. J., Karahuta, E., Van Norden, C., Interra, V., & Stout, W. (2019). The socialization of children's moral understanding in the context of everyday discourse. In D. J. Laible, G. Carlo, & L. M. Padilla-Walker (Eds.), *The oxford handbook of parenting and moral development* (pp. 287–300). Oxford Library of Psychology.
- Laible, D., & Murphy, T. (2014). Constructing moral, emotional, and relational understanding in the context of mother-child reminiscing. In Weinraub, C. & Recchia, H. (Eds), *Talking about right and wrong: Parent-child conversations as contexts for moral development* (pp. 98–122). New York: Cambridge University.
- Langley H. A., Coffman, J. L., & Hussong, A. M. (2021). The socialization of gratitude: How parent-child conversations impact children's memory for gratitude-related events. In L. Baker-Ward, D. Bjorklund, & J. L. Coffman (Eds.), *The development of children's memory: The scientific contributions of Peter A. Ornstein* (pp 203–222). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press
- Layous, K., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2014). Benefits, mechanisms, and new directions for teaching gratitude to children. *School Psychology Review*, 43(2), 153–159.
- Ma, L. K., Tunney, R. J., & Ferguson, E. (2017). Does gratitude enhance prosociality?: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 143(6), 601 <https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000103>.
- McCullough, M. E., Kimeldorf, M. B., & Cohen, A. D. (2008). An adaptation for altruism: The social causes, social effects, and social evolution of gratitude. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 17(4), 281–285.
- McCullough, M. E., Kilpatrick, S., Emmons, R. A., & Larson, D. (2001). Is gratitude a moral affect? *Psychological Bulletin*, 127(2), 249–266. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.127.2.249>.
- Mendoça, S. E., Merçon-Vargas, E. A., Payir, A., & Tudge, J. R. (2018). The development of gratitude in seven societies: Cross-cultural highlights. *Cross-Cultural Research*, 52(1), 135–150. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1069397117737245>.
- Merçon-Vargas, E. A., Poelker, K. E., & Tudge, J. R. (2018). The development of the virtue of gratitude: Theoretical foundations

- and cross-cultural issues. *Cross-Cultural Research*, 52(1), 3–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1069397117736517>.
- Nelson, K., & Fivush, R. (2019). The development of autobiographical memory, autobiographical narratives, and autobiographical consciousness. *Psychological Reports*, 123(1), 71–96. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033294119852574>.
- Poelker, K. E., Gibbons, J. L., Hughes, H. M., & Powlishta, K. K. (2016). Feeling grateful and envious: Adolescents' narratives of social emotions in identity and social development. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 21(3), 289–303. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2015.1067895>.
- Poelker, K. E., Gibbons, J. L., Maxwell, C. A., & Elizondo-Quintanilla, I. L. (2017). Envy, gratitude, and well-being among Guatemalan adolescents with scarce economic resources. *International Perspectives in Psychology: Research, Practice, Consultation*, 6(4), 209–226. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ipp0000076>.
- Recchia, H. E., Wainryb, C., Bourne, S., & Pasupathi, M. (2014). The construction of moral agency in mother-child conversations about helping and hurting across childhood and adolescence. *Developmental Psychology*, 50(1), 34–44. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0033492>.
- Reese, E., Haden, C. A., & Fivush, R. (1993). Mother-child conversations about the past: Relationships of style and memory over time. *Cognitive Development*, 8(4), 403–430. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0885-2014\(05\)80002-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0885-2014(05)80002-4).
- Reese, E., & Cleveland, E. S. (2006). Mother-child reminiscing and children's understanding of mind. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 52(1), 17–43. <https://doi.org/10.1353/mpq.2006.0007>.
- Reese, E., Bird, A., & Tripp, G. (2007). Children's self-esteem and moral self: Links to parent-child conversations regarding emotion. *Social Development*, 16(3), 460–478. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9507.2007.00393.x>.
- Rothenberg, W. A., Hussong, A. M., Langley, H. A., Egerton, G. A., Halberstadt, A. G., Coffman, J. L., & Costanzo, P. R. (2017). Grateful parents raising grateful children: Niche selection and the socialization of child gratitude. *Applied Developmental Science*, 21(2), 106–120. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2016.1175945>.
- Tesser, A., Gatewood, R., & Driver, M. (1968). Some determinants of gratitude. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 9(3), 233.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Wainrb, C., & Recchia, H. E. (Eds.). (2014). *Talking about right and wrong: Parent-child conversations as contexts for moral development*. Cambridge University Press.
- Waldron, V. R., Kloeber, D., Goman, C., Piemonte, N., & Danaher, J. (2014). How parents communicate right and wrong: A study of memorable moral messages recalled by emerging adults. *Journal of Family Communication*, 14(4), 374–397. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15267431.2014.946032>.
- Wang, Q., & Fivush, R. (2005). Mother-child conversations of emotionally salient events: exploring the functions of emotional reminiscing in European-American and Chinese families. *Social Development*, 14(3), 473–495. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9507.2005.00312.x>.
- Wang, D., Wang, Y. C., & Tudge, J. R. H. (2015). Expressions of gratitude in children and adolescents: Insights from China and the United States. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 46, 10–39. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022115594140>.