"James" was an anomaly. The majority of students I (JFF) worked with while I was a school psychologist came from middle to upper middle-class backgrounds. James lived in a shelter with his mother—nutritious meals and restful sleep were luxuries. Every morning German imports lined the front of the school because many parents drove their children to school; James arrived by bus after commuting 11/2 hours.

Winter approached, yet he still wore T-shirts. His teacher, "Mrs. Riebe," got him a sport jacket for warmth. A kind gesture, but a sixth-grader with a sport jacket in a public school meant one thing: a bully target. I looked for James to discuss how to keep himself safe. When I found him, to my surprise, he was not embarrassed from wearing oversized business attire—he smiled widely. "Dr. Froh, check out this cool jacket Mrs. Riebe gave me," he said. "I love it. I can’t stop thanking her." James stood in the hallway wearing an oversized sport jacket, tired, hungry—and expressing gratitude. This was a defining moment for me. Gratitude, in my view, needed to be injected into our students—and youth in general.

The experience with James triggered reflections about my own childhood. Dubbed "The King of Thank Yous," I always expressed gratitude toward others—particularly friends. Thanks was communicated verbally (e.g., saying, "thank you"), written (e.g., a "thank you" letter), or via the norm of reciprocity (e.g., returning the favor). Noticing the boost that expressing gratitude gave to my well-being during childhood and adolescence leads me to think of the million-dollar question: If I benefited from early expressions of gratitude could everyone?

Thanks to Robert Emmons, Michael McCullough, and colleagues, progress is being made in understanding gratitude in adults. But little is known
about gratitude in children and adolescents. Gratitude research in children and adolescents is critically needed to understand and promote the full spectrum of child development—namely, flourishing into happy, productive, and helpful members of society. The primary aim of this chapter is to shed light on what is known about gratitude in youth. We begin with a general discussion of gratitude, and then elucidate the development of gratitude. We then describe the personal and interpersonal consequences of gratitude, and interventions created for increasing gratitude. We conclude with fruitful directions for future research on gratitude in youth.

GRATITUDE, DEFINED

Gratitude is experienced when people receive something beneficial; it is the appreciation one feels when somebody does something kind or helpful. It has been defined as “a sense of thankfulness and joy in response to receiving a gift, whether the gift be a tangible benefit from a specific other or a moment of peaceful bliss evoked by natural beauty” (Emmons, 2004, p. 554). Gratitude is a source of human strength because it promotes personal and relational well-being (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000), and is a highly valued trait—one that is encouraged by many philosophers (e.g., Cicero) and by all the major religions of the world.

While gratitude has been largely ignored throughout the history of psychology, it has recently attracted considerable interest from the scientific community (Bono, Emmons, & McCullough, 2004; Bono & McCullough, 2006; Emmons & McCullough, 2004; Froh, Miller, & Snyder, 2007; Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, 2008; Kashdan, Uswatte, & Julian, 2006; McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002; Tsang, 2008; Watkins, Scheer, Ovnick, & Kolts, 2006). In fact, even popular culture has taken interest (e.g., Emmons, 2007; Emmons & Hill, 2001; Hay, 1996; Norville, 2007; Ryan, 2000). We have made advancements but have much more to learn about the psychology of gratitude.

Gratitude is an emotional trait, mood, or emotion (McCullough et al., 2002). Trait gratitude, or the disposition toward gratitude, is “a generalized tendency to recognize and respond with grateful emotion to the roles of other people’s benevolence in the positive experiences and outcomes that one obtains” (McCullough et al., 2002, p. 112). People high in trait gratitude are likely to experience and express gratitude more easily, more often, and more strongly. For instance, a dispositionally grateful child may experience lots of gratitude toward her father for taking her out on a fishing trip, even though she spent most of the time enjoying a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and talking with her father rather than catching any fish. She may even offer her father unsolicited help afterward with cleaning the boat and fishing supplies to express her gratitude. On the other hand, a less grateful child may instead focus on the “wasted” time sitting on the boat and not catching fish (presumably the goal of fishing!), thus experiencing frustration and a desire to be someplace else. Further, she may even leave the cleaning up to her father afterward and, knowingly or unknowingly, rush off to a friend’s house to play in an act of ingratitude. Grateful
people recognize and appreciate the numerous gifts bestowed upon them at any given time. They are grateful for the "little things," such as peanut butter and jelly and time spent with loved ones. With gratitude comes abundance.

McCullough and colleagues (2002) suggest four facets of the grateful disposition that may lead to distinct emotional experiences. The first facet is intensity. Grateful people are likely to feel a stronger sense of gratitude for a positive event than their less grateful counterparts. The second facet is frequency. Grateful people report feeling grateful many times during the day and being thankful for small favors or acts of politeness. The third facet is span. Grateful people are grateful for many life circumstances (e.g., family, friends, teachers, health, and ice-cream) at any given time. The fourth facet is density. Grateful people feel grateful to many people for a single positive outcome. To illustrate, the valedictorian at a high school graduation may thank her parents for helping her with homework over the years, kindergarten teacher for instilling a love of learning, friends for supporting her long hours in the library, and younger brother for letting her catch up on sleep over the weekends.

According to Erika Rosenberg (1998), moods are like emotions, in that they change during or across days (Clark, Watson, & Leeka, 1989), but they probably last longer than emotions (Davidson, 1994). Like traits, moods may strongly influence one’s thoughts and behaviors; but unlike traits, moods are more likely to be consciously experienced by people. Gratitude, sustained as a mood over time, may influence people’s ability to process information and respond to certain situations (McCullough, Tsang, & Emmons, 2004). For instance, constructively framing adversity likely stems from gratitude as a mood, not an emotion (e.g., one may acknowledge that a romantic breakup hurts but remain grateful for supportive friends through the ordeal).

The emotion of gratitude is experienced when people receive a valued gift or favor that was intentionally provided by someone, usually at some cost to that person (McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001). As an emotional state then, gratitude stems from a positive outcome that was not earned or deserved but the result of someone’s good will (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Further, as an emotion, it is psychologically beneficial not just because it feels good but also because it elicits the tendency to help others, which in turn promotes relationship strengthening. Children experiencing gratitude as an emotion are not only more likely to return the favor to the benefactor (i.e., direct reciprocity), but may also help others not involved in the initial altruistic exchange (i.e., upstream reciprocity) (Froh, Yurkewicz, & Kashdan, 2008). If gratitude as an emotion promotes prosocial behavior toward benefactors and even others—conceivably several others—the result may be an epidemic of altruism (Nowak & Roch, 2007). Therefore, because gratitude likely fosters community cohesion in the long run, it can also serve as an impetus for turning schools into communities of children helping children.

Certain conditions must be met for someone to experience gratitude as an emotion. Fritz Heider in 1958 suggested that gratitude is felt when the
beneficiary perceives the actions of the other person as intentional. To illustrate, a child may experience gratitude when he learns that his mother, who always works in the evening, takes the evening off to attend his play or recital. Children begin to understand people's intentions only after developing a theory of mind (we address this in the development section of the chapter). Abraham Tesser and colleagues in 1968 expanded on Heider's observation. First, they suggested that the more the beneficiary thinks the benefactor acted intentionally, the more he will perceive the act as genuine, presumably because the benefactor expects little in return. Because gratitude is an interpersonal emotion, believing someone acted intentionally with one's best interest in mind is vital for experiencing it (Heider, 1958; see Graham & Weiner, 1986, and Weiner & Graham, 1988, for reviews). Gratitude, however, can also be experienced toward impersonal (e.g., nature) or non-human sources (e.g., God, animals, the cosmos). This is referred to as transpersonal gratitude (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000).

Second, the beneficiary experiences more gratitude if he perceives the benefactor to have incurred more cost. The mother may have had to work hard to convince her boss to let her go, use much needed sick time, or work extra hours just to be able make it to the play. The more her son realizes and appreciates this, the more strongly he will feel grateful.

Finally, the beneficiary should value the benefit. The son will experience gratitude to the degree that his mother attending his play recital is important to him (Tesser et al., 1968). The longer and harder he practiced for it, the more important the play is to him (e.g., he has an exciting or prominent role, acting may be in his future), and the more it means to him to see his mother in the audience, the more likely he will experience and express gratitude for her being there.

Gratitude can also be conceptualized as a virtue (McCullough et al., 2001). McCullough and colleagues operationalized gratitude as a moral emotion—one that motivates concern for others and propagates supportive social ties. After thoroughly reviewing the literature in developmental, evolutionary, social, and personality psychology, they concluded that gratitude serves three moral functions. As a moral barometer, gratitude signals the beneficiary that someone has given her a gift. As a moral motive, gratitude encourages the beneficiary to behave prosocially either directly towards the benefactor (i.e., direct reciprocity) or toward others (i.e., upstream reciprocity). Finally, as a moral reinforcer, gratitude increases the probability that the benefactor will act prosocially toward the beneficiary in the future. Thus, it is a virtue that builds trustworthy social relationships.

Whether considered as a trait, mood, emotion, or virtue, gratitude's link to personal and relational well-being in children and adolescents is undeniable. We contend that gratitude may be essential for flourishing in youth and that it makes sense to include gratitude in the scientific pursuit of positive youth development precisely because it helps build personal resources for ensuring well-being, social integration, and generativity at a critical stage in life when social identity and belonging go hand in hand (Bono & Froh, in press). We provide a brief overview of the development of gratitude in children and adolescents below.
Gratitude Development

The development of gratitude in youth remains a mystery. In her essay "Envy and Gratitude," Melanie Klein in 1957 proposed a psychoanalytic theory describing the development of gratitude in children. She asserted that gratitude first emerges in the earliest stages of infancy, but only if envy does not overpower its development. Envy, Klein maintained, originated during the development of the mother-child bond if the mother deprived the child either of physical nourishment via breast milk, or emotional nourishment via love and care. The ultimate consequence for a child who develops envy in this way is being deprived of the opportunity to experience joy. The infant only experiences absolute enjoyment if the capacity for love is adequately developed—this enjoyment is the foundation for gratitude. Klein argued that the infant’s early experiences with the mother “constitute not only the basis of sexual gratification but of all later happiness and make possible the feeling of unity with another person; such unity means being fully understood, which is essential for every happy love relation or friendship” (p. 18). Because joy, according to Klein, is the precursor to gratitude, a child who develops envy becomes unable to develop gratitude. This is most troublesome because only gratitude can defend against the destructiveness of envy and greed.

Gratitude, according to Klein (1957), is crucial for the infant to build a strong relation with the “good object” (i.e., mother) and fosters an appreciation of oneself and others, as well as fostering hope, trust, and goodness. It is also a natural byproduct to the capacity for love; the more the infant experiences maternal love, the more the infant will also experience gratitude. The more gratification the infant feels towards maternal nourishment, the greater the experience of being the recipient of a valued gift. Regular gratification will foster the experience of joy and gratitude in the child. In this instance, gratitude engenders generosity (Klein). “If this gratitude is deeply felt it includes the wish to return goodness received and is thus the basis of generosity. There is always a close connection between being able to accept and to give, and both are part of the relation to the good object” (Klein, 1963/1987, p. 310 as cited in Komter, 2004).

Like Klein (1957), Dan McAdams and Jack Bauer (2004) maintained that the early attachment experience, as conceptualized by Bowlby (1969), might be where gratitude originates. But empirical investigation is needed to support this speculative view of gratitude’s foundations in infancy. Indeed, a criticism of Klein’s theory—as psychoanalytic interpretations in general—is its lack of empirical support. Aafke Komter (2004) argued that, “the clinical material she (Klein) adduced to support her ideas may be considered too idiosyncratic, too filtered through her own analytical perspective” (p. 202). Because sustained effort and focus are needed to develop virtues such as gratitude, Emmons and Charles Shelton (2002) argued that, “gratitude does not emerge spontaneously in newborns” (p. 468). Therefore, while infancy still remains a plausible developmental stage for the development of gratitude, firm conclusions will only be reached with rigorous empirical confirmation.
Some submit that the experience of gratitude is enhanced during development (Baumgartner-Tramer, 1938; Graham, 1988). That is, older children report experiencing and expressing more gratitude compared with younger children. Jean Gleason and Sandra Weintraub (1976) audio-taped conversations between 115 children (2–16 years of age) and adults on Halloween night with the aim of elucidating language routines in child development. During three Halloweens and in two houses, a cassette recorder was hidden near the door and turned on every time the bell rang. Children were asked their age as they were leaving the house. The authors also accompanied two mothers and their children as they traveled from house to house to collect data on what the mothers say to the children about receiving candy. In this “trick or treat” routine, children younger than six thanked an adult for giving them candy noticeably less (21%) compared with 10-year-olds (83%) and 11-to-16-year-olds (88%).

Other researchers found similar results. Esther Greif and Jean Gleason (1980) conducted a laboratory investigation in 22 boys and girls aged 2 to 5 and their parents studying politeness routines for “hi,” “thanks,” and “good-bye.” Parental prompting lead 86% of the children to express gratitude; but with no prompting, expressing gratitude became the least frequent politeness routine—only 7% of children spontaneously expressed gratitude.

The finding that preschool children in these studies seldom say “thank you” may not necessarily suggest they are not experiencing gratitude. Because these studies were conducted in novel situations (i.e., Halloween night in the first study and in a laboratory in the second), the children may have been more focused on the unfamiliar aspects of the situation instead of the saying “thank you.” These studies may not give a true picture of the experience and expression of gratitude among youth in normal natural settings (Becker & Smenner, 1986). Indeed, Judith Becker and Patricia Smenner reported that 37% of 3½- to 4½-year-olds spontaneously said “thank you” in a familiar context. These findings, however, were influenced by the children’s socioeconomic status (SES). Lower income children were more likely to say “thank you” compared with middle-income children (34% vs 18%). Thus, familiar situations may promote more gratitude expression in children. Nonetheless, these studies suggest that gratitude may begin developing in early childhood—probably solidifying in middle childhood (Weiner & Graham, 1988)—and is affected by individual differences in socialization (Becker & Smenner).

Adults can likely foster gratitude development in children and adolescents. Children’s language acquisition is facilitated by input from adults in the environment (Gleason & Weintraub, 1976). As illustrated by Greif and Gleason’s (1980) laboratory study, discussed previously, gratitude is expressed spontaneously less so than after adult prompting. But certain linguistic behaviors and social scripts spark more explanatory conversation between adults and children than others. For example, adults teaching children a lexical item and concept embed it in several frames: “See the bird? That’s a bird. The bird is flying.” But adults do not as often expand on politeness formulas, such as expressing gratitude and saying “thank you.”
Instead, gratitude expressions seem to be taught as social scripts and little, if any, time is spent explaining why thanks should be given. Parents seem primarily concerned with the context and timing of saying “thank you” (e.g., when a friend helps with homework), giving little emphasis to the reasons for the helping (e.g., the friend noticed your need and chose to provide help) (Gleason & Weintraub). Because gratitude can be taught and is an acquired virtue (Emmons & Shelton, 2002), consistent support from adults can help instill in children the skills to both express and experience gratitude. Encouraging the practice of gratitude as politeness and as awareness of other’s good efforts should in turn facilitate the development of gratitude.

Children and adolescents seem to differ with respect to the experience and expression of gratitude. In 1938, Franziska Baumgarten-Tramer embarked on perhaps the most ambitious study to date on the development of gratitude in youth. She asked 1,059 school children ages 7–15 years in the city of Berne, Switzerland two questions: (a) What is your greatest wish? and (b) What would you do for the person who granted you this wish? After coding the responses, four types of gratitude emerged. Verbal gratitude (e.g., “I should thank him”) occurred in 30% to 48% of the total replies. It was mainly expressed in 15-year-olds (72%).

Concrete gratitude occurs when the child wants to give the benefactor something in return for the gift (e.g., “I should give him a book, a bow, a pocket knife”). There are two kinds of concrete gratitude: exchange and material. Exchange gratitude occurs when the beneficiary gives the benefactor an object in return for an object (e.g., a skateboard in return for a video game). As with Tesser et al.’s (1968) belief that more gratitude is experienced when the gift received is highly valued by the beneficiary, Baumgarten-Tramer (1938) maintains that the degree of exchange gratitude experienced by the beneficiary reflects the subjective value of the object given in return for the gift. Data were not provided on the percentage of children demonstrating exchange gratitude. Material gratitude occurs when the beneficiary shares with the benefactor some benefits of the gift (e.g., giving the benefactor a ride to town on a bike). This type of gratitude was most frequent with 8-year-olds (51%) and least frequent with children between 12 and 15 years of age (6%). Both exchange gratitude and material gratitude involve tit-for-tat gift exchange. But exchange gratitude occurs when different objects are swapped, and material gratitude occurs when both the beneficiary and benefactor benefit from the same gift, yet different aspects of it.

Connective gratitude is an attempt by the beneficiary to create a spiritual relationship with the benefactor. “I would help him in case of need” characterizes this type of gratitude. Connective gratitude was reported by children as young as 7 years of age but became more frequent at the age of 11 and occurred in 60% of 12-year-olds (Baumgarten-Tramer, 1938). Here, children seem to lose some of their egocentrism and become more other-centered and capable of abstract thought, developmental growth that corresponds to improved social understanding and the development of empathy during early adolescence (Berk, 2007). This type of gratitude also
occurs after theory of mind is established, or the ability to perceive people’s behaviors as purposeful—something which begins to develop around the ages of 3 to 4 (Baron-Cohen, 1995; Wellman, 1990). According to McAdams and Bauer (2004), “[c]hildren can feel and express gratitude toward others when, and only when, they understand that other people (like themselves) are intentional beings whose behavior is motivated by desire and belief. In a random universe without motivated actors ... gratitude is impossible” (p. 88). By developing a theory of mind, children begin to understand that behavior can be intentional—the key thought in experiencing gratitude. Thus, with connective gratitude, children presumably begin to grasp the social cognitive appraisals inherent in adult theories of gratitude, such as appreciating and reciprocating the beneficial intentions of others (McCullough et al., 2001; Tesser et al., 1968).

Lastly, finalistic gratefulness is the “tendency of the child or youth to reciprocate for the realization of his wish by an action which would be in some way helpful for the object or the situation desired, or would promote their personal development” (Baumgarten-Tramer, 1938, p. 62). This is exemplified by the child who wishes to make the field hockey team and, if she achieves her goal, intends to express gratitude by always practicing her drills at home and being early to practice and games. Similar to Klein’s (1957) psychoanalytic interpretation of gratitude development in infancy, there are no empirical data to support Baumgarten-Tramer’s findings. Aside from Jeffrey Froh, Charles Yurkewicz, and Todd Kashdan (2008), who exclusively investigated the development of gratitude in early adolescents, and Froh (2008), who investigated the development of gratitude in both early and late adolescents, Baumgarten-Tramer’s study remains the only known attempt at scientifically elucidating the development of the experience and expression of gratitude in youth.

Can children be taught the distinction between obligatory gratitude and genuine gratitude? Social etiquette such as saying “thank you” when someone holds the door for them helps children successfully navigate the social world (Gleason & Weintraub, 1976). But such social scripts do not require the child to respond with gratitude. Feeling grateful occurs mainly when someone believes the benefactor gave a gift intentionally (McCullough et al., 2001). The person held the door intentionally—they did not have to. Not expressing gratitude can lead to social problems (Apte, 1974), but expressing gratitude can help individuals become socially effective communicators and proactive in securing positive social interactions as well as supportive and satisfying relationships (Hess, 1970, as cited in Becker & Smenner, 1986). It therefore seems fruitful to teach children and adolescents the intricacies behind the experience and expression of gratitude. Doing so may foster its development.

PERSONAL AND INTERPERSONAL CONSEQUENCES

Gratitude has long been considered a critical component of health and well-being for individuals and social stability for society, and its practice has
been encouraged and maintained in cultures throughout the world (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000). Even though it is widely acknowledged as an uplifting experience (Gallup, 1998), only in the last decade have the personal and interpersonal consequences of gratitude been tested empirically. Overall, evidence suggests that gratitude may be beneficial for individuals in the short run and in the long run. In fact, Emmons (2004) recently described how gratitude fulfills the criteria of being a character strength or virtue of transcendence because it helps provide meaning and a sense of connection to the universe. Nansook Park and Christopher Peterson (2006) subsequently showed that it contributes to the moral competence and character of youths.

Links to Subjective Well-Being

Gratitude is associated with various positive states and outcomes. Research on gratitude as a disposition consistently demonstrates that grateful people, young or old, tend to be happy people (McCullough et al., 2002, 2004; Watkins, 2004). For example, McCullough and his colleagues (2002) demonstrated that, compared to less grateful people, grateful people report experiencing more satisfaction with life, optimism, vitality, less depression and envy; and they also tend to report greater religiousness and spirituality. They determined that grateful individuals generally have more agreeable, more extroverted, and less neurotic personalities. Further, they found that the aforementioned relationships could all be obtained using self and peer reports as well, suggesting that gratitude and its positive correlates are visible to oneself and to friends, relatives, and romantic partners. This research, along with other research on adults (Overwalle, Merwede, & DeSnyder, 1995; Watkins, Woodward, Stone, & Kolts, 2003), has also shown that relatively grateful people tend to experience greater positive emotions and states, such as more positive moods, contentment, happiness, and hope, as well as less envy, depression, and negative moods. It appears that gratitude and happiness may mutually reinforce each other in a cyclical manner (Watkins et al., 2003).

Until the last few years, research on gratitude and subjective well-being has mostly been conducted on adult populations. Froh et al. (2008), however, recently began filling this gap by examining the correlates of gratitude in early adolescence. Exploring the relationships between a grateful mood (i.e., feeling grateful since the day before) and well-being, they found that early adolescents’ gratitude was positively related to many of the same emotions found in the adult research, such as hope, forgiveness, pride, contentment, optimism, inspiration, excitement, and overall positive affect. Gratitude was also positively related with gratitude in response to aid, providing emotional support, and satisfaction with school, family, friends, community, and self; it was negatively related to physical symptoms. Demonstrating gratitude’s robust relationship with physical and psychological well-being, many of these relationships remained even after accounting for the effects of global positive affect. Gratitude, however, was unrelated with
global negative affect, a finding that was consistent with some adult samples (Watkins et al., 2003) and inconsistent with others (McCullough et al. 2002). As with much of the research on gratitude and subjective well-being in adults (cited above), the correlational nature of this research precludes casual interpretation. If gratitude increases such positive emotions and psychological outcomes in youth, however, as has been shown in adults (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006), then these findings suggest that encouraging gratitude among adolescents may help promote their well-being and development.

We now turn to some of the main reasons for the positive relationship between gratitude and subjective well-being. Evidence from Barbara Fredrickson and her colleagues suggest that the regular experience of positive emotions in general can improve individuals’ functioning and well-being, making them healthier, more resilient, and more socially integrated (Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002). Thus, positive emotions help broaden individuals’ thoughts and actions so that they actually accrue lasting physical, intellectual, and social resources for later success and well-being (Fredrickson).

Gratitude has been implicated in these same processes too. Fredrickson, Michele Tugade, Christian Waugh, and Gregory Larkin (2003) found that gratitude was the second most commonly experienced emotion in the wake of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 (out of 20 emotions, only compassion was more common). They found evidence that the experience of positive emotions helped resilient people actively cope with the tragedy. A subsequent archival study of newspaper accounts about what children were thankful for before and after September 11 produced further evidence that gratitude plays an important role in coping—for adults and children as well. Anne Gordon, Dara Mushers-Eizenman, Shayla Holub, and John Dalrymple (2004) found that themes of gratitude for basic human needs (i.e., family, friends, and teachers/school) increased after September 11. Therefore, evidence suggests that gratitude may be a powerful emotion for coping with adversity (Fredrickson, 2004).

Resource for Interpersonal Well-Being

Individuals who are more grateful tend to be more helpful toward others. McCullough et al. (2002) also found that dispositional gratitude was associated with being more helpful, supportive, forgiving, and empathic toward others. Again, these associations held using self reports and peer reports as well. Other research has shown that relatively grateful people are also less narcissistic (Farwell & Wohlwend-Lloyd, 1998). Here too, there is evidence to suggest that gratitude may be helpful for the relational well-being of youths. In addition to satisfactions with their peer and family contexts, the early adolescents in the study by Froh et al. (2008) also reported greater perceived peer and family support. Together, the evidence then suggests that individual differences in gratitude correspond to other personality traits, all of which are geared toward upholding supportive and
caring ties to friends and family, and perhaps other social relationships in
general.

Recent experimental research has demonstrated that gratitude can
actually cause prosocial behavior. The experience of gratitude can cause
direct reciprocity, leading individuals to respond prosocially to a benefactor
(Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006; Tsang, 2006, 2007); and can cause upstream
reciprocity, leading them to treat other people prosocially in subsequent
interactions (Bartlett & DeSteno). Moreover, the prosocial behavior
spurred by gratitude appears to increase as a function of the value of the
benefit to the beneficiary (Tsang, 2007).

Aside from increasing helping behavior, gratitude may also lead individu-
als to inhibit destructive interpersonal behavior. Robert Baron (1984)
engaged college students in a conflict simulation task related to work with
a confederate who disagreed with whatever views they held. During a break
in the task the confederate then introduced one of four conditions (i.e.,
gift, sympathy, humor, or a control). Participants in the gift and humor
conditions characterized the confederate as more pleasant and reported that
they would be more likely to use collaboration to resolve such conflicts in
the future, compared with participants in the control group. Though this
research did not assess whether gratitude accounted for this effect in partic-
ular, these results suggest that experiencing gratitude may aid the resolu-
tion of social conflicts.

Grateful individuals may act prosocially as a way of merely expressing
their gratitude, however, over time these actions can have lasting impacts
on people’s social relationships (Emmons & Shelton, 2002; Harpham,
2004; Komter, 2004). Gratitude helps build trust in social relations in gen-
eral (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005). Thus, the evidence supports the notion
that gratitude serves to maintain and build personal resources of social sup-
port (Fredrickson, 1998, 2001, 2004). This may be crucial for youths with
disabilities, special needs, or social adjustment difficulties. A critical chal-
genue faced by adolescents is coordinating social and academic goals effec-
tively (Wentzel, 2005). Given the centrality of social acceptance and the
strength of peer relationships in determining adolescents’ social behavior
and development (Berk, 2007; Youniss & Haynie, 1992) then, gratitude
may be quite valuable for helping adolescents align their social and achieve-
ment goals. We proceed to a brief focus on another potential mechanism,
one less explored empirically, through which gratitude may boost personal
and interpersonal well-being.

Does Gratitude Foster Intrinsic Motivation?

Fredrickson’s broaden and build hypothesis of positive emotions (2001)
suggests that gratitude may also help individuals build other lasting resour-
ces for well-being. Specifically, it may nurture creativity, greater intrinsic
motivation, and a stronger purposefulness. This may be one reason why
grateful people tend to be higher in vitality and optimism and more reli-
giously and spiritually minded than less grateful people (McCullough et al,
Gratitude for help received early in life—like mentoring—may motivate later generative behavior for the sake of the original cause or for society (Peterson & Stewart, 1996). People who are more grateful tend to also be less materialistic (McCullough et al., 2002), and the constant pursuit of extrinsic or materialistic goals has been shown to erode more purposeful engagement in life (Kasser & Ryan, 1993; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan, Sheldon, Kasser, & Deci, 1996). All of these findings could be explained by the fact that gratitude likely focuses individuals on intrinsic goals, other-oriented motivations, and the fulfillment of higher-order needs (e.g., achievement in a self-relevant domain), whereas materialism focuses them on extrinsic goals, individualistic motivations, and the fulfillment of lower-order needs (e.g., possessions of comfort and safety) (Polak & McCullough, 2006). Gratitude may safeguard against this erosion.

Giacomo Bono and Emily Polak (2008) conducted a daily diary study examining gratitude and materialism over a two-week period and provided more direct evidence for such an interpretation. They found that people were less materialistic than they usually are on days when they were also more grateful. This link emerged regardless of the degree to which people were materialistic, and it was stronger the more they endorsed stimulation values. In particular, temporary increases in gratitude accounted for temporary reductions in all three aspects of materialism—financial striving, appealing appearance, and social recognition. Moreover, gratitude and materialism were divergently related to states of social loneliness and conflictual social interactions. These findings imply that gratitude and materialism sway individuals toward opposing modes of being—one that values connecting to people and social capital and another that values possessions and social status. Couple these findings with other evidence that over-reliance on extrinsic values is associated with increased use of tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana, as well as increased sexual intercourse (Williams, Cox, Hedberg, & Deci, 2000), then it becomes apparent that gratitude may help youth flourish because it also encourages growth toward purpose and community. Indeed, contribution to society represents the desired outcome of positive youth development (Lerner et al., 2005). Thus, instilling an attitude of gratitude when this character strength is just developing (Park & Peterson, 2006) holds much promise because it could help adolescents cope successfully with central challenges and facilitate their identity achievement (Rowe & Marcia, 1980).

GRATITUDE ENHANCING INTERVENTIONS AND STRATEGIES

Religious and self-help groups commonly conduct activities that have members reflect on the gifts or good conditions that they are grateful for in their lives. These practices rest on the assumption that the exercise of grateful thinking enhances well-being. Experiments aimed at increasing gratitude in people have applied similar methods with apparent success, showing how such activities can foster psychological and social functioning.

Emmons and McCullough (2003) conducted three experiments investigating whether gratitude-inducing exercises (i.e., counting blessings) could
lead to heightened well-being over time, compared to focusing on hassles, downward social comparisons, or neutral life events. Across three studies, participants were randomly assigned to these experimental conditions and then completed daily or weekly records of their positive and negative affect, health behaviors, physical symptoms, coping behaviors, and overall life appraisals. In the first study, participants completed these exercises and measures once a week for 10 consecutive weeks. Afterward, those in the gratitude condition not only reported being more grateful than those in the hassles condition—showing that the activity successfully induced grateful affect—they also reported feeling better about their life as a whole, being more optimistic about the future, having fewer health complaints, and exercising more than participants in the comparison conditions. Thus, a simple weekly gratitude intervention demonstrated significant emotional and health benefits.

Participants in the grateful condition in Emmons and McCullough’s (2003) Study 2 (i.e., counting blessings on a daily basis for two weeks) indicated that they felt more joyful, enthusiastic, interested, attentive, energetic, excited, determined, and strong than those in the hassles condition. They also reported having offered more emotional support or help with personal problems to others, indicating that the gratitude induction also increased prosocial motivation. As with the first study, the gratitude manipulation showed a significant effect on positive affect relative to the hassles condition, but no reliable impact on negative affect. Study 3 then replicated these effects in adults who had neuromuscular diseases. Similar to the previous studies, the gratitude group showed significantly more positive affect and satisfaction with life, but they also showed less negative affect than the control group. Moreover, both the self-reports of the participants and reports by their spouses reflected the increases in positive affect and life satisfaction. These three studies demonstrate that gratitude has a causal influence on subjective well-being and suggest that various populations could benefit from the regular experience and expression of gratitude.

To investigate which method of expressing gratitude best enhances positive affect, Watkins et al. (2003) conducted an experiment in which they assigned students to one of four conditions (Study 4)—three were gratitude-related (i.e., thinking, writing an essay, or writing a letter about someone to whom they were grateful) and one was a control condition (i.e., writing about the living room). People in the gratitude conditions reliably reported increases in positive affect, compared to those in the control condition. Thus, expressing or even reflecting on grateful experiences can enhance one’s mood. They also found that this effect was strongest in the grateful thinking condition, relative to the writing conditions, which suggests that meditating on grateful experiences may enhance positive moods more than processing them analytically. One reason may be that scrutinizing grateful experiences may inhibit positive memory biases (Watkins, Grimm, & Kolts, 2004). Nonetheless, these findings imply that gratitude interventions should consider their targets in terms of whether the induction exercises are interesting and engaging to them, the amount of time available for the intervention, and the degree or kind of intervention that is most appropriate given the circumstances.
Women seem more likely to experience and express gratitude (Becker & Smenner, 1986; Gordon et al., 2004; Ventimiglia, 1982) than men. Todd Kashdan and colleagues (2008) conducted multiple studies investigating potential sex differences in gratitude and found support that men and women differ in the perception of and reaction to gratitude. In a sample of 148 college undergraduates (Study 3), gratitude was positively related to greater relatedness and autonomy for women—but not men. This relationship was explained by women’s tendency to accept and express positive emotions (e.g., gratitude). Men typically express emotions associated with power and status (Brody, 1997, 1999). Therefore, because gratitude, indebtedness, and dependency are associated with each other in some ways (Solomon, 1995) but not all (Watkins et al., 2006)—men may regard the experience and expression of gratitude as a detriment to their social standing. With this in mind, it seems that tailoring gratitude interventions to individuals so that they can find their own appeal in grateful behavior would be a good idea for both sexes—because building strong and satisfying relationships may benefit anyone, whether they seek more communal or individualistic strivings.

Froh et al. (2008) found that girls tended to report experiencing gratitude more than boys. This is consistent with other youth samples (Becker & Smenner, 1986; Gordon et al., 2004) and adult samples (Kashdan et al., 2008; Ventimiglia, 1982). But boys, compared with girls, appear to derive more social benefits from gratitude, findings that were inconsistent with adult samples (Kashdan et al., 2008). In extrapolating from the volunteer research summarized by Post and Neimark (2007), being grateful may help boys more than it helps girls, and being ungrateful may hurt girls more than it hurts boys. Boys may potentially derive more benefit from gratitude because doing so is beyond others’ expectations; and this may increase their confidence and self-esteem. But girls may not only derive less benefit for expressing gratitude—because doing so adheres to social norms—they may also experience more negative symptoms for experiencing and expressing ingratitude.

These sex differences in the experience and expression of gratitude suggest that the sex of the child should be considered in gratitude interventions. Because sex differences in gratitude may emerge in childhood (Froh et al., 2008; Gordon et al., 2004) emotional reeducation might be needed to encourage boys that expressing gratitude for gifts from others does not necessarily undermine their own accomplishments or autonomy. Reeducation may be more successful by appealing to boys’ desire to be seen as brave (Emmons, 2004). For instance, acknowledging others’ help in academic success can be framed as knowing what you need or whom to count on to do a good job. Such efforts would encourage youth to express gratitude because they would help frame target behaviors as desirable and make thanking others for their help compatible with the need to feel competent. This would, in turn, help instill healthy goal striving habits and greater social emotional intelligence in the long run.

Froh, Sefick, and Emmons (2008) conducted the first experimental investigation of a gratitude intervention in early adolescents. For two weeks
students were asked on a daily basis to either count up to five things for which they were grateful (i.e., gratitude condition), five things they found annoying (i.e., hassles condition), or just complete the measures (i.e., control condition). Gratitude journal entries included benefits such as: "I am grateful that my mom didn’t go crazy when I accidentally broke a patio table;" "My coach helped me out at baseball practice;" "I am thankful for my family, friends, religion, education, health, and happiness;" and "My grandma is in good health, my family is still together, my family still loves each other, my brothers are healthy, and we have fun everyday."

Counting blessings was related to more gratitude, optimism, life satisfaction, and less negative affect. Students who claimed feeling grateful for receiving help from others reported more positive affect. In fact, the relationship between feeling grateful for help from others and positive affect became stronger during the two-week intervention and was strongest three weeks after the intervention ended. Gratitude in response to aid also explained why students instructed to count blessings reported more general gratitude. Recognizing the gift of aid—yet another blessing to be counted—seemed to engender more gratitude.

The most significant finding, in our view, was the relationship between counting blessings and satisfaction with school. Students instructed to count blessings, compared to either students in the hassles or control conditions, reported more satisfaction with their school experience (i.e., find school interesting, feel good at school, think they are learning a lot, and are eager to go to school) (Huebner, Drane, & Valois, 2000) both immediately following the two-week intervention and three weeks after completing the intervention (see Figure 4.1). Expressions of school satisfaction included: "I am thankful for school;" "I am thankful for my education;" "I go to a good school;" and "I am thankful that my school has a track team and that I got accepted into honor society." School satisfaction is positively related to academic and social success (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). Many early and late adolescents, however, indicate significant amounts of dissatisfaction with their school experience (Huebner et al., 2000;

Figure 4.1. School Satisfaction
Huebner, Valois, Paxton, & Drane, 2005). Therefore, inducing gratitude in students via counting blessings may be a viable intervention for mitigating negative academic appraisals and simultaneously promoting a positive school climate—one that nurtures both academic and social competence.

Gratitude interventions are relatively easy to implement, making them potentially appealing to practitioners and individuals—because the aim of finding fulfillment in life is basic and universal. When practicing as a school psychologist, the first author (JFJ) organized a school-wide counting blessings exercise for over 1,000 middle school students. For two weeks all students were asked to follow the same directions as those in Froh and colleagues’ gratitude condition on a daily basis (Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, 2008). Teachers were instructed to process the experience with the students after the two-week intervention by following a gratitude lesson plan created specifically for this intervention. Adhering to the focused conversation method of teaching (Nelson, 2001), students were asked the following types of questions in this order: objective (e.g., What specific blessings did you count?), reflective (e.g., What did you like most about counting your blessings), interpretive (e.g., What are the benefits of giving thanks?), and decisional (e.g., How can we inject gratitude into our lives and school?).

Anecdotally speaking, students seemed to benefit from counting blessings. Some students reported recognizing that “life could be so much worse.” One student, who was from a wealthy family, stated “I realized how good I really have it. Some kids have nothing. I just never thought about it before.” This is just one of the many creative ways we think youth can be taught to experience and express gratitude (Froh, 2007). Another option is to dedicate a specific time of year (e.g., a certain month) to expressing gratitude to others. For instance, students can write a thank you card each week for a gift received, such as by another student (e.g., protecting them from a bully), an administrator (e.g., supporting a class trip to a museum), a teacher (e.g., waiting with them until their parents arrive at school to pick them up), or support staff (e.g., ensuring the heat works during the cold winter months). Also, students could be encouraged to embark on a gratitude visit and personally read the letter to their benefactor. This practice in particular has been shown in adults to cause a significant increase in happiness and decrease in depression for up to one month later (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). Given the ease of inducing gratitude, its potential for making school tasks and exercises more creative, and its benefits to individuals and their environments, gratitude interventions for youth, in our view, should be seriously considered by those interested in fostering positive youth development.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Because the scientific understanding of gratitude in children and adolescents is in its infancy (Bono & Froh, in press), the avenues for inquiry are endless. We provide some structure for future investigations by offering several areas of gratitude research we think are currently in need of
expansion. First, while counting blessings in youth has been shown to be related with psychological well-being (Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, 2008), whether gratitude adds anything unique to such outcomes beyond positive emotions is still unclear. Maybe children offer help to others because thinking about things they should be grateful for makes them happy, which in turn leads to helping others. While Froh, Yurkewicz, and Kashdan (2008) addressed this issue with a correlational study, addressing this issue through gratitude intervention experiments would be important for distinguishing gratitude’s beneficial effects from those of positive moods.

Second, an important issue is determining how much effort should be expended in practicing gratitude. Sonja Lyubomirsky, Kennon Sheldon, and David Schkade (2005) found that adults who counted blessings once a week reported more life satisfaction than those who counted blessings three times a week. The authors suggested that this may have happened because counting blessings several times a week can cause the exercise to lose its freshness and maybe even become boring. Therefore, with the practice of gratitude more may not always be better, and the ideal frequency should be explored—especially when it concerns youth, whose attention is quickly engaged and disengaged.

Third, other variables likely influence the magnitude of effects reported by using gratitude interventions. Variables such as sex, personality, dispositional gratitude, religiosity, spirituality, age (e.g., children vs adolescents) should be considered as potentially enhancing the effects of such exercises. Sheldon and Lyubomirsky (2004) maintain that some activities make people happier than others and that person-activity fit plays an important role in such interventions. Due to idiosyncratic values, interests, strengths, and inclinations, some gratitude exercises may do nothing for one person, but may make another person substantially happier simply because it “fit” that person better.

More recently, Sheldon and Lyubomirsky (2006) found support for this notion. They examined the motivational predictors and positive emotion outcomes of regularly practicing two mental exercises: counting one’s blessings (gratitude) and visualizing best possible selves (BPS). Both exercises caused more positive affect than the control group. But the BPS exercise may be better at raising and maintaining positive affect compared to the other two conditions—counting blessings came in second. They concluded that sustained personal effort, regardless of exercise, maintained the positive impacts of such interventions over time. Because the person-activity fit influenced this sustained effort, we agree that engaging youths’ intrinsic interest in any gratitude exercises is critical for interventions to have any meaningful impacts on them.

Fourth, longitudinal research that follows the same group of people over an extended period of time is needed to ascertain the development of gratitude. In particular, it will be critical to determine social cognitive differences that enable or inhibit the experience of gratitude. Also, data from children and the people in their environments (e.g., parents, siblings, and teachers) will help identify the social factors that facilitate the development of these determinants. For instance, is gratitude only spoken about during
grace at dinner and prayers at bedtime? Do children speak about gratitude more with their fathers or mothers, and if so, why? Does the family’s religious denomination play a role in gratitude development? These questions largely remain unanswered.

Longitudinal research will also help determine the long-term effects of gratitude interventions. In 2005, Martin Seligman, Tracy Steen, Park, and Peterson (2005) found in an adult internet sample, that the gratitude visit lead to significant gains in happiness and reductions in depression for one month after the intervention compared to an intervention that possibly could have also lead to positive outcomes (i.e., writing about early memories). Two studies aside (Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, 2008, Froh, Ozimkowski, Miller, & Kashdan, 2008), we are unaware of other studies investigating sustainable outcomes for gratitude interventions in youth.

Finally, asking children and adolescents to complete questionnaires about gratitude may produce questionable results due to social desirability (i.e., answering the questions the way they think they “should”). An improvement could be to include behavioral measures of gratitude (e.g., frequency of saying “thank you” after an intervention). But this also has limitations. Is saying “thank you” a true measure of gratitude or is it just politeness? It is therefore ideal when studying gratitude to use self-report and behavioral measures (Emmons, McCullough, & Tsang, 2003).

We argued here and elsewhere (Bono & Froh, in press) that while we now understand the development, assessment, promotion, and outcomes of gratitude in youth more than ever (see Froh, Miller, & Snyder, 2007, for a review), we still only see the tip of the iceberg—much work is needed! Gratitude has been associated with a host of positive outcomes in children and adolescents. In addition to personal benefits, gratitude also yields relational benefits—strengthening families, peers, schools, and communities. It seems that gratitude may be a simple way to help children and adolescents actualize their social, psychological, intellectual, and spiritual potentialities. We hope this chapter helps consolidate our understanding of gratitude among youths and that it helps spark future research exploring its benefits to individuals and society.

### PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENTS

#### The Giving of Thanks

We grouped the personal mini-experiments into two main categories: ranging from lots of effort and time to little effort and time. We believe that individuals will experience a stronger boost in gratitude after completing the more effortful exercises of counting blessings or making a gratitude visit, compared with the others. These more effortful exercises should be tried if one is interested in testing how much a boost—be it personal or relational—one can obtain from the experience and expression of gratitude.

**Much Effort and Time Needed:**

**Counting blessings:** There are many things in our lives, both large and small, for which we could be grateful. Think back over the past day and write down on the lines below up to five things in your life that you are grateful or
thankful for. Keep a journal and do this daily for two weeks. As a variation, you may also want to focus on one thing you are grateful for and deeply reflect on why this might make you feel particularly grateful.

Gratitude visit: Think of someone to whom or for whom you are grateful, but never quite gave the thanks she deserved. Write a letter to her explaining in detail why you feel so much gratitude toward her. Then read the letter to her in person. If distance and travel make it difficult to do this in person, you may also read the letter over the phone.

Little Effort and Time Needed*:
- Every day, thank someone for something that you might otherwise take for granted (e.g., thanking the janitor who cleans your hallways). As can be done with most of these exercises, it may help to first think of the different environments in your daily life (school, park, home, a friend’s house, the neighborhood, etc.) and then think about the people in each of those environments that did something that helped you or made you happy. Also consider things that those people did not have to do, things that they went out of their way to do, or things that were really tuned in to your needs, goals, or wishes at the time.
- Keep a record of the number of times you use the words “thank you” in a day. Over the course of the first week, try to double the number of times that you say the words.
- Call a parent/sibling/friend each day and thank him or her (e.g., for helping you achieve something important to you, for helping you avoid a bad or negative outcome, for helping you to become who you are, or for always being there for you).
- Send someone a “thank you” e-greeting or instant message.
- Leave a note on your roommate/apartment mate suite mate/hall mate that thanks her for something about her that you appreciate (e.g., maybe they cleaned up or left you food or treats to eat).

REFERENCES


*Jonathan Haidt developed some of these exercises with his students. We are grateful to him for sharing them with us.


