

MENDONÇA, SARA ANN ETZ, Ph.D. *A Grateful Heart: Parents' Reflections on Gratitude and its Development in their Children.* (2019)  
Directed by Dr. Jonathan Tudge, 221 pp.

Too much focus has been placed on positive psychology's view of gratitude, which is broad in scope but operationalized often merely as a positive emotion. I argue that gratitude should be defined as a virtue, as it has been conceptualized by a multitude of philosophers, psychologists, and other scholars who have studied it (Annas, 2011; Baumgarten-Tramer, 1938; Emmons, 2009; Tudge, Freitas, & O'Brien, 2015). As a virtue, gratitude is experienced when (a) a benefactor purposefully and willingly gives a benefit to the beneficiary, and the beneficiary (b) recognizes the intentionality of the benefactor and feels good about it, (d) freely reciprocates based on the benefactor's needs and wants, if and when the opportunity presents itself, and (e) is consistent in this type of behavioral response (Tudge et al., 2015).

The goals of the present research were, in a diverse sample: (1) to investigate whether parents place importance on gratitude for their children; (2) to examine whether parents' experiences of gratitude affect their thoughts and actions regarding their children's gratitude; and (3) and to investigate parenting strategies to foster and encourage gratitude, including exploring potential differences based on social class, society, and racial/ethnic group membership.

Drawing from semi-structured interviews conducted in the United States and China with parents of children aged 7 to 14, representing seven distinct cultural groups, 100 interviews were coded using directed content analysis based on a triadic coding

scheme. A priori codes were established based on literature and new codes were determined based on parent responses.

Through parents' own words, it became apparent that gratitude is significant in all of the cultures represented. The close ties that gratitude helped foster and solidify among family, friends and the community were clear based on the examples given by parents of being helped by benefactors. The need to encourage gratitude in children was evident when parents spoke of children who were not able to truly understand gratitude and who did not demonstrate it enough. Children's young age was a key factor limiting their understanding of gratitude, regardless of whether the children were in middle childhood or adolescence. Parents also spoke of children who were shy as being less inclined to express gratitude and those who were out-going as being more likely to express gratitude. Strategies parents used to promote gratitude were quite similar such as speaking to children about gratitude or reminding them to express it appropriately

Cultural differences were found as well. Gratitude was conceptualized differently depending on the language and cultural group. In this study when examining transcripts from Brazilian or Mexican immigrants in Portuguese or Spanish or the Chinese parents' transcripts translated into English from Mandarin, special care was taken in interpretation of the interviews. Further, parents varied in why they felt that their children should feel gratitude depending on whether parents were middle-class or working-class. Overall, the present study showed both similarities and differences among the various cultural groups in parents' thoughts about and experiences of gratitude and how they relate to their opinions of and encouraging gratitude in their children.

A GRATEFUL HEART: PARENTS' REFLECTIONS ON GRATITUDE  
AND ITS DEVELOPMENT IN THEIR CHILDREN

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to  
the Faculty of The Graduate School at  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

Greensboro  
2019

Approved by

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I dedicate this dissertation to all of the participants who were willing to share their heartfelt stories of gratitude with me and the rest of the DOGMAS team. Let people continue to give of themselves to others and let others continue to feel grateful for what has been done for them and to reciprocate in kind.

APPROVAL PAGE

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The road to the PhD is long and arduous and is achieved with perseverance and determination, but that road is never walked alone. I would like to acknowledge and thank the many people who supported and encouraged me on my journey. First, I am deeply grateful to my advisor Dr. Jonathan Tudge. As a gratitude researcher, I take seriously time spent and effort made on my behalf and I don't take one minute of the countless hours that he put into improving my writing and my work for granted. I also want to thank Dr. Bob Henson who was always willing to make himself available to explain the nuances of higher level statistics to me. Without my committee none of this would have been possible so I thank Dr. Anne Fletcher, Dr. Danielle Crosby, and Dr. Lisa Kiang for helping me and guiding me in this process along with all of the other excellent professors that have contributed to my development as a scholar.

On a personal note, I would like to thank those people who continually remembered and championed the small goals along the way. Without the comfort and cheer I received from Linda, Jennifer, Janet, and Hector some of these steps would have seemed impossible. Pamela and Shakiera were on parallel roads to my own and the camaraderie and mutual support found with them made the trip less lonely. My sister, Dr. Kathy Etz, has provided constant encouragement and advice along the way and I thank my mother, Sally Etz, for willingly stepping in and proofreading just when I needed it most. Heading to the finish line, Caroline and Sean stayed awake with me late into the night and were there first thing in the morning to make sure I hadn't fallen on the

path and no words could ever describe how grateful I am for their support. I know that the strength they gave me was instrumental to my success. Lastly, there is one person who helped me more than any other and that is my husband, Joni Mendonca. It feels like part of this accomplishment is his. His never-ending confidence in me and invaluable practical help made all the difference and I'm not convinced I could have made it without him.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In recent psychological studies many claims have been made that gratitude is beneficial to people of all ages and, for those who espouse it, promotes positive individual well-being making it a topic worthy of scholarly attention (Algoe, 2012; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Emmons & Stern, 2013; Froh, Bono, & Emmons, 2010; McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001; Rash, Matsuba, & Prkachin, 2011; Wood, Joseph, & Maltby, 2008). However, far too much focus has been placed on positive psychology's view of gratitude, which is broad in scope but is operationalized most often merely as a positive emotion. Based on measures examining it as an emotion, correlational studies suggest that gratitude is positively related to concepts such as life satisfaction and positive affect (Froh, Yurkewicz, & Kashdan, 2009). These findings may have value, but such a mismatch of measures with such expansive conceptualizations allows for conceptual confusion and lacks differentiation among concepts (Fagley, 2016; Tudge & Freitas, 2018). The question then becomes what the best way is to define gratitude. I argue that gratitude should be defined as a virtue, as it has been conceptualized by a multitude of philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, and other scholars who have found it worthy of study (Annas, 2011; Baumgarten-Tramer, 1938; Cicero, *pro Plancio*, 54 BC/2009; Emmons, 2009; McConnell, 1993; Tudge, Freitas, & O'Brien, 2015). As a virtue, gratitude is experienced when (a) a benefactor

purposefully and willingly gives a gift or benefit to the beneficiary, and the beneficiary (b) recognizes the intentionality of the benefactor and feels good about it, (d) freely reciprocates based on the benefactor's needs and wants, if and when the opportunity presents itself, and (e) this is the consistent behavioral response of the beneficiary (Tudge et al., 2015). Defined in this way, gratitude has the potential to promote deep connections between benefactors and beneficiaries creating a positive continuous cycle. When considering the strength of the possible cycle of giving that gratitude may create, the significance of examining how virtuous gratitude develops in children and adolescents cannot be underestimated.

A group of scholars has begun to investigate the development of what may be the precursors of virtuous gratitude in children and adolescents, but much more research is needed to understand this important moral virtue (Tudge & Freitas, 2018). The seminal study conducted by Swiss psychologist Baumgarten-Tramer (1938) examined gratitude that included an emphasis on reciprocation and revealed different types of gratitude expression. The three most common types have been found in all societies where virtuous gratitude has subsequently been studied suggesting the significance of these possible precursors to gratitude (Freitas, Silveira, & Pieta, 2009a, 2009b; Wang, Wang, & Tudge, 2015; Mendonça, Merçon-Vargas, Payir, & Tudge, 2018). These studies are crucial in establishing children's gratitude expressions, but there have been very limited attempts to understand how children know when and how to express gratitude or what they understand about gratitude, particularly in diverse samples (Ramsey, Gentzler, & Vizio, 2018).

As may be expected, the most basic type of gratitude expression is verbal gratitude, defined as when a beneficiary responds with kind words after receiving a benefit from a benefactor (Baumgarten-Tramer, 1938; Tudge et al., 2015). Another basic type of gratitude is concrete gratitude. This is when a beneficiary understands that reciprocation is in order, but does not take into consideration the wishes or needs of the benefactor before reciprocating. It is only in connective gratitude that virtuous gratitude is demonstrated: when the beneficiary considers the wants and needs of the benefactor when determining how to reciprocate for a benefit received. However, it is only virtuous gratitude if reciprocation actually takes place, when and if it is appropriate. This is the least common type of gratitude expression found in the majority of children and adolescents. This is expected considering that the achievement of any virtue only happens over time and with practice and a certain level of socio-cognitive functioning is necessary to embody any virtue, including connective gratitude (Annas, 2011; Freitas, O'Brien, Nelson, & Marcovitch, 2012). For example, a beneficiary must have the ability to act autonomously and to take another's perspective into account before acting. Certain similarities have been found in how these expressions of gratitude are used in all societies where they have been examined, but many differences as well. For example, in the majority of societies concrete gratitude is seen more often in younger children than older children; however, in China this is not the same trend (Mendonça et al., 2018). It is important to consider why connective gratitude and other expressions of virtuous gratitude are found in all societies.



Virtues are based on conforming one's life to moral and righteous behaviors (Annas, 2011) and in order to understand what are to be designated ethical and good actions, values must be examined. Values are beliefs that individuals hold that govern their decisions about right and wrong and guide behavior, regardless of specific circumstances (Schwartz, 1992). Schwartz's theory of basic values identified ten personal values found in the majority of societies examined on most of the world's continents (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001). What is key to Schwartz's (2012) research is that these values create a circular structural model that reflects values that seem compatible and values that are at odds with one another. Therefore, values are ordered in importance relative to one another and opposing values cannot have the same significance. Benevolence values are encompassed in Schwartz's model and are regularly found to be at the highest rank of the value hierarchy in the overwhelming majority of societies that have been studied. Therefore, it is both unsurprising and compelling that expressions considered to be manifestations of virtuous gratitude, a benevolent virtue, have also been found on multiple continents (Payir et al., 2018).

A highly likely connection between gratitude and benevolence values is apparent when examining Schwartz's model (Schwartz, 1992, 1994). Benevolence values are those that represent voluntary consideration and attention to the welfare of others and are associated with words and expressions such as helpful and true friendship (Schwartz, 1992, 2012). Notably, benevolence and conformity values are differentiated based on what motivates them. Both sets of values foster harmonious social connections, but only benevolence goals are intrinsically motivated whereas conformity values are based on

fear of receiving negative judgments from others. As mentioned in the definition of virtuous gratitude, both the benefactor and the beneficiary must act voluntarily implying intrinsic motivation. This distinction reinforces the connection between the values of benevolence and gratitude, although these links have never been examined. In light of the significance placed on benevolence values in a plethora of different societies, it may be that people in diverse cultural groups deem gratitude to be important as well.

Values are an important part of how parents choose to socialize their children and spending time with their parents and in their families is the first way in which children begin to understand what values are significant in their cultural group (White & Klein, 2002). Knowing that values will affect behavior, it is important to consider how children determine which values are important and which values are important to parents. The importance given to benevolence values found in most societies examined by Schwartz (2012) may give an indication as to the importance parents may place on gratitude. Thus, examining parental opinions about gratitude and parental interactions with children with regard to gratitude will be an important step in the direction of understanding the development of this significant moral virtue.

In order to address these gaps in the literature, the goals of the present research are, in a diverse sample: (1) to investigate whether parents place importance on gratitude for their children; (2) to examine whether parents' experiences of gratitude affect their thoughts and actions regarding their children's gratitude; and (3) and to investigate parenting strategies to foster and encourage gratitude, including exploring potential differences based on social class, society, and racial/ethnic group membership.

This study will make substantial contributions to the field of developmental science by investigating in depth how a diverse sample of parents feels about gratitude for themselves and their children and how they may encourage its development. In this way invaluable insight may be gained to move the field of gratitude science forward. It will also begin to determine whether parents place importance on virtuous gratitude in their children's lives. This is extremely important considering how beneficial gratitude is, but also because by fostering gratitude, negative characteristics such as materialism appear to decrease. Interventions have been created to encourage gratitude, but thus far they have not been very effective (Davis et al., 2016; Dickens, 2017; Renshaw & Steeves, 2016); and it will be crucial to examine virtuous gratitude more carefully to determine how best to promote its development and aid in intervention design.

The present dissertation consists of six chapters: In chapter two I discuss the conceptualizations, operationalizations, and theoretical perspectives of gratitude and values. Moreover, I discuss Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory (2001) and the connection with gratitude. Moving to chapter three, I review the literature and what is known about appreciation and gratitude, including the development of gratitude as a virtue. Then, considering the potential relation between values and gratitude, I review values in various cultures with a focus on values in immigrant families due to my interest in diverse samples and how values may differ based on cultural groups. Next, in chapter four I outline the methodological strategies that were used to conduct this study, including sampling and data collection procedures, sample characteristics, and analytic strategies. In chapter five I present the results based on the research questions

of this study. Lastly, in chapter six I discuss the findings along with limitations to the study, possible future directions in gratitude research and a conclusion.

CHAPTER II  
THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

**Concepts and Theoretical Perspectives**

**Conceptualization of Gratitude**

Gratitude is currently being studied by scholars in developmental, positive, and social psychology and their research is bringing new and important findings to illuminate this important concept (Algoe, Kurtz, & Hilaire, 2016; Hussong, et al., 2018; Mendonça et al., 2018; Tudge et al., 2015). However, lack of clarity as to what exactly is being examined means that study results may not actually reflect the concept of gratitude. Therefore, knowledge gained from findings may be less effective when used to promote more gratitude or increased well-being with interventions (Davis et al., 2016; Dickens, 2017; Renshaw & Steeves, 2016). There is debate as to what is the best way to conceptualize gratitude, not only among psychologists but among philosophers as well.

Common definitions of two words, gratitude and appreciation, are relevant and helpful in parsing out this debate, particularly because it is confusing to speak about gratitude when this concept is denoted by appreciation (Gulliford, Morgan, & Kristjánson, 2013). A simple Internet search for the word gratitude provides the definition “readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness” (Oxford Living Dictionaries). To explore this definition further, it is necessary to define appreciation.

The definition of appreciation provides four different variations pertinent to gratitude or feeling grateful, two of which seem the most relevant, “the recognition and enjoyment of the good qualities of someone or something” and “gratitude for something” (Oxford Living Dictionaries). Interestingly and importantly, both gratitude and appreciation are used in the definition of the other, but following the logic of the definitions themselves, it is clear to see that in order for something to be considered gratitude, there must be a readiness to return a kindness, not just recognition and a positive feeling. Examining the above definitions, it is easy to see why these two words may become confounded and used synonymously, but that does not mean they are actually the same word and in scientific research it becomes crucial to distinguish between them. Beyond the clear variations in the dictionary, scholars note differences that separate appreciation from gratitude (Fagley, 2016).

Over the past twenty years, gratitude has been conceptualized as an emotional state and the disposition toward gratitude considered a life orientation characterized by being sensitive to and appreciating the positive aspects of life (Algoe, 2012; Algoe, Haidt, & Gable, 2008; Froh et al., 2011; Hoy, Suldo, & Mendez, 2013). Moreover, it has been understood to be a positive emotional response that a beneficiary feels in the form of elation or thankfulness after receiving either a gift or some sort of act of benevolence given freely by the benefactor (Emmons & McCullough, 2004). Gratitude has also been called a moral barometer, a moral motivator and moral reinforcer, but measures have not been created to examine these conceptualizations (Gulliford et al., 2013). A less studied, but more appropriate, conceptualization of gratitude is also concerned with its moral

nature, focusing on the beneficiary returning a kindness. The understanding that reciprocation is necessary and the willingness to act on this knowledge are crucial aspects of what distinguishes gratitude from appreciation (Tudge et al., 2015). These are ways in which gratitude strengthens relationships and supports the idea that by acting in a grateful manner, gratitude qualifies as a moral virtue (Tudge & Freitas, 2018).

Three requisite factors define gratitude as a moral virtue; the conceptualization that will be examined in this dissertation. First, gratitude occurs in the event that a benefactor has knowingly and voluntarily helped or given a beneficiary something; second, the beneficiary recognizes and understands the benefactor's intended action; and third, when it is feasible and suitable, the beneficiary freely and intentionally chooses to repay with something that has value for the benefactor (McConnell, 1993; Tudge et al., 2015). An important characterizing feature of gratitude as a virtue is that a possibility for repayment may not be imminent, but if and when an opportunity does present itself, the beneficiary will reciprocate. Finally, in order for an individual to possess gratefulness as a virtuous trait, grateful behavior must be the usual behavior of the individual, as opposed to an intermittent way in which the individual may act (Annas, 2011). Therefore, neither children nor adolescents would be expected to be virtuously grateful. Moreover, if the usual way of a person is not to reciprocate, then they are not actually experiencing gratitude, but rather ingratitude and would be considered ungrateful. A person cannot be considered grateful and ungrateful at the same time. Therefore, it is impossible to examine a concept called gratitude that does not include reciprocation. The reasoning behind this choice of conceptualization begins with age old philosophers, such as Cicero

and Aristotle, but can also be partly understood by examining what differentiates gratitude from appreciation, the need to reciprocate to a benefactor and why this is so.

### **Gratitude as a Moral Virtue**

At its foundation, a moral virtue is defined as conforming one's conduct to good and righteous principles (Aristotle, 1985) and, as Cicero said, gratitude is the parent of all virtues (Cicero, *pro Plancio*, 54 BC/2009). Aristotle, considered by many to be one of the fathers of virtue ethics, believed that moral virtues are not innate, but instead may only be achieved through habit and practice (Aristotle, 1985). In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle (1985) posited that it is impossible to abstractly achieve a moral virtue. In order for one to be considered morally virtuous, one must act morally in a social environment. With Aristotle's claim in mind that moral virtues come about through habit and practice, it is important to remember that neither children nor adolescents may be deemed morally virtuous, but it may be possible to study ways of behaving that could possibly lead to the development of a virtue. Aristotle thought that people may achieve happiness by living virtuous lives. However, the virtue itself may not be the means to that end, but because living in a morally laudable manner may bring its own satisfaction. Employing this understanding, if gratitude is considered a moral virtue it should not feel that repaying someone for a kindness is an onerous task, because it is in the action of being morally virtuous that one feels gratification.

In line with a developmental viewpoint, Annas (2011) an Aristotelian virtue ethicist, posed the important question of how we are guided to carry out virtuous actions. She suggested that virtuous dispositions are active and developing from their inception;



thus in the field of human development, researchers' interest is in how virtue may begin. Research has not examined this question, although research on the development of moral values may be relevant. Values are beliefs that individuals hold that govern their decisions about right and wrong, and moral virtues are dispositions to behave in the right manner; therefore parents' and children's moral values should have a strong influence on what they consider to be moral virtues. This understanding does not preclude moral virtues from influencing moral values, but it is not the focus here. Research supports Annas's argument that morality may be active and developing and suggests that parents are influential in the socialization of children's moral values, particularly through the nature of children's experiences in close relationships and the quality and substance of parent-child conversations (Grusec, 2006; Grusec & Hastings, 2007; Thompson & Winer, 2014; Wainryb & Recchia, 2014). Looking at older children, adolescents' parents' morality positively predicted adolescents' morality and the predictors had a stronger association with self-transcendence values such as benevolence and universalism, as opposed to self-enhancement values such as power and achievement (Barni, Ranieri, Scabini, & Rosnati, 2011; White & Matawie, 2004). Annas (2011) argues that initially children may accept their parents' view of virtuous traits such as honesty as being defined as telling the truth and trust that their parents believe it is the right thing to do. However, with maturation and their own experience with honesty, they may question the meaning given to them and eventually form their own.

Like Aristotle before her, Annas suggested that moral virtues must be practiced to be gained and likens this to learning a skill. This implies that there are beginners and

those who are experts. For example, when learning to play the flute, the expert's knowledge is accepted and there are generally attempts to follow it because there is no way for novices to know otherwise. However, once skill is attained, flautists may gain further insight from their own experiences and comprehend how to use their newfound, more developed, skill to think about melody and harmony and change their actions based on this. Perhaps they will opt to play more challenging music or try playing by ear using their recently acquired expertise guided by their personal desire. Applying this idea to gratitude, for those children who are encouraged to say "thank you" or are required by their parents to write thank you notes, initially they are acting on a partial and passive understanding of gratitude. As they develop and have more experience with gratitude, they may become able to act as someone who experiences gratitude, not someone just following the expert, and may behave based on their own internalized principles. Thus, through parents' socialization of values, moral behavior may be learned. It is also unrealistic to think that children will actually become experts before adulthood and experience gratitude as a moral virtue; yet it may be possible to try and understand the progression towards experiencing gratitude as a moral virtue.

So, then, how does one practice gratitude? The final aspect of gratitude to be addressed before considering a theory of its development is the connection between gratitude and moral obligation. Recall from the definition of gratitude as a moral virtue that a benefactor, acting freely and intentionally, does something for a beneficiary, and the beneficiary, acting freely and intentionally, must repay with something of value to the benefactor, if possible. Thus, as a virtue, gratitude creates a moral obligation because

under the stated conditions, the beneficiary has a duty to repay the benefactor (McConnell, 2013). It is important to note that an obligation of gratitude is not an outwardly enforced duty because it is the actual feeling toward the benefactor that creates a psychological duty to repay (Piaget, 1972). Favors should be returned, although without outside pressure. Considering the definition of moral virtue as acting on righteous principles, and considering that living a virtuous life brings joy, this implies that conducting one's life in a moral way cannot be conceived of as a negative duty. Therefore, gratitude as a moral virtue inherently elicits a moral obligation that creates positive connections between people. It is the sense of connection between the benefactor and the beneficiary that creates gratitude in the beneficiary. The beneficiary may then become the benefactor, creating a constructive cycle of social connectedness and prosocial behavior that encourages positive feelings between individuals, in this case benefactors and beneficiaries.

Some scholars have suggested that feeling an obligation to repay impedes the emergence of gratitude because if gratitude increases, then indebtedness decreases, and vice versa, implying that the two cannot coexist (Watkins, Scheer, Ovnicek, & Kolts, 2006). These authors were interested in determining whether the debt of gratitude is internally generated or a form of economic indebtedness, conceptualizing indebtedness as an economic debt defined as a form of forced repayment for a favor or other benefit. According to Piaget, an autonomous obligation develops through moral reasoning (Piaget, 1932/1960), and will therefore not be controlled by outside forces such as an economic debt would be. Therefore, an economic debt would be a heteronomous

obligation that would not lead to gratitude and heteronomous obligations are not generated in the same way as autonomous obligations. Watkins (2014) also argued that there are distinct cognitive appraisals leading to indebtedness and to gratitude. This may be, but the conceptualization of economic indebtedness is different from the indebtedness related to gratitude as a virtue, which is internally generated and may be considered autonomous obligation and thus cannot be analogous to an economic debt (Mendonça & Pahlares, 2018; Tudge et al., 2015).

### **Moral Development**

Piaget's theory of moral development is both instructive and explanatory when examining the ability of children to reason morally. It is imperative to understand the theoretical assumptions that inform changes in moral reasoning in order to understand at what point children may begin to recognize a moral obligation and, therefore, experience gratitude. Piaget's interest in children's moral development was focused on what they think and, therefore, in how they reason morally (Mayer, 2005). Using stories with moral themes and listening to children's opinions about the stories, he found that their understanding of rules, moral judgments, and punishment evolved in a progressive manner as they aged. Piaget's stages of cognitive development provide an understanding of how children's cognitive functioning may affect their progression through the stages of moral development, thereby influencing social cognitive development (Piaget & Inhelder, 1955/1970).

When considering Piaget's developmental stages, it is important to remember that the stages do not correspond precisely with exact ages and changes in individual children

and that the appearance of stages varies depending on the child (Piaget, 1972).

According to Piaget, from roughly age two through approximately age seven, children are in the pre-operational stage (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). It is characterized by egocentric thinking and very early on in the stage children cannot understand the concept of rules. They still have difficulties distinguishing appearance from reality. When responding to questions based on moral dilemmas, most children in Piaget's research were only able to think of material consequences in response to not following the rules, not the intention behind the breach in rule-following (Piaget, 1932/1960). Considering gratitude, children may be instructed by their parents to show thankfulness with a hug or to verbally thank those who have given them something or helped them, but it is unlikely that they have a real understanding of what their actions or words mean and are acting merely by following instructions. In this period, most children only know unilateral respect, that which they have for their parents or other authority figures, and understand that they must conform to their demands (Piaget, 1932/1960). There is no mutuality. Even when children begin to understand rules, they are accepted as immutable and externally created.

As children gradually progress from the preoperational to the concrete operational stage, around age seven, their perspective on what is right and wrong may become more nuanced (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). As in all of Piaget's stages, this shift does not happen at once and likely began in the preceding stage. In the case of right and wrong, as change is taking place, children's perspectives may differ based on the context in which they find themselves. One way for the change to occur is through interactions with peers, and

children may begin to recognize that rules may be changed by common consent (Piaget, 1972). Cognitively, children begin to reason logically about concrete events, although they still have trouble reasoning about abstract concepts and hypothetical situations. The ability to take others' perspectives helps facilitate their movement in thinking, as does peer interaction that encourages negotiating rules with others based on mutual respect and contemplating their own personal views with regard to right and wrong (Piaget, 1932/1960). It is during this stage that autonomous normative systems are formed (Piaget, 1972). The distinction between unilateral and mutual respect is important and forms part of the basis for obligation. When an obligation is based on duty, the rule or norm that one must follow is understood as already established and is, therefore, heteronomous (Piaget, 1932/1960). In contrast, when a norm is mutually created, the individuals who feel obligated to follow it have autonomously participated in its formation. Further, mutual respect and negotiation with peers encourages children to understand that their perspective may be different from those around them and this promotes a decrease in egocentrism. At this point, gratitude may be expressed spontaneously; however, expressions of gratitude may still be used because of a fear of disapproval and because of the rule-based social expectations associated with gratitude that children may have been taught by parents, family members, teachers, and others with whom the children interact.

According to Piaget, the formal operational stage begins at approximately age 12 and is characterized by an increasing ability to reason abstractly, but, again, this shift likely began in the previous stage (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). Children become concerned

with the hypothetical and the future and are able to create hypotheses and test them. They can think logically about abstract propositions and build theories. They have the potential for mature moral reasoning. These abilities allow adolescents to create hypothetical worlds and decide what behaviors are most desired in them. Contemporary adolescents are exposed to a multitude of influences and many are able to make judgments about what they see. At this stage in development, adolescents for the most part have learned to respect people's differing points of view and feel internal responsibility for their actions (Piaget, 1954/1981). They continue the progression from heteronomous morality to autonomous morality that likely already began in the preoperational stage and are able to construct principles regarding how they believe it is best to act (Piaget, 1932/1960). They are able to build personal relationships based on mutual respect and in this way moral obligations are created between individuals based on positive internal principles, rather than externally enforced ideals. Thus, at this point they are able to begin experiencing virtuous gratitude.

### **Operationalization of Gratitude**

Having established the basis for my conceptualization of gratitude, to avoid confusion it is important to understand what may be a more appropriate term than gratitude for research said to deal with the concept of gratitude, but lacks interest in who one feels grateful to or whether reciprocation is involved. It is only by examining how gratitude has been operationalized that it becomes possible to name what appears to be a distinct concept. Current gratitude science has been dominated by research that was begun by social psychologists in the field of positive psychology. Gratitude seemed to be

a good fit because Positive Psychology strives to foster greater well-being for individuals (Seligman & Csikszentmihayli, 2000) and correlational studies demonstrated a relation between gratitude and well-being that seemed promising (Froh, Wilson, Emmons, Card, & Bono, 2011; McCullough, Emmons & Tsang, 2002; Owens & Patterson, 2013; Rash, Matsuba, & Prkachin, 2011). Problematically, regardless of the definition of gratitude provided by researchers in these studies, gratitude has been operationalized in ways that do not match the conceptualizations (Gulliford et al., 2013; Navarro & Morris, 2018; Tudge et al., 2015). Thus, due to measures that do not match conceptualizations, it is difficult to unpack what concept is actually correlated with well-being. Upon further examination, these measures do not seem to be measuring the concept of gratitude, but rather appreciation. Although measures may not usually be addressed before establishing conceptualizations, in the case of gratitude, an examination of them is necessary to explain the conceptual confounds.

The Gratitude Questionnaire–6 (GQ–6: McCullough et al., 2002) is the questionnaire that has been used by far the most often in gratitude research and in particular with children and adolescents, even though it is far more reliable with adult samples (Card, 2018; Navarro & Morris, 2018). The GQ–6 uses a likert-type scale, which is meant to measure frequency and strength of what are designated feelings of gratitude. It uses items such as “I have so much in life to be thankful for,” “If I had to list everything that I felt grateful for, it would be a very long list,” and “As I get older I find myself more able to appreciate the people, events, and situations that have been a part of my life history” (McCullough et al., 2002). Gratitude has long been considered an



interpersonal emotion (Algoe et al., 2016; Heider, 1958); therefore, it is remarkable that one of the two items that actually mentions people is in a general comment encompassing all things in life that one may appreciate. What is more, this was recently removed because of lack of fit for a younger population, leaving the measure with “I am grateful to a wide variety of people” as the only direct reference to people (Chaplin, John, Rindfleisch, & Froh, 2018). This is problematic because some scholars using this and similar measures include benefactors in their conceptualization, but then have no measures that include them, thus missing a key element of gratitude. Second, this questionnaire seems to actually be measuring levels of appreciation or positive feeling for life, not gratitude (Gulliford et al., 2013; Tudge et al., 2015).

Two other common measures have the same problem, the Gratitude Adjective Checklist (GAC: McCullough et al., 2002) and the Gratitude, Resentment, Appreciation Test–Short Form (GRAT: Watkins, Woodward, Stone, & Kolts, 2003). They are similar to the GQ–6, in that they do not make a connection between gratefulness to someone as a result of other people’s actions nor are they interested in whether there is a wish to repay them. Therefore, these scales do not promote the ability to understand gratitude’s origins. For example, the GAC is made up of three words: grateful, thankful, appreciative, and people are instructed to rate how much they have felt them in the recent past (McCullough et al., 2002). There is no way to gauge if people even perceive these words as being different from each other. In fact, a study including focus groups suggests that individuals have myriad understandings of the words related to gratitude (Halberstadt et al., 2016).

Just as dubious as the GAC, the GRAT is composed of 44 items representing what the authors propose are different traits that a grateful person would manifest. The following are descriptions of the various traits: (a) a grateful person would not feel deprived (sense of abundance), (b) they would appreciate the simple pleasures in life (simple appreciation factor), and (c) they would recognize the contribution of others to their achievements and well-being (appreciation for others) (Watkins et al., 2003). Ironically, a fourth factor was part of the original measure consisting of items linked to feeling and expressing gratitude to a specific other, but it was removed. Considering these positive traits, it is not surprising it was easy to validate the measure using a sample composed of middle-class North American college students, and even less surprising that they were positively correlated with subjective well-being. Moreover, a meta-analysis conducted of the reliabilities of these methods (with the addition of the GRAT short form) demonstrates that 53% of gratitude studies have been conducted with a majority of European American college students and although there are studies with more diverse ages, most of the samples comprise middle-class European Americans (Card, 2018). Considering that there is a section on the GRAT titled sense of abundance that examines lack of any kind of deprivation, which points more towards materialism than gratitude, middle-class samples would likely respond to these items differently than those in a lower social class (Chaplin, Hill, & John, 2014; Ku, 2014). This lack of diversity has long been a problem in psychological research (Arnett, 2008; Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010); thus it is not a surprise that the GQ-6 was not as appropriate for use

with non-English speaking samples, and even less so with samples not from Western industrialized societies such as Iran (Card, 2018).

Based on the basic dictionary definitions of gratitude and appreciation reported earlier, it seems these measures are actually examining appreciation and not gratitude because they fail to examine gratitude to a benefactor and returning a kindness. A small group of scholars supports this argument and finds that gratitude and appreciation are confounded in much of the research (Fagley, 2016; Rusk, Vella-Brodrick, & Waters, 2015; Tudge et al, 2015). Fagley (2016) argues that gratitude is encompassed under the broader concept of appreciation and that appreciation actually consists of eight different dimensions that include *awe* (e.g., the beautiful sunrise); a *have* focus (e.g., appreciation for what one has); a *ritual* (e.g., using routines or practices to foster noticing and valuing something); *present moment* (e.g., valuing the moment); *self- or social-comparison* (e.g., comparing to others to feel appreciation); **gratitude** (e.g., feeling grateful to a benefactor); *loss* (e.g., appreciation triggered by experiencing loss) ; and *interpersonal appreciation* (e.g., noticing and valuing a person in one's life). Comparing Fagley's definition to the measures presented, it appears that they are actually measuring the overarching concept of appreciation, not gratitude and the concept being studied should be named appreciation accordingly. Therefore, for the rest of this dissertation I will use the term appreciation to refer to the concept examined using such measures.

## **Operationalization of Gratitude as a Virtue**

Tudge and colleagues have suggested several useful and innovative methods for studying gratitude as a virtue based on the Bronfenbrenner's (2001) bioecological theory that have been used in their study of gratitude (Tudge et al., 2015). These include asking open-ended questions aimed at understanding a child's response to a benefactor's good intention, vignettes designed to examine whether children feel they should help a benefactor or repay a favor and the reasoning behind their answer, and questionnaires designed to provide data allowing researchers to better understand the cognitive processes involved with gratitude. Moreover, interviews have been created for children and parents to better comprehend their thoughts and feelings surrounding gratitude. From the parents' perspective the interviews evaluate both how the parents' themselves feel about gratitude, but also their children's gratitude. Surveys have also been created to examine gratitude **to** a benefactor, as opposed to gratitude **for** something.

## **Conceptualization of Values**

Considering that values will affect behavior, it is important to discern how children determine which values are important. Spending time with their parents and in their families is the first way in which children start to comprehend what values are meaningful in their cultural group (White & Klein, 2002). Values are defined as "(a) beliefs (b) pertaining to desirable end states or modes of conduct, that (c) transcend specific situations, (d) guide selection or evaluation of behavior, people, and events, and (e) are ordered by importance relative to other values to form a system of value priorities" (Schwartz, 1994, p. 20). Human behavior is guided by value systems and

these systems form progressively over time (Freitas, Tudge, Palhares, & Prestes, 2016). Notably, according to Piaget (1936/1960), when a child acquires symbolic function (i.e. the capability to use symbols to represent perceived objects and occasions), the value of an object becomes lasting and the satisfaction of an object or person is no longer limited to the immediate moment. The child can gradually both remember and delay satisfaction. Thus, as children age, for most youth hedonistic values are progressively replaced by virtuous values (Piaget, 1954/1981). According to Freitas and colleagues (2016), parents transmit their cultural group's values to their children through interaction. In support of this argument, La Taille (2006) found that adolescents said their parents had a strong influence on their values. Based on this knowledge, examining parents' values related to gratitude may provide insight into the connection between parental values and moral behavior through children's practice of gratitude.

Based on the above conceptualization of values, it is not surprising that sociocultural differences exist when considering parental values. Interestingly, Schwartz (1992) found 10 main value types that exist in a multitude of societies, one of which was benevolence. Considering that benevolence was found to be important by Schwartz in all of the societies represented in this study and the likely existence of a relation between benevolence and gratitude, it is probable that parents will value gratitude for their children. Determining whether parents' place importance on gratitude treated as a value for their children will be useful in further understanding how parents' socialize gratitude. Tudge and Freitas' (2011) Parents' Values for their Children Questionnaire is an ideal

way to examine whether parents consider gratitude as significant for their children and whether this significance affects how parents may socialize gratitude in children.

### **Operationalization of Values**

Tudge and Freitas (2011) created a measure called The Parents' Values for their Children Questionnaire designed to capture parents' opinions on what they feel are important values for their children. The questionnaire asks parents to rate 27 characteristics that represent certain values and whether they feel that it is important that their children manifest these characteristics as adults. There are five possible responses that vary from "not at all important" to "very important." In addition, parents are asked to choose the three most important characteristics and the most important among those three. In contrast, parents are asked to choose the three least important characteristics and the least important among those three. This questionnaire is useful because gratitude is one of the characteristics included. Examples of other characteristics listed are ambitious, assertive, respectful, empathetic, honest, and following rules.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Examining gratitude from the perspective of development, the aim is to understand from where gratitude originates, how gratitude may change with ontogeny, and how its system of influences may affect its evolution (Cairns & Elder, 2001). Considering this aim, Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory is well-suited to examine the growth of gratitude in children and adolescents because his PPCT model incorporates multiple elements that are influential in a child's development (Bronfenbrenner, 2001; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The PPCT model emphasizes the significance of

proximal processes, person characteristics, context, and time and, importantly, allows for the examination of the interrelations between children and their environments.

### **Proximal Processes**

Proximal processes are at the very core of Bronfenbrenner's theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). They are the types of interactive activities that occur between individuals and the people, symbols, and objects that are found in the individuals' environment. It is in the course of these interactions (which become progressively more advanced over an extended time period) that the developing individual gains skills and knowledge that may lead to positive developmental outcomes. Considering the role of proximal processes, interactions between parents and children are fundamental in the development of virtuous gratitude. Virtues are acquired by habit and practice, as opposed to being innate (Annas, 2011; Aristotle, 1985); therefore, parental instruction regarding the proper expression of gratitude and how this may change with ontogeny will be crucial in developing gratitude.

Beyond the more obvious encouragement of parents to young children to say "thank you" for a benefit received (Visser, 2008), research suggests that parents are significant in the socialization of children's moral development. As previously discussed, this influence is seen especially when examining encounters children have with close others and also in the character of parent-child conversations (Grusec & Hastings, 2007; Thompson & Winer, 2014; Wainryb & Recchia, 2014). Furthermore, the few studies conducted examining the development of gratitude (although these studies may actually be examining the related concept of appreciation) involving parental

interaction support the essential role of parents in its development (Hussong, Langley, Coffman, Halberstadt, & Costanzo, 2018; Ramsey et al., 2018; Rothenberg et al., 2016). Taken together, these results emphasize the strong influence of children's interactions with parents, both parental discussions with children regarding gratitude and parents acting as role models to promote the development of gratitude.

### **Person**

Personal characteristics are the foundation for any interaction in which an individual engages and include such things as temperament, age, and ability. When considering gratitude, individuals' levels of cognitive development will play a key role because one must be able to take another's perspective and act autonomously to practice gratitude as a virtue. Piaget suggested that children's moral development is connected to cognitive development and both domains are important when considering the development of gratitude (Piaget, 1932/1960). It is only as children gradually move from the preoperational stage to the concrete operational stage, roughly from about seven years old, that they may begin to take another's perspective. For the most part they use logic to reason about concrete events, although not as effectively about abstract thoughts. They begin to recognize that by common consent rules of a game may be changed (Piaget, 1972). According to Piaget, as children engage in more play with other children, the nature of cooperation drives children to practice reciprocity; therefore, it drives the moral universality and generosity that exists in their relationships (1932/1960). Autonomous normative systems are progressively formed at this point in development (Piaget, 1972).



In the development of gratitude, autonomous normative systems are important because they will help children and adolescents distinguish between heteronomous and autonomous behavior and autonomous behavior is required for the practice of gratitude. When feeling obliged to follow a norm that is understood as already established, it is heteronomous. However, when a norm is mutually created, individuals who may feel obligated to follow it have autonomously participated in its formations and, therefore, act autonomously. Thus, there is a change from unilateral respect to mutual respect. Negotiation with peers and mutual respect encourages children to comprehend that their perspective may vary from others and this promotes a decrease in egocentrism.

As mentioned earlier, children progressively move into the formal operational stage at approximately 12 and increasingly gain the capacity to reason abstractly (Piaget, 1954/1981). Children have the potential for mature moral reasoning. At this stage in development, many adolescents have learned to respect differing points of view held by others and feel internal responsibility for their actions (Piaget, 1954/1981). Importantly, they are moving from acting based on heteronomous morality to acting based on autonomous morality (Piaget, 1932/1960). This ability is crucial when considering gratitude as a virtue because it necessitates that the beneficiary freely reciprocates based on autonomous will, not heteronomous will.

Research supports the idea that cognitive abilities are related to gratitude. Over a span of two years, researchers found that what children understood about their own and others' mental states at age four mediated the relation between emotion knowledge at age three and emerging gratitude understanding at age five (Nelson, et. al., 2013). Moreover,

Freitas and colleagues (2012) determined that theory of mind was connected to 5-year-olds understanding of emerging gratitude such that the better their abilities with theory of mind, the more able they were to understand gratitude (Freitas, O'Brien, Nelson, & Marcovitch, 2012). This is logical because without the ability to understand another person's perspective, reciprocation taking into consideration another person's needs and desires is impossible.

### **Context**

A key area in bioecological theory is context because all interactions take place in a setting that will affect the interactions (Bronfenbrenner, 2001). Moreover, settings are situated in larger contexts, or systems, that may also have a tremendous effect on human development. For the purposes of the development of gratitude, the focus here will be on family context, found in the microsystem, and cultural context, found in the macrosystem. Bronfenbrenner addressed ethnic variations within the United States as part of the mesosystem; however, cultural differences as part of the macrosystem affect all of the lower levels of the systems so will be addressed as part of the macrosystem in this dissertation.

For developing children, their parents or caretakers are the first and primary instructors in their lives and research demonstrates that parent-child relationships have a profound effect on children's positive development (Cabrera, Shannon, & Tamis-Lemonda, 2007; Pinquard & Teubert, 2010). There is still little known regarding gratitude, but parent-child conversations seem instrumental in gratitude development (Hussong et al., 2018; Visser, 2008). Moreover, there are strong links between early

home environment, particularly interactions with caretakers, and children's cognitive development (Fox, Almas, Degnan, Nelson, & Zeanah, 2011); and cognitive development has been linked to the understanding of gratitude (Nelson et al., 2013). Where the home is located will also have tremendous significance in a child's development because it will shape the behavior of everyone in the family.

Cultural context is key to understanding development because researchers must have an understanding of parents' culturally and historically derived values and beliefs about parenting and how these same values and beliefs influence both the activities in which parents engage with their children, and the ways in which they interact with them. Parents' values and beliefs about child rearing are derived from the cultural group of which they are a part and cannot simply be considered individual constructs. In his cultural-ecological theory, Tudge defines a cultural group as "any group that has a shared set of values, beliefs, practices, access to resources, social institutions, a sense of identity, and that passes on the values, beliefs, etc. to the next generation" (Tudge et al., 2006, p. 1447). Based on this definition, diverse societies or diverse ethnic, racial, or socioeconomic groups within any society comprise different cultural groups. Considering values found to be important in multiple cultures (Bilsky, Janik, & Schwartz, 2011), it seems that virtuous gratitude may also be significant. However, the promotion of its expression and the strategies that parents employ to foster it in their children will likely differ based on the society's cultural values (Merçon-Vargas, 2017; Tudge et al., 2015). The importance of addressing cultural context has been demonstrated in extensive research examining the variation of expression of gratitude across multiple continents and

countries (Mendonça, Merçon-Vargas, Payir, & Tudge, 2018; Wang et al., 2015). Both similarities and differences in patterns of gratitude expression have been found in how children and adolescents say they would respond to a benefactor granting their greatest wish, demonstrating that although the majority of cultures experience gratitude, the experience is culture dependent.

### **Time**

The bioecological theory incorporates different kinds of time. Ontogenetic time has clear implications for any type of child development. When considering the development of gratitude, the everyday activities that occur over an extended period of time as children mature cognitively and socially give them the ability to practice gratitude and are likely to help them internalize it (Annas, 2011). Thus, once they have the sociocognitive abilities needed to fully experience gratitude, it is more likely to develop into a virtue.

Beyond the changes over ontogenetic time that will affect the developing individual, other aspects of historical time may be taken into consideration, such as those that affect the macrosystem. This may be particularly important when examining immigrant families, as in this study, and what changes over time may affect them. An informative framework for examining cultural values is the Family Change Theory that was inspired by the shifts in cultural values found when populations living in the majority world moved from being more rural to more urban in search of better employment and education (Kağıtçıbaşı & Ataca, 2005). As parents gained education and understood the autonomous characteristics that their children would need to succeed,

they began promoting more autonomous values. Kağıtçıbaşı's theory (2007) was not based on the movements of immigrant families; however, there are notable similarities between families moving from rural to urban areas and immigrant families moving from one country to another such that both are groups relocating from one area to a disparate area in search of opportunities. With the move, both may have their values affected in comparable ways. In fact, Kağıtçıbaşı (2007) supports her theory with evidence of Hispanic immigrant families and their continual emotional interdependency, but less financial interdependency after moving to the United States. In the context of immigration, acculturation, or the cultural adjustment of a group or an individual by adapting to another culture (Berry, 1980), is responsible for the changes in values as opposed to a move from a rural to an urban environment, although for some immigrants that may also be a factor.

Kağıtçıbaşı moved beyond the more traditional collectivistic-individualistic binary perspective often found in cross-cultural research and added two dimensions to allow for more cultural variability: agency (ranging from autonomy to heteronomy) and interpersonal distance (ranging from relatedness to separation). Kağıtçıbaşı herself emphasized the importance of considering cultural differences on a continuous dimension, but she also proposed "prototypes" of cultural values. For example, she placed the United States in the autonomy-separate quadrant based on the commonplace belief that Americans promote values of individual achievement and success over others in the group. In contrast, more collectivistic societies may be assumed to belong in the heteronomous-related quadrant, but research demonstrates a change in traditional

societies as people move to metropolitan centers for more opportunities and education (Kağıtçıbaşı & Ataca, 2005). Notably, parents tend to value both autonomy and relatedness upon moving to an urban environment where there is more competition for places in school and for jobs. For example, individual academic success may become more important, but a feeling of being related to the group is still highly valued. The co-existence of autonomy and relatedness is crucial to be able to appropriately express virtuous gratitude because one must understand the benefactor's intentionality and wishes (relatedness), and to reciprocate to the benefactor autonomously.

CHAPTER III  
LITERATURE REVIEW

**Gratitude**

As previously stated, to further the field of gratitude research within developmental science, specific nomenclature must be used to designate what concept is being examined because it is unclear what behaviors may be best to promote to foster gratitude, particularly in children. I argue that the most advantageous way to study gratitude is as a virtue, not appreciation. However, the research conducted on appreciation is relevant as the concepts of gratitude and appreciation are typically treated as being identical; therefore, literature from both will be reviewed here. Regardless of the term originally used by researchers, if the study involved is using measures that actually examine appreciation, that is the name used below for the sake of clarity. The only exception is when referring to gratitude interventions, because it is not always possible to know the intention of the intervention design based on meta-analyses.

**Appreciation in the Field of Positive Psychology**

Attention has been given in academia and the media to the findings regarding appreciation found in positive psychology, both for adults and adolescents (Algoe et al., 2008; Brooks, 2015; Froh et al., 20011; Hoy et al., 2013), because of the possibility that it may enhance people's lives. As was highlighted earlier, the conceptualization often used

in these studies may be of multiple concepts related to gratitude and appreciation, but what is actually being studied is appreciation. Researchers have found that appreciation is positively associated with a plethora of indicators of overall well-being, such as higher self-esteem, happiness, optimism, hope, greater life satisfaction, and prosociality (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Froh et al., 2011; Rash et al., 2011). For adolescents in particular an association has even been found with a better school experience (Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, 2008). These results have led to increased interest in how appreciation's favorable aspects may be used to improve lives, both for adults and children, spurring a deluge of popular psychology self-help books, magazine articles, websites, and school-based interventions. Based on initial correlational research, it seems that the writers expounding the myriad benefits of appreciation as they have defined it are supporting people in their endeavor to become happier and this should be advantageous. However, further research suggests that what are being called gratitude interventions may not be particularly effective (Davis et al., 2016).

Recent meta-analyses focused on gratitude research revealed that despite the extensive promotion of gratitude interventions designed by scholars in the school of positive psychology they are not very effective in general and are likely completely ineffective for children and adolescents (Dickens, 2017; Renshaw & Steeves, 2016). Although gratitude interventions may be minimally effective when used with adults and college students, results demonstrate that there have been negative or null effects for children. Renshaw and Steeves (2016) focused their meta-analysis on the usefulness of gratitude interventions in youth and schools and found that there was no direct evidence



that gratitude interventions ameliorated any kind of behavior or academic performance. These same scholars lament the lack of conceptual clarity found in gratitude studies and highlight that there are no significant associations with performance-based variables rated by informants that would have any benefit to teachers or school psychologists. They also found evidence that gratitude measured in this way may act as a subjective well-being indicator in youth. Therefore, it is not a surprise that researchers find that gratitude is correlated with markers of well-being.

The few gratitude interventions that seem to demonstrate marginal effectiveness are generally exceptions that may make the results seem more effective than they are. For example, one group of studies at first seemed to be useful in increasing well-being, but the effectiveness was inflated by the comparison of a gratitude condition with a hassle condition that likely increased stress in the hassle group (Davis et al., 2016). Moreover, no differences in effectiveness were found between gratitude interventions and other positive intervention conditions meaning that any positive intervention may have positive effects, not gratitude interventions in particular (Dickens, 2017). These results, along with other literature, bring into question what concept may be confounded with gratitude as it is conceptualized and operationalized in this research to produce such lack of results.

### **Appreciation in Relationships**

Appreciation has also been examined by scholars focused on its possible effects on relationships between people (Algoe, 2012; Gordon, Impett, Kogan, Oveis, & Keltner, 2012; Lambert & Fincham, 2011). As in positive psychology, the conceptualizations often used lack any reference to reciprocation and therefore what may actually being

studied is likely appreciation. However, research on gratitude in relationships creates confusion because some studies look at appreciation between people and how that appreciation is communicated (Algoe et al., 2016; Lambert & Fincham, 2011). This research may appear more like an examination of gratitude because of the dyadic nature of the studies and the dyadic nature of gratitude. Moreover, researchers try to determine whether communicating appreciation has more positive effects than not communicating appreciation to a partner, which seems somewhat like examining if ingratitude is negative in relationships. Problematically, none of these studies includes reciprocation in the conceptualization of gratitude given nor is it necessary; thus what is being investigated is appreciation.

This work has focused mainly on adults and late adolescents so it is not as relevant when considering the development of gratitude in children and early adolescents; however, it does examine important positive benefits of appreciation in relationships so is worth briefly reviewing. Social evolutionary theories suggest that gratitude may have evolved to promote reciprocal altruism in that it allows for the continuous exchange of valuable benefits between nonrelatives (McCullough, Kimeldorf, & Cohen, 2008). Algoe (2012) used this and other theories from relationship science to create the find-remind-bind theory positing that appreciation is unique among other positive emotions because it has the ability to promote lasting relationships by encouraging partners to continue participating in the relationship. Algoe's theory is useful, but when conducting research to find support for it, despite social evolutionary theories' focus on reciprocal gratitude, gratitude in its true sense is not being measured; it is appreciation. Research supports the

find-remind-bind theory with studies testing the first of the premises; appreciation has the ability to help find a worthy partner. Benefactors were more likely to provide an unknown beneficiary their contact details when beneficiaries recognized the time and effort put in to the help provided by benefactors (Williams & Bartlett, 2015). Not surprisingly, a meta-analysis suggests that when examining appreciation's enhancement of prosociality that appreciation in response to others' kindness had a much stronger effect than appreciation that focuses merely on what is valued in life (Ma, Tunney, & Ferguson, 2017). Current measures used to test this theory have many advantages in gratitude research.

As with most social science research, scientists interested in examining relationships have used questionnaires to examine appreciation. However, recently other more useful methods have become more common such as daily diaries and direct lab observation of couples when they are communicating about actions in their relationship that they perceive should elicit appreciation (Algoe, Gable, & Maisel, 2010; Gordon et al., 2012). These researchers may be actually studying appreciation, but these methods would be useful in investigating gratitude as well. Daily diaries allow participants to report on what they perceive to be their partner's and their own considerate actions, their emotional responses to these actions, both individually and based on partner interactions, and overall feelings about the relationship. Participants could also report whether their partners' reciprocated to them for what they had done. This provides greater insight into appreciation's effects on the dyadic interaction of a couple. Additionally, observation provides rich data that strengthens a multi-method approach to understanding how

appreciation functions in relationships and provides researchers with an opportunity to examine whether participant self-reports correspond to coder observations. These methods point out the benefits of a more interpersonal approach to examining both appreciation and gratitude and the insights that different research methods can bring to gratitude research.

### **Development of Appreciation**

Research investigating children and adolescents' relation to virtuous gratitude is revealing, but it is important to delve further to understand more about parents' roles in gratitude development. There is a dearth of research examining the role of parents in child and adolescent gratitude development. One study using the GQ-6 found a small significant correlation between mothers' and children's appreciation, but not fathers' appreciation (Hoy et al., 2013). This result may be of some interest, but the use of the GQ-6 brings the results into question because it is unclear if gratitude is what is being measured.

Hussong and colleagues (2018) took a different approach and tried to determine how parents influence their children's gratitude through parenting behavior such as discussing gratitude with their children. In this research, gratitude is treated as whatever parents assume it to be which is different from targeting appreciation; however, parents often mean appreciation when discussing gratitude. This work is valuable, but is limited to a very specific sample from a homogeneous (both racially and socio-economically) group. In order to examine ways parents may influence their children's appreciation, research from this group examined the meditational role of niche selection between

parents' and children's appreciation (Rothenberg et al., 2016). In other words, how does a parent's propensity to enroll children in appreciation-inducing activities affect the relation between parent and child appreciation, as perceived by the parent. Results suggest that parents' use of niche selection partially mediated the significantly positive association found between parents' appreciation and parents' report of their children's appreciation.

The above results suggest that parents who are more appreciative would likely prioritize appreciation in parenting practices, but this sample was limited to one cultural group; therefore it is necessary to investigate further how different cultural values may affect appreciation.

### **Gratitude as a Virtue**

Thus far it is clear to see that there is far more research on appreciation than gratitude, although there are few interesting exceptions. In his well-known book on interpersonal relations, Heider (1958) conceptualized gratitude as an interpersonal emotion that one cannot direct at oneself and that is evoked when receiving a benefit resulting from another person's purposeful actions. Moreover, the perceived intentionality of the benefactor was seen as a key element in shaping the beneficiary's sense of gratitude because he posited that it is based on the beneficiary's theory of mind. The ability to take the perspective of the benefactor would help the beneficiary infer the benefactor's well-meaning intention, which would result in the beneficiary feeling loved and esteemed and lead to reciprocation. Compellingly, in the early 2010s scholars examining theory of mind in young children in fact found a positive correlation between

theory of mind and understanding of gratitude (Freitas et al., 2012). Based on writings of Adam Smith, Heider (1958) suggested that reciprocation was an important component of gratitude. A second study by a clinical psychologist based on clinical observations examining pathological narcissists determined that such individuals were seen as incapable of either experiencing or expressing sincere gratitude (Heilbrunn, 1972). Their failure to recognize gifts received and their lack of gratitude resulted in negative cascades of emotion felt by benefactors, such as rejection, depression or anxiety. Although these studies were conducted with adults, these examples illustrate that some earlier work in psychology focused on gratitude in its traditional sense and that psychologists were concerned with its positive and negative effects on relationships. If the focus has shifted away from gratitude as a virtue, it is even more critical to move the attention back to it and to its development as some scholars have done (Tudge & Freitas, 2018).

### **Development of Gratitude in Children and Adolescents**

Emmons (2004) argued that the virtuous nature of gratitude may currently not be emphasized in Western culture and developmental science is poorer for it, but there is a growing base of developmental gratitude research and it has provided valuable findings (Castro et al., 2011; Freitas et al., 2012; Mendonça et al., 2018; Nelson et al., 2013; Rava & Freitas, 2013; Tudge & Freitas, 2018; Tudge, Freitas, Wang, Mokrova, & O'Brien, 2015; Wang et al., 2015). The first psychologist known to be concerned with the development of gratitude during the twentieth century viewed it in the virtuous sense (Baumgarten-Tramer, 1938). This Swiss psychologist asked 7- to 15-year-olds to write answers to questions seeking to know their greatest wish and what they would do for the

person who granted them their wish. Notably, this study of gratitude was not actually focused on how youth would feel, as studies of appreciation are, but how they would reciprocate after having received their heart's ultimate desire. Moreover, Baumgarten-Tramer advised that parents should stress the sense of community built through gratitude or eradicated by ingratitude, as opposed to focusing on its role in proper etiquette or forced obligation. The most significant findings of her research were the multiple ways children and adolescents express gratitude.

Baumgarten-Tramer's research focused on age-related changes in how children express gratitude in an attempt to understand its determinant factors, means of expression, and trajectory of development. The methods used in her research are quite different from those used in other gratitude studies. Open-ended vignettes and questions are employed to get a better understanding of what children think, feel, and understand about gratitude, depending on their stage of development. For example, children are asked specifically what they would do for a benefactor who has provided something the child wants or needs in order to examine the virtuous nature of gratitude. Freitas et al. (2011) were interested in replicating Baumgarten-Tramer's study, albeit with 7- to 14-year-olds. The analysis showed that expression of gratitude manifests itself in four types of gratitude that appear to develop sequentially with maturation, although it is unclear from results if all types develop in all people.

Baumgarten-Tramer (1938) and Freitas et al.'s (2011) findings were similar, even though the studies were conducted more than fifty years apart and on different continents. Coding responses based on what the participants said they would do for the person who

granted them their greatest wish, researchers found three types of gratitude. One type of gratitude was expressed verbally and was characterized by responding to benefactors with a common expression like “thank you” in response to a gift or an act of kindness and is the most minimal form of reciprocation. This was found in children of all ages, but it is difficult to know whether its use was based on children’s understanding of social etiquette, or if they were feeling profound gratitude but did not have another way of expressing their deeper feelings. The second type of gratitude was termed “concrete gratitude” and was conceptualized as occurring when children wanted to repay benefactors by offering something that would have value from the children’s point of view, but that may not have been of any value to the benefactors. Children’s wishing to give adults one of their toys as an expression of thanks is an example of this type of gratitude. This was seen most often in 8-year-old children and infrequently in children over 12 years old. Children understand that reciprocation is called for, but they do not yet have the ability to take the other’s point of view when choosing how to reciprocate, and, therefore, it may make it difficult to know why they are choosing to reciprocate.

The remaining two types of gratitude demonstrate older children may express gratitude in a way that is more closely related to virtuous gratitude and suggest strongly that they could be precursors to virtuous gratitude. The third type of gratitude was termed “connective gratitude” and was distinguished by the beneficiary’s recognition of the benefactor’s wants or needs as evidenced by the child’s choice of reciprocation. When children expressed connective gratitude, repayment could take the form of an expression of feelings, such as wanting to show long-term affection or appreciation for



the benefactors themselves, or giving something of value to the benefactors. Connective gratitude was seen much more often with children aged 11 and above than with those who were younger, and was characterized by the beneficiary appreciating not only the favor, but also the benefactor and the benefactor's needs or wishes. A much less frequently expressed fourth type of gratitude was termed "finalistic" and was conceptualized as being a hard worker if given a job or an excellent student in return for an opportunity to study in an excellent university. Finalistic gratitude was seldom found and only among 14- and 15-year-olds (Baumgarten-Tramer, 1938). Due to the rarity of finalistic gratitude, it has not been included as a measurable variable in other studies. Significantly, although all four kinds of gratitude have a connective element in that any form of gratitude may create a connection with another person, the important distinction in connective gratitude is that the beneficiary considers the specific needs, wants and desires of the benefactor before reciprocating.

Research indicating that there is more than one type of gratitude and that it develops with age inspired further research using different approaches to examine the development of gratitude in young children from a cognitive perspective. The aim of the studies was to investigate possible causes for the observance of the change noted in gratitude types by age to determine when children can actually comprehend the idea of gratitude or what may be emergent gratitude as opposed to merely repeating the words "thank you" based on their parents' command or learned politeness. A team of researchers conducted a longitudinal study spanning two years to determine

developmental precursors to children's early understanding of gratitude (Nelson et al., 2013). Findings indicated that children who better understood emotions and mental states earlier in their development showed a better, but not complete, understanding of gratitude at age five. Specifically, they found that how children reasoned and what they understood about their own and others' mental states at age four mediated the relation between emotion knowledge at age three and an understanding of emergent gratitude at age five. Using a different approach to examine the level of cognitive development needed in order to understand gratitude, Freitas et al. (2012) studied theory of mind (TOM) in 5-year-olds to determine if children who perform better on TOM tasks have a better understanding of gratitude. Findings suggested that TOM is positively correlated with a better understanding of gratitude; however, results were inconclusive when looking at TOM as a necessary condition for gratitude. An association between cognitive development and gratitude has been suggested, but further research is necessary to understand these links more thoroughly.

Multiple studies looking at gratitude from a developmental perspective were conducted in Brazil using morally-themed vignettes and interviews with three different age-groups, 5- to 6-year-olds, 7- to 8-year-olds, and 11- to 12-year-olds. The studies focused on what type of feelings children think another child may have towards a child versus an adult benefactor (Freitas et al., 2009a, 2009b). The responses indicated that younger children focused on the feelings of the beneficiary alone, but some of the older children began to discuss the feelings between the benefactor and the beneficiary. In a similar study with the same three age groups, besides discussing the feelings between the

benefactor and the beneficiary, children were asked about the beneficiary's obligation to return the favor or the help received. Then researchers examined if the justifications for whether or not to return the favor or help would vary among the three age groups (Castro et al., 2011). Results suggested that the majority of 5- to 6-year-olds thought the favor should be returned to avoid material or psychological consequences. For example, the children did not want to make their aunt angry by not helping her. A considerable change was noted between the first group and the 7- to 8-year-olds and 11- to 12-year olds. As Piaget (1932/1960) theorized, the majority of the two older groups thought that they should return the favor to avoid a negative judgment for not being willing to help, or heteronomous obligation. A similar study conducted in the United States with older children between the ages of seven to fourteen found similar results. Although in the US sample there was a clear progression with age such that the older children were more likely than younger children to help based on autonomous obligation (Mendonça & Palhares, 2018).

Considering that benevolence values are found in the majority of societies, it is not surprising to find commonalities in gratitude expression, but the different prioritization of how such values are manifested also leads to variation. Wang and colleagues (2015) were the first to examine gratitude expressions in China, as opposed to appreciation, and found some dramatic differences in the proportion of distinct gratitude types used. For example, in China verbal gratitude decreased with age and concrete gratitude remained relatively stable while the opposite was found in the United States where older children were found to be more likely to express verbal gratitude and less

likely to express concrete gratitude. The most disparate result was that children aged 7 to 10 in the United States were 76% less likely to express connective gratitude than were Chinese children of the same age. These differences suggest that cultural norms' influence on values is such that parents are likely to be influenced in their parenting practices around gratitude based on their cultural group.

Research conducted in various societies by Tudge and colleagues has found the same dramatic differences between the United States and China, but some more nuanced results as well (Liang & Kiang, 2018; Mendonça et al., 2018; O'Brien, Mendonça & Price, 2018; Palhares, Freitas, Merçon-Vargas, & Tudge, 2018). Importantly, this group of scholars has moved beyond focusing on the narrow European American middle-class samples that limit the majority of psychological research (Arnett, 2008; Heinrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010) to examine more diverse groups, both within and outside of the United States. Their cross-cultural body of research supports the importance of focusing on virtuous gratitude by demonstrating that it exists in the many societies where it has been studied.

Results from studies in Brazil, Guatemala, China, South Korea, Turkey, the United States, and Russia are not only informative, but highlight the need for diverse samples to understand a phenomenon (Mendonça et al., 2018; Heinrich et al., 2010). For example, when examining the use of gratitude expressions, variations were found. Children in China and South Korea were far more likely to express connective gratitude than those children in the other countries mentioned above (with children from China demonstrating the highest rate), followed by children in Russia and Turkey, with children

from the United States, Guatemala, and Brazil expressing the least amount of connective gratitude (Mendonça et al, 2018). It may be that China and Korea value relatedness more than the other societies do. In contrast, children in the United States expressed the highest rate of concrete gratitude, which was significantly different from children in all other countries except for Brazil. Guatemalan children were found to be the most likely to express gratitude verbally, followed by Brazilian children. In the same body of research, interesting similarities were revealed in age-related changes in gratitude.

Examining how age affects gratitude expression, results suggested that for each additional year, rates of concrete gratitude were lower in most societies (Mendonça et al., 2018). In the United States, China, and Russia, older children tended to express more connective gratitude. Interestingly, verbal gratitude was not related to age in the majority of countries studied. Thus, findings show what appears to be a strong tendency for children to progress beyond concrete gratitude, which is the most egocentric form of gratitude, with maturation. Such research demonstrates the value of examining various cultural groups to find both similarities and differences

### **Values**

The conceptualization of values used in this dissertation has been established as well as the likelihood that parents are a strong influence on their children's values. Therefore, it is important to understand how parents may prioritize values and an examination of literature with diverse samples may aid in this endeavor. The extensive research supporting Schwartz's value theory (Bilsky et al., 2011; Schwartz, 1994) supports the argument that values such as benevolence, which maps onto gratitude,

is hierarchically the most significant in the vast majority of societies examined.

However, although value structures are similar in all cultures, individuals within the different cultures may prioritize values differently. Thus the hierarchy of values may be comparable regardless of the society being examined, but the significance of each value within the society may be distinct. Therefore, insight into the importance placed on certain values is necessary and for this study, with a diverse sample including a large group of immigrants, an understanding of immigrant values is a key aspect of this knowledge.

### **Cultural Values in Immigrant Families**

Reviewing empirical literature examining immigrant values will likely help to better comprehend the diverse sample proposed in this study. Kağıtçıbaşı's two dimensions of agency, ranging from autonomy to heteronomy, and interpersonal distance, ranging from relatedness to separation, will be helpful in understanding these values (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007). Those cultures that strongly promote relatedness tend to focus on group harmony, family cohesion, interdependence, and conformity to group social norms. Traditionally, autonomy has been seen as a value that was incompatible with cultures that promote relatedness and associated only with countries designated as individualistic, such as the United States (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008), but Kağıtçıbaşı's work supports the coexistence of these two values (Kağıtçıbaşı & Ataca, 2005). Importantly, benevolence values embrace both desiring social harmony and autonomous action (Schwartz, 2012), which demonstrates how values typically considered incongruous may be joined together. In the United States it has been assumed that immigrant minority ethnic groups espouse

values that focus on relatedness and more closely adhere to heteronomous behavior. This is in contrast to the dominant cultural group, European Americans, who are thought to embrace separateness and strong autonomy values. This motivated researchers to uncover salient values in immigrant families, particularly in Chinese families and Latino families.

Chinese cultural ideology is based on Confucianism, which emphasizes the significance of harmony and the importance of hierarchy within the social world (Yang, 1961). Many values found in Chinese and other Asian cultures stem from these ideals such that family loyalty and respect for elders are key governing values. Moreover, filial piety and family obligation are very important as well. These values would suggest these groups fall in the heteronomous-related quadrant based on Kağıtçıbaşı's dimensions (2007). Filial piety is defined as the primary duty of respect that children have to care for their parents and the elders in their family (Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010). Family obligation in Asian families is defined as behaviors related to provision of support and assistance within family groups. It has long been considered one of the focal values in Asian families.

Asian families are not the only families in which family obligation is a key value. Latino families also place tremendous importance on this value. It may be possible to see how family obligation found in Asian families is related to family obligation in Latino families by examining immigrant groups from these two areas of the world. Research in this area has demonstrated that many of the same values found in Asian immigrant families have been found in Latino immigrant families, but they do not necessarily have

the same salience between cultural groups (Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999; Schwartz, 2010). Notably, many of the individual values found in Asian cultures are incorporated into one overarching value, family obligation, in Latino families (Stein, Gonzalez, Cupito, Kiang, & Supple, 2014). In the United States, cultural values found in immigrant groups may also be found in European Americans and African Americans as well, but just as with Schwartz's (2011) value structure versus value prioritization, there may be variations in their differences and similarities across groups.

As Schwartz discovered, values may exist in a circular structural model that is comparable among myriad societies and cultures. In this same line of thought, there may be some comparable immigrant cultural values that exist in the United States. There are two important questions of interest regarding the extent that immigrant values may be common across various cultures and societies. The first is to what degree similarities and differences may be found across cultures, but the other is the magnitude of change that may be seen in values based on bidirectional influences of the immigrant values affecting the host culture and the host culture affecting values that are salient to immigrants. Various researches have explored these questions.

Kağıtçıbaşı (2005) presented research demonstrating that non-European immigrant populations had higher levels of familial obligation than did European Americans. Based on these results, when examining groups of both native born and immigrant adolescents living in urban areas in the United States from Mexican, Chinese, Filipino and European backgrounds, it would be expected that when examining feelings of family connectedness, the cultural values of heteronomy and relatedness that promote



family interconnectedness and responsibility associated with Mexico, the Philippines and China would affect study results. However, results were instead found to depend on the context or the type of interaction that was being examined, not only cultural background. For example, no differences were found in the different cultural groups in dyadic relationships when examining emotional closeness with mothers and, additionally, all adolescents identified strongly with family (Fuligni, 1998; Hardway & Fuligni, 2006). Moreover, gender differences demonstrated more similarities in that all girls were closer with their mothers than were boys. In contrast, all boys were closer to their fathers than were girls. Adolescents from immigrant families may place more importance on relatedness with regard to familial obligation, but in other areas of relatedness they may be the same as their peers from different cultural groups (Hardway & Fuligni, 2006). It may be that instead of differing on the dimension of family connectedness, varying cultural groups in the United States differ in the manner in which family connectedness is sustained during adolescence.

An examination of adolescent relational experiences revealed that adolescents with non-European backgrounds maintained expectations and beliefs compatible with a greater respect for parental authority and less emphasis on individual autonomy than did adolescents with European backgrounds. Despite this, all adolescents reported similar amounts of actual conflict and cohesion with parents (Fuligni, 1998). Another notable result is that differences in family obligation in Mexican American families were attributable to a greater number of siblings, demonstrating how individual variability among interacting partners can be important when considering cultural differences.

Mexican American youth are often expected to care for and help younger siblings (Updegraff & Umaña-Taylor, 2015), but in absence of siblings, differences in family obligation may not be apparent. In support of this argument, in all cultural groups a higher number of siblings was associated with higher family obligation levels and more time spent helping at home (Hardway & Fuligni, 2006). It may be that differences between certain cultural groups could be explained by latent factors, such as lower birth rates in European American families, not that children feel less of an obligation to help their parents. More support for this argument was found in the result that in all cultural groups higher parental education levels were associated with adolescents spending less time assisting family, more time studying, and more time with friends. Research has demonstrated strong positive correlations between more parental education and a higher income level (Cirino et al., 2002); therefore, parents with more education likely do not have the same need for assistance in the form of unpaid labor from their children, as do families with a lower socioeconomic level.

Other researchers, such as Coon and Kemmelmeier (2001) have also looked at variation among subgroups in the United States and have found results that do not necessarily correspond to stereotypical views of European Americans or other racial/ethnic groups. For example, by examining with meta-analytic techniques the four largest ethnic groups found in the United States, these researchers found that Asian Americans and African Americans scored higher in collectivism compared to European Americans. However, Latinos did not. Perhaps surprisingly, African Americans scored higher in individualism than did European Americans. This means that African

Americans scored higher in both individualism and collectivism than did European Americans supporting the assertion that individualism and collectivism may coexist and are not naturally opposed to one another. Another meta-analysis supports the argument that unexpected variation exists among cultural groups, particularly those assumed to be strongly on one end or the other of the individualism–collectivism spectrum such as with European Americans (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). For example, European Americans were not found to be more individualistic than African Americans or Latinos, nor were they less collectivistic than Japanese or Koreans. Therefore, it is helpful to examine a diversity of racial/ethnic groups to best understand a phenomenon.

Longitudinal study results revealed more insight into similarities among ethnic groups (Fuligni, 1998). For example, all adolescent groups became more willing to disagree with their parents as they aged, even though overall acceptance of parental authority did not change in any of the cultural groups. However, despite a general acceptance of parental authority, all adolescents withdrew their endorsement of parental authority over personal topics as they became older. Despite these similarities, over time levels of family obligation in groups of non-European Americans remained higher than with European Americans, demonstrating that individuals' cultural backgrounds are influential in promoting certain values. Given the above results, it may be that adolescents hold certain beliefs regarding authority and autonomy based on cultural values and ideals promoted by their parents, but that in their current cultural context these values and ideals have only a slight association with actual behavior in parental relationships.

A compelling view of how values may change over time based on cultural context is provided by a comparison of Mexican immigrants in Los Angeles and their siblings' experiences who remained in Mexico (Reese, 2002). Both the group of Mexicans that immigrated to the United States and their siblings who remained in Mexico reported a desire of higher levels of education for their children. This is a change from earlier generations of parents in Mexico. Both parent groups reported that their own parents' main concern was to teach them to work, but contemporary parents' main concern was to educate their children, demonstrating a shift in prioritization of values from one generation to the next. However, despite parental desire to educate their children, when considering cultural context, differences existed in possibilities to reach educational goals based on availability of schooling. Mexico recently mandated secondary schooling demonstrating a shift in values, but that does not mean that schools are actually available for all children and in one town middle school was only available for 40 % of school-aged children. In contrast, free school is provided for all children through high school in Los Angeles. Another change over time was the help that parents give with homework. Even though their own parents never assisted them with their own homework, contemporary parents in both countries were eager to assist their children with homework when possible. Interestingly, parents in Mexico spent more actual time on a daily basis helping with schoolwork because limited English proficiency prevented Mexican immigrants from providing more help. Thus, it is possible to see that even if values seem to be universal, there will likely be differences and similarities based on the salience of values in the group and the possibility to act on one's intrinsic values within extrinsic

limitations. Therefore, it may be that with values related to gratitude, which are not regulated by outside societal forces, but are rather an autonomous decision to act in a certain way, all racial/ethnic groups in the U.S. and in other countries will demonstrate similar positive actions.

Despite what is known about youth expression of gratitude in diverse populations (Mendonça et al., 2018) and values in diverse cultural groups (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005), little is known about the value parents place on gratitude for themselves or their children nor what parents do to support its development. One way to advance this knowledge is to explore the relationship between parents and their children with regard to gratitude and investigate strategies parents may use to promote it. Proximal processes between parents and children are crucial to child development (Bronfenbrenner, 2001); thus this will likely be a fruitful way of discovering more about gratitude's evolution. Parents' personal experiences, thoughts, and feelings involving gratitude will likely influence how they encourage it in their children. However, there are other elements that may come into play when considering what is important in how the development of gratitude may be supported.

Various factors, such as child age and parental cultural group, will likely influence parenting and how parents may foster gratitude. As noted earlier, research suggests that children of different ages may have a different capacity to understand the most appropriate response to a benefactor when expressing gratitude (Freitas, Pieta, & Tudge, 2011). Further, cultural contexts will influence proximal processes; therefore it is important to explore the ways in which the parents' cultural group and its values may

cause parenting strategies to encourage gratitude to differ among groups. As mentioned in Chapter 2, not only do different racial and ethnic groups constitute different cultural groups but also so do different socioeconomic groups, and so social class should also be explored (Tudge et al., 2006). Therefore, it is possible to have two cultural groups from the same racial or ethnic group, as is the case with middle-class and working-class African Americans. These two cultural groups may share the same race, but they may still be considered different because they are not from the same social class. Tudge's (2008) research of children of preschool age demonstrates that middle-class children were often given better opportunities to study in preschools that would help prepare them for school readiness as opposed to working-class children that were not given the same opportunities. Research demonstrates that diverse cultural groups in the United States may have different priorities in parent-child relationships, but that despite the variations among groups, parallel parenting practices may exist as well (Fulgini, 1999). Importantly, variations and similarities found in parenting values among disparate cultural groups may be affected by movement of a cultural group from one society to another such that parent values may change with time in the new society (Bronfenbrenner, 2001; Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007). Therefore, the amount of time living in a society may be a determinant in how parents foster gratitude.

### **Research Questions**

With the aim of better understanding gratitude's development based on the influence of parents living in different cultural groups, the following research questions will guide an exploration into how parents may foster this important moral value:

### **Research Question 1**

How do parents' thoughts about and experiences of gratitude affect what they think their children should feel about gratitude, how their children express it, how they may encourage it, and how this may differ based on the age of the focal child?

### **Research Question 2**

How will parents' social class, ethnic/racial group, whether or not they were born in the United States, and the length of time they have lived in the United States affect how they think and feel about gratitude and the strategies they may use to promote gratitude in their children?

### **Positionality and Ethics**

I am a cross-cultural reflexive researcher working from an interpretivist and constructivist paradigm. I believe that all researchers from all paradigms have the obligation to act reflexively when conducting research; otherwise, it is not feasible to work ethically (Lincoln & Canella, 2009). Without serious reflection, it is too easy to let personal biases influence our work and cloud our vision. It is impossible to understand my positionality and how I approach the study of gratitude without reflecting on what caused it to be salient in my life and where my original thoughts about gratitude led me as a researcher.

I was raised in an upper middle-class suburb just outside of a large city in the United States and hold two masters degrees; however, this does not reveal a lot about who I am because my experiences have transformed me from who I appear to be.

DiAngelo and Sensoy (2009) argued that positionality is a declaration that knowledge

depends on interacting cultural values, beliefs, experiences and ascribed social positions. Bettez (2015) discussed the idea that we are never just one of our positionalities, but an assemblage, or “that unique collection of multiplicities that becomes something distinct from our individual social identities and recalled experiences” (p. 934). Moreover, she posited that the individual’s interpretation of an experience gives it meaning and this resonates with me. I have lived and worked as a teacher in seven countries, including Mexico and Brazil. I am fluent in Portuguese, Spanish, French, Swedish, and my native language, English. As a result of my time abroad, I have had many rich opportunities to understand at a deeper level the various cultural values that exist in the world and how they may affect human behavior. I became aware that people feel differently about character virtues, such as generosity and gratitude, depending on where they live.

When I was living in Mexico, I was particularly struck by the gratitude that people demonstrated for what they had and received, even when families were struggling with health, personal, or financial problems. In my experiences in the United States and Europe, people never seemed to feel gratitude as a virtue. It seemed that for them gratitude was dependent on whether they perceived that the gift or service given or provided to them was fitting their social position. In the course of time, I married a Brazilian man and when our children were born and started receiving gifts from American family members, we discussed gratitude and materialism. His perspective seemed closer to a Mexican perspective and I felt defensive of my family because of a general cultural assumption that most Americans are materialistic and are not particularly thankful for the high quality of life from which many of them benefit. Thus, when the



opportunity arose for me to pursue research as a graduate student examining gratitude and materialism in various cultures, including in Brazil and Mexico, I decided to accept it. Through both the self-critical and communal process of reflexivity, what I have found through my research using my interpretivist perspective and asystematized reflexivity is not what I would have expected and I wanted to explore the topic more through interviews (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2007; Lather, 2003). I did not see reflexivity as a holistic process when I began, but, by taking the self-critical and communal processes seriously, I have perceived that my interview data may not always support the theories that have influenced my thinking regarding different cultural groups. Therefore, assumptions made with regard to gratitude based on cultural theories need to be reconsidered.

Beyond positionality, ethics are important to consider. After my first reflection on ethics, I wondered how much they were involved in my work because I do not study controversial issues; however, I realized they are greatly involved in all research. In the cross-cultural research that I do, it would feel unethical not to come from an interpretivist/constructivist paradigm. As Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2011) discussed, in terms of practical issues, it allows me to understand culture as a consensus that is not based on preconceived notions, and to see people as building individual understandings of their reality. Although not an ethnographic researcher, I adhere to Geertz's (1994) belief that theory's role is to give us words to express the role of culture in human life. Too often research is conducted from the standpoint of testing hypotheses created without a firm base in theory examining how participants do or do not fit into certain categories.

This creates analyses that point out the lack of fit, and perhaps even why it may exist, but often there is no attention given to what is actually happening and why. I believe this is particularly important in considering how to conduct my research ethically because beyond guaranteeing interviewees privacy and receiving their consent before speaking with them, it is important to consider cultural relativism (Glesne, 2016). Assumptions about different cultural groups, such as moral codes, are often reified without actually understanding the actual thoughts and feelings of the group being studied. In my case, I strove to listen to what I was being told so that I could best attend to the parent's actual words and not what I expected to hear.

CHAPTER IV  
METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGIES

**The Developing Gratitude Research Project**

This dissertation draws on data collected as part of the Developing Gratitude Research Project (DGRP), a cross-cultural project that investigated the development of gratitude in children and adolescents. Contributing greatly to the advancement of gratitude science, Tudge and colleagues (Tudge et al., 2015) created methods to examine and explore the development of gratitude as a virtue that are in line with the bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2001; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Data have been collected from participants in seven diverse countries, the United States, Brazil, China, Turkey, Russia, South Korea, and Guatemala, to allow for a better understanding of the development of gratitude that is not limited to a European American middle-class perspective (Arnett, 2008; Henrich et al., 2010; Mendonça et al., 2018). Moreover, a more diverse sample helps to increase external validity by testing whether a determined effect is seen in different contexts or in different populations (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). One part of the study in the United States and China involved interviewing one parent and one of their children at home. In this dissertation, I used the parent interviews collected in the United States and China from the DGRP to allow for an exploration of how parenting may affect gratitude development in children and adolescents.

## **Sample**

Parent participants were drawn from various locations in the United States and China. In total, 100 parents gave their time to be interviewed with a focal child for this study. The first group of parents in the study was recruited from Greensboro, NC. A second group of parents comprised solely of Brazilian immigrants was recruited from Greensboro, NC, the Atlanta area, and Boston. A third group of parents was recruited in Guilin, China and have been included to demonstrate that even a cultural group that is not at all related to the Americas has some similarities with other groups, and some important differences that highlight the complexities of gratitude. On the parent permission letter, parents reported their highest level of education, occupation, working status, gender of the target child, and additional primary caregivers of the target child. In addition, they were asked to provide information about languages spoken at home, birthplace of the parent and child, as well as race/ethnicity for themselves and their children.

Race/ethnicity was only relevant for the parents in the United States.

The initial U.S. study took place in Greensboro, a medium-sized city in the Southeastern United States. From the 730 children recruited from nine elementary and middle schools, approximately 80 parents participated in interviews. Not all of these interviews have been included, but instead a selection of 53 interviews was drawn from the total based first on those parents for whom complete demographic information was provided (see Table 1). In addition, due to lack of adequate numbers, biracial and Asian participants were not included in an attempt to create a balance between working-class and middle-class parents and the various racial and ethnic groups represented.

Schools were selected in an attempt to capture Greensboro's socioeconomic and ethnic/racial diversity by using information provided by the school district about percentages of free lunches and ethnic variation in each school. In order to represent the full range of diversity of Greensboro, children from local private schools were also recruited.

An additional group of Brazilian parents and their children were recruited from after-school programs, churches and snowball sampling in the Atlanta area and Boston to target the population of Brazilian immigrants who attend these institutions. The Atlanta area is considered a gateway community for Brazilians (Marcus, 2009a, 2009b; Merçon-Vargas, 2017), with an unofficial estimate of 30,000 Brazilians, around 70% of whom are from Goiás (Menezes et al., n.d.). Brazilian immigrants were also recruited from Massachusetts because it is the state with the highest population of Brazilian immigrants (22.8%, 300,000 Brazilians; Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015). In addition, snowball sampling was used in the Greensboro area because local employers, such as Volvo Trucks North America and other international companies, have brought many middle-class Brazilians to the area working in managerial positions in the fields of finance, purchasing, and engineering. In the end, 31 Brazilian immigrant parents and their children were interviewed (see Table 1).

Lastly, 16 Chinese parents and their children were interviewed in Guilin, China (see Table 1). All families interviewed were contacted through snowball sampling, which means that the sample is somewhat homogeneous and all from the same socioeconomic group. It is important to note that the parents of the principal interviewer

in China employed five of the parent participants. It is unlikely that this affected the data because the subject matter has no bearing on their employment, but as an ethical researcher it is necessary to examine any potential area of bias.

Only around 50% of the parental sample provided education level on the parent permission letter making it difficult to use education level alone as a proxy for social class. However, interviewers asked parents about their highest level of education and their occupation as part of the parent interview for both the parent being interviewed and a second primary caretaker of the child. Therefore, it was possible to approximate social class using parent education level and parent occupation from the interview transcripts. If the information taken from the original parent permission letter differed from the information given in the interview, the information in the interview was used given the in-depth nature of the questions.

In order to establish which families to classify as middle class and which families to classify as working class, I used Hollingshead's Four Factor Index of Social Status (Hollingshead, 1975). This index is considered a classic in the field of social science so could be considered outdated, but current research has demonstrated through comparing it to more recent scales and indices that it is still an effective tool in establishing social class (Cirino et al., 2002). I chose to use this index because occupation is weighted heavier than education when calculating the total sums to aggregate to create a final score to determine social class. For example, occupational level, which ranges from 1 to 9, is multiplied by 5, whereas educational level, which ranges from 1 to 7, is multiplied by 3. Thereafter, the products of these two equations are summed to get the aggregate

score for each person. When complete occupational and educational information was given for each caretaker of the child, often a mother and father, an average of the two aggregate scores was taken to create a score representing the family.

The difference in weight given to occupation and education could be particularly important for this sample because it is composed of 41% immigrants. Although occupation in general is highly correlated with educational level (Cirino et al., 2002; Hollingshead, 1975), immigrants do not always have access to employment at their educational level due to language barriers and issues of legal working status and this affects their socioeconomic status (Feliciano & Lanuza, 2017). For example, in one working-class Brazilian couple, both the mother and father are college-educated, a 6 out of 7 on the educational scale. However, both the mother and father work as cleaners, a 1 out of 9 on the occupational level scale. Therefore, this couple would receive an aggregate score of 23 on a scale that ranges from 8 to 66 demarcating them clearly as working class. This example demonstrates that families may be perceived as one class by society in their home countries, but when moving to a new country are perceived as a different class based on their occupation. The occupation and income will also affect where people are able to live and send their children to school, which is why despite parents' education having importance, social class here is defined with occupation weighted higher. Some participants in the study were found at the two extremes. For example, a few working-class Mexican immigrants scored an 8, whereas some of the middle-class European Americans working as physicians or in business with an MBA scored a 66.

Hollingshead (1975) created an indication of social strata with five levels based on a range of scores. For example unskilled workers scored from 8 to 19, semiskilled workers scored from 20 to 29, skilled craftsmen and clerical workers scored from 30 to 39, minor professionals scored from 40 to 54, and professionals scored from 55 to 66. Based on this index, the majority of study participants fit clearly into either middle or working class. This is not surprising considering the high correlation between education and occupation; however, there were exceptions such as the one mentioned above. Exceptions were found in the group of working-class Brazilian immigrants because there were more cases where the parents may have had an educational level that was higher than their occupational level, but even for these parents, their aggregate scores remained below 30. Discrepancies were not found between educational level and occupational level with the working-class Mexican immigrants because of the entire group only one mother was college-educated and no fathers and with two exceptions, the occupations of the mothers and fathers were either as a cleaner or another type of unskilled or semiskilled labor. There was only one case in the middle-class European-American group in which educational level did not correspond to occupational level. The mother has some college and the dad only has a high school diploma, but the mother owns her own real estate firm which is classified as a medium-sized business according to Hollingshead for a classification of 8 out of 9, and the father is considered a lesser professional which is also an 8 out of 9. Therefore, their aggregate score of 54 places them solidly as middle class.



Besides exceptions due to disparities between occupational and educational level, a few working-class African American families and one working-class Brazilian immigrant family are in a possible transition from working class to middle class due to increased education. For the participants in the study, their current occupations were still not high enough on Hollingshead's index to change their social status, but upon termination of their university degree, educational level scores will increase and a planned change in employment will likely affect their status. Another factor affecting this small group is that when both individuals in a couple are working, an average of their two scores are taken. In three cases, the father's educational level and occupational level brought the combined score of the couple down considerably. In the end, I chose to consider all families that scored 38 or higher middle class and all families that scored 37 or lower working class. As demonstrated above, Hollingshead distinguishes in a more nuanced way between social strata, but this study is interested in social class as a way to distinguish cultural groups, not looking specifically at multiple social classes; therefore, a two-class system is adequate.

Having determined criteria for establishing who classifies as either working or middle class, seven distinct cultural groups emerged in the sample (see Table 1). As mentioned in Chapter 2, in this dissertation diverse societies or diverse ethnic, racial, or socioeconomic groups within any society comprise different cultural groups (Tudge et al., 2006). Thus, two cultural groups may be from the same racial group, as is the case with middle-class and working-class African Americans or ethnic group, such as with middle-class and working-class Brazilian immigrants. The seven cultural groups

represented in this study are middle-class African Americans, working-class African Americans, middle-class European Americans, working-class Mexican immigrants, middle-class Chinese nationals, middle-class Brazilian immigrants and working-class Brazilian immigrants creating rich variation when comparing and contrasting similarities and differences among the groups.

The ages of the children in the middle-class African American group ranged from 9 to 14 ( $M = 11.38$ ;  $SD = 1.22$ ) and in the working-class African American group ages ranged from 8 to 14 ( $M = 10.67$ ;  $SD = 1.96$ ). Ages of the middle-class European American children ranged from 8 to 12 ( $M = 9.76$ ;  $SD = 1.43$ ). Ages of the children of working-class Mexican immigrants ranged from 7 to 14 ( $M = 9.3$ ;  $SD = .61$ ), with the majority of the sample composed of nine-year-olds. The middle-class Chinese children ranged in age from 7 to 13 ( $M = 9.95$ ;  $SD = 1.66$ ). Lastly, age ranges of the children of the middle-class Brazilian immigrants were from 7 to 14 ( $M = 9.91$ ;  $SD = 2.31$ ) and of the working-class Brazilian immigrants from 7 to 14 ( $M = 9.33$ ;  $SD = 2.29$ ). Therefore, although the groups were diverse in age, the average age of the majority of the children in the study was between 9 and 10 years old, with the exception of the African American children who on average were closer to 11. This is likely due to the large number of 13-year-old African American participants compared to the other ages (see Table 1). Interestingly, the average ages of the middle-class European American, Brazilian immigrant, and Chinese children were almost the same. Moreover, the average ages of the working-class Mexican and Brazilian immigrant children were nearly identical as well. Thus, despite the difference of the two African American groups, the other groups

were quite similar. Ages and gender of children are broken down in the following table by cultural group.

Table 1

Number of Children per Cultural Group by Age

Age of Child	African Americans		European Americans	Mexican Immigrants	Chinese	Brazilian Immigrants	
	Middle Class	Working Class	Middle Class	Working Class	Middle Class	Middle Class	Working Class
7	0	0	0	1	2	4	1
8	0	4	5	1	0	4	1
9	1	3	3	6	6	5	4
10	2	3	3	1	4	0	0
11	1	0	3	0	2	2	0
12	2	1	3	0	1	4	1
13	1	7	0	0	1	3	0
14	1	0	0	1		1	1
<i>n</i> =	8 (38%)	18(50%)	17(70%)	10(50%)	16(53%)	23(74%)	8(38%)

*Note.* (%) = percentage of girls.

As possible to see in Table 1 and as mentioned above, beyond dividing participants by racial, ethnic, or societal groups alone, African American and Brazilian immigrants were broken down into both middle-class and working-class groups. Interestingly, the make-up of the groups is different such that the majority of the African American sample is working class (69%) and the majority of the Brazilian immigrant sample interviewed is middle class (83%). Of the Brazilian immigrant middle class, 83% is from the Greensboro area. Therefore, of the 100 participants interviewed for this study, 72% are from Greensboro.

It is of interest to note that although social class of the parents was established based on parents' occupational and educational level, based on discussion of

grandparents' occupational and educational level, it seems the majority of the African American and Chinese sample appears to be first generation middle class. This is in contrast to the middle-class European Americans and middle-class Brazilian immigrants who all appear to have middle-class parents based on similar discussions in the interviews about the type of support given by grandparents.

One last consideration of the sample is the length of time that immigrant families had been living in the United States. The Brazilian immigrants had been living in the United States between 1.5 months and 19 years ( $M = 9.38$  years,  $SD = 6.41$ ). The working-class Mexican immigrants had been living in the United States between 8 and 17 years ( $M = 14$ ,  $SD = 1.8$ ). If the range of time living in the United States is calculated for working-class Brazilian immigrants alone it becomes from 8 to 18 years with an average of 12.85 years, which is much closer to the working-class Mexican immigrant average of 14 years. One more similarity between working-class Brazilian and Mexican immigrants is that the most common occupation for the mothers listed was as a housecleaner. Working-class Brazilian immigrant fathers were more likely to work in construction and sometimes painting and working-class Mexican immigrant fathers were more likely to work as painters. The discrepancy of time living in the United States between middle- and working-class Brazilian immigrants is likely because Greensboro is not as established an area for Brazilians. Moreover, the majority of the Brazilian immigrants living in Greensboro were financially sponsored by their companies to relocate which includes immigration documentation and often language instruction. This is a very

different experience than those arriving as working-class immigrants to the United States without such assistance.

### **Procedure**

In Greensboro, parental consent forms were dropped off at or sent to each participating institution one to two weeks prior to data collection. In schools in Greensboro, teachers were offered \$2.00 for every parent permission letter returned, regardless of whether the parents gave their consent or not. There was no financial reward offered for parent permission letters in the after-school programs, language schools, or churches where data was collected from Brazilian immigrants, nor in China. Upon receiving parental consent and child assent forms, trained research assistants administered a short set of questionnaires during school time for those children in Greensboro, NC and as part of the interview process for the children of Brazilian immigrants and in China.

In Greensboro, as part of the original parent permission letter sent home with the children, parents were asked if they would be willing to participate in home interviews along with the target child. Families who agreed to participate were randomly selected and then contacted by phone or email by a research assistant and invited to participate in an interview. For the Brazilians who were recruited via afterschool programs, language schools and churches, this process was the same. However, the majority of the parents were recruited through snowball sampling and this meant that the primary Brazilian interviewer would ask single participants for the names and email addresses of people they thought might be interested in participating in the study. In addition, I know

Brazilians who were able to indicate people who were willing to participate in the study. Interviews could be scheduled either in the home or elsewhere, but all participants elected to be interviewed in their homes. The overwhelming majority of parent participants were mothers, but a few fathers participated as well.

A group of all-women research assistants trained in interview techniques worked in teams of two to interview North American, Brazilian immigrant, and Mexican immigrant parents and children. The parent and child were interviewed simultaneously in separate parts of the house to allow for maximum confidentiality and openness in responses of interviewees. Before beginning the parent interview, parents were given a set of questionnaires to fill out. The Parents' Values for their Children Questionnaire (Tudge & Freitas, 2011) was the only questionnaire from the set used in this study. All of the values on the questionnaire were not evaluated for this dissertation, but answers to the interview questions asking parents to refer to the questionnaire when considering how they rated the importance of gratitude were examined. Participants opted to be interviewed in their homes; therefore, it was not possible to strictly control the environment. Spouses, other children in the household, and friends would occasionally speak to the parent being interviewed. Two Brazilian couples insisted on being interviewed together. Both the parents and children were recorded with participant consent and later transcribed and coded. Parents and children could choose to be interviewed in their native language or English. I worked with four other interviewers to interview European and African American parents. A Jamaican American research assistant, a Brazilian research assistant, a Chinese research assistant and me interviewed

the majority of the European and African American parents. A native Brazilian interviewed the Brazilian immigrant parents and I interviewed the Mexican immigrant parents. I lived in Oaxaca, Mexico, for over one year and am fluent in Spanish using Mexican vernacular. All Brazilian parents chose to be interviewed in Portuguese, but two Mexican immigrant mothers chose to be interviewed in English. The Chinese families interviewed in China were interviewed by either a female or male research assistant trained in interview techniques who would visit the family as a team. Families in the United States were offered a \$10 gift card to Target upon completion of the at-home interview, but not in China.

Native Portuguese speakers transcribed the audio recordings of Brazilian immigrant parents and a native Mandarin speaker transcribed the Chinese parents' recordings. Both native Spanish speakers and I transcribed the Mexican immigrant parents' audio recordings. I have been licensed and worked professionally as both an interpreter and translator in Spanish, French, and Swedish and feel competent in my ability to transcribe Spanish and subsequently translate it into English. I also translated the transcribed Portuguese interviews into English. If I had any questions with regard to Spanish or Portuguese, I consulted multiple native speakers to ensure my interpretation was as accurate as possible. The Mandarin was translated to English by a Chinese research assistant and I created a focus group of Chinese immigrant parents to help interpret doubts I may have had about the translations or the structure of the language.

This study had multiple interviewers and multiple cultural groups being interviewed, which means that what was the normal behavior in one interview may have

been slightly different based on cultural group. For example, when arriving at the home of African and European Americans, the first thing established was where the child and parent interviews would take place, and then after each participant–interviewer pair spent a few minutes establishing a rapport, the interviews began. In contrast, when conducting interviews with Brazilian and Mexican immigrants, interviewers would almost always be offered something to drink by the parent participants before the interviews began and this often meant that there was a longer time for a rapport to be established. Chinese interviewers in China were also offered drinks by parent participants, and food as well. Regardless of the consideration shown by the Brazilian and Mexican immigrant parents and the Chinese parents, the depth of information shared does not seem affected by the differences in appropriate cultural behavior when a guest comes into the home. Despite the differences in welcoming behavior, the interview audio files from all cultural groups averaged approximately 25 minutes with the shortest interviews around 20 minutes and the longest interviews around 35 minutes.

## **Measures**

**The Development of Gratitude Interview** (Tudge, Freitas, & Vahehra, 2011), provided in Appendix B, is designed to (a) examine which values parents feel are important and less important for their children to embody as adults (b) allow an understanding of what gratitude means to the parents, (c) allow an understanding of the parents' experiences with gratitude, (d) allow an understanding of the extent to which parents see gratitude as a significant characteristic for their children to develop and, if important, in what ways they encourage it, and (e) parents' perceptions of the conditions



under which their child is most/least likely to express gratitude. This was a semi-structured interview with a chance for participants to answer open-ended questions without being interrupted and encouraged to answer in whatever way suited them. Follow-up questions were used when participants failed to answer the original questions.

**The Parents' Values for their Children Questionnaire** (Tudge & Freitas, 2011), provided in Appendix A, was designed to assess which values parents find most and least important for their children to have and manifest as adults. This is accomplished by asking parents to rate 27 characteristics based on how important they are for their children in adulthood, circling one of five possible responses that vary from “not at all important” to “very important.” In addition, parents are asked to write in what the three most important characteristics are for their children in an open-ended format and then to choose what they feel is the single most important characteristic from the three. Parents are next asked to write in the three least important characteristics for their children in an open-ended format and then to choose what they feel is the single least important characteristic of the three. Sample characteristics are ambitious, determined, gratitude, humble, respectful, responsible and self-confident.

### **Analysis**

Descriptive data were analyzed using SPSS (Version 25). Variables of interest presented in Table 1 are gender, race, age, ethnicity, country of origin for parents, and social class (based on parent education level and parent occupation) for all participants.

Qualitative methods were used to analyze the Development of Gratitude interview to explore answers to the two research questions: (a) how parents' thoughts about and experiences of gratitude affect what they think their children should feel about gratitude, expression, and how parents may encourage it, accounting for child age and (b) whether parents' social class, ethnic/racial group, place of birth, and length of time in the United States affect the strategies they may use to promote gratitude in their children. To analyze the interview, I used a directed content analysis as my major analysis technique, with the aid of thematic analysis to provide secondary support. Directed content analysis is well-suited to research based on existing theory and prior research, which is the case with this study (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The aim of this approach is to validate or extend an existing theory and extant research aids in focusing research questions. It is particularly useful in helping the researcher decide what coding scheme may be most effective when beginning to analyze content and hypothesize about potential associations among coded variables. It allows for the researcher to find data that cannot be coded and then to determine whether a new category may be created. This is important because data are then not lost, even with the use of my primarily deductive approach. Qualitative scholars recommend using more than one approach when analyzing qualitative data to achieve the highest quality work with the most reliable results (Glesne, 2016; Joffe, 2012); therefore, I also used thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis was established in content analysis research and it has been argued that it forms the implicit foundation for much qualitative work; therefore it is appropriate to use here (Joffe, 2012). It has been demonstrated to be a good technique

with verbal interviews. Thematic analysis as a second analysis technique was useful because it allowed for examination of both manifest and latent content. In studies of gratitude, gratitude may be mentioned explicitly, but parents may speak about gratitude by indicating actions and behaviors of others that have affected them or their children. Therefore, the possibility to determine latent content was important. Codes were established using directed content analysis, but after establishing what codes were found or not found using existing data, thematic analysis was useful to ensure that implicit data were not lost (Glesne, 2016).

I coded the interviews in three waves based on a triadic coding scheme that uses open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to aid in interpreting data (LaRossa, 2005). First, I read through the interviews line by line employing the technique of open coding to determine what discrete codes existed that would provide insight into parents' thoughts and feelings about gratitude. A priori codes were established based on current gratitude literature and new codes were determined when coding based on their connection to parents' experiences with gratitude for themselves or their children. Having established relevant codes, I read the interviews a second time using axial coding whereby I determined categories and compared similarities and differences among parents' comments to establish which codes belonged under which categories. Lastly, I used selective coding to determine the core categories and codes in the data that would be able to form an explanatory whole. By using these three strategies I was able to interpret the data in the best way possible.

It is impossible to participate in an interview or analyze interview data with a complete absence of bias; therefore I explored my own positionality and paradigm beliefs (as presented after Research Questions 1 and 2) before analyzing the data (Bettez, 2015; Lincoln & Guba, 2011). In addition, I included information about the other interviewers after consulting with them so that the relations between interviewers and interviewees may be better understood (Daly, 2007).

## CHAPTER V

### RESULTS

The exploratory nature of this dissertation provided me with the opportunity to examine intimately and thoroughly the thoughts and feelings that parents have with regard to gratitude. Some of the groups were quite small, such as the groups of middle-class African Americans and working-class Mexican and Brazilian immigrants. However, the depth of the qualitative analyses of the interviews allowed me to discover suggested patterns of responses despite their limited size. When introducing data from the seven cultural groups determined in Chapter 4, I am not proposing implicitly or explicitly that the results presented here would be relevant to other cultural groups, even if they shared the same race, ethnicity, society, or social class. Nevertheless, the similarities and differences in patterns of codes found within and between the various cultural groups suggest that the findings here may be useful in building a foundation for knowledge regarding parenting practices with regard to gratitude. In particular, this knowledge may be useful in helping shape possible interventions. Importantly and compellingly, different codes emerged when parents answered the same question with regard to themselves as opposed to their children, suggesting that parental thoughts regarding what is appropriate when it involves gratitude may be different for children and adults. These differences are key when considering parent expectations for their children and how this affects the socialization of gratitude.

The semi-structured Development of Gratitude (Tudge, Freitas, & Vahehra, 2011) interview scripts were created based on theory and extant literature; therefore, directed content analysis was my major analysis technique, complemented by thematic analysis. I created a priori codes before reading through the interviews using previous research as a guide. For example, research has demonstrated that the most common gratitude expressions used by youth are either verbal (verbal expression of thanks), concrete (giving something to the benefactor not based on benefactor desire), or connective (reciprocating to a benefactor in a way that they would like). Based on these studies categories were created such as saying thank you, giving a present, and helping the person who helped you. I first read all interviews once and then read them an additional three times to code the data. Examining the interviews, other typical forms of expressing gratitude became clear. For example, participants in four of the seven cultural groups mentioned helping a third party, or paying it forward, as a way to express gratitude; this code was therefore added.

Before the interview responses are thoroughly addressed, tables are presented with the most common codes to give a general view of the results, particularly with regard to similarities and differences among the cultural groups. Codes are presented such that those codes that were found in all the groups are listed first, with codes found in fewer cultural groups listed in descending order. Occasionally a code was found in one cultural group, but not in any other group. Despite the lack of prevalence of the code in all groups, if it was a code used by more than 10% of the participants in the particular cultural group, it is included along with the most common codes presented in the tables.

Based on selective coding, I found some codes that were reported by less than 10% of any one group and that were either not useful in presenting a cohesive explanation of the phenomenon in question or seemed to indicate that the participant may not have understood the question. These codes were designated as “Other.” I felt it was important to acknowledge the response of the parents, but not to overwhelm the reader with superfluous codes that do not add explanatory value to the overall understanding of gratitude. For example, one European American mother responded to the general question of in what situations she felt it was appropriate for her child to express gratitude by responding for being able to hear. Her child was given Cochlear implants as a toddler so hearing was salient for her child, but this was a general question, not specific, and the response was not relevant too other participants’ responses.

Code frequencies were determined by taking the number of responses given of one code out of the total number of responses given to a question within each cultural group. This means that the total number of coded responses is sometimes higher than the number of participants in one cultural group and is sometimes lower. For example, 18 middle-class Brazilian immigrants responded to the question, “How would you express that gratitude?” and there were 63 responses. Determining frequency in this way allowed me to understand the most prevalent response in any given cultural group. The total number of group participants was not uniform among groups, so it is important to represent what is most common in each group in a way that allows for between-group comparisons. The results were not tested for statistical significance for multiple reasons. As noted when presenting the participants in the study, these were not samples drawn at

random from known populations, and as such inferential statistics are not relevant.

Instead, the results are meant to give an overview of how the distinct groups responded to certain questions to explain the data. Moreover, interviews were semi-structured so that responses and follow-up questions differed. If participants chose to give multiple answers to one question, they were not discouraged from doing so and it is impossible to ascertain whether one response was more meaningful to a person than another.

Moreover, participants in some groups chose to give multiple responses, whereas in other groups participants gave far fewer responses. For example, European Americans and middle-class Brazilian immigrants gave on average three types of gratitude expressions per participant when asked how they express gratitude. In contrast, working-class Brazilian immigrants gave on average just over one gratitude expression per participant.

The issue of child gender and parent gender will be discussed before the presentation of data because there were no noticeable differences in how parents discussed gratitude regardless of whether the child was a girl or a boy. Parents did not discuss gender as having an effect on their children's gratitude. In the majority of the cultural groups in this study, at least one father was interviewed and there were no discernable differences in how fathers or mothers spoke about their children's gratitude, so interviews with fathers were left in the final results. There were a few differences noted in how fathers spoke about how they personally expressed gratitude. For example, one European American father suggested that he might buy someone a case of beer as a way of showing thanks. This may be a more stereotypical male behavior, but the code applied to this response, "buy a present", is no different than for a woman choosing to



buy a friend flowers. Therefore, there is no reason that the father's response or gender would somehow distinguish his gratitude behavior from a mother's gratitude behavior.

When reporting results and giving examples from the interviews, participant names were replaced with numbers and pseudonyms to maintain anonymity, but the pseudonyms were chosen to demonstrate respect for the individuals' worthwhile stories (Kvale, 1996; Seidman, 2006). Many people gave their time and effort to share very personal experiences involving gratitude with interviewers from the project, including stories of great health and financial difficulties. I chose names that are common in the cultural groups from which the participants come to attempt to embody the person who is speaking. In addition, participants born in North America are indicated as either African American or European American and immigrants to the United States are indicated as Brazilian Immigrant or Mexican Immigrant. Although the word immigrant may be used pejoratively by some, a capital I is used when presenting participants in an attempt to show respect for the status and identity that these individuals have been given by American society as those not born in the United States. It is not appropriate to use the term Brazilian American or Mexican American because it is unknown how many in our study may have become citizens and many do not have the documents necessary to live and work legally in the United States.

One last issue is that parents chose the vocabulary that they felt was appropriate to describe their ideas when talking about gratitude. I have stated that I am interested in virtuous gratitude, but based on extant literature, it is clear that it is inevitable that parents will confound gratitude and appreciation if they are not directed to focus their attention

on one versus another (Halberstadt et al., 2016; Ramsey, Gentzler, & Vizio, 2018). In fact, results from a common measure used in gratitude research discussed in Chapter 2, the Gratitude Adjective Checklist (GAC), have suggested that people do not distinguish between the words grateful, appreciative, or thankful (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002). In the interviews presented here, some parents would try and distinguish between the two, but this was the exception rather than the norm. Therefore, in my presentation of the results, I do not change words used by parents, but this does not mean that because a parent has used the word “gratitude,” she or he meant virtuous gratitude. I interpreted whether the parent meant appreciation or gratitude based on how parents described gratitude in context. For example, I understood it to be virtuous gratitude when parents described a situation in which they felt the desire to reciprocate to a benefactor for something that was done for them with something the benefactor needed or wanted. When parents discussed feeling gratitude for having a lovely home, I interpreted this as appreciation. There are more nuanced uses of the words presented in the results below, but when analyzing the interviews, it often became clear whether parents were referring to virtuous gratitude or appreciation.

### **Research Questions 1 and 2**

The results of the exploration into RQ1 and RQ2 are presented for each category with RQ1 discussed first and RQ2 discussed second. RQ1 is how parents’ thoughts about and experiences of gratitude affect what they think their children should feel about gratitude, its expression, and how parents may encourage it, and how this may differ based on the age of the child. RQ1 was designed to address commonalities across the

cultural groups that participated in the study. RQ2 is how parents' social class, ethnic/racial group, whether or not they were born in the United States, and the length of time they have lived in the United States affect how they think and feel about gratitude and the strategies they may use to promote gratitude in their children. RQ2 was designed to examine sociocultural differences among groups. The same data are used to answer both of these questions. Therefore, using these data, I first address responses that are pertinent to RQ1 by discussing codes that are found across all groups and whether this varies based on the age of the child. Then I discuss RQ2 based on what codes seem to distinguish the cultural groups from one another.

### **Value of Gratitude for Parents and Children**

Parents were asked a series of questions in an attempt to determine what gratitude means in their and their children's lives. The interviewers stated "I see that on the Parents Values for Children questionnaire (Tudge & Freitas, 2011) you put gratitude as..."

There were five possible responses to this statement based on how the parent responded on a questionnaire designed to understand which characteristics and values parents feel are most important for their children to have when they are adults. Gratitude is one of the characteristics parents were asked to rate in importance with 1 as least important and 5 as most important.

## Importance of Gratitude for Parents

Table 2

Importance Parents Give to Gratitude

	African Americans		European Americans	Mexican Immigrants	Chinese	Brazilian Immigrants	
	Middle Class	Working Class	Middle Class	Working Class	Middle Class	Middle Class	Working Class
<b>1</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>2</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>3</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>4</b>	14%	0	25%	10%	36%	5%	0
<b>5</b>	86%	100%	75%	90%	64%	95%	100%
Total number of responses	7	15	16	10	14	22	8

When considering commonalities in all the cultural groups to address RQ1, it is notable that all parents either chose important or very important as indicated in the table below. Table 2 is not particularly nuanced, but is included to demonstrate the overwhelming importance of this value found in all groups and establishes how the concept of gratitude is viewed as a positive fundamental value in all the cultures represented here.

Besides the similarities noted, differences were found in answer to RQ2. Interestingly, despite the overwhelming majority of parents reporting that gratitude was very important, the working-class parents as a whole were more likely to rate gratitude higher in importance than most middle-class parents. Middle-class Brazilian immigrant parents were the only exception. Middle-class Chinese parents were more divided in their responses than were middle-class African Americans or European Americans.

It is clear from the interviews that some parents specifically thought of the importance of gratitude in their children's lives based on the instructions given on the questionnaire, which were to think about their daughter or son. However, other parents thought of gratitude more generally and why they think it is important in everyone's lives. Regardless whether parents answered this question for themselves or their children, current child age was not mentioned at all as a determining factor in how parents think of gratitude. However, in all the cultural groups parents do say that they would like their children to act in a grateful way as an adult. Table 3 represents the variation in parents' responses and participant examples demonstrate further the different thoughts on gratitude's importance. Parent responses to this question are key because when describing why gratitude is important, they are also beginning to share their understanding of the meaning of gratitude and what they think of this important value.

Table 3

## Why Parents Feel Gratitude is Important

	African Americans		European Americans	Mexican Immigrants	Chinese	Brazilian Immigrants	
	Middle Class	Working Class	Middle Class	Working Class	Middle Class	Middle Class	Working Class
Can't take people's help for granted	14%	14%	23%	17%	32%	55%	44%
Appreciate what one has in life	43%	29%	36%	17%	0	23%	11%
Creates cycle of gratitude	14%	7%	23%	50%	0	14%	33%
Must be grateful for everything	0	29%	5%	0	26%	5%	0
Can't take people for granted	29%	14%	5%	17%	0	0	0
Need to be grateful to God	0	0	0	0	0	5%	11%
If grateful, can get along with others in society	0	0	0	0	21%	0	0
Other	0	7%	9%	0	21%	0	0
Total number of responses	7	14	22	6	19	22	9

Exploring commonalities in parents' thoughts about gratitude in response to RQ1, one code was expressed by all seven cultural groups, and two codes were expressed by all but one group.

## Can't Take People's Help for Granted

Brianna (956) – working-class African American mother to 13-year-old boy: When we first moved here I had a hard time financially and people have always come through and I just think that it's always good to be grateful. Sometimes people don't even realize how the little things that they do, how much it means to you and when you're grateful, when you're able to do something for someone and they return it, it makes you wanna do more... My ten year old is a cancer survivor and so he's on a billboard out here... I was working for a credit card company when he got sick and I felt like I had lost like all of my empathy and so uhhh when he got sick people you know would do like the smallest thing, like little organizations that make pillow cases with his name on it... It was just a time.... people who you would never think would do small things would do it. I think it's important to show how... it's just showing that appreciation for compassion and it makes people wanna go and pay it forward and wanna go and do more uhm when they get the gratitude back. And not that they were looking for anything to begin with, but I just think that it's important to uhhh show people what it means. I think it's important for people to know what the actions meant to you ... While they may go on and do what they're doing I think it means even more when they know that it's received. Does that make sense?

Valerie (1149) – middle-class African American mother to 13-year-old boy: Because I hate when people are ungrateful and I feel like whenever you're ungrateful you're selfish and you're not thinking about the needs and feelings of others. And so whenever you're grateful it keeps you humble.

Ning (001) – middle-class Chinese mother to 9-year-old girl: I think as humans, we need to have a grateful heart to others who have helped us. If you don't feel anything towards the people who have helped you and take them for granted, then...(laughing)...I don't know what to say...If someone has ever helped me, I would definitely like to repay him.

Nilsa (BR036) – middle-class Brazilian Immigrant mother to 7-year-old girl (10 years in the United States): I think that you have to value the people that help you and that are available to you in moments when you need help and in that way you relate well to people. Because I think people need each other to live well.

Addressing RQ1, “Not to take people's help for granted” was the one response given by all the groups. It is clear from the examples that gratitude elicited positive

emotions in every cultural group. The examples highlight that by not taking people's *help* for granted, people were beginning to discuss gratitude in a virtuous way. The idea that people do not need to give assistance and are choosing to help based on their own desire is important and should be recognized.

Despite this code demonstrating the commonality of gratitude among groups, one RQ2 difference found was that this code was given more frequently by both middle-class and working-class Brazilian immigrants than any other group. More than other groups, Brazilian immigrants were focused on the help that one receives from others as being important. This did not differ based on time lived in the United States.

### **Appreciate What One Has in Life**

Destiny (934) middle-class African American mother to 11-year-old boy: I think because it (gratitude) creates humility and for the person to be humble ummm and grateful for the things that they have and when they lack in those areas they can still be grateful for the things that they have. Whether it be—you know a nice car, a nice house. What have you, just be grateful to breathe air.

Peyton (1156) – working-class African American mother to 13-year-old girl: It's just being grateful and appreciative of whatever the situation may be you know if you're living with family, hey, you're not living on the streets. So you know it's just looking at the situation and saying hey you know this is where I was, this is where I'm at and just be grateful for the journey along the way to where you're gonna be. It just I'm grateful for my little put put car. I thought it was going to break down Saturday, but it didn't.

Molly (1007) middle-class European American mother to 8-year-old girl: Uh..I think it's really important to appreciate the things that you are offered in life and um..you know not everybody has the same opportunities and privileges and I think that something is lost when people don't feel like you're grateful for the opportunities that they've given you...I guess it's from my own personal experience of--you know being around young children and--and having them not say "Thank you" and not appreciate what's being offered to them--um..you know when they seem essentially ungrateful--uh to me it's disheartening because I feel



like children who are ungrateful grow up to be adults who are ungrateful and they're usually not great assets to society.

Jerusa – (BR042) – middle-class Brazilian Immigrant mother to 12-year-old girl (19 years in the United States): I think it's important. I don't know, be grateful for what you have, for the things that happen in your life. That's being grateful, right? Recognize the good things that happen in life.

In response to RQ1, to “appreciate what one has in life” was another common answer found in most of the cultural groups. An exception was found in the middle-class Chinese group indicating an RQ2 difference. One additional RQ2 variation noted is that it was a more frequent response of all participants who were native-born American citizens than other groups. Later in the interview, it seems the need to “appreciate what one has in life” is related to how North American parents' responded when asked for what (rather than to whom) they believe their children should be grateful. It may be that North Americans confound more readily appreciation and gratitude.

Looking at the examples given above, it seems as if this response may be focused more on the material goods that one has or what one may be able to acquire based on personal financial power, but it is not necessarily the case. Parents also reported the need to appreciate the people in one's life.

Peyton (1156) – working-class African American mom to 13-year-old girl: I'm more grateful to you know a person helping me out versus an organization maybe or monetary help. Your words mean more to me than you say “hey, you go buy me something.” You know, so there's different kinds of gratefulness to me.

Meredith (1003): middle-class European American mother to 8-year-old girl: Uhh I mean if--if you can't be thankful and grateful for what you have, I don't think you ever--I don't know where the barometer would be for what's important, you know I think you have to realize whether it be grateful for friendships and grateful

for family. Um I think if you--if you're grateful for what you have, when you lose those things or you recognize that there's people who don't have it, you can-- you're more apt to help them and to make them feel more comfortable or come into your family or be part of your family. So I think--uhm whether it's the smallest little thing or the biggest thing if we're not--if we're not grateful for that, how are we--how do we know what to feel? Does that make sense?

As Peyton explained, being grateful for all things is important, but it does not mean she feels the same about all things. In addition, Meredith talked about having a family and friendships, which are not the same as material goods. Again, North Americans were not the only groups to highlight this, but they were by far the most prevalent.

### **Creates Cycle of Gratitude**

Porsha (1118) middle-class African American mother to 12-year-old girl: Because It's kinda like being humble... You never know how you gonna need somebody or how somebody might need you... little things you do affect people in a way that you wouldn't even understand and them to you. Like something minute to you might be like a mountain to somebody else and it's just always good to think positively.

Guadalupe (675) working-class Mexican Immigrant mother to 7-year-old boy (25 years in the United States): I like to help people if possible. I like to help without looking for something in exchange. This is how everyone should be and then all would help each other.

Juliana (BR005) working-class Brazilian Immigrant mother to 9-year-old boy (10 years in the United States): It's this (meaning the story she told about someone helping her and the desire to keep the person as a close friend in her life because of gratitude she feels). I even cried telling you. Sometimes you receive help from someone you least expect it from and you thank this person. Sometimes then you just give help out of the blue to someone you don't know. I think gratitude is good for human beings, it's good for the soul.

“Creates cycle of gratitude” is a significant code because it indicates that there may be an understanding that gratitude is based on a reciprocal relationship between benefactor and beneficiary. This is important because this relationship is a hallmark of virtuous gratitude. However, in spite of the positive examples of thinking of gratitude as reciprocal, it is important to use caution and not assume the motive on which reciprocation is based. As with children, adults may also be concerned that they will not be helped in the future unless they reciprocate to help given them. The code was found in the majority of cultural groups suggesting it is an RQ1 response, but the Chinese did not express this type of gratitude highlighting a distinct RQ2 variation.

### **If Grateful, You Can Get Along With Others in Society**

Just as the Chinese were the only group to not respond with “creates cycle of gratitude”, they were the only group to respond with this unique code when asked this question. They were unique in specifically suggesting that gratitude has a role in helping people live well and properly with others in society, as opposed to just speaking about the importance of gratitude in interpersonal relationships more generally. This is compelling because the idea that gratitude is the key to living with others in harmony and is necessary in order to understand how one must act to get along with others is an important distinction and this idea is a theme that is found throughout the Chinese interviews.

Liqin (003) middle-class Chinese mother to 11-year-old boy: I think it’s important to have someone that a child can rely on during the process of growing and learning. He needs to have a good relationship with his teacher and his classmates. In future work, he cannot complete all the work by himself and also

needs the cooperation of many other people. So such relationships are needed. You need to help people who have helped you. Having a grateful heart is important...My husband and I came to a new town, and gradually began knowing more and more people around. So we get along with each other, help each other and are grateful. Gradually everyone becomes your relatives, like brothers and sisters. When I have something I need help with, the friends around me come to help me, for which I am very grateful. When they have something that needs help, I go to help them. Therefore, I think children should get along well with the people around them no matter where they work or live. They should be grateful for help. If you are indifferent, no one around would like you.

Zhou (020) middle-class Chinese mother to 9-year-old boy: I think if a person doesn't know being grateful for what other people have done for him, he can't live in this society. If he only thinks of what he can get from others without repayment, he would never have real friends.

One additional Chinese interview is presented here because of the depth of thought with regard to the importance of gratitude and the understanding on the part of the parent that gratitude in Western countries may not be the same as how gratitude is perceived in China. It is an interesting viewpoint considering that some fundamental differences in explaining the importance of gratitude were found when comparing parent comments from parents living in the United States versus parents living in China. For example, the code presented above regarding the need to be able to function in society.

Li (011) middle-class Chinese mother to 9-year-old girl: I think it is the basic principle as a human, and it's also a good characteristic. We would be selfish and egocentric without the feeling of gratitude. From a viewpoint of perspective taking, gratitude is very important. I like what Western cultures have encouraged. They don't have strict rules regarding respect toward elders. Everyone is equal. I think their sense of gratitude all comes naturally, not something that you have to force. They express their gratitude not because someone is your boss or someone is older than you or whatever other reasons...I want to feel true gratitude.

The last example is significant because Li's comments about strict rules governing gratitude in China suggest that gratitude as it is understood in China may not always be based on autonomous, but rather heteronomous rules. This suggests that the requisite of virtuous gratitude to require autonomy as understood in the West may not be universal. Many Chinese parental comments seem to equate gratitude with respecting your elders or those above you in status, such as a boss. However, Chinese parental comments also reflect the way that friends and family help each other as the key to experiencing gratitude. Confucian principles state that following virtuous gratitude as a way of existing harmoniously with others is the right way to live in society and these principles also stipulate looking after one's parents as part of filial piety (Fung 1983; Yang, 1961). It could be that the joining of these two ideas lies at the foundation of Chinese gratitude.

### **Meaning of Gratitude for Parents**

Besides being asked about the importance of gratitude, the majority of parents were asked what gratitude means to them. Interviewers were not consistent in asking this question; therefore, there are fewer responses than when parents were asked about the importance of gratitude. When considering RQ1, only one Chinese parent was asked this question so the Chinese parents are not included in the table and there was no way to explore commonality among all groups. For some parents the responses were quite similar to when describing why gratitude is important; however, for some groups, the frequency of certain responses was quite different. For example, the most frequent response of both middle- and working-class Brazilian immigrants was that you "cannot

take people's help for granted" when asked about the importance of gratitude (see Table 3). In contrast, when asked about the meaning of gratitude, both middle- and working-class Brazilian immigrants mentioned most frequently "noticing everything around one" and "appreciating all of the little things" (see Table 4). This suggests that the ways that parents think about gratitude may be different given the question and also highlights the changing nature of the concept of gratitude for parents. Parents were not asked this question in regard to their children; therefore, their children were not mentioned in the responses and neither was child age.

Table 4

## Meaning of Gratitude for Parents

	African Americans		European Americans	Mexican Immigrants	Brazilian Immigrants	
	Middle Class	Working Class	Middle Class	Working Class	Middle Class	Working Class
Feeling grateful (appreciative) for everything	20%	25%	54%	0	35%	38%
Being thankful to benefactor who helped/did something	0	25%	23%	27%	23%	25%
Reciprocating with help to a benefactor	20%	13%	0	9%	15%	25%
Feeling appreciation for something that happened or was given	60%	25%	8%	0	0	0
Feeling of love between two people	0	0	0	9%	12%	13%
Being thankful for food/home/etc...	0	13%	15%	0	0	0
Being thankful for all God provides	0	0	0	27%	8%	0
Other	0	0	0	27%	8%	0
Total number of responses	5	8	13	11	26	8

**Feeling Grateful (Appreciative) for Everything**

Amelia (1194) middle-class European American mother to 11-year-old girl:  
 Gratitude to me means uhm it's a state of mind. I think it's, you know, it's not it's not a thing, it's not the tree that I'm giving to my mom's neighbors. It's the bond that is created between us. It's the uhm gratitude is...it's kind of a way of being in the world...You know like with my kids we talk about goals and then we talk about what we're thankful for...I feel like it's a two part thing. It's a part of reflecting and an act of making those things like reaffirming those things so not

just doing things not just being in the world in a certain way but also it's a reciprocal thing so you know so I feel like being grateful makes you more able to give and makes you more open in some ways so I see it as a reciprocal thing so like for my mom's neighbors it's like I don't know if I'll ever have the opportunity to repay what they have done for me, but I feel being grateful to them might make me more able to do something for someone else you know what I'm saying ? Like I may not have the opportunity to pay them specifically in that way but but I may be then more likely to sacrifice something else for something else or to make an extra, do extra, or do an extra effort for someone that I can help. You know?

Marina (986) middle-class European American mother to 8-year-old girl: It means that I'm happy for what I have or what has been given to me without reservation, without there being any conditional part of that. That no matter how small it is or even if everything I have was gone tomorrow, I'm still be grateful for what...um...you know for my family and for my kids and for all that stuff. And that gratitude isn't about what you have, it's about what you—umm—what you can share as well.

Angela (BR037) middle-class Brazilian Immigrant mother to 7-year-old girl (13 years in the United States): It means to wake up every day and say how grateful I am, to have my family, to have my health. And many people don't have that, many people are sick, many people are without a job. So gratitude to me is to thank God for what I have, for my family, for health, and my entire family and because of this to give to others as well.

Aily and Guilherme (BR041) working-class Brazilian Immigrant mother and father to 9-year-old girl (14 years in the United States):  
Mother: You can recognize the good things around you. And you recognize the bad things that happen too.

Father: I believe that only those who are grateful enjoy life...if you live without gratitude you live like this "I get this to get that and that to get the other"...I'll never stop and look back and appreciate where I was or where I am.

Mother: You don't feel satisfaction in what you have (without gratitude).

Interestingly, considering RQ1, there was not as much variation in what parents chose as most important when considering the meaning of gratitude versus the importance of gratitude. Participants in most groups said that gratitude means noticing



everything around you and feeling grateful or appreciative for it all, often to a specific mention of the “little things in life.” Significantly, relationships with other people were often included in this response, but it encompassed more than just interpersonal relationships. This suggests that thinking of the meaning of gratitude for many elicited a response that indicates people often think of others and the help that others have provided them. Therefore, even if all of components required to be considered virtuous gratitude or connective gratitude are not described in totality by parents in one single response, many parents appear to be describing virtuous gratitude.

### **Being Thankful to a Benefactor who Helped/Did Something**

Sheniqua (785) working-class African American mother to 9-year-old girl: I try to have gratitude for anything someone does for me or show me how to do.

Magali (713) working-class Mexican Immigrant mother to 8-year-old girl (12 years in the United States): To be thankful to the person who...somebody who has done you a favor or something to help you, you thank them. You always have to be thankful to the person who helped you.

Bruna (BR039) middle-class Brazilian Immigrant mother to 9-year-old boy (17 years in the United States): It means that you're thankful to the person (who helped you)...

As with feeling grateful for everything, most groups had a response in this category suggesting that the need to feel thankful to a benefactor is prevalent in the majority of cultural groups represented here. In response to RQ2, middle-class African Americans did not give being thankful to a benefactor as an example, but there were only five responses from this group. Therefore, it is not easy to draw any conclusions and does not indicate that it would not be more easily found in a larger group.

## **Reciprocating with Help to a Benefactor**

Bruna (BR039) middle-class Brazilian Immigrant mother to 9-year-old boy (17 years in the United States):...(a continuation from above) ). and want to do for that person what they did for you (example of reciprocation as well), or even do something for other people as a way to pay it forward.

Ning (001) middle-class Chinese mother to 9-year-old girl: It's like repaying someone...I think this is a kind of relationship... He helped you; you repay him, which also increases (positive) feelings toward each other.

Thinking again of RQ1, reciprocating with help to a benefactor was again found in five of the six cultural groups represented. In fact, the one Chinese parent who responded to this question gave it as her response. This is a key step in virtuous gratitude; thus it is significant that it is ubiquitous in a variety of cultural groups.

## **Feeling Gratitude (Appreciation) for Something That Happened or Was Given**

Joleah (1317) middle-class African American mother to 9-year-old boy: If I had to define gratitude I would say that it is being appreciative and happy about things that you receive.

Quintasia (1290) working-class African American mother to 8-year-old boy: I guess feeling some sort of appreciation and satisfaction for something that has happened to me or been given to you or something that you accomplished.

This is one code that addresses RQ2. In the interviews, only native-born Americans fell into this category and many more African Americans of both classes than middle-class European Americans. In the parent interviews presented here appreciation seems associated less to thoughts of others. When using the word appreciation, parents

seem to speak less about a person who may have been involved in why the parent is feeling appreciation in the first place and more about their own individual feelings.

## **Love**

Andrea (BR100) middle-class Brazilian Immigrant mother to 12-year-old girl (2 years in the United States): It means receiving with love. When you receive something with love, then automatically, you return the feeling of love for the people who did something for you. So for me gratitude is as if it were to give back the love that was given.

This code highlights an important RQ2 distinction. Only the Latino groups mentioned love. It was not a common response, but the idea of gratitude as a way to experience love with love being the emotion elicited by receiving help or another benefit from another and then giving back to a benefactor is significant.

## **Being Thankful for All That God Provides**

Rosario (689) working-class Mexican Immigrant mother to 9-year-old boy (15 years in the United States): God gives us our health and it all starts there. Without our God-given health nothing else is possible, no work, no things, no being able to take the kids to school, nothing.

Viviane (BR024) middle-class Brazilian Immigrant mother to 8-year-old girl (3 and a half years in the United States): Because I'm a Christian and gratitude is not just from being human...So, I'm grateful every morning and I thank God, I thank him for my family. I have a tremendous amount of gratitude and I want her (daughter) to learn it as well, that we're not here for nothing and we're not here alone. So, we thank God every day. A huge thank you! A huge thing to know that it's not possible to do anything alone. If there weren't air, then I wouldn't be breathing....

Another RQ2 difference with regard to Latinos involves God and religion. Throughout the interviews, the Latino groups consistently mentioned religion and God more than other groups, including when discussing the meaning of gratitude.

### **Parents' Thoughts Regarding When They Should Feel Gratitude**

After exploring why parents think gratitude is important and how they define it, interviewers attempted to understand in what situations parents believe it is appropriate to feel gratitude. An important RQ1 finding is that for every cultural group, the most or second-most frequent response given was when someone either does something for you or helps you. This is significant because although differences exist with regard to why gratitude may be important or what it means, there is clear recognition that it is most often thought of as a response to another human being, as is the case with virtuous gratitude.

## When Parents Feel It's Appropriate for Themselves to Feel Gratitude

Table 5

Situations in which Parents Feel It Is Appropriate to Feel Gratitude

	African Americans		European Americans	Mexican Immigrants	Chinese	Brazilian Immigrants	
	Middle Class	Working Class	Middle Class	Working Class	Middle Class	Middle Class	Working Class
When benefactor helps you	57%	57%	36%	33%	83%	50%	44%
All occasions	29%	29%	36%	22%	17%	27%	44%
For everything – food, clothes, a house, for children	0	7%	14%	11%	0	0	0
Other	14%	7%	14%	33%	0	9%	0
Total number of responses	7	14	14	9	6	22	9

### When a Benefactor Helps You

Azoria (926) middle-class African American mother to 10-year-old boy: When you need help...um...gratitude comes in when you see someone in need and you step in and help. To me that's like you are grateful and you want to show them gratitude...for being there for you.

Inija (747) working-class African American mother to 8-year-old girl: I'll say when someone is helping you with something 'cause that's letting them know that you appreciate what they have done for you...just somebody showing you something, teaching you something, say if you have somewhere to go and you don't have nobody else to go with, they taking their time out to go with you, that's showing they care.

Li (011) middle-class Chinese mother to 9-year-old girl: Whenever others have helped you and whenever someone really cares about you. I believe love is mutual. When you received help from someone, you need to repay them. (Li mentioned wanting to feel real gratitude.)

Zhang (012) middle-class Chinese mother to 10-year-old boy: I think whenever I receive some help or receive something.

Consuela (694) working-class Mexican Immigrant mother to 9-year-old boy (13 years in the United States): When someone helps you and you need to eat.

This response addresses RQ1 and was by far the most prevalent found across all cultural groups represented. This is significant because when asked the question, the majority of parents in all groups related the thought of gratitude to when another person has acted in a way that is beneficial to them, not a generic sense of appreciation. Many of the parents highlighted an occasion in which a benefactor is giving for no other reason than to help a beneficiary.

### **All Occasions**

Rebecca (1337) middle-class European American mother to 10-year-old girl: In all situations. I think you should feel grateful in my line of work (real estate). I go to people and ask them for their business because it provides for my family and they are grateful for my services at the end of the day because I've provided for their families. So, I think you have to have gratitude in everything you do. Even in school be grateful for your teachers. They show up to teach you. It's a circle and it has to start somehow and somewhere, down the line if someone is not grateful it causes hatred.

Emilio (BR047) working-class Brazilian Immigrant father to 9-year-old girl (18 years in the United States): Gratitude at all times is good...in every moment, in any situation, whoever the person is, whatever race, color doesn't matter. I'll give you an example, not because I want to make myself look good in your study...One time I was going into the supermarket... and in the doorway there was a Hispanic family. The dad said to me, "I don't have anything to eat today (participant pauses in interview because he is weeping too hard to continue), my children are there. I'm not asking for money but could you go in the store with me and buy them something to eat?"...I thought, OK, let's go...We bought everything he wanted or needed....leaving the store, seeing the way the children's eyes sparkled was so gratifying...So that's what it is... 'doing good without seeing who'. I think this story is a kind of gratitude because a lot of times people think

of gratitude only as a way to reciprocate when someone does something good for you, but gratitude, you can show gratitude to someone that didn't do anything for you, not only to someone who did something for or gave something to you, or said something nice to you. You can receive from someone all that you gave to them, but you can give it to another person too.

“All occasions” was another RQ1 response found in all cultural groups. These examples demonstrate that by saying “all occasions” parents are not necessarily thinking of gratitude as appreciation in a general sense. The examples also demonstrate that parents are mixing the idea of gratitude with generosity and they are not the same thing. The second example highlights the nature of “paying it forward” by giving “it” to another person. In his interview Emilio stated the need to reciprocate to a benefactor, but the above example demonstrates that in his opinion if someone is a grateful person, it is a way of being. It is the way people live their lives and consistently react, which is an aspect of virtuous gratitude. For Emilio, reciprocation to a benefactor does not mean only to the one benefactor, but that by a benefactor doing something positive for a beneficiary, the beneficiary will want to do more positive things for others. By “paying it forward”, gratitude is being created.

### **Other**

The following examples do not fit a category across all groups and therefore address RQ2. They are important to consider when thinking of how some people think of gratitude. What is salient in a person's life at any given point will often come through in an interview situation, which is the case here. Araceli is a cancer survivor still in treatment with three minor children.

Araceli (981) working-class Mexican Immigrant mother to 14-year-old girl (24 years in the United States): You know that you healthy, back then I didn't care about health. People that have nice cars and nice houses, I don't care about stuff like that, but to feel grateful is when you have good health.

Marcia (BR035) middle-class Brazilian Immigrant mother to 11-year-old girl (15 years in the United States): I think in emotional situations. For example, I don't consider that if someone comes and gives me a present a reason (to feel gratitude). I'm going to say thank you and I'm going to think it's great, but I don't think this justifies gratitude. Gratitude is when someone does something for you to feel good emotionally and not materially.

The last example given is particularly interesting because the idea is what other participants have said as well, it is not possible to *buy* friendship or *buy* love and by acting on virtuous gratitude, the action signifies friendship and a certain depth of feeling. Marcia's definition of gratitude was "to show people that they are important in your life, that you want the best for them, that if you could do something so that they're well, you would," which is in line with her comments here. Parents often spoke of a benefactor just giving their time to be with a beneficiary as an example of a reason to feel gratitude.

### **Parents' Thoughts Regarding When Children Should Be Grateful**

Besides being asked in which situations they personally felt it was appropriate to feel gratitude, parents were asked whether there are things for which their children should be grateful. Notably, one RQ1 finding is that the most frequent responses that parents gave for themselves (see Table 5) were not necessarily the same answers that parents gave for their children (see Table 6). For example, consider the RQ2 finding that middle- and working-class African American parents more often responded that they should feel gratitude when they "had been helped by someone" when responding for themselves.



In contrast, both groups most frequently responded that their children should express gratitude for “everything.” Addressing RQ1, child age was again not a factor in this response.

Table 6

When Children Should be Grateful

	African Americans		European Americans	Mexican Immigrants	Chinese	Brazilian Immigrants	
	Middle Class	Working Class	Middle Class	Working Class	Middle Class	Middle Class	Working Class
For everything – food, school, family	44%	50%	60%	27%	4%	38%	30%
Something specifically done for the child	22%	25%	30%	18%	29%	26%	20%
For things given by the parents	11%	10%	5%	9%	0	12%	0
Always - Religious	22%	10%	0	27%	0	6%	10%
Always Teachers' help	0	0	0	9%	21%	3%	30%
Other	0	0	0	0	33%	0	0
Total number of responses	9	20	20	11	24	34	10

### **For Everything – Food, School, Family**

This code addresses RQ1 and was found in all the cultural groups represented here. It was the most frequent code in all groups except the Chinese. Based on this, the first impression might be that responses to this code should be somewhat uniform. However, despite the prevalence of grateful “for everything” given as a response in all the groups, very significant RQ2 differences were found across both social class and racial/ethnic groups. First, distinctions were discovered between middle- and working-class groups. In addition, there was a distinction noted between African-American parents and the other cultural groups. Therefore, in the case of this code, examples are presented in subgroups based on similarity to one another because of the myriad RQ2 variations.

Imani (1342) middle-class African American mother to 11-year-old boy: I think he should be grateful for having opportunities that we didn't have in the sense it's hard for an 11-year-old to understand that in regard to being able to go to after school activities or clubs, being able to go to overnight camps, being able to have a TV in his room and video games, having parents that are involved in his life.

Nhandi (1149) middle-class African American mother to 13-year-old boy: I believe he and his brother have a good life. They for the most part get to do most of what they want. They enjoy hanging out with their friends...The both play travel soccer...and that's not very cheap so we do a lot of sacrifices to make sure that they can do that and he doesn't want for a lot and you know unless it's just something super expensive that's out of the picture. But if he usually ask for and I feel like if my kid's have a good attitude or doing what they're supposed to then they get it. So I think he should be grateful just because he has and he's surrounded by a great family that loves him.

Takita (936) working-class African American mother to 12-year-old boy: he should be grateful that he has--umm both parents, even if we don't live together. 'Cause there are kids that are being raised in group-homes or by grandparents and even though his parents aren't together and we don't necessarily get along,

he still has both of his parents independently. He should be grateful that he has his own bedroom. Na--ah--there's plenty of kids that have to share a bedroom with a sibling, he has his own space. He doesn't have to share clothes with a little brother, you know his things are his own. I grew up with siblings, I always had to share everything. I'm the youngest, all I ever got was hand me downs, I never got anything new \*laughs\* and he gets new things and they're always all his. He doesn't--umm--it's the small things like that that he's not grateful for, but he is grateful for the big things. Like you know I (meaning son) can come home and I can talk to my mom and my mom will defend me or if I'm sick, my mom will give me medicine and can tuck me in. He's grateful for the big things but it's the little things like, I can go in my bedroom and shut my door that he's not grateful for yet.

Shontel (970) working-class African American mother to 13-year-old boy: Because there's some kids out here that not making it like I tell him, you just don't understand I got a nephew it's like so hurtful tryna talk about stuff and he don't listen my nephew is now in prison I don't want my son to be that and I try to tell him over and over...he don't understand that he need to be grateful for all he got, things that no other kids got. We had two Playstation 4. Somebody robbed us. He gettin nice shoes nice clothes. I tell him there are kids ... that mom gotta go to clothing closet to do that and can't afford that.

Brandi (778) working-class African American mother to 8-year-old girl: I tell 'em..."Y'all gotta be grateful, thankful that ..there's people here that love you and care for you." Know what I'm saying, I was like "you got so many kids out here that don't have nothing." I let them know that they need to be grateful for the things they do have.

Both middle- and working-class African Americans were most likely to say that they felt their children should express gratitude "for everything," including things such as food and a home, but also having a loving family and friends. A distinction was noted between middle-class and working-class African Americans in that middle-class African Americans often specified that their children should notice the financial opportunities available to them. This could be money to join friends at the local mall or to be a part of clubs or activities. Based on the comments from middle-class African American parents

about their financial situation and life history, the impression that was given is that all of the middle-class African American families participating in the study are first generation middle class. Both middle- and working-class African American mothers commented on their children's need to feel grateful and their children having "more" than they did. "More" could refer to opportunities, but also to having more personal space in living quarters.

In the preceding examples it is possible to see the focus on material goods in these two groups. There is a contrast in social class in that the middle-class parents focused more on the things the children received above and beyond the norm. The working-class parents focused on children having what to some other groups may seem like normal necessities, such as new clothes as opposed to hand me downs, or a child not needing to share a room. The same social comparison was made, but with a different emphasis based on social class. The focus on material goods makes it seem as if the parents may be materialistic, but it may be that having constant financial concerns keeps thoughts of material goods salient for this population.

The following are middle-class examples. Both middle-class European Americans and middle-class Brazilian immigrant responses were easily distinguishable from other similar responses discussing the need for children to be grateful "for everything." The parents in these two groups qualified many objects with adjectives denoting the superior quality of goods that their children had.

Chloe (1044) middle-class European American mother to 9-year-old boy:  
Because... he's got what any kid would need or--you know. He's got a mother and

father who love each other and love him and he's got two siblings which I'm sure he's not really grateful for right now but they are all for the most part good, good people. And he's got his health, he's very healthy. He's very athletic. He's intelligent. He's cute and he's a good friend. Everybody--all the kids like him, adults love him. He's got a lot of qualities that are valuable in life. So I hope he appreciates that and beyond that, he's got--you know this house with this big yard and places to play and a basketball hoop and he has 6 grandparents that all love him and I'll spend time with him and he's got coaches that are great and value him he's got so much.

Meredith (1003) middle-class European American mother to 8-year-old girl: Because I think that sometimes in the world that she's being raised in it's a little different than the world that lots of kids are being raised in. So I feel like she needs to realize how fortunate she ...has it. And be thankful for the things that she has, supportive family, wonderful school, a roof over her head, clothes to wear, friendships--tons and tons of friends, healthy family. Um so I think that-- that she does need to be grateful and she does need to realize that that's not what everybody has. (When should she express gratitude?) I think every situation is okay to express gratitude. I just don't ever think of a time where you shouldn't express what your grateful for. Unless you're with a bunch of people who don't have a whole lot, then you don't--you can think it but I think sometimes you have to be respectful of who's around you...But I want her to always 'please' and 'thank you' and always thank people for being invited over somewhere or for when she's provided for a meal, or when she gets to go--go do special things. Um I like her to write a thank you letter if she gets--you know birthday gifts and um and she will often times help me volunteering whether it be her swim meets or what not and she'll come and give her time and help me do things, so I think it's important for her to learn that a lot of what we do to feel good and help other people, isn't something you're always getting paid for.

Like the other cultural groups in the study besides the Chinese, middle-class European Americans' and middle-class Brazilian immigrants' most frequent response was that their children should express gratitude "for everything." One unique factor in the responses of both these groups is that a distinction was often made about being grateful for *good* schools or a *good* education and a *nice* house. In addition, parents mentioned many experiences that are possible because they are in a privileged financial

position. A commonality in middle-class parents' responses suggesting an RQ1 finding among just the middle-class groups is that gratitude and a sense of entitlement do not seem to co-exist in a positive way. Meredith mentioned that her daughter should always be grateful and she also mentioned the need to be grateful for family and friends, but she stipulated that she should not show gratitude if people with less money are around. She was clearly not thinking of virtuous gratitude, but the comment is notable regardless because it suggests that her daughter should be consistently vocally grateful for her privileges unless someone is nearby who does not share them.

Angela (BR037) middle-class Brazilian immigrant mother to 7-year-old girl (13 years in the United States): For example, having a great house, the fact that she can travel with us, not many children her age have already been to five countries. So I think that she is exploring new cultures and having opportunities, to meet other people....to be grateful for being in the United States, to have a good quality public school system and that we can provide her with extra curricular activities...So then material things but I also think that we really care about our relationship with our family.

Camilla (BR026) middle- class Brazilian Immigrant mother to 7-year-old son (40 days in the United States): For being here [in the United States], for the fact that he studied in a good school, he had things of his own at home, to have the bed that he had. Here it's less common, but there (in Brazil) it's normal to see kids in the street, with nothing to eat. I think it's important.

Carolina (BR109) middle- class Brazilian Immigrant mother to 12-year-old boy (15 years in the United States): Yes. I always tell him that he should be grateful for the opportunity to be here, to have been born in the United States and to have a house, to have food everyday, the experiences he has had already at his age.

Izabela and João (BR003) working-class Brazilian Immigrant mother and father to 14-year-old boy (17 years in the United States): Izabela - For example, for being alive (mother laughing), for having two parents that are always taking care of him, for having a house.

João – I tell him all the time that it may not be the best, but we have food, maybe they aren't the best clothes, but they're clothes. If we look around in the world how many children are there with nothing, suffering. So a lot of times we talk with them (their children) that they need to be grateful even if it's not the brand they want but because there are many that don't have anything.

Yolanda (651) working-class Mexican Immigrant mother to 9-year-old girl (15 years in the United States): Everything...Because she's in the land of opportunity. We have a ton of people in Africa and Mexico everywhere who are starving, who have nothing to eat, nothing to wear and here you are. I don't care if you got little \$10 shoes, you got shoes. You got clothes, you got food! Even if it's just beans and eggs, you have food! ...We got food banks everywhere in Greensboro, America, everywhere. People will not go starving here.

Another RQ2 finding is that although the comments of the middle-class Brazilian immigrant mothers in general were similar to those of the middle-class European American mothers, there was one notable exception. Many of the middle-class Brazilian immigrant parents remarked on being grateful for living in the United States. Throughout the interviews no differences were apparent in how middle-class Brazilian immigrant parents or working-class Brazilian or Mexican immigrant parents felt about gratitude depending on how long they had lived in the United States. The middle-class Brazilian immigrant mother who has only lived in the United States for forty days compared what may be normal here versus Brazil, but that does not make her different in considering the reasons for which her daughter should be grateful. One example of a working-class Brazilian immigrant couple is included with this group to show what was a common contrast between middle-class and working-class responses to this question and throughout the interview. In addition, a comment from a working-class Mexican immigrant mother is included to show the emphasis put on gratitude for living in the

United States. This was a common difference in the immigrant groups versus those who were born in the United States or the Chinese nationals in China.

### **Always**

Tatiana (BR032) working-class Brazilian Immigrant mother to 9-year-old boy (6 years in the United States): Always (For what, for example?) With me, his father, with people, with his teacher, with everything...with his grandparents, with his friends.

The RQ2 finding “always” is very similar to the RQ1 finding “for everything”, but the way parents described these were not the same. When parents spoke about “for everything” the focus was on what the children had, whether it was a material object or love and affection. When parents said “always” or “on all occasions”, it was important that children noticed always and in every situation that they should feel grateful, whether it be for waking up in the morning or for grandparents nearby. This is in contrast to “for everything” that was more of a focus on the idea of having.

### **Always - Religious**

Peyton (1156) – working-class African American mom to 13-year-old girl: You know you not only be grateful to people but you know be grateful to God and the journey of the road. I mean cause I mean the journey you have to be grateful for the journey because it leads you to where you end up at. I mean I like the journey but I'm not liking the journey I'm on right now but I'm grateful for it gonna make me a better person. (laughing).

Ana (708) working-class Mexican Immigrant mother to 9-year-old boy (10 years in the United States): Simply for life...because, well, the new day that God gives us is a marvelous day and many people might not wake up to this kind of day.



Various RQ2 findings were discovered with this code. First, African American mothers' only responded "Always – Religious", but not "Always" without the religious connotation. Working-class Brazilian immigrants answered both "Always" and "Always – Religious", but they answered "Always" as often as they answered "for everything." Working-class Mexican immigrants also answered frequently "Always" and "Always – Religious;" however, most often for working-class Mexican immigrants there was a religious context added.

### **Teachers' Help**

Fan (021) middle- class Chinese mother to 9-year-old boy: I think he should be grateful for his teachers at school. They are all responsible teachers. I feel that we don't teach my child at home as much as what they would teach him at school. Teachers have taught him more.

Jing (009) middle- class Chinese mother to 9-year-old girl: She is relatively shy and quiet. But I think her English teacher likes her and always gives her chances to express herself in class. So I think my child should be grateful in this regard.

Liu (012) middle- class Chinese mother to 10-year-old boy: I don't particularly feel that he should be grateful for us because it's our responsibility to take care of him. I don't really expect him to pay us back in the future. However, I feel he definitely needs to pay his friends back (whenever he receives help from them)...Also, he should be grateful to his teachers.

Again, the Chinese parents were unique in the extreme importance put on gratitude towards teachers and tutors indicating a RQ2 finding. Other cultural groups might have mentioned good schools or a good education as something for which children should be grateful, but usually along with other things such as a good house and a loving family. The Chinese put a special focus on gratitude to teachers and would often

highlight gratitude to teachers not in combination with gratitude for other things as was more common with other cultural groups. Considering the focus of gratitude on teachers, it is not surprising that one mother suggested that teachers teach her daughter more than she and her husband do. Many parents echoed this sentiment, but others thought that parents teach children more. Importantly, the last example given is significant because the mother does not believe that her son needs to be grateful to her or her husband by paying them back in old age. The idea of taking care of parents in old age as a way of showing gratitude is mentioned repeatedly in the interviews so this mother's response is in sharp contrast to what many of the other parents say, which is that children should have gratitude for what their parents have done for them and think of repaying them.

### **Parents' and Childrens' Experiences with Gratitude**

#### **Help or Something of Value Parents Received From a Benefactor**

Parents were asked if they could recall a situation or occasion in which someone helped them to do something that was difficult to do by themselves or gave them something of value. Addressing RQ1, all participants, without exception, chose a time when someone helped them. The help given might have partially been financial in nature, for example, if money were needed either to pay bills in a time of need or to buy winter coats for children who did not have any. However, not one parent in one hundred interviews and seven distinct cultural groups chose to give an example that was merely something of material value that was given to them. This could be due to the nature of the interview or how the interviewers asked the question, but all participants spontaneously chose events that were profound in nature and, with one exception, elicited

connective gratitude on the part of the beneficiary. The need for manageable codes means that the codes presented below cannot elucidate adequately the outpouring of love and good will participants described as having been bestowed upon them by a very wide range of benefactors. When study participants shared the stories of help they received with the interviewers, it was not uncommon for participants in all cultural groups, including the fathers, to become emotional and cry.

There were some RQ2 differences noted. Interestingly, many Brazilian immigrants asked a follow up question about whether it needed to be about something of value. They were told it was not necessary, but they seemed confused initially by the use of the word “value.” There was much variation in responses in most cultural groups to this question; therefore, not as many responses are presented for each individual code and the focus will be on RQ2 findings.

Table 7

## Parents' Experiences of Help or Something of Value Received from a Benefactor

	African Americans		European Americans	Mexican Immigrants	Chinese	Brazilian Immigrants	
	Middle Class	Working Class	Middle Class	Working Class	Middle Class	Middle Class	Working Class
Family Support	25%	39%	18%	11%	6%	35%	13%
Friends' Support	25%	6%	12%	0	0	48%	38%
Help from Strangers	0	11%	6%	11%	0	4%	25%
Help / Support from Boss	0	6%	0	33%	28%	0	13%
Help / Support from Coworkers	0	6%	18%	0	17%	4%	0
Friends' Support Caring for Children	0	0	24%	22%	11%	9%	0
Family Support Caring for Children	50%	0	6%	0	28%	0	0
Help from neighbor	0	0	18%	0	11%	0	0
Social services & public school	0	17%	0	22%	0	0	0
Help from church	0	17%	0	0	0	0	13%
Total number of responses	8	18	17	9	18	23	8

**Family Support**

Nahla (778) working-class African American to 8-year-old girl:  
 Yeah..uhmm...basically having custody of my kids because if it wasn't for my mom and dad I wouldn't have 'em because CPS called me and was like, "Come to

Asheville, come get your kids.”, and then when I was going to court they was like—my lawyer stay right next door and she was like—umm,”you need somebody to step in and say they’d speak for you.” My mom and dad stepped in, so yeah I was real thankful for that.

Family support was the one code that was clearly an RQ1 finding and one that every cultural group represented in the study mentioned. Considering the importance given to families in all cultures, this is not surprising. As mentioned, despite similar codes existing across groups, responses to this question had more RQ2 disparate answers than did other questions because the situations described were very personal and unique in nature. In this case, the examples given by working-class African Americans with family support suggest that for this cultural group mutual reliance on family members may be a means of survival. Adult daughters often mentioned help received from their own mothers and the gratitude they feel towards them.

### **Friends’ Support**

Juliana (BR005) working-class Brazilian Immigrant mother to 9-year-old boy (10 years in the United States): When I got pregnant my husband was working for an American that never paid anyone...after working for three months and the guy didn’t pay, he (the American) gave a check without the funds to cover it...After that he (the American) turned around and left and there was no money...I had already stopped working and there was no money in our accounts. A friend simply said “money, here it is, there’s no hurry in paying it back” and he helped us.

Marian (BR027) middle- class Brazilian Immigrant mother to 8-year-old girl (2 months in the United States): It’s hard for me to answer this because normally I don’t have any difficulty doing things alone or need help, even if I don’t know how. But moving here (to the United States) I had people helping me and showing me where the best supermarket is and how to get to places.

Addressing RQ2, both working- and middle-class Brazilian immigrants gave more examples of help from friends than any other group and any other kind of help. This was not surprising because this group often mentioned that after leaving Brazil and not living near family, it was very important to have friends to rely on in the United States. The explanation often given was that being away from Brazil, regardless of how much time families had lived in the United States, friends took the place of family. It was reported multiple times that without even knowing a new family arriving, other Brazilian immigrants would offer any help and assistance that they could. There were no apparent differences in response regardless of how long the families had been living in the United States. When both of these women were asked what their emotions were for the people who helped them, the response expressed was “gratitude” and both mentioned remaining friends and becoming closer with their benefactors.

### **Family Support in Caring for Children**

Fan (021) middle-class Chinese mother to 9-year-old boy: My mother-in-law is living with us and she has helped me a lot in terms of taking care of my child.

Imani (1342) middle-class African American mother to 10-year-old boy: Well you know we live away from family so the kids have been getting sick back and forth and my mother-in-law she helped us a lot by coming to town. She drove an hour to come and be with the kids. And it just helps us because we don't have to take time off from work. We can maintain our norm while being secure that the kids are being cared for.

For middle-class African Americans, family support in caring for children was the most common experience shared with interviewers. For the Chinese, family support in caring for children was tied in frequency with help or support from a boss.

## **Support from Boss**

Maria (757) working-class Mexican Immigrant mother to 7-year-old girl (17 years in the United States): I have no car so they have helped me (her bosses). The 'señora' always has said if you need something or need help I'll come pick you up and take you where you need to go.

Liquin (003) middle-class Chinese mother to 11-year-old boy: In our construction company, most young male and female colleagues needed to go to the site (out of town) whenever they were single. Most people had to work on projects (out of town), and those who could work at the headquarters were the minority. I was thirty during the time and I was ready to have a baby so I wanted to come back....the manager of the technology department...helped me to transfer back as a technician. There were several leaders who have helped me, and I feel very grateful. Anyway, they are the people who I should feel grateful for.

Mexican immigrants most often gave examples of help or support given from a boss. The Chinese gave this response as often as family support in caring for children so a Chinese example is included here. Help from a boss is clearly salient to both of these groups.

## **Friends' Support in Caring for Children**

Suzanne (1177) middle-class European American mother to 10-year-old girl: So we've recently had a family change as my husband is battling epilepsy and he's not driving (he is a physician who can no longer work or drive) so we have been very blessed to be the recipients of many rides for our children...ummm...we have had families make us meals just to help out...I feel like I have been trying to look out for ways their family may need help, so that reciprocal relationship.

For European Americans, the most frequent example of when someone helped them was friends caring for their children. On the surface, this may seem as simple as

giving children a ride to where they need to be, but the reasons behind the need for help were often more complicated, such as recovering from surgery or a debilitating illness.

When considering the codes as a whole, of the codes that were not listed as most frequent among any of the groups, one RQ2 finding is that only the working class had examples depicting parents being helped by social services, a public service agency, or a church. For example, a working-class African American mother told of being helped by the YMCA so that a child could attend camp. A second example with a different working-class African American mother was given of a social worker that found the money to pay for a school uniform. When in great financial need, the church of a third working-class African American mother gave her money to pay her bills. One working-class Mexican immigrant mother told how her child's teacher bought winter coats for all of her older children and another working-class Mexican immigrant mother who had lived in the United States for ten years mentioned the invaluable help of the interpreter at the hospital. As mentioned, family support was the only way of receiving help that all groups mentioned. Interestingly, of the four middle-class groups, only the Chinese mentioned help or support from a boss. There is not space to illustrate all of the profound experiences shared by participants here, but it is noteworthy that participants from all racial/ethnic groups freely shared a multitude of moments that they described as having touched their hearts, caused them to feel and experience virtuous gratitude and brought them closer to their benefactors.



### **Parent-reported Child Experience with Gratitude**

As a way to understand when children demonstrate or do not demonstrate gratitude, parents were asked a series of questions designed to understand what they thought about their children's relation to gratitude. As part of this series, parents were asked when their children are *most* likely to express gratitude. The response to this question demonstrates what parents perceived as an event or situation that is most likely to elicit some sort of gratitude response from their children (see Table 8). The two most common responses "When child really wants something (object or event)" and "When someone gives child a gift" are ostensibly the same answer because in the end the child is being given something or an event that they would like. However, the two responses remain as separate codes because parents were specific that for certain children *really* wanting something was why they were more likely to show gratitude for it. In some cases this distinction was important because children may not demonstrate as much gratitude receiving a gift if it was not actually something they wanted. Responding to this question was when parents began mentioning age.

Table 8

## Situations in which Children Are Most likely to Express Gratitude

	African Americans		European Americans	Mexican Immigrants	Chinese	Brazilian Immigrants	
	Middle Class	Working Class	Middle Class	Working Class	Middle Class	Middle Class	Working Class
When someone gives him a gift	13%	36%	36%	17%	25%	46%	40%
When child really wants something (object or event)	25%	29%	29%	50%	38%	12%	40%
When someone helps him	13%	0	0	17%	25%	15%	10%
On all occasions	38%	14%	14%	0	0	0	10%
When child is not expecting it	13%	21%	7%	0	0	4%	0
When child realizes the effort	0	0	14%	0	13%	4%	0
When someone they like gives them something	0	0	0	17%	0	4%	0
To parents	0	0	0	0	0	12%	0
Other	0	7%	0	0	0	4%	0
Total number of responses	8	14	14	6	8	26	10

## **Receiving a Gift**

Bonnie (1014) middle- class European American mother to 9-year-old girl: If we give her gifts...I think that she does get very excited about getting new things but gratitude is short-lived, you know?

Viviane (BR024): middle- class Brazilian Immigrant mother to 8-year-old girl (3 and a half years in the United States): I think because of her age, for things you can buy. Because of her age, she needs something concrete. She can't be thankful for the air she breathes. She doesn't understand the magnitude of everything. I think it's like this. If you give her a cell phone, she's going to thank you a lot.

Addressing RQ1, it was quite common for parents in all the cultural groups to mention that children express more gratitude for something that is tangible or concrete because being young children's concept of feeling gratitude is limited.

## **When the Child *Really* Wants Something (Object or Event)**

Ruan (007) middle-class Chinese mother to 13-year-old boy: Whenever he really wants something. When he sees our efforts he helps, and he was very grateful after he entered the good middle school. Normally, he expresses his gratitude whenever he gets something that he really wants.

Yara (BR013) working-class Brazilian Immigrant mother to 8-year-old girl (8 years in the United States): When we do what she wants. Sometimes, she wants to go on a trip and we do, for her, it's everything, you know? Kids!

Araceli (981) working-class Mexican Immigrant mother to a 14-year-old girl (24 years in the United States): When she really wanna go somewhere. (What does she say or do in those situations?) I get off work and honey it look like Mary Poppins been here...I didn't have to ask her to do it, that's how I know something is up her sleeve is when everything is clean (mom laughs) and I ain't ask her to do it.

Takita (936) working-class African American mother to 12-year-old boy: He's most likely to show gratitude when it's something that he really wanted...because he's a twelve-year-old boy (mom laughs).

Many parents in all the cultural groups said that their children were most likely to express gratitude when they really wanted something and then got it in the end. The reaction of the child was often described as excitement or happiness. There is no way to compare the response of parents and children in this example because the questions leading up to the responses were not identical. However, it is interesting that many parents qualified the response to this question by saying something of the nature that “she/he is a child.” The implication is that children are generally only excited for the things that they like and want; therefore, it is expected that this would be the time that they most likely would remember they should feel gratitude.

### **On All Occasions**

Nyala (977) working-class African American mother to 13-year-old boy: I guess in everything that you do for ‘em. Yeah in ever-pretty much everything you do for ‘em, but he’s very grateful when I bring him some Takis (type of snack food), he love Takis (mom laughing).

With this code, RQ2 findings start to show. Overall, even though they are not the only groups to mention this, both middle- and working-class African Americans were more likely than other groups to say that their children expressed gratitude on “all occasions.” Responses to later questions suggest that some mothers in these groups also feel that they demonstrate the right amount of gratitude. There are many mothers in this group who feel their children do not show gratitude, but it seems that well-behaved good-natured children are seen as always expressing gratitude.

## **Children Do Not Express Gratitude**

Sun (008) middle- class Chinese mother to 7-year-old boy: I think only a few times. He doesn't express himself very often. I think we might need to teach him to express his gratitude more often.

Huang (002) middle- class Chinese father to 10-year-old girl: I can't really answer this...I feel like she expresses less gratitude to others in front of me.

An important note when reading Table 8 is that far fewer Chinese parents responded to this particular question out of the overall series of questions than the other groups. Often the interviewer did not include the question. Second, an RQ2 finding was that when asked the question, parents would sometimes say that the child has almost never expressed gratitude or does not express gratitude enough. Therefore, the question remained unanswered. Third, parents would say that they were unable to answer because they did not know when their child expressed gratitude. It could be argued that these responses from Chinese parents are answers, but this specific question was to illustrate when children demonstrate the *most* gratitude and there are other questions that capture when children do not show gratitude or enough gratitude. Therefore, in this case these responses remained uncoded.

### **Parent Feelings Towards a Benefactor Who Did Something Meaningful for Them**

Moving from events that may evoke gratitude to the feelings these events may draw out, parents were asked what feelings they had towards the benefactor who they had described as the person who had helped them. Addressing RQ1, the overwhelming majority of the parents in all the cultural groups said they felt gratitude (see Table 9).

Many parents gave more than one response to this question because there was an outpouring of positive emotion with regard to the benefactor; therefore it was natural for the parents to say more than one thing. The code “closer to person” is included in Table 9, but it was always mentioned as a complementary emotion felt by the beneficiary towards the benefactor. It was not mentioned in isolation from other emotions.

Table 9

Parents’ Feelings Toward Benefactor Who Helped Them

	African Americans		European Americans	Mexican Immigrants	Chinese	Brazilian Immigrants	
	Middle Class	Working Class	Middle Class	Working Class	Middle Class	Middle Class	Working Class
Grateful/Thankful	40%	65%	60%	44%	46%	48%	58%
Love	30%	6%	8%	13%	8%	13%	17%
Closer to person	0	0	16%	25%	21%	18%	25%
Friendship	0	0	4%	6%	8%	18%	0
Kind	0	0	4%	6%	13%	0	0
Happy	0	12%	0	0	0	3%	0
Total number of responses	10	17	25	16	24	40	12

**Grateful/Thankful**

Porsha (1118) middle-class African American mom to 12-year-old girl: I’m very thankful for her (her mother). I tell her all the time, ‘Lord you are like a Godsend’ ‘cause a lot of people don’t have a good relationship with their mom and their kids barely see their grandparents.

Brandi (778) working-class African American mom to 8-year-old girl: I feel gratitude, I felt thankful. You know what I’m saying, I was just thrilled...you know what I’m saying couldn’t be put into words...I love my parents, even before—they have always been there for me.

Tiffany (1022) middle-class European American mother to 9-year-old girl: Oh, I was extremely grateful and I hated asking..but they—they (friends) were

overwhelmingly offering to help and it was--it was just a really good feeling ...I kept remembering thinking how lucky I am that I have people that care about me and that care about Claire (her daughter) and that--that recognized that even though I might not be overly willing to ask for help I needed it. I feel like the--you know, the people that--that offered me help that day ... are all close and they are like family to me...I even felt it before this happened, but I never really had something that solidified it.

Aurora (690) working-class Mexican Immigrant mother to 9-year-old boy: I felt so grateful to her. I felt close to her, like she (the woman who helped her) was my mother.

Zhou (020) middle- class Chinese mother to 9-year-old boy: I was very grateful, and I told myself that I'm going to try my best to not let them (in-laws) down. (Since you received help, have your emotions changed towards them?) I've felt a little bit different to my in-laws. I used to think that I was an outsider to them, and they probably would not help me to develop my career. It seems I was wrong before.

Marian (BR027) middle- class Brazilian mother to 8-year-old girl (2 months in the United States): Gratitude. There was one woman that I already knew (out of a group of women who helped her when she moved to the United States) and things changed, I became closer to her. There were two that showed me around Beatriz's school and I got to know them and to like them.

Yara (BR013) working-class Brazilian mother to 8-year-old girl (8 years in the United States): If I could, I'd give everyone an enormous bear hug (the group from her church who took an offering to pay for her daughter's medical bills). I cried a lot from feeling so much gratitude. I'm eternally grateful.

Considering the positive emotion elicited by the kind act of a benefactor as an essential component of virtuous gratitude, it is clear this aspect is a RQ1 finding that exists in all the cultural groups that participated in this study. Despite some RQ2 variation such as responses of kindness, friendship, and love, the vast majority of parents

answered in a similar way to this question or expressed feelings of thankfulness and gratitude first, and then mentioned other feelings.

### **Parent Gratitude Expressions**

Parents were asked how they expressed gratitude to the people who helped them and how they may express gratitude in other situations (Table 10). The majority of parents gave more than one answer; therefore, the total number of responses is greater than the actual size of the groups. One major RQ1 finding is that parents in every cultural group mentioned saying “thank you” and helping their benefactor as ways of expressing gratitude. As seen before, praying or thanking God was an RQ2 finding and not common, but at least one person in every group except for middle-class African Americans and middle-class Chinese mentioned it as a way of expressing thanks. There were many unique responses and much variation in answering this question so there are many codes in the “other” category.



Table 10

## Parents' Gratitude Expressions

	African Americans		European Americans	Mexican Immigrants	Chinese	Brazilian Immigrants	
	Middle Class	Working Class	Middle Class	Working Class	Middle Class	Middle Class	Working Class
Say thank you	26%	25%	27%	30%	24%	21%	36%
Help them	11%	14%	10%	20%	41%	21%	50%
Buy a present	26%	16%	14%	20%	21%	17%	0
Do anything you could	5%	8%	4%	7%	9%	8%	0
Sending messages, card, note	16%	12%	12%	3%	0	5%	0
Hugging	5%	12%	8%	0	0	5%	7%
Paying forward	0	4%	14%	10%	0	2%	0
Other	11%	10%	10%	7%	6%	11%	7%
Total number of responses	19	51	49	30	34	63	14

**Saying Thank You**

Fayth (771) working-class African American mother to 9-year-old boy: It just depends on the person, umm, I let them know that no matter what they done, I tell 'em I appreciate it and if I can do something back in return, I will always give back and help out in a time of need if they need something...I mean they want to be acknowledged, let 'em know that you appreciate 'em.

Kirsten (1192) middle-class European American mother to 11-year-old boy: Well, by saying thank you, acknowledging when people have contributed positively to me or my life or my family and also doing deeds for them in kind.

Magali (713) working-class Mexican Immigrant mother to 8-year-old girl (12 years in the United States): Thanking the person...with words or with something. I don't know, giving something as a present, I don't know, inviting the person to eat.

Eduarda (BR023) working-class Brazilian Immigrant mother to 7-year-old boy (9 years in the United States): Gratitude is a smile, a hug, a word of thanks, and a prayer.

In this RQ1 response, parents state that they would verbally thank their benefactor.

### **Helping the Person**

Ning (001) middle-class Chinese mother to 9-year-old girl: If my friend helps me, I will buy something for him, or invite him to have dinner. And if there is anything happening in his household, I will help him out or do something similar.

Bruna (BR039) middle-class Brazilian Immigrant mother to 9-year-old boy (17 years in the United States): I thank the person. I try to say that when the person needs help I'll do the same. Send a card, give a present, it depends. It depends on the person. My father-in-law didn't need a present, so our way of thanking him... was to thank him a lot and always let him know how important his help was. So it depends on the person.

Juliana (BR005) working-class Brazilian immigrant mother to 9-year-old boy (10 years in the United States): I think by practicing gratitude...showing gratitude is helping others. We say thanks (for help)... Also, when we can, we can help people. If people are going through a hard time, we can help. That's how it (gratitude) goes.

As mentioned above, these are both RQ1 responses. The first responses listed under the code "Saying thank you" are not always particularly different than the responses for "Helping the person" because of the way that participants go on to list multiple ways that they may express gratitude. However, in all of the first examples, the person actually states that they would verbally express gratitude along with other possible ways of demonstrating gratitude.

## **Buying a Present**

Jashanna (934) middle-class African American mother to 11-year-old boy: Saying thank you, rewarding with a gift. Giving that person something that they feel like is im...that I know is important to them or you know buying them something that they wouldn't necessarily buy themselves or giving them something they need. Yeah, letting them know I'm grateful for them.

This example is important because it highlights that buying a present can be an excellent way of expressing virtuous gratitude. In this case, Jashanna specifically said that she would buy a gift that is important to the person that the person would not buy on her or his own, or give the person something she or he needs. "Buy a present" was a common response signaling RQ1, but when examining the RQ2 nature of this response both African American groups seem more concerned with material goods than the other groups. It may be that the ability to buy the things they need is a challenge. Therefore, this response may suggest that when all of one's income goes to necessities, receiving a gift in a material form is an act of virtuous gratitude on the part of the giver. If it is not always possible to get what you want, then someone who gets it for you is showing they care. Therefore, sometimes the idea of buying someone a present is much more than that. It seems that for African Americans, it is a way of showing someone they are special to you.

Even though no group had a frequency of the code of "Do anything you could" of more than 10%, it was left to show that it is an important RQ1 finding considering that almost all groups mentioned this and it has special significance with regard to gratitude. It is considered the strongest indication of virtuous gratitude so it is interesting to see that

it exists in most groups, but that when responding to a question based on a real experience of help and considering a real benefactor it is not a common response.

As mentioned, one RQ1 finding is that for the majority of the groups, saying thank you was the most common way of expressing gratitude. Nevertheless, RQ2 cultural differences emerge when looking at frequency patterns in parents' expression of gratitude. For the Chinese parents the most frequent way of expressing gratitude is to help the person who helped them. This is not surprising considering what Chinese parents said about the need to help others when discussing the importance of gratitude.

### **Children's Gratitude Expressions**

It is expected that many of the ways to express gratitude that parents mentioned are the same ones found when parents described how their children express gratitude. However, with the exception of saying thank you, there is a sharp contrast in the frequency with which parents said they express certain types of gratitude and the frequency with which they said their children express forms of gratitude. In addition, an RQ1 finding is that many parents mentioned children jumping up and down in excitement. It is not listed as a separate code because it was never a central gratitude response, rather a side comment on how children behave when they are enthusiastic about something due to their age. Moreover, all but one group, the Chinese, reported that their children's most common way of expressing gratitude is to say "thank you." This does not mean that children do not help the person who helped them or their parents, but it is not as common. Addressing RQ2, when asked how their children express gratitude, the most frequent Chinese response was compelling. It was not a way that their children

express gratitude at all, but instead that their children do not express *enough* gratitude.

They are the only group to mention this as a response to this question.

Table 11

Children's Gratitude Expressions

	African Americans		European Americans	Mexican Immigrants	Chinese	Brazilian Immigrants	
	Middle Class	Working Class	Middle Class	Working Class	Middle Class	Middle Class	Working Class
Say Thank you	38%	36%	34%	34%	17%	34%	44%
Hug/kiss/affection	25%	24%	18%	17%	11%	28%	33%
Make a card	6%	10%	23%	7%	11%	9%	6%
Child does thing for person/parent	25%	10%	2%	10%	11%	6%	11%
Child gives thing to person/parent	6%	0	5%	14%	11%	9%	6%
Say I love you	0	10%	2%	7%	6%	4%	0
Children helps person	0	10%	7%	7%	0	8%	0
Child doesn't express enough gratitude	0	0	5%	0	33%	0	0
Others		2%	9%	1%		2%	
Total number of responses	16	42	44	29	18	53	18

## Saying Thank You

LaToya (1160) middle-class African American mother to 12-year-old girl: She shows gratitude. She's a very respectful girl. You know every time she sees when I come down says, "Oh Mommy, how are you doing?", "Hey mommy." When I'm going to work, "Mommy I miss you." You know all that, "Thank you", "Please" is very much like her. She always says "Thank you." And even when I come and I'm tired and I still fix them something she's like, "Mommy, thank you so much for fixing this for us."

Liana (744) working-class African American mother to 8-year-old boy: It's almost kind of weird where like Semaj says please and thank you, but it's almost robotic. It's almost I think you know it hasn't got to the point where it actually resonates with the spirits right now. He's just doing it like like a robot and that's fine because when it gets to the point where he makes the connection with himself when he says thank you so much, he'll really mean it. So now it's kind of like "thank you so much", and, "yeah yeah, you're welcome bye", and then he doesn't mean it, but when he gets older it will all come together.

A common RQ1 response, many parents in all the cultures represented felt the same way as Liana. They commented that their children say thank you appropriately, but the parents are not convinced that the children actually understand what they are saying. It is almost as if the words lack conviction.

Steve (1030) middle-class European American father to 8-year-old girl: "Thank you" and eye contact and being well behaved...I'm sure I've seen hugs and kisses.

Being well-behaved was never mentioned first as a way to demonstrate gratitude nor was it equated with gratitude, but children that are well-behaved are considered children that show gratitude in all the cultural groups. The parent-child gratitude relationship is unique. It is almost as if the parents' job is to care for the children and in

this way they will give the children things and take much time and effort on behalf of the children. In return, it is the children's job to do as the parents say and in this way show gratitude for what the parents do for them.

### **Kiss, Hug, or Affection**

Cristina (BR019) middle-class Brazilian Immigrant mother to 13-year-old girl (15 years in the United States): Adolescent, you know? She's in a phase that's a little bit tricky, she doesn't want anything, she's very closed, but when we can get her to show gratitude, she says thank you, gives a kiss, a hug.

Lourena (BR021) working-class Brazilian Immigrant mother to 12-year-old boy (17 years in the United States): First with love and second with affection.

Another RQ1 response that was common for parents of adolescents in all the groups was to mention that it is a phase that is somewhat difficult. The children had become less communicative and when they became less communicative, they were less likely to express gratitude. However, they were also less likely to express anything to the parents.

### **Helping**

Aurora (690) working-class Mexican Immigrant mother to 9-year-old boy (11 years in the United States): He always loves to help other people. Well, all my kids, if we go somewhere, they like to take care of that person. If there is an elderly person, they like to hold their hands, open the doors for the adults, and if there is something falling they would run to pick it up.

One RQ2 finding that was very common for working-class Mexican immigrant mothers is that they described their children's expressions of gratitude in behavioral terms. One mentioned her son making friends with others to show gratitude and another mentioned her daughter behaving well in school to show gratitude to teachers.

## **Not Expressing Enough Gratitude**

Ruan (007) middle-class Chinese mother to 13-year-old boy: I think he needs to express gratitude in many ways. I cook for him, take care of him, pick him up from school. I feel tired sometimes, but he seems to take it for granted. I have to pick him up and drop him off at the school. The child isn't really aware that he needs to express his gratitude in this regard. Only once after he entered his dream middle school because he had good grades did he hug me and express thanks to me...My child's grandparents are not around, so he feels not very close his grandparents and other relatives. I think he lacks such expression of gratitude to members of the extend families. The only relative that he feels close to is his aunt, and he calls her during the holiday.

Zhou (020) middle-class Chinese mother to 9-year-old boy: He seldom expresses his gratitude. (He has never expressed gratitude?) I don't really feel it. Only once when he was still in the kindergarten. The activity was to let children wash their moms' feet. He took it very seriously... He washed my feet very carefully and other mothers probably were jealous of me.

Karen (1260) middle-class European American mother to 12-year-old girl: I will probably say that she's more grateful than we realize. I think she may definitely have the feelings but she does not express them.

RQ2 findings often involve the Chinese and this is the case here. The most frequent response of middle-class Chinese parents was that children do not demonstrate enough gratitude. Sometimes parents blamed themselves for their children's lack of gratitude, but more often explanations given focused on lack of awareness on the part of the child. Karen, one middle-class European-American mother said that because her daughter is so shy and reserved, she does not express enough gratitude.



### **Level of Child Gratefulness**

Table 12 depicts how grateful parents thought children should be based on a question that asked parents to rate how much their child had to be grateful for thinking of the past year. The possible range in response was from 1, “not a lot go be grateful for”, to 5, “an awful lot to be grateful for.” Addressing RQ1, it seems that the overwhelming majority of parents answered 4 or 5 to the first question. However, considering RQ2, there were both some class differences and cultural differences when answering this question. For example, 70% or more of middle-class parents (with the exception of the Chinese) rated their children at 5 when considering for how much they have to be grateful. Working-class African Americans and Mexican immigrants both rated their children nearer to 50%. The two groups of Brazilian immigrants rated their children with scores that were nearly identical. The responses of both classes of Brazilian immigrants were also similar such that parents mentioned how fortunate they were for what they had. Middle-class Brazilian immigrant parents in particular highlighted their privilege and the high quality of life that their children had when rating how grateful their children should be. This was similar to the RQ1 finding across middle-class parents such as when European American parents reported that their children should be grateful for their privilege.

Table 12

Parents' Thoughts Regarding How Grateful Child Should Be

	African Americans		European Americans	Mexican Immigrants	Chinese	Brazilian Immigrants	
	Middle Class	Working Class	Middle Class	Working Class	Middle Class	Middle Class	Working Class
1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	0	0	0	0	7%	0	0
3	0	6%	0	0	27%	0	0
4	14%	53%	27%	50%	60%	26%	25%
5	86%	41%	73%	50%	7%	74%	75%
Total number of responses	7	17	15	10	15	23	8

Table 13 depicts how grateful parents thought their children actually were based on a question that asked parents to rate how grateful their child is. The possible range in response was from 1, “not at all grateful”, to 5, “extremely grateful.”

Table 13

Parents' Thoughts Regarding How Grateful Child Actually Is

	African Americans		European Americans	Mexican Immigrants	Chinese	Brazilian Immigrants	
	Middle Class	Working Class	Middle Class	Working Class	Middle Class	Middle Class	Working Class
1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	0	0	0	0	0	4%	0
2.5	0	0	0	0	0	4%	0
3	40%	27%	47%	14%	56%	39%	0%
4	40%	47%	41%	29%	38%	39%	50%
5	20%	27%	12%	57%	6%	13%	50%
Total number of responses	5	15	17	7	16	23	8

Considering RQ1, it seems that the majority of parents in most groups responded with 3 or 4. Perhaps not surprisingly, parents rate their children as having more for which to be grateful than they say their children actually are grateful. Parents' thoughts on this provide key insight into what parents believe about children and gratitude.

Again, with regard to RQ2, the Chinese were unique and responded with more frequent lower scores than the other groups in both Tables 12 and 13. It may be that they are more realistic in considering their children's lives or it may be considered boastful to say one has so much for which to be grateful. Another RQ2 finding is that a few middle-class Brazilian immigrant parents thought that their children were less grateful than the other groups.

## Age

Zhang (012) middle- class Chinese mother to 10-year-old boy: I do not want to push him at this age. He doesn't need to feel anything right now, he will gradually feel those things.

Fan (021 middle- class Chinese mother to 9-year-old boy: I think he is still too young to think those things. There hasn't been too many things that have happened in his life yet.

Emilio (BR047) working-class Brazilian Immigrant father to 9-year-old girl (18 years in the United States): Well, as a child her personality isn't completely formed yet, you understand? So, she doesn't have a notion of really everything that we do for her. It's an incomplete vision, understand? Because there are things that we can do, that aren't visible in her eyes, but that we're doing for her. She doesn't have an idea, so I don't think she needs to be grateful. Of course, a child is grateful for what they see, when it's visible, a toy they get, or a trip they go on, food, juice, this type of thing...visible. Let's say the invisible isn't there yet. The things we do outside of what she sees, she doesn't understand that she should feel gratitude for those things too.

Izabela (BR003) working-class Brazilian Immigrant mother to 14-year-old boy (17 years in the United States): It's because I think they often fail to be grateful for the things that we think they should. If I were talking about my son Gabriel today, who is 19, he has already matured so today he has seen many things that we see already almost on the same level. I think Levi over the years will get there.

Kirsten (1192) middle- class European American mother to 11-year-old boy: I think where he is developmentally he is still pretty self-absorbed. I think not only developmentally but I also think he has lots of people who are working to encourage him to communicate how he feels and to recognize when he's been given gifts or advantages and point out areas that he should be grateful.

Consuela (694) working-class Mexican Immigrant mother to 9-year-old boy (13 years in the United States): At his age, he doesn't see the importance of being grateful for certain things.

Addressing RQ1, many parents from all the cultural groups felt that their children were too young to understand gratitude, whether the child was seven or fourteen; nor did they expect them to understand it. This lack of any expectation may impact how children perceive the necessity to express it. The majority of parents mentioned that gratitude will come with development, but that children are incapable both cognitively and socially-emotionally of experiencing virtuous gratitude until they have grown into adults.

### **Shy – Need to Express More Gratitude**

Beatriz (BR040) middle-class Brazilian Immigrant mother to 13-year-old girl: I think that she doesn't express herself very much. I don't know if it's because she's too shy, because she forgets, if she doesn't think it's important. So I think that she should really express gratitude. That it needs to be expressed. I'm grateful is OK!

Nhandi (1149) middle- class African American mother to 13-year-old boy: I think sometimes he may be more grateful but sometimes he's not very expressive so

you don't always know what he's thinking. So what he expresses, that's what I give the 3.5 on.

It is interesting that both these examples are of 13-year-olds. It may be that as other parents lamented, in adolescence children become less expressive to their parents so it is hard to know if the children actually feel gratitude or not.

### **How Would Child Know**

Amanda (1014) middle-class European American mother to 9-year-old girl: I would say she has a lot to be grateful for, but at the same time how would she know. You know I mean uhm I would say she she has a lot to be grateful for.

Amy (986) middle-class European American mother to 8-year-old girl: I think it goes back to what I said before. I think she doesn't have exposure. She's sort of a product of her environment so I don't think she has exposure to what it means to not have all of those things. So um that's probably why she's not as grateful.

These responses are strongly related to RQ2. Both of these middle-class European American mothers seem to have equated gratitude with the privilege of having financial stability and the things one can buy with it. It is the assumption that was mentioned by Meredith earlier that by downward social comparison children might be able to feel more gratitude. This is clearly confounding gratitude with something else, some form of appreciation, and is not in the spirit of virtuous gratitude. Moreover, using the misfortune of one group to feel better about one's own fortune seems counter to connecting with others in a cycle of gratitude. However, it is clear that parents want children to be aware of the people and possibilities in their lives and awareness of what one has received from others is a necessary step condition for virtuous gratitude.

## Entitled vs. Spoiled

Joleah (1317) middle-class African American mother to 9-year-old girl: I would put her in the middle with a three just because again she doesn't realize how blessed or grateful she should be. She thinks that it's a given everything should be given to her. I would like for her to express her gratitude more than she does cuz I have a niece that's very compassionate expressing. She thanks you a million times over for anything that you do for her and you can just tell, you can just tell the difference between those two.

Quintasia (1290) working-class African American Mother to 8-year-old boy: He is grateful for certain things, like umm around Thanksgiving they had a class assignment to draw a picture of what they are thankful for and at the bottom saying what it is and he put that he was thankful for his mom. So I feel like he has a sense of I do a lot for him, but then at the same time he can be kind of have a spoiled attitude about things so I think he's kind of in the middle.

Brandi (778) working-class African American Mother to 8-year-old girl: Yeah, I feel she has an awful lot, but just like a typical kid--you got a lot of kids that they feel they should just have it--you know it's just typical kids. I just feel pretty general--you know what I'm saying, I know when I was growing up I wasn't really grateful- I thought, "Umm yeah, I'm supposed to have all this!", but me being a parent now, I feel, "Hey, I might not can't get you the best all the time, you supposed to be grateful for whatever I can provide for you--you know if it's a roof over your head and food to eat you suppose to be grateful for it. I can't get you to do this photoshoot or get you in this cheerleader thing right now, but if I can get you this down the road you should be grateful for it--you know what I'm saying, I can provide what I can provide I just feel in general.

Another interesting RQ2 finding is that it was more common for middle- and working-class African Americans to respond by saying they feel their children are entitled and spoiled. This is particularly ironic because more parents in these same groups said that their children always show enough gratitude. It may be that parents have specific expectations when it comes to behaviors and if the children do not display them, mothers think the children are acting spoiled.

## **Help With Homework**

Bruna (BR039) middle-class Brazilian Immigrant mother to 9-year-old-boy (17 years in the United States): When I'm helping him do something he's not necessarily seeing the value of that thing, but I know it's important. Like helping everyday with his homework, it's one thing that he'll never recognize, will not say thank you, no. But I'd like him to understand that I'm doing it for his sake. I don't think he sees the benefit. He does not understand. He does not see yet that it is so beneficial to him that I am there to help, but he doesn't see the immediate benefit to him.

Yara (BR013) working-class Brazilian Immigrant mother to 8-year-old girl (19 years in the United States): When I get on her case to study...I understand because of the age (that she won't show gratitude), I understand that I get on her a lot about her studies. I tell her,, "One day you will thank me for everything that I'm doing for you." I think she still doesn't understand. She hasn't understood how important school is yet.

Some more meaningful RQ2 findings are that, as with Chinese parents, both middle- and working-class Brazilian immigrants prioritized education. For many, they see it as the road to success in the future. Some parents mentioned educational opportunities as one reason for coming to the United States and leaving Brazil. Thus, it is not surprising that the way their children react towards help with school is important for Brazilian immigrant parents. Although they said they felt that their children do not show enough gratitude in this aspect, it is notable that they are similar to other parents when providing an RQ1 excuse for their children by saying they are too young to understand gratitude.

## **Importance in Adulthood**

Jinfu (004) middle-class Chinese father to 12-year-old girl: I think it's (gratitude) still very important. If a child doesn't understand gratitude, he won't take care of

his parents after growing up. It's very important to understand gratitude after entering real society.

Again, the Chinese provided an RQ2 response. The idea is that for Chinese children gratitude is absolutely necessary when considering a successful life in the future, both considering the needs of the parents, and the needs of the child to be able to function well in society. If parents are clearly focused and concerned about this it is logical to assume that gratitude has a central focus in their own lives because they have entered 'real' society.

#### **When Parents Feel Children Should Show More Gratitude Than They Do**

Parents were asked an important question when it comes to understanding what they feel is important with regard to their children and gratitude expression. They were asked in what situations they feel their children should show more gratitude than they do. In answering these questions, parents also answered why this may be so and what parents do to combat this. In this way, parenting strategies to encourage gratitude were discussed in a straightforward manner.



Table 14

## When Parents Feel Children Should Show More Gratitude Than They Do

	African Americans		European Americans	Mexican Immigrants	Chinese	Brazilian Immigrants	
	Middle Class	Working Class	Middle Class	Working Class	Middle Class	Middle Class	Working Class
Something from parent	13%	11%	27%	23%	30%	17%	10%
If child shy or uncomfortable	13%	5%	27%	8%	22%	11%	0
Too young to understand	0	11%	5%	8%	9%	20%	30%
When angry or upset	0	5%	5%	23%	22%	3%	0
Something child feels they deserve	50%	16%	18%	0	4%	0	0
Has not happened	0	21%	0	8%	0	6%	20%
Parent nags about school or chores	0	5%	0	0	0	11%	40%
Distracted by TV, playing something	0	0	0	23%	0	0	0
Other	25%	26%	18%	8%	13%	31%	0
Total number of responses	8	19	22	13	23	35	10

**Something from Parent**

Kimberly (1121 middle-class European American mother to 12-year-old boy: I think for like things that his father and I do around here for him. Like we mostly do or I mostly do his laundry and fix his meals. He does do a little bit of it on his own but we do the majority...he could be the one doing it or he probably should be the one doing it himself but he could be the one doing it himself. So he should be a little more grateful that he didn't have to.

Huang (002) middle-class Chinese father to 10-year-old girl: Because she thinks her parents should help her. Nowadays children are all like this. For example, every day, if I don't go on a business trip, I help her carry her back pack. Because I carry it every day, she feels that this bag is supposed to be held by my dad. Children always think it is natural for their parents to help them. However, I

think gratitude should be expressed moderately, but I don't need her to express gratitude for everything; it just makes relationships between family members seem further away. Make your own judgment. If it's important for you to express gratitude for something, then express it.

One common RQ1 response found in all cultural groups was that parents feel taken for granted. This idea came out in multiple ways as we have seen earlier in reporting the results. When parents complained in interviews about their children not feeling gratitude for what they do for them, they often excused their children's actions based on age or were somewhat non-committal in what they were saying about their children. This may be because some parents do not set their expectations high for the kind of gratitude response they may receive from their children.

### **Shy**

Suzanne (1177) middle-class European American mother to 10-year-old girl: So that would be those kind of small moments you know after leaving her piano lessons I would love for her to say thank you and so you it's those kind of moments...I think uhm she's just naturally not as outgoing as I'd like her to be but then it may also may be she's not very grateful for the piano lesson.

This is an RQ1 response because it was common across the groups. There were other parents besides Suzanne who felt that their child's shyness caused the child to not express gratitude. The other parents also expressed that they were not certain about whether or not their children actually feel gratitude because of their quiet, shy nature. This response was common across the groups, but having shy children did not seem that common.

## **Too Young to Understand**

Liquin (003) middle-class Chinese mother to 11-year-old boy: Now? I think my child is still too young to understand these interpersonal relationships. Whenever his teacher cares about him, I often tell my child that the teacher is working very hard for this class, and he has to study hard in order to repay the teacher—Good grades are what teachers are looking for, so (I would say to my child) you have to study hard because your teacher is hard working. You are not supposed to have lower grades

Jinfu (004) middle-class Chinese father to 12-year-old girl: The academic work. She is in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade right now and the learning is quite heavy for her. We have arranged some tutoring classes for her, but she doesn't want to go. She cannot feel yet that we do these all for her own benefit. (So you think that she should be grateful to you for helping her study and she shouldn't feel negative about going to tutoring classes?) Yeah.

Rebecca (1337) middle-class European American mother to 10-year-old: I don't think any child is grateful until they grow up.... I say that judging. I do think they are grateful with trying to teach this gratitude so that she has it in her and she's a grateful child, but you know she's also a child. I don't think she fully understands everything that we do and the extent that we do and we want her to be grateful.

Again, addressing RQ1, parents stressed that age is a factor in how their children respond to events in which they would expect them to feel gratitude. Parents often referred to themselves or something they did for their children when discussing their children's lack of understanding due to age. The assumption is that one day children will understand all of the things that their parents have done for them.

## **Something Kids Feel They Deserve**

Joleah (1317) middle-class African American mother to 9-year-old girl: Least likely like buying her clothes and shoes, stuff that's needed. She feels like she needs it so it's not necessary, she shouldn't say thank you. Like she need new shoes because they were too small, that's when she doesn't seem grateful.

When stuff is needed, she doesn't think she should, or it's required, so she doesn't say thank you.

This is an RQ2 finding and was a much more common response from North American parents. As mentioned previously, children should not feel entitled to just “get things.” It is related to the idea that parents do not want to feel that children take what parents do for them for granted because children feel it is the job of the parent to be a caretaker.

### **Doesn't Happen**

Sheniqua (785) working-class African American mother to 9-year-old girl: (Ok are there situations in which you think she should be more grateful?) No. (And you've never seen a situation when you thought she should be grateful and you had to mention it to her?) No

Tia (947) working-class African American mother to 13-year-old girl: (Are there situations in which you think that Deronda should be more grateful and do you have any examples of when you thought she should be be more grateful?). Hmmm not really she's always usually pretty grateful for everything.

This was another RQ2 response and in these instances the interviewer came back to the topic repeatedly because it was such an uncommon response that it was hard to know if the mother was really considering the question or just answering. Nevertheless, it was the most frequent response of working-class African American mothers and therefore it seems that this group feels that they get the positive gratitude responses from their children that they expect.

## **Distracted by Electronics**

Aurora (690) working-class Mexican Immigrant mother to 9-year-old boy (11 years in the United States): I believe when he's distracted. He is always watching TV or on his iPod. When there are people who come over I tell him to greet the guests. Usually after the guests leave I'll scold him for not speaking at all. I tell him instead of being on his iPod, he should speak to others.

It was not uncommon for working-class Mexican immigrant parents to complain about their children's lack of attention to what is going on around them and therefore missing opportunities when they should be expressing gratitude. Interestingly, parents said they wait for after the opportunity passes and they are alone with their children to discuss the issue, as opposed to taking the electronic device away from the child immediately as in the above example.

### **What Parents Do When Child Shows Insufficient Gratitude**

Parents were asked what action they take if their children do not show enough gratitude. Two codes, "talk to them" and "remind them" are very similar because both involve the parent verbally speaking to the child about their lack of gratitude. They have been left as two distinct codes because reminding can be as simple as a parent saying to a child, "What do you say?" but when parents talked about talking or speaking to their children, the implication was that they have a longer conversation about the need for gratitude. Notably, for every single cultural group, using direct verbal communication was the most common parenting strategy to encourage gratitude demonstrating an RQ1 finding. One unique RQ2 finding is that middle-class African Americans were the only group to mention speaking about God as a way to teach gratitude. Not surprisingly, the

Chinese were also unique in responses given. They were the only group to mention reading a story to their children as a way of teaching them about gratitude and they were also the only group to say they criticize their children as a parenting technique.

Table 15

Parents' Reaction if Child Does Not Show Enough Gratitude

	African Americans		European Americans	Mexican Immigrants	Chinese	Brazilian Immigrants	
	Middle Class	Working Class	Middle Class	Working Class	Middle Class	Middle Class	Working Class
Talk to them/Teach	38%	65%	55%	86%	25%	65%	55%
Remind them	23%	24%	22%	14%	30%	16%	36%
It's OK, they're young	8%	12%	11%	0	0	6%	9%
Act as an example	15%	0	11%	0	15%	10%	0
Read them a story	0	0	0	0	15%	0	0
Talk about God	15%	0	0	0	0	0	0
Criticizes	0	0	0	0	15%	0	0
Total number of responses	13	17	27	7	20	31	11

### Talking to Child – Teaching

Fayth (771) working-class African American mother to 9-year-old boy: Because you should teach your child to be grateful and know that things don't just come or anything. I don't like to hand my kids things. I want them to know that like even with Christmas a lot of people buy gifts so I tell them.

Linda (1228) middle-class European American mother to 11-year-old boy: I think it depends. I would try to talk about how it made the other person feel and how if he were the other person that did that how he would feel. So I try to first talk about the other person, then say how would you feel if you felt like you kinda put

yourself out there and did something and and no one said thank you. It depends (whether she would say something in the moment) if there's a lot of peers. Sometimes both our kids, if they see me and I'm doing a face or something, they know now that's cause I don't usually want to personally call them out unless they are just being terrible....I don't like public embarrassment.

Ana (708) working-class Mexican Immigrant mother to 9-year-old boy (10 years in the United States): Well, I believe that children don't know how to say what they feel, rather they are taught. I talk to my son.

Guadalupe (659) working-class Mexican Immigrant mother to 9 year-old girl (17 years in the United States): I say to my kids, what's the problem if someone doesn't show gratitude? They're UNgrateful. To me it means they don't put any importance on anything. They don't think anything is important. I always teach my kids and tell them that and that the gift itself isn't important, what's important is that it's given from the heart, and it's how you should receive it. It doesn't matter if it's just a little flower. That's why it's important. You need to know how to show gratitude, not just from the mouth, you need to feel it.

Sandra (BR025) middle-class Brazilian mother to 9-year-old girl (3 years in the United States): We talk to her a lot. She usually shows gratitude. I think because of our influence because we say that things have value and she might not have the skates she wanted, but we made the sacrifice and bought them, so that's important to her.

Lourena (BR021) working-class Brazilian mother to 12-year-old boy (17 years in the United States): (Do you talk to him when you think he should be more grateful?) Always, they're (all her children) tired of hearing it.

Addressing RQ1, it is perhaps not surprising that the most common way to foster gratitude in children discussed is to speak to them about it. Parents were clear in each of the cultural groups that they do have expectations for their children with regard to gratitude and let them know what they are. Although, as seen previously, parents are aware that their children will not fulfill their expectations right way, but will likely not achieve what they consider gratitude until they are older teens or adults. However, this does not mean they do not continue to encourage gratitude in conversation.

## **Reminding Child**

Shu (022) middle-class Chinese mother to 10-year-old boy: I would remind him. I would kindly remind him: sometimes it's not a good time, then I would talk to him afterwards...I think he is in a learning process. He needs our guidance in terms of how to be grateful. I hope that he could learn by the experiences that he has had, rather than telling him directly about how he should be grateful. He is a considerate kid, he would remind to go to the doctor for an exam whenever I don't feel well.

Ruan (007) middle-class Chinese mother to 13-year-old boy: I don't think that nowadays parents would expect their children to be grateful (to their parents) that much. As parents, we always feel that we are responsible for doing something for our children without asking any repayment. The children seem to take it for granted...So I've been trying to influence him since he was very young. If I pass something to him, I would ask about if he needs to say anything to me. He would tell me: "thank you."

Reminding children of what they should say or that they should express gratitude was one of the most common strategies given for fostering gratitude indicating an RQ1 response. However, only Chinese examples are given because it was the most common reaction reported by middle-class Chinese parents when their children did not show enough gratitude.

## **Act as an Example**

Azoria (926) middle-class African American mom to 10-year-old boy: (Why might he express gratitude that way?) From his home training. I think from watching me and how I react to certain things...I try to tell him. I try to set an example for him and put it like that so he uses his own mind. You know what I mean? Instead of doing what I say and that aspect. I want him to, and he usually does, know when to say things from the self. You know what I mean?



This is an RQ2 response, although other parents share Azoria's point of view that acting as an example may be more effective than merely speaking to the child. Some parents in discussing how their children express gratitude mentioned that their children had likely watched them and express gratitude in the way that they do because they observed their parent.

In the results presented here many commonalities were found among the diverse cultural groups that suggest parents share many views on both the importance of gratitude and the way to encourage it in children. Interestingly, parents in every cultural group here demonstrated understanding that gratitude is an emergent property and that it must develop during childhood. Moreover, although it was considered problematic, parents in all the cultural groups understood that in the period of adolescence children would become less communicative. Despite the many similarities noted, multiple differences were reported based on cultural norms demonstrating the benefit of examining phenomena in various cultures.

## CHAPTER VI

### DISCUSSION

This exploratory study has helped to lay a foundation of knowledge of strategies that parents may use to promote gratitude in their children. Importantly, as the first known study to examine both similarities and differences found in parental experiences and thoughts about gratitude, how they see their children experiencing gratitude, and how parents may foster gratitude among multiple diverse cultural groups, it helps push the field of gratitude research forward. In accordance with the literature, commonalities were found among the cultural groups presented in this dissertation when considering the importance of this significant virtue (Schwartz, 2012) and similarities were found with regard to how parents experienced and thought of gratitude despite coming from diverse cultural groups. Important differences emerged as well, particularly variations based on social class and the unique responses of the Chinese parents.

#### **What is Gratitude?**

##### **Gratitude or Appreciation?**

As previously mentioned, when trying to define gratitude many people think of the word appreciation and do not differentiate conceptually between these words. This was an issue found with all the cultural groups examined in this study. Other researchers have found this same phenomenon in focus groups with parents; thus it appears to be common to confound the two (Halberstadt et al, 2016; Ramsey et al., 2018).

Parents often seemed to treat gratitude as appreciation, a far broader construct (Fagley, 2016). For example, parents discussed that children should appreciate or be grateful for what they have or are given, termed by Fagley as a *have* focus (one of eight dimensions of appreciation she found). All groups of parents interviewed in the United States, particularly middle-class parents, encouraged their children to appreciate what they have compared to those who are not fortunate enough to have the same things (*self- or social-comparison*). Parents were eager for children to notice family and friends and their importance in their lives (*interpersonal appreciation*). Lastly, parents from all the cultural groups discussed virtuous *gratitude* stipulating that they not only wanted their children to recognize and feel good about what was received, but to reciprocate to their benefactor. Four of Fagley's eight dimensions were thus represented in this multicultural sample, indicating that gratitude is a complex concept and researchers should use caution and not assume that parents use the term in the same way and with the same definition as scholars might.

Some researchers suggest that it is important to follow the lead of parents and create studies and interventions based on parent definitions of gratitude (Hussong et al., 2018). However, I would suggest that distinctions can be made among the various types of appreciation presented by Fagley (2016) and then used by researchers to better understand what parents are saying about gratitude. For example, Ramsey and colleagues (2018) found that most mothers did not mention elements of virtuous gratitude when asked directly to define gratitude. They found that when mothers were asked for a definition they only mentioned people 31.5% of the time and even then it could just be

saying they were grateful for a person in their life, a general activity, or something someone did. In contrast, when mothers were asked to describe a source of gratitude, 92% expressed gratitude for people. This is similar to what I found with parents thinking of gratitude towards people when asked to recall a gratitude-eliciting experience.

Parents' responses provide evidence that parents will answer differently when asked about gratitude depending on what specifically is asked. This suggests that if a researcher's goal is to investigate virtuous gratitude that it may be beneficial to go beyond asking for gratitude's definition. Instead, researchers might ask about a gratitude-eliciting experience to encourage parents to talk about other people as opposed to how much they have or social comparisons. This does not mean parent definitions of gratitude are not important, but that scholars should use the information in a way that furthers their research, not change their research based on the definitions given. This is particularly important because recent studies suggest that interventions designed either with a vague or undefined concept of gratitude or else treating gratitude with a *have* focus have not been effective (Dickens, 2017; Renshaw & Steeves, 2016). Therefore, understanding parents' thoughts, clarifying what is meant by virtuous gratitude, and proceeding from that point will likely be more effective in research and intervention creation.

### **Gratitude in Latino Cultures**

Beyond issues with conceptualizing gratitude in English in the United States, in this study language and cultural differences contributed to variations found in how parents discussed gratitude for themselves and their children. For example, Brazilian and

Mexican immigrants responded that they felt “agradecimiento” or “agradecimiento,” respectively, towards a benefactor. Both of these words can be translated into English as gratitude, which implies a positive feeling towards a benefactor, but they can also be translated as thanks or thankful, which does not necessarily mean thankful to a person. Therefore, it is important not to assume which meaning is being conveyed by parents and to establish which form of the word the parent means.

Cultural norms surrounding gratitude were also important to take into consideration. For example, Brazilian and Mexican immigrants mentioned God more often when discussing gratitude than did the other groups. This is not surprising with the historical influence of the Catholic Church in both Brazil and Mexico and how this has affected speech patterns in Portuguese and Spanish over time (Daudelin & Hewitt, 1995; Gómez de Souza, 2007). For example, the more common references to God may be partially explained by the pervasiveness of the practice of saying “*Graças a Deus*” (“Thanks be to God”) in everyday speech in Brazil and “*Gracias a Dios*” in Mexico. Even when informally greeting friends or family members and inquiring about their well-being, a common response given is “fine, thanks be to God.” In this example, God is referenced as part of what has become a non-secular linguistic phrase, which may be one reason that God and religion appear to remain more salient in Latino populations.

### **Gratitude in China**

When examining Chinese parental responses it seemed that cultural influences on the conceptualization of gratitude provided unique findings such that the Chinese often responded in a way that was different from other parents. As a Western researcher with

minimal knowledge of Mandarin I felt it would be important to use triangulation to deepen my understanding of the data with regard to gratitude (Daly, 2007). Using multiple viewpoints or sources of data, triangulation increases the credibility of findings. Therefore, I created a focus group in order to better understand the Chinese data. The group consisted of middle-class Chinese immigrant women who live in Greensboro and work in large international corporations in positions such as engineers or project managers. All of the women have college educations and all of the women have children, which is that same as the Chinese women who participated in the study.

Upon meeting, I first asked about the various Mandarin characters that make up the word gratitude because I noticed that gratitude was often characterized differently by the Chinese than when the other cultural groups described it. I was told that there is a word “*gan un*,” which in essence means that you *feel* the good things that someone has done for you. We discussed the idea of *feeling* good things in detail because the Chinese women were aware that the concept of feeling in this way does not exist in the English language. It does not mean one feels something *about* the good things; the explanation was that the good things done for you are acting on you to produce a profound positive emotional response that is then directed at the benefactor. This word is often used in regard to bigger things such as help received at work or from a friend. There is another word “*gan ji*” which translates as “thank you” in English. Both of these words were used in questions when interviewing Chinese parents about gratitude and therefore their difference is crucial. Parents answered in a specific way when asked how they *felt* (in the Chinese sense of the word) the good things that someone had done for them versus when

they were asked about their more general thanks. Researchers' questions necessitated certain types of answers depending on which form of the word gratitude was used. This is why one father mentioned his daughter not *feeling* yet what they did for her. She was not old enough to feel the good things that her parents were doing for her.

Importantly, this focus group discussed how gratitude is seen in China and that Confucius gives instructions of how to treat people in all relationships, including with regard to gratitude. The obligation of children to care for their parents later in life is considered a part of gratitude. The comments of this focus group are in line with recent research examining the role of gratitude and obligation to care for a parent conducted by Shi Li (2015) that examined the need to foster gratitude in children so that they will care for their parents in old age. This is a key difference because it brings into question how the Chinese feel about the obligation to care for their parents. In virtuous gratitude there should not be a feeling of forced obligation to reciprocate. The Chinese do not necessarily feel forced to care for their parents and considering the complexity of the parent-child gratitude relationship (McConnell, 2018), this may be done out of love. Researchers cannot assume the obligation is heteronomous or autonomous, but this distinction is crucial. Importantly, as Schwartz (2012) highlighted in research examining values found in most societies, same values can hold different kinds of importance and look different depending on the cultural context. It seems that based on Confucian ideals, virtuous gratitude is in the fabric of Chinese society tied in with expectations based on filial piety as opposed to how it is viewed in the other societies examined in this study.

## **Context**

Based on parental accounts of their own experiences of gratitude and their children's experiences of gratitude, it is clear that context plays a crucial role in the gratitude experience. As Bronfenbrenner (2001) theorized in the bioecological theory, all interactions take place in a setting that will have an effect on each person's behavior. In my exploration of the development of gratitude, I focused on family context by examining parents' relations with children and cultural context by examining how parents have been influenced by their own cultural group. Cultural differences were not addressed specifically in the PPCT model, but culture as part of the macrosystem affects the lower level systems as the results of this study suggest.

## **Values**

Values are essential when considering what shapes any distinct cultural group because part of the definition of a cultural group is that it has a shared set of values and practices that are passed on from one generation to the next (Tudge et al., 2006). Considering RQ1, there is no question that gratitude was considered to be significant in all cultural groups examined; all parents viewed it as important or very important. Moreover, when parents chose to share an example of an event that elicited gratitude in their lives, they chose an incident that told a tale of virtuous or connective gratitude. The parents of course knew that they were being interviewed about gratitude; however, the heartfelt stories from *all* the cultural groups suggest that virtuous gratitude is an important aspect of myriad cultures. As seen throughout this study, parents from all the cultural groups represented here have much in common with regard to gratitude. This is



not surprising considering that many researchers who study values have found that the same values may exist in multiple cultures, even if variations may exist and distinct groups may prioritize the values differently (Bilsky et al., 2011; Schwartz, 1994). Moreover, values may coexist in cultural groups that may not traditionally be thought of as having them or being important to them (Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2001; Oyserman et al., 2002). Despite similarities found in the importance of gratitude among the groups presented here, many differences were found as well with regard to thoughts and feelings about gratitude.

### **Family Change Theory**

An important context that affects parents and children is the macrosystem; thus I explored whether changes over historical time on the macrosystem affected parents' values related to gratitude. Using the Family Change Theory (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007) it was possible to examine whether differences were found in immigrant families that had lived in the United States for different periods of time. The theory was influenced by the changes in cultural values found when populations shifted from rural to urban areas. In the case of the Brazilian and Mexican immigrant parents in this study, no variations were noted with regard to the importance of or feelings about gratitude depending on time lived in the United States. This was true of both middle-class Brazilian immigrants and working-class Brazilian and Mexican immigrants. This is significant because these groups varied in their circumstances in their native countries and upon arrival to the United States. Many of the working-class immigrants were moving from more rural areas in their native countries to urban areas in the United States with no financial

assistance. Most of the middle-class Brazilian immigrants already had lived in urban areas in Brazil and arrived in the United States with assistance from their employers or they arrived as university students with help financing tuition. Despite these differences, these groups demonstrated no real disparities in how they valued gratitude. This may be because of the RQ1 finding noting the importance of gratitude in all the cultural groups.

Importantly, although no differences were found among immigrant groups based on the Family Change Theory, the part of the theory concerned with agency (autonomy to heteronomy) and interpersonal distance (relatedness to separation) is informative when examining the results of all the cultural groups (Kağıtçıbaşı & Ataca, 2005). For example it was noted in Chapter 2 that autonomy and relatedness were both necessary to properly express connective gratitude. Parents' reported desire for their children to one day understand what gratitude is and to act on this understanding autonomously by reciprocating to benefactors suggests that parents in all of the cultural groups wished for their children to embody these two values. Interestingly, although Kağıtçıbaşı theorized that with a move to a more urban environment, families that were traditionally considered in the heteronomous-related quadrant might move towards the autonomous-related quadrant, this was not necessarily the case for the Chinese. The Chinese families in this study lived in an urban environment. Some parents had moved from a more rural environment to the city, but others were from a city originally. Regardless, parent reports of wanting their children to demonstrate gratitude in order to act in accordance with societal rules and functioning suggests that values guiding gratitude behavior in China may be based on heteronomy as opposed to autonomy. It was not the goal of this study

to ascertain which of these values is a stronger influence on Chinese gratitude, but it may explain why Chinese children have been consistently found to express more connective gratitude in hypothetical situations than all the other cultural groups studied (Mendonça et al, 2018). It may be that Chinese children observe through their parents' behavior in society that this is an important societal norm that they are expected to follow.

Moreover, parents' clearly reported socializing their children to express gratitude. It may be that the combination of these two influences means that Chinese children say they would express more connective gratitude than other cultural groups.

### **Cultural Differences**

There were many other RQ2 differences found that are not necessarily related to values but that likely have an effect on how parents encourage gratitude. One notable variation found among the groups in this study was that every cultural group except for the Chinese mentioned God and religion with regard to gratitude, although not often. Considering the underlying differences in ideology in Western and Eastern cultures this result is to be expected. What is more interesting is that despite gratitude often being associated with religion, it was not brought up more frequently. All Latino groups mentioned God more often than the other groups followed by African Americans. It was rarely mentioned by middle-class European Americans. In this study, it seemed that for those who spent time in church, thanking God was just one way to focus on gratitude and the things for which one should be grateful. However, when actually focused on virtuous gratitude only one working-class Mexican immigrant mother thanked God for putting the people in her life who would help her. This is in line with research demonstrating that

intrinsic religion is positively associated with a grateful disposition, but not actually with behavioral gratitude when participants thought of a specific favor that was done for them and their response (Tsang, Schulwitz, & Carlisle, 2011).

Parents' reports of what they thought their children should be grateful for demonstrated one of the biggest differences found among the cultural groups. One or more parents in all the cultural groups responded with "everything" to this question (although only one Chinese parent) and most parents who responded in this way used downward social comparison to qualify their response. However, the condition parents put on what was meant by "everything" suggested a sharp divide in response based on social class. As Ramsey and colleagues found (2018), the middle-class parents in this study were more likely to say that children should be thankful for all that they have and working-class parents were more likely to say that children should be thankful for the basic necessities in life. When interviewed, middle-class Brazilian, European, and African American parents were specific that children should think of the privileges that came with their wealth. For example, they benefitted from good schools, excellent food, nice things, money to go shopping, opportunities to travel on vacation, and opportunities to compete in expensive travel sports programs or theater activities in comparison to those who are not afforded those same opportunities.

In sharp contrast to middle-class parents, working-class African American, Mexican and Brazilian immigrant parents said that their children should be grateful for a place to live (even if not the nicest house), food on their plate, clothes (even though they may not be the best), and shoes in comparison to children who have nothing to eat or

need to live in group homes. Research has suggested that people report higher life satisfaction after volunteering to help a person who is considered less fortunate than themselves (Huang, 2014). Interestingly, the effect is stronger when wealthier people can compare their lives to those less fortunate, which may be why this behavior was more prevalent with middle-class parents. It may be that by doing this people are more mindful of the advantages they have in life so are more positively focused and thus may feel it is easier to appreciate what they have.

By considering the nature of *social comparison*, parents are clearly focused on one of the aspects that Fagley (2016) has determined fits under the umbrella of appreciation, but that is not gratitude. Another aspect of appreciation that parents concentrated on was a *to have* focus. Neither of these is helpful in promoting virtuous gratitude. Interestingly, this was not the most common response that parents gave when reporting what they themselves should be grateful for, which was “when a benefactor helps you.” There is a distinction such that with the exception of the middle-class Chinese, parents focused more on what their children have, but for themselves they focused more on what was done for them. This could be because the focus of the parents is often on what they are doing for their children and in this stage of life they are providing all of the things that their children have.

It is compelling that only one Chinese parent suggested their child should be grateful for “everything.” The same research examining volunteering and social comparison was conducted in Asian countries, but no significant effects were found with Asians (Huang, 2014). Although Asians use downward social comparison, they are more

likely to use it in daily life such as the workplace (Foley, Ngo, & Loi, 2016). Moreover, the most common response of Chinese parents when asked what children should be grateful for was “when something is done specifically for the child.” This may reflect a possible difference in how Chinese parents perceive gratitude or the characters used to ask the question as discussed above.

### **Person (Child) Characteristics**

#### **Age**

Time is an important component of the PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner, 2001) and in any study of child development ontogenetic time is a crucial element to examine. In the case of gratitude, child age had a tremendous effect on parents’ thoughts regarding what they felt was appropriate with regard to their children’s behavior linked to gratitude. In all the cultural groups parents said that both they and their children expressed gratitude by verbally thanking their benefactors. Moreover, it was the most frequent response given as a way to express thanks in all cultures except the Chinese (for whom it was second). It is not surprising that children would demonstrate the same gratitude behaviors as their parents considering how parents often socialize their children through modeling (Bandura, 1977). However, parents reported that their children were likely to kiss or hug their benefactors in addition to verbalizing their thanks and parents did not report this same behavior for themselves. Parents from all the cultural groups reported expecting this type of behavior to be more prevalent considering child age or what parents felt to be their children’s instinctive behavior. This is important because it

seemed to affect parents' expectations of their children's gratitude and how they promoted it.

The PPCT model is helpful in interpreting this result because it is clear that parents were interacting in a certain way with their children and have expectations of their children based on child characteristics that have an effect on how parents perceive their children (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). For example, parents would say that children would give a hug because it is part of their natural behavior to always show affection or children would not give a hug because they are naturally shy. More evidence of person characteristics affecting parent-child interaction was seen based on parent responses to the question of when their children were least likely to show gratitude. Parents often mentioned adolescent children as being at an age when they were less likely to demonstrate gratitude. Parents were not happy with their children's behavior, but there was an implicit or explicit understanding that such behavior at all stages of childhood is normative and was therefore tolerated. Beyond stage in development, cognitive ability was mentioned as an important person characteristic by parents in all cultural groups.

As Halberstadt et al. (2016) and Hussong et al. (2018) reported, I found that parents in each of the cultural groups mentioned their children's cognitive ability or social emotional capacity when describing their children's reaction to an event that the parents felt should elicit gratitude or appreciation. Parents specifically noted that it is easier for children to feel gratitude for something tangible as opposed to intangible. Children were considered incapable of feeling gratitude in the abstract. Moreover, parents clearly mentioned and highlighted that gratitude is an emergent competence and

does not usually manifest completely before adulthood. Age was mentioned far more than any other child characteristic in all the cultures as a factor in how children both understood and expressed gratitude. Parents clearly lowered their own expectations for their children's understanding with regard to gratitude and how they should express it based on what they perceived to be their children's cognitive ability. Interestingly, parents did this regardless of whether their child was still in middle childhood or if their child was in adolescence, although there were distinctions made between these two age periods.

As mentioned, adolescence was generally noted as a period when children were not as expressive and in this way they often did not express as much gratitude as they should. This is ironic considering that in adolescence cognitive ability becomes such that children should be more able to take on a benefactor's perspective and exhibit more connective gratitude (Mendonça & Palhares, 2018). Moreover, findings demonstrate that older children in all of the cultures represented in this study were more likely to use connective gratitude than were younger children in a hypothetical situation (Mendonça et al., 2018). It may be that adolescents know what they should do, but may not always act on their knowledge.

Bausert and colleagues (2018) discussed various findings regarding gratitude in adolescence that are relevant to this discussion. A positive relation was found between adolescent gratitude expression and subjective well-being. In contrast, those adolescents who were more likely to demonstrate anti-social behavior scored lower on gratitude scales with this relation significantly mediated by life satisfaction. It is no surprise that



life satisfaction would have this mediation effect because, as mentioned previously, it seems the gratitude scales they used measured subjective well-being more than gratitude itself. Thus, those adolescents who feel more positively about life and are less anti-social are more likely to express gratitude, which is in line with what parents are reporting about adolescents that display sullen, withdrawn behavior as being less likely to express gratitude. However, there may be an additional reason that parents report adolescents as being less likely to express gratitude.

Adolescents are in a developmental phase that is characterized by seeking their own identity and separating themselves from their parents (Steinberg, 2001). At the same time parents see their children as more capable and with greater cognitive ability and thus may expect their children to begin to express the gratitude that their parents feel they are owed. McConnell (2018) has suggested that parents and children have a special gratitude relationship that is different from the gratitude relationship that children have with others and comments made by parents in this study support this position. Gratitude in and of itself is a special obligation because it is based on the knowledge that benefactors have acted from appropriate motives. Parents having children is not necessarily a motive that should elicit gratitude from children because it is not necessarily for the good of the children themselves that they were conceived. However, parents caring for their children is obviously beneficial to their children, thus beginning the complicated relation between parent and child gratitude.

When it comes to parent and child gratitude, McConnell argues that there is an intersection of gratitude and filial obligation. This is like other intimate relationships that

have multiple dimensions, including one based on love; therefore, the gratitude relationship between parents and children is not always clearly defined. This corresponds with what parents said about their children. The parent–child gratitude relationship may be particularly complicated during adolescence because just as parents are starting to perceive their adolescent children as more capable of experiencing gratitude the adolescents are seeking autonomy from their parents (Meeus, Iedema, Maassen, & Engles, 2005). This may result in children not showing parents the same gratitude as they show others nor showing the same behavior in front of their parents that they show to others. Besides child age, other child characteristics were important when considering gratitude.

### **Temperament and Child Behavior**

Parents in each of the cultural groups seemed to classify the same characteristics as either negative or positive attributes when considering expression of gratitude or being grateful for something. For the most part, both being shy and having a sense of entitlement were portrayed negatively with regard to gratitude because they hindered gratitude expression. One RQ2 finding was that it was most common for working-class African American parents to complain that their children felt they were too entitled to what they received from their parents. Besides negative aspects of children being reported, positive child characteristics were also associated with gratitude.

Children perceived as good-natured or affectionate were seen as being more grateful. Another important often mentioned characteristic was being well-behaved. A well-behaved child was considered a grateful child in all the cultural groups studied,

with no exception. This suggests that parents associate their children's obeying parental rules and meeting parental expectations as a demonstration of gratitude. The opposite of this is also true. If children do not obey parental rules and expectations they are deemed ungrateful. As mentioned above, gratitude may be somewhat different in special relationships (McConnell, 2018), and it may be that this is the beginning of that special relationship. Parents are considered to be good parents if they are concerned with their children's moral education (McConnell, 2018). It could be that when children demonstrate appropriate behavior that parents feel their children are grateful for the parents' efforts on their behalf to help them become virtuous individuals. Parents clearly have different expectations of their children's gratitude if the parents themselves are the benefactors versus a different person. One parent, for example, said that her daughter cleaned her house to show her gratitude, but she did not want her daughter cleaning anyone else's house. It seemed that then her daughter may be doing too much for someone. However, most parents thought that children could never show too much gratitude to themselves or other family members.

As seen in the results, parents in all of the cultural groups reported showing gratitude for receiving family support for themselves. This supports the suggestion of the special parent-child gratitude relationship noted above (McConnell, 2018). Based on parent testimonials, adults notice what their families do for them and feel gratitude for it. Importantly, in describing these and other experiences of help received from people, participants from all the cultural groups in the study mentioned feeling close to their benefactors and feelings of warmth and love directed towards them. Parents liken

gratitude to creating relationships with people, but critically they stipulate that it is not possible to buy friendship or love or true help. Moreover, when one has true friendship or love between family members, the desire to reciprocate for help received comes from within, which is what is expected in virtuous gratitude.

### **Proximal Processes**

Proximal processes are the substantive interactive activities that happen between individuals and people; thus, in the case of this study, they will encompass what parents may actually do to encourage gratitude in their children. Importantly, over time these activities should become steadily more advanced. In this way the less skilled individual may gain skills and knowledge to lead to beneficial developmental outcomes. Parents' accounts of their strategies to foster gratitude provide evidence of the importance of proximal processes.

### **Strategies to Promote Gratitude**

With regard to strategies that parents use to foster gratitude, first we will examine RQ1 responses. Despite the differences found with religion, social class, and in China, all the parents shared similar strategies to encourage and foster their children's gratitude. The overall most popular strategy to encourage gratitude in children was to talk to them about it. Parents in all the groups often mentioned not wanting to embarrass their children in front of anyone, particularly adolescents, so they would wait to discuss gratitude at a time that was more private and when they were more certain their children would pay attention to the conversation. For younger children, parents often said that expressing gratitude was something that children just needed to be reminded about.

Interestingly, parents recognized that in childhood this was likely not actually gratitude but what was hopefully the precursor to gratitude. One of the mothers said that gratitude is “short-lived.” Clearly this is not what I would consider gratitude. However, this could be based on the notion of children saying thank you, but not necessarily internalizing gratitude. The ephemeral good feeling one has when receiving a gift may gradually change as parents point out the need to say thank you and the effort of acquisition of the gift and a greater understanding starts to be formed of what to value. Considering the aforementioned role of proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), it is not surprising that by interacting in this way parents may solidify their children’s positive gratitude behavior. The expectation that parents have is that by insisting on behavioral gratitude, over time children will internalize the true nature of gratitude.

Some strategies were more reflective of RQ2 and differed by cultural group. Parents in all four of the middle-class groups mentioned that sometimes it may be better to not be direct when speaking with the child, but instead to model gratitude for the child to encourage through example. This class difference may reflect different parenting styles that may be more prevalent in one social class than another (Lins-Dyer & Nucci, 2007). Chinese parents were unique with two strategies to promote gratitude, namely reading stories to children and criticizing. It is unlikely that no other parents in the other groups read stories about gratitude or criticize their children, but it is interesting to find that these behaviors seem more purposeful with the Chinese parents. Considering how many parents are already speaking to their children about gratitude, purposefully buying

or borrowing books to start conversations about gratitude is an activity that would likely lend itself well to intervention.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

By examining what parents are saying about their thoughts and experiences of gratitude and their children's thoughts and experiences of gratitude, it is evident that gratitude is a crucial relational component in their lives. All the cultural groups examined in this dissertation experienced gratitude and felt it was important, although significant differences were found based on cultural group, including social class and society. By examining these differences more closely, it was possible to consider what is important about gratitude in the various groups and what may be the best that gratitude has to offer people in improving their personal relationships and how parents can foster this important characteristic in their children.

Although this study broadened greatly the knowledge base with regard to gratitude, it had several limitations. There was wide variation in how interviewers encouraged parents to answer questions and on occasion some questions were not asked. This made both across- and within-group comparisons more difficult. Moreover, if the parents gave short one-word answers, they were sometimes accepted without follow-up questions. The Chinese interviewers were not consistent in the way they asked the scripted questions. Therefore, at times the wording of the questions seemed as if they were leading the participants towards a certain answer, but at other times interviewers would ask the questions in the neutral way they were written. Beyond differences in questioning, some participants were naturally more articulate and talkative and discussed

gratitude in such depth that an impression was given that may have biased the impression attributed to the overall cultural group.

Besides issues with the interviews, many of the Brazilian immigrants and all of the Chinese participants were recruited via snowball sampling, which creates groups with less variation. In the case of the Chinese sample, it was also clear that some of the participants worked for the principal interviewer's parents and considering the hierarchical nature of Chinese society, this may have altered participant behavior in the interviews. Moreover, depending on the culture, it may have been more common to openly share private information with interviewers than in other cultures and this could have affected how comfortable participants were in sharing certain information. However, even with this possibility and occasional truncated answers, depth of information did not appear to be a problem when examining the interviews.

Despite these limitations, this study sheds important light on a complex concept and how it is experienced in a wide variety of cultural groups, including two distinct immigrant groups, African and European Americans, Chinese nationals, and a variation of social class among the groups. The results of this study suggest that virtuous gratitude is a concern of parents and that they actively encourage its development in their children. Parents may confound gratitude and appreciation when speaking generally about gratitude, but that does not mean they do not have a specific interest in virtuous gratitude. Many parents in all the cultural groups stated clearly that they would like their children to recognize the good things being done for them and reciprocate to their benefactors. Moreover, many parents stipulated that they would like reciprocation to be a natural

reaction of their children to an act of kindness from a benefactor. Thus, considering future directions, interventions that involve parents would be potentially beneficial for everyone involved.

By creating virtuous gratitude interventions that clearly define and explicate what is being encouraged in children, it may help parents focus their attention better on this important characteristic. When parents discussed their feelings of gratitude toward a benefactor who had helped them, many mentioned the positive benefit of feeling closer to the person. Asking parents this sort of question and identifying this type of positive feeling may be a good starting point in an intervention when discussing connective gratitude because it highlights one reason gratitude is advantageous. After establishing a foundation by discussing connective gratitude, it would be possible to explain how it is a synonym for virtuous gratitude and further discuss its benefits. In addition, by working with parents specifically on fostering virtuous gratitude, parents may realize that it is possible to raise their expectations for their children's gratitude behavior and in this way encourage children to demonstrate more virtuous gratitude at earlier ages. An intervention of this nature may also encourage parents to consider using more virtuous gratitude in their own interpersonal interactions as well as in their interpersonal interactions with their children.

Despite the high level of connective gratitude expressed by Chinese children in comparison to children from other societies (Liang & Kiang, 2018; Mendonca et al, 2018), it remains unclear after speaking with Chinese parents whether the need for connective gratitude is based on autonomous or heteronomous obligation.



Therefore, an interesting avenue for future research would be to use the vignettes used in research by Freitas and colleagues (2009a, 2009b) with Chinese children to understand the reasons behind why they feel it is important to help a benefactor. An adaptation of these stories for use with an older population is being tested now with college students; thus it would be interesting to give these measures to both Chinese parents and children to see what type of obligation is responsible for the help given to one another. As McConnell (2018) states, people usually act based on multiple motives, which may be the case with the Chinese.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study advances research on gratitude by examining closely the thoughts, opinions, and feelings that parents from seven different cultural groups have about gratitude for themselves and their children. The comparison among diverse cultural groups, including one from an Eastern culture, allowed me to understand important commonalities and variations in how gratitude is perceived by parents beyond just those born in the United States. It is innovative because beyond using measures to understand levels and expressions of gratitude, it investigates how parents both understand and experience this virtue. This is particularly important in order to consider how to promote virtuous gratitude as children are developing.

Through parents' own words, it became apparent that gratitude is a significant part of all of the cultures represented. The close ties that gratitude helped foster and solidify were clear based on the examples given by parents of being helped by benefactors. The need to encourage gratitude in children was also evident when parents

spoke of children who were not able to truly understand gratitude and who did not demonstrate it enough. This is important because as children became cognitively more aware of gratitude parents told of adolescents who demonstrated less gratitude. This is a period of development in particular that seems would benefit from intervention. Not only would it benefit the adolescents themselves, but may benefit the parent–child relationship during a time when it is often characterized by more conflict. Parents gave many strategies to encourage gratitude, but the most prevalent was talking to their children. It may be that this is not the most effective strategy for parents to use to be able to reach their children so other strategies may be suggested that are more specifically focused on increasing the salience of virtuous gratitude in both parents’ and children’s lives.

In my research of gratitude, the objective is and has been to form a more connected world and communities that are more cohesive. Therefore, virtuous gratitude must be distinguished from appreciation. When this is accomplished, it will be possible to focus on relationship-building virtuous gratitude, which as one mother put it “is a way of being in the world.” In order to understand better how to promote gratitude, parents provided important insight into how they view their children’s relationship with gratitude and what they feel is important in this regard and putting this information into practice will be an important next step in gratitude research.

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APPENDIX A

THE PARENTS' VALUES FOR THEIR CHILDREN QUESTIONNAIRE (PVC)  
TUDGE & FREITAS, 2011

We would like to know which of the following characteristics are important for your child when an adult. We'll then ask you to choose the 3 characteristics that you think the most important of all (including the absolutely most important), and the 3 that you think are least important (including the absolutely least important). **There are no right or wrong responses—we are simply interested in what you think is important for your child when an adult.**

<b>For each of the following questions, please respond with one of the following: Not at all important (1); a little important (2); somewhat important (3); important (4); very important (5)</b>	Not at all important	A little important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very important
1. How important to you is it that your child be ambitious?	1	2	3	4	5
2. How important to you is it that your child be assertive?	1	2	3	4	5
3. How important to you is it that your child be compassionate?	1	2	3	4	5
4. How important to you is it that your child be cooperative?	1	2	3	4	5
5. How important to you is it that your child be determined?	1	2	3	4	5
6. How important to you is it that your child respects elders?	1	2	3	4	5
7. How important to you is it that your child be empathic (easily understands others' feelings)?	1	2	3	4	5
8. How important to you is that your child be fair?	1	2	3	4	5
9. How important to you is it that your child be generous?	1	2	3	4	5
10. How important to you is it that your child be grateful?	1	2	3	4	5



11. How important to you is it that your child be honest?	1	2	3	4	5
12. How important to you is it that your child be humble?	1	2	3	4	5
13. How important to you is it that your child be independent?	1	2	3	4	5
14. How important to you is it that your child uses his/her initiative?	1	2	3	4	5
15. How important to you is it that your child be kind?	1	2	3	4	5
16. How important to you is it that your child be a leader?	1	2	3	4	5
	Not at all important	A little important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very important
18. How important to you is it that your child be obedient?	1	2	3	4	5
19. How important to you is it that your child be persistent?	1	2	3	4	5
20. How important to you is it that your child be polite?	1	2	3	4	5
21. How important to you is it that your child be respectful?	1	2	3	4	5
22. How important to you is it that your child be responsible?	1	2	3	4	5
23. How important to you is it that your child follows your rules?	1	2	3	4	5
24. How important to you is it that your child be self-confident?	1	2	3	4	5
25. How important to you is it that your child be sociable?	1	2	3	4	5
26. How important to you is it that your child be tidy and neat?	1	2	3	4	5
27. How important to you is it that your child be tolerant?	1	2	3	4	5

Which are the three most important to you?

\_\_\_\_\_

The single most important one is: \_\_\_\_\_

Which are the three least important to you?

\_\_\_\_\_

The single least important is: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF GRATITUDE INTERVIEW

Thank you for being part of our study. First, for our records, are you the parent most responsible for raising [child's name]? \_\_\_\_\_ [If not, who is, and do you think that he/she would be interested in participating?] Who else is responsible for raising [child's name]?

I know that we already asked this information, but we'd just like to check:

Could you please tell us your highest level of education? [Appropriate levels for the given society]

\_\_\_ less than high school; \_\_\_ high school; \_\_\_\_\_ some college, including Associates (2-year) degree; \_\_\_ a college (4-year) degree; \_\_\_ some graduate study; \_\_\_ MA/MS; \_\_\_ PhD

Ask the same question for the person who is next most likely to be responsible for raising the child.

\_\_\_ less than high school; \_\_\_ high school; \_\_\_\_\_ some college, including Associates (2-year) degree; \_\_\_ a college (4-year) degree; \_\_\_ some graduate study; \_\_\_ MA/MS; \_\_\_ PhD

And your job? \_\_\_\_\_ What do you do typically at work? [ask questions to be sure about the likelihood of needing to obey a boss, or being able to use self-direction, etc.)

And the other person responsible for raising your child? [Go over education and occupation in the same way, unless it's clear that there isn't anyone who is also responsible.]

And where were you born? \_\_\_\_\_ How long have you lived in [this city]?

\_\_\_\_\_  
[For those who were born in another country, ask how long they've lived in this country]? \_\_\_\_\_

And the other person who's responsible for the child? [Same questions]

What other languages, besides [the language that's being spoken during the interview] do people use at home?

Thanks for filling out the Parents' Values for their Children (PVC). You think that these three characteristics are the ones that you'd most like to see your child develop. Why did

you choose these particular ones? And you listed these three as the ones that you least value. Can you explain why? [Follow up where necessary, so that you get a good sense of why the parent values these a lot and a little.]

In the recent past, can you recall a situation or an occasion in which someone helped you to do something that it might have been difficult to do alone or gave you something of value? What did the person do for you or give you? Can you remember what your feelings were towards that person at that time? And since then, do you feel anything for that person? [Probe with questions such as: What did the person's kindness mean to you and how did you feel (or do you still feel) about that person?]

Can you sum up in one word how you felt about that person?

I'm particularly interested in your thoughts regarding gratitude. I noticed that in your set of most important values, you circled "gratitude" as \_\_\_\_\_. Can you explain why? What does gratitude mean to you? [In case gratitude wasn't mentioned before: Is it different from the feeling you described above?] In what situations do you think it is appropriate to feel gratitude? How would you express that gratitude? Is there anything else you might do? Are there situations or occasions in which you might do something different? Why or why not?

Are there things that you think [child's name] should be grateful for? Why?

In what situations or occasions do you feel it is appropriate for [child's name] to express gratitude and how does he/she typically express that gratitude? [Probe: What does he/she say or do or feel in those situations or on those occasions?] Is the response different in other situations or on other occasions? How, or how not?

In what situations or on what occasions is [child] **most** likely to show gratitude? What does s/he say or do or feel in those situations?

In what situations or occasions is [child] **least** likely to show gratitude when you think that he/she should? Why do you think that is?

Do you think [child's] response of gratitude depends upon the act, or the benefactor (the person who helped or gave something), or on both? In other words, does it depend upon what was done for [child] or who was doing it, or both? Does this ever vary (for example, if a relative that [child] doesn't like very much gives him/her a nice gift)?

Are there situations in which you think [child] should be more grateful than [he/she] is? Can you give some examples of these situations? Why did you think that s/he should have been more grateful? Did you do or say anything to him/her at the time or afterwards?

Can you recall an event or incident in which [child] remembered a kind or generous act and talked about it to you? Did [child] express a need to do something for that person? What did he/she do or say or feel? Is this typical for how [child] responds to this type of act, or was this event something special? [In case the parent can't remember any situation: Even if [child] hasn't actually talked to you about this type of act (kindness or a generous act), do you think that s/he feels a need to do something in return for the other person? Can you think of any examples?]

Thinking about [child's] life this past year, would you say that he/she had:  
1 nothing to be grateful for; 2 not much to be grateful for; 3 a little to be grateful for; 4 a lot to be grateful for; 5 an awful lot to be grateful for.  
If you had to express how grateful [child] is, and 1 means "not at all grateful" and 5 means "extremely grateful", where would you put him/her on the line between 1 and 5?