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Conditional benefits of gratitude: parents' gratitude is associated with greater day-to-day family satisfaction, especially on rough days

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ABSTRACT

Gratitude has been associated with better parental well-being and relationship quality, yet less is known about its implications for daily family life. This study examined whether parents' daily gratitude was associated with parents' daily family satisfaction, and whether this link was moderated by daily positive and negative affect. Using a 14-day daily diary design, Canadian parents ($N = 176$; $M_{\text{age}} = 38.26$ years, $SD = 5.51$; 83.5% mothers) provided 1,766 daily reports. Parents who had higher trait-like gratitude reported higher daily family satisfaction over time. At the daily level, same-day gratitude also showed context-dependent associations with family satisfaction: on days characterized by high negative or low positive affect, greater gratitude was linked to higher family satisfaction. Findings suggest that gratitude may operate as a context-sensitive resource in daily family life, particularly under emotionally challenging conditions, with possible implications for parenting interventions.

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Promoting parents' psychological and emotional well-being is essential, not only for their own health, but also because parents' well-being is foundational to children's positive development and overall family functioning (Klein, 1957; Komter, 2004; Laurenzi et al., 2021; Lear, 2024; Palamaro Munsell et al., 2012; Schmitz et al., 2024). Thus, the investigation of psychological processes that may support parents is essential. Family satisfaction is an important determinant of parents' well-being, reflecting how they perceive their parenting competence and the quality of family relationships. Although previous research has shown that overall family satisfaction is linked to greater parental well-being (He et al., 2025; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2020), less is known about the contextual factors that may shape and protect parents' daily perceptions of their family experiences.

One such protective factor may be gratitude, which has long been recognized as a powerful internal resource that strengthens personal well-being (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Wood et al., 2010) as well as interpersonal relationships (Algoe, 2012; Algoe et al., 2010). In the family domain, gratitude can be particularly important, increasing feelings of connectedness between parents and between parents and children and promoting their well-being (Nelson-Coffey et al., 2023; Yeung, 2025). However, little is understood

about how daily feelings of gratitude may contribute to sustaining family satisfaction in the shifting and often demanding emotional context of everyday parenting. Therefore, in this study, we examined (a) the association between parents' daily feelings of gratitude and family satisfaction, and (b) whether this association was moderated by daily positive and negative affect – a proximal indicator of the daily changes in parenting experiences.

Gratitude

Gratitude can be defined as the ability to recognize and appreciate the benefits one has received from others or from life in general (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). It can be experienced as a trait, reflecting a general tendency to notice and appreciate positive experiences, or as a state that fluctuates based on daily circumstances. Gratitude has been described as a powerful psychological resource that fosters positive interpersonal processes and promotes well-being (Wood et al., 2010). Beyond contemporary positive psychology, this perspective also has deeper theoretical roots. Klein (1957) framed gratitude as a fundamental aspect of early emotional life, and later discussion by Komter (2004) and Lear (2024) similarly emphasized the importance of gratitude for reciprocity, close relationships, and family dynamics.

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In the context of the family, studies demonstrate that boosting gratitude may enhance perceptions of family relationships. For example, in a study among adolescents and their parents, Yeung (2025) found that higher levels of parents' trait gratitude were associated with more positive family functioning reported by both parents and children. Furthermore, in an experimental study, Nelson-Coffey et al. (2023) found that a gratitude-based intervention enhanced parents' general feeling of connectedness with others, particularly among those with high attachment anxiety. Gratitude-based interventions have also been found to improve family relationships, including greater closeness between parents and children, fewer difficulties in parent-child interaction, and reduced conflict alongside more supportive exchanges between parents and children (Nelson-Coffey & Coffey, 2024).

However, existing studies on parents' gratitude have tended to focus on links to family functioning (e.g. warmth, conflict, parenting style, relationship quality) or children's outcomes, omitting parents' feelings of satisfaction with their family members and parenting role (Hussong et al., 2018; Lo et al., 2017; Nelson-Coffey & Coffey, 2024; Rothenberg et al., 2016; Yeung, 2025). A nuanced lens on the link between parental gratitude and family satisfaction would provide further understanding of parent factors that can be associated with parents' broader positive perceptions of the family.

Family satisfaction

Family satisfaction is a multi-faceted concept that encompasses parents' evaluations of themselves as caregivers (e.g. parenting competence), their partners as coparents, and their interactions with their children (Brik & Wang, 2024; Campbell, 2022; Negraia & Augustine, 2020; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2020). In its essence, family satisfaction integrates perceptions of both personal and relational dimensions of family life, providing a comprehensive indicator of how parents experience their daily parenting role and family relationships (Salonen et al., 2011; Schumm et al., 1986).

Existing research consistently shows that higher family satisfaction is associated with parents' greater psychological well-being, lower stress, and stronger relationship quality within families (He et al., 2025; Kincaid, 2023; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2020). For example, a study of Chinese caregivers of children under the age of three found that feeling competent and satisfied as a parent – an aspect of family satisfaction – was associated with greater quality of life, including psychological well-being (He et al., 2025). On the other hand, in their review, Nomaguchi and Milkie (2020) noted that low parenting

satisfaction and low satisfaction with the coparent (i.e. fair division of childcare) were linked to poorer emotional and psychological well-being.

Although much of the literature treats family satisfaction as a relatively enduring quality, parenting experiences are inherently dynamic. Thus, satisfaction may also depend on inherently fluctuating daily factors. For instance, a calm morning routine with a cooperative child might boost parents' sense of satisfaction, whereas an unsuccessful routine might diminish it. Although there is a broader literature linking gratitude to well-being and relationship functioning, research examining family satisfaction at the day-to-day level remains limited. Existing daily diary studies with parents have suggested that some of the aspects of family satisfaction; partner satisfaction (Morin et al., 2024), and parent child interaction quality (Lippold et al., 2016; Manczak et al., 2018; Moschko et al., 2022) fluctuate on a daily basis. However, family satisfaction as a more global appraisal that encompasses these aspects had not been directly examined at the daily level. Identifying factors that may enhance or protect family satisfaction in the face of daily challenges can reveal how parents sustain high family satisfaction amid everyday stressors.

Gratitude may serve as one such protective factor by helping parents reframe daily experiences, foster appreciation, and maintain satisfaction with oneself as a parent, one's coparent, and their child (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Nelson-Coffey & Coffey, 2024; Yeung, 2025). However, much of the research to date has examined gratitude at the trait level or in cross-sectional designs (e.g. Wood et al., 2010; Yeung, 2025), which overlook the daily variability that characterizes family life. Building on this, capturing daily fluctuations in gratitude can clarify when it is most beneficial for family satisfaction. Furthermore, daily emotions, as a reflection of parents' daily experiences, may provide a meaningful lens for examining these dynamics and may moderate how gratitude is linked to family satisfaction in everyday life.

The moderating effect of daily emotions

Family climates are dynamic and affect individual cognitive processes, including emotions (Banez & Compas, 1990; Enlund et al., 2015; Rönkä & Korvela, 2009). We propose that daily affect can moderate the effect of gratitude on parents' family satisfaction. Situating gratitude within the dynamic context of parents' daily experiences of affect provides a proximal indication of the fluctuations in daily family life (Iida et al., 2012; Stone et al., 1991). Positive affect and negative affect are defined as

broad dimensions of emotional experience, with positive affect encompassing feelings such as happiness, joy, fun, love, interest, and amusements, and negative affect including emotions such as worry, anger, frustration, sadness, guilt, and depression (Diener & Emmons, 1984).

Daily affective experiences are particularly relevant to family processes because emotions from one domain (e.g. work, social contexts) can spillover to the family domain according to the Stress Spillover Theory (Bolger et al., 1989). Thus, variations in global daily affect among parents may be associated with more positive or negative perceptions of the family. Indeed, empirical findings support the idea that daily affect is linked to parents' perceptions of the family, at least in the realm of coparental family functioning. For example, in a 14-day diary study, McDaniel et al. (2018) found that on days when parents reported higher negative mood, they reported lower levels of coparenting satisfaction. Conversely, in a 21-day diary study, Chen et al. (2025) noted that on days when parents experienced higher positive mood and lower negative mood, they reported greater levels of coparenting support.

Despite this evidence, little research has examined the moderating role of daily affect in the association between daily gratitude and family satisfaction. In other words, it remains unclear whether the link between daily gratitude and parents' family satisfaction holds equally on days characterized by high versus low positive or negative affect. A growing body of literature shows that gratitude interventions increase positive affect and decrease negative affect across diverse populations (Cunha et al., 2019; Kirca et al., 2023), suggesting that gratitude can shape individual's emotional experiences in meaningful ways. Rather than looking at gratitude as a mechanism that exerts its influence through affect, we consider affect as a contextual factor that may condition the strength of the link between gratitude and family satisfaction. Examining how daily affect interacts with gratitude is crucial to clarify whether gratitude serves as a stable protective factor in daily family life or whether its association with family satisfaction varies depending on parents' global emotional experiences on a given day. Investigating these processes may provide insight into the context through which gratitude operates as a protective resource in family life, pointing to potential targets for interventions designed to improve parental well-being in the face of daily family challenges.

The present study

Given these gaps in the literature, we examined how parents' daily perceptions of family satisfaction may be

associated with their experiences of daily gratitude using a daily diary study design that captured fluctuations over time. Building on prior evidence linking gratitude to coparenting satisfaction and family functioning, we expected that both parents' general tendency of gratitude (person-average gratitude) and their day-to-day variations in gratitude would be linked to higher family satisfaction.

We also examined whether daily gratitude is associated with family satisfaction differently depending on parents' daily positive and negative affect. We hypothesized that the association between daily gratitude and family satisfaction would be significantly positive on days when parents experienced higher positive affect, showing an amplifying effect. Conversely, we expected that daily gratitude would remain positively linked to family satisfaction even on days characterized by higher negative affect, though this association would be significantly weaker, suggesting a buffering effect against negative emotions.

Methods

Participants and procedure

Participants were 176 parents of children aged three to twelve that were recruited from the *Greater Vancouver* area as well as online via social media (i.e. Facebook, Instagram). To participate, parents were required to have (1) at least one child in the three- to twelve-year-old range; (2) access to a device capable of completing daily online surveys; (3) cohabited with the child's other parent (e.g. biological, step) for at least three years; and (4) satisfactory English reading comprehension. Parents first completed an initial survey that measured sociodemographic variables and other variables not examined in the present study. Following the initial survey, parents completed daily surveys for 14 consecutive days. Daily surveys were received at 6:00 PM and were only considered valid if completed in a 12-hour timeframe before 6:00 AM the following day. All survey data was collected through Qualtrics. All parents provided electronic informed consent to participate in the study, and the research ethics board at Simon Fraser University approved the study procedures (#30001798).

The average age of parents was 38.26 years ($SD = 5.51$). Most participants identified as mothers ($n = 147$; 83.5%), with the remaining 29 participants identifying as fathers (16.5%). Regarding the ancestral origins of the sample, the majority of parents identified as White/European (43.2%), East Asian (19.3%), or Southeast Asian (5.7%). The rest of the sample identified with a variety of other ancestral origins, including Central

(2.3%) and South Asian (2.8%); Middle East or West Asia (1.1%); Central (4%) and South America (2.8%); South (1.7%), West (1.7%), East (4%), North (1.7%), and Central African (1.1%); Indigenous (2.3%); Pacific Islanders (0.6%); and mixed descent (5.1%). Parents reported to have between one and six total children, averaging around two ($mean = 1.96$; $SD = 0.82$). The average age of participants' selected children was 5.97 ($SD = 2.42$); 88 were boys (50.3%) and 87 were girls (49.7%). Parents completed an average of 10.03/14 daily surveys ($SD = 3.98$) which gave rise to 1766 total daily survey observations.

Missing data

Participants completed an average of 10.03 out of 14 daily surveys ($SD = 3.98$), and 28.3% of all possible diary reports were missing. Missingness increased over the diary period, indicating attrition. A multilevel logistic regression showed that participants were significantly less likely to complete surveys on later days, $b = -.084$, $SE = .014$, $z = -6.16$, $p < .001$, suggesting that the data were not Missing Completely at Random (MCAR). We next examined whether the previous-day family satisfaction predicted the present-day completion, because family satisfaction was the primary outcome variable in the present study and thus most directly relevant for evaluating whether missingness may have biased focal analyses. The result was nonsignificant ($b = .10$, $SE = .08$, $z = 1.18$, $p = .24$). We also examined whether demographic characteristics were related to missingness. Neither household income, nor parent age were significantly associated with daily completion ($b = -.0129$, $SE = 0.068$, $z = -1.90$, $p = .058$ and $b = 0.00$, $SE = 0.028$, $z = 0.02$, $p = .988$, accordingly). Thus, although missingness was related to study day, there was no evidence that it was associated with the prior-day family satisfaction, parent age, or household income. This pattern is more consistent with Missing at Random (MAR) than MCAR.

Measures

Daily family satisfaction

Family satisfaction was measured using a 5-item scale adapted from the Kansas Parental Satisfaction Scale (James et al., 1985). Items were adapted to capture 'today's' experience. The measure uses a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *extremely dissatisfied*; 7 = *extremely satisfied*) and assesses a parent's satisfaction with oneself as

a parent (e.g. 'How satisfied are you with yourself as a parent today?'), with their child (e.g. 'How satisfied are you with your children today?'), and with their spouse/partner (e.g. 'How satisfied are you with your spouse/partner as a parent today?'). The five items were averaged, with higher scores reflecting higher daily family satisfaction.

Given that family satisfaction was measured at the within-person level, reliability of the scale was split into between-person reliability, RkF (i.e. the average reliability across all items and days), and within-person reliability, Rc (i.e. reliability within parents; see Cranford et al., 2006 for more information). The RkF for family satisfaction was 0.98 and the Rc was 0.81 for our sample.

Daily gratitude

A single item was used to assess daily gratitude. Participants were asked to report the extent to which they felt 'grateful' each day using a 7-point Likert-type scale (0 = *not at all*; 6 = *extremely*). Single item measures are often used in daily diary designs to reduce participant burden. Allen et al. (2022) have shown that single-item measures can be sufficient when the construct of interest is narrow in scope and unidimensional. Several previous studies have assessed daily gratitude using a single-item measure to reduce participants' burden in intensive longitudinal designs (Jiang, 2020; Jiang et al., 2021; Nelson-Coffey & Coffey, 2024; Newman et al., 2021).

Daily positive and negative affect

A total of 15 items evaluated daily positive and negative affect. Parents were asked to report the extent to which they felt a set of emotions each day using a 7-point Likert-type scale (0 = *not at all*; 6 = *extremely*). Six positive affect items (happy, pleased, joyful, enjoyment/fun, love, and interested) and nine negative items (worried/anxious, angry/hostile, frustrated, depressed/blue, unhappy, guilt, sad, concerned, and disgusted) were adapted from the Affect Adjective Scale (Diener & Emmons, 1984) and utilized in previous published work with high reliability (e.g. Nelson-Coffey et al., 2023). The six positive and nine negative affect items were averaged to create a positive and negative affect score for each day, respectively. Similar to family satisfaction, affect was measured at the daily level, and thus RkF and Rc values captured scale reliability. The RkF and Rc values for the positive affect scale were 0.99 and 0.85, respectively. The RkF and Rc values for the negative affect scale were 0.98, and 0.80, respectively.

Covariates

A number of sociodemographic variables were included in our analytical models as covariates based on past evidence of their links to our outcome of interest, family satisfaction (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2020; Pittman & Lloyd, 1988; Shorey et al., 2020; Twenge et al., 2003). Our covariates were parent age, parent role (0 = *father*, 1 = *mother*), household income, child age, and total number of children each parent had. Two of the most common ancestral origins reported by participants were also added, White/European (0 = *White/European*, 1 = *not White/European*), and East Asian (0 = *East Asian*, 1 = *not East Asian*). We limited to two most common reported origins as the other groups were too few in sample size per group to reflect accurate representativeness and sensitivity in our analyses and interpretation.

Data analysis

Multilevel modelling was used to account for the nested structure of our data (i.e. repeated daily measures nested within individuals). Three multilevel models were estimated in R (Version 4.4.1) via the *lme4* (Bates et al., 2015) package using restricted maximum likelihood estimation. Model A included between-person (i.e. average score calculated across days for individual people; person-average) and within-person (i.e. daily) gratitude, between- and within-person positive affect, and between- and within-person negative affect predictors; in addition to the covariates mentioned in the previous section. This initial model allowed us to determine whether person-average and daily gratitude, positive affect,

and negative affect were associated with daily family satisfaction.

Models B and C were hierarchical extensions of Model A, including interaction terms. Each assessed the interaction between daily affect and daily gratitude to determine if the link between gratitude and family satisfaction differed on days with high or low positive affect (Model B) and high or low negative affect (Model C). All models included a random intercept and slope for daily gratitude, positive affect, and negative affect. Prior to their additions to the models, person-average gratitude, positive affect, and negative affect; parent and child age; household income; and the number of total children were between-person centered. Daily gratitude, positive affect, and negative affect were within-person centered before they were added to the models.

In addition to these primary concurrent models, we conducted exploratory lagged multilevel analyses testing whether prior-day gratitude was associated with next-day family satisfaction. Results of these lagged analyses are reported in the supplementary materials and not discussed further as they were all underpowered for further interpretation.

Results

The intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) for the family satisfaction variable was 0.45, 95% CI [0.39, 0.51], suggesting that approximately 45% of the variance in family satisfaction was ascribed to between-participant differences, whereas 55% of the variance in family satisfaction was ascribed to within-participant differences, or daily fluctuations within individuals.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of model variables and covariates ($N = 176$).

Variable	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>) or %	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Parent age	38.26 (5.51)	—									
2. Parent role (mother) ¹	83.5%	0.20***	—								
3. Parent ethnicity (White/European) ²	43.2%	−0.22***	−0.28***	—							
4. Parent ethnicity (East Asian) ³	19.3%	−0.07**	−0.10***	—	—						
5. Household Income ⁴	6.44 (2.43)	0.29***	0.38***	−0.30***	−0.02	—					
6. Child age	5.97 (2.42)	0.34***	−0.21***	−0.06	0.12***	−0.13***	—				
7. Total number of children	1.96 (0.82)	0.11***	−0.01	−0.03	0.11***	0.11***	0.06*	—			
8. Person-average positive affect	3.80 (1.18)	−0.01	0.01	0.01	0.09***	0.01	0.03	−0.09***	—		
9. Person-average negative affect	1.28 (1.01)	−0.24***	−0.14***	0.08**	0.07**	−0.22***	−0.09***	0.06**	−0.41***	—	
10. Person-average family satisfaction	5.50 (1.01)	0.09***	0.07**	−0.10***	0.17***	0.17***	0.03	0.05*	0.58***	−0.50***	—
11. Person-average gratitude	4.18 (1.46)	0.01	0.06*	−0.01	0.09***	0.05*	−0.01	0.05*	0.71***	−0.27***	0.48***

¹Parent role 0 = *father*, 1 = *mother*.

²Parent ethnicity 0 = *White/European*, 1 = *not White/European*.

³Parent ethnicity 0 = *East Asian*, 1 = *not East Asian*.

⁴Income 1 = under \$20,000, 2 = \$20,000–\$40,000, 3 = \$40,000–\$60,000, 4 = \$60,000–\$80,000, 5 = \$80,000–\$100,000, 6 = \$100,000–\$120,000, 7 = \$120,000–\$140,000, 8 = \$140,000–\$160,000, 9 = \$160,000+.

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for person-average variables of interest and model covariates are depicted in Table 1. Family satisfaction was positively correlated with positive affect and gratitude and negatively correlated with negative affect. Positive affect was negatively correlated with negative affect, and positively correlated with gratitude, whereas negative affect was negatively correlated with gratitude.

Gratitude and daily family satisfaction

Model A evaluated whether person-average and daily gratitude were associated with daily family satisfaction. Parents reporting more gratitude on average reported greater daily family satisfaction, $b = 0.20$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.10, 0.31]. Contrary to expectations, daily gratitude was not significantly associated with daily family satisfaction, $b = 0.03$, $SE = 0.02$, $p = 0.125$, 95% CI [-0.01, 0.07]. However, simulation-based power analyses (Green & MacLeod, 2016) indicated limited power to detect this within-person main effect (31.6% (95% CI [27.5%, 35.9%])), and this null finding should therefore be interpreted cautiously.

Positive affect and daily family satisfaction

Model A also assessed the links between person-average and daily affect and daily family satisfaction. Both person-average, $b = 0.20$, $SE = 0.07$, $p = .003$, 95% CI [0.07, 0.34], and daily positive affect, $b = 0.30$, $SE = 0.03$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.25, 0.36], were significantly positively

associated with family satisfaction. Thus, parents who generally experienced more positive affect tended to report more family satisfaction on a daily basis. In addition, parents reported more family satisfaction on days when they indicated greater positive affect.

Interaction between daily gratitude and positive affect on daily family satisfaction

Model B estimated the interaction between daily gratitude and positive affect on daily family satisfaction. The interaction between these two variables was significant, $b = -0.05$, $SE = 0.02$, $p = .004$, 95% CI [-0.08, -0.02]. Simple slopes indicated that on days when positive affect was high, the association between daily gratitude and daily family satisfaction was not statistically significant, $b = -0.01$, $SE = 0.02$, $p = .652$. However, on days when positive affect was low, daily gratitude and daily family satisfaction were significantly positively associated, $b = 0.06$, $SE = 0.02$, $p = .008$. A retrospective simulation-based power analysis suggested that power to detect this interaction was adequate (79.2% (95% CI [75.4%, 82.7%])). This interaction is depicted in Figure 1.

Negative affect and daily family satisfaction

The associations between person-average and daily negative affect and daily family satisfaction were captured by Model A. Similarly to positive affect but in the reverse direction, both person-average, $b = -0.37$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-0.47, -0.28], and daily negative

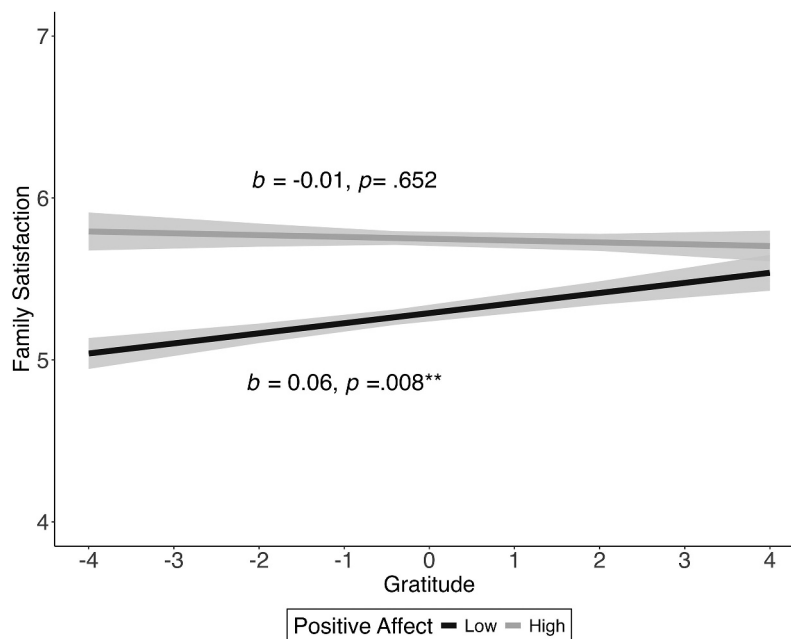


Figure 1. Interaction between daily gratitude and positive affect on daily family satisfaction.

affect, $b = -0.35$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-0.42, -0.28]$, were significantly negatively associated with family satisfaction. Therefore, parents who tended to experience more negative affect generally reported lower daily family satisfaction. Furthermore, parents reported lower family satisfaction on days when they reported greater negative affect.

Interaction between daily gratitude and negative affect on daily family satisfaction

Model C estimated the interaction between daily gratitude and negative affect on daily family satisfaction. The interaction was significant, $b = 0.04$, $SE = 0.02$, $p = .046$, 95% CI $[0.00, 0.08]$. Simple slopes suggested that on days when negative affect was low, the association between daily gratitude and daily family satisfaction was not statistically significant, $b < 0.01$, $SE = 0.02$, $p = .924$. A retrospective simulation-based power analysis suggested that power to detect this interaction was limited (53% (95% CI $[48.5\%, 57.4\%]$)), and thus these findings should be interpreted with some caution. However, on days when negative affect was high, daily gratitude and daily family satisfaction were significantly positively associated, $b = 0.05$, $SE = 0.02$, $p = .020$. This interaction is depicted in Figure 2.

Covariates

All covariates (i.e. parent role, age, household income, number of children) included in our models were not significantly associated with daily family satisfaction,

except for the East Asian ancestral background covariate which showed a significant positive association in Model A, $b = 0.32$, $SE = 0.10$, $p = .001$, 95% CI $[0.13, 0.52]$. Considering our coding for the covariate (0 = *East Asian*, 1 = *not East Asian*), this finding suggests that the East Asian background families reported lower family satisfaction. See Table 2 for all multilevel model coefficients and effect estimates for Model A, Model B, and Model C.

Discussion

This study examined the association between parents' average and daily gratitude and family satisfaction. Findings revealed that parents who reported higher average levels of gratitude across 14 days (trait gratitude) also reported greater family satisfaction. At the daily level, gratitude was not significantly associated with day-to-day changes in family satisfaction; however, this link appeared to vary depending on parents' emotional context. Specifically, on emotionally difficult days – when negative affect was high or positive affect was low – daily gratitude was positively associated with family satisfaction. In contrast, under less emotionally difficult conditions, the association between daily gratitude and family satisfaction was not statistically significant, although these findings should be interpreted cautiously given limited power to detect these within-person effects.

Although gratitude is conceptualized as both a trait-like disposition and a dynamic state (McCullough et al.,

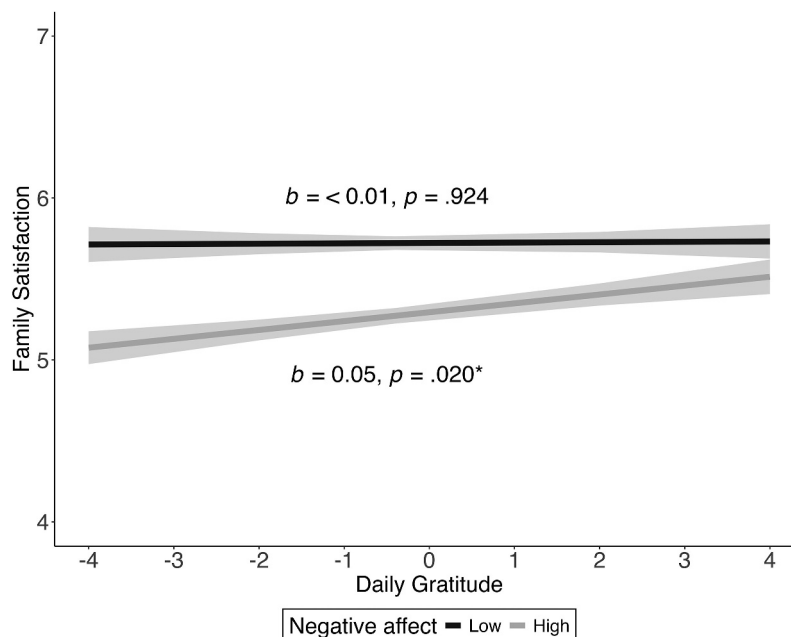


Figure 2. Interaction between daily gratitude and negative affect on daily family satisfaction.

Table 2. Effect estimates for multilevel models linked to daily family satisfaction ($N = 176$).

Variable	Outcome Variable		
	Daily Family Satisfaction		
	Model A	Model B	Model C
	Estimate (SE)	Estimate (SE)	Estimate (SE)
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
(Intercept)	5.28 (0.16)***	5.29 (0.16)***	5.30 (0.16)***
Day	−0.00 (0.00)	−0.00 (0.00)	−0.00 (0.00)
Parent role (0 = father, 1 = mother)	−0.01 (0.10)	−0.01 (0.10)	−0.01 (0.10)
Parent age	−0.00 (0.01)	−0.00 (0.01)	−0.01 (0.01)
Parent ethnicity (White/European; 0 = White/European)	0.02 (0.08)	0.02 (0.08)	0.02 (0.08)
Parent ethnicity (East Asian; 0 = East Asian)	0.32 (0.10)***	0.32 (0.10)***	0.32 (0.10)***
Child age	−0.01 (0.02)	−0.01 (0.02)	−0.01 (0.02)
Household income	0.02 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)
Total number of children	−0.05 (0.04)	−0.05 (0.04)	−0.05 (0.04)***
Person-average gratitude	0.20 (0.05)***	0.20 (0.05)***	0.20 (0.05)***
Daily gratitude	0.03 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)
Person-average positive affect	0.20 (0.07)**	0.20 (0.07)**	0.20 (0.07)**
Daily positive affect	0.30 (0.03)***	0.31 (0.03)***	0.31 (0.03)***
Person-average negative affect	−0.37 (0.05)***	−0.37 (0.05)***	−0.37 (0.05)***
Daily negative affect	−0.35 (0.04)***	−0.34 (0.04)***	−0.34 (0.04)***
Daily gratitude × daily positive affect		−0.05 (0.02)**	
Daily gratitude × daily negative affect			0.04 (0.02)*
<i>Random effects</i>			
Intercept variance	0.19	0.19	0.19
Daily gratitude slope variance	0.01	0.01	0.01
Daily positive affect slope variance	0.03	0.03	0.03
Daily negative affect slope variance	0.08	0.08	0.08
Covariance of intercept and daily gratitude variance	−0.05	−0.08	−0.08
Covariance of intercept and daily positive affect variance	−0.69	−0.67	−0.65
Covariance of intercept and daily negative affect variance	0.30	0.30	0.29
Residual variance	0.32	0.32	0.32
<i>Model fit</i>			
Marginal R^2 / Conditional R^2	0.464/0.699	0.466/0.578	0.466/0.699

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

2002; Wood et al., 2008, 2010), our findings more clearly supported a link between trait-like gratitude and daily family satisfaction than a link between daily gratitude and daily family satisfaction. In other words, parents who were more grateful on average tended to perceive greater family satisfaction across days, whereas daily gratitude did not show a significant association with family satisfaction. This pattern is consistent with Wood et al. (2008) social cognitive model highlighting that trait gratitude is associated with beneficial appraisals of events which in turn shape state gratitude over time. Accordingly, we suspect that trait gratitude provides a stable cognitive lens through which family experiences are consistently appraised more positively. Although the literature in the family domain is limited, emerging empirical evidence supports the idea that gratitude may not always operate as a daily predictor of individual's daily well-being but instead functions as a broader interpretive lens through which individuals view their lives (Măirean et al., 2018). Together, these findings underscore the importance of distinguishing between trait-like and state-like gratitude in shaping daily perceptions of family life.

Further, the interaction between daily gratitude and daily affect showed that on emotionally difficult days –

either when negative affect was high or positive affect was low – daily gratitude was positively associated with the same-day family satisfaction. However, under less emotionally difficult conditions, the association between daily gratitude and family satisfaction was not statistically significant, although these null findings should be interpreted cautiously given the modest power to detect this interaction's effects. Our findings are aligned with the stress-buffering model (Cohen & Wills, 1985), through which framework we may conclude that daily gratitude functions as a protective factor under emotionally challenging circumstances. Namely, on emotionally challenging days, the same-day gratitude was significantly linked to greater family satisfaction, perhaps suggesting that daily gratitude might help mitigate the adverse context of daily negative emotions and maintain family satisfaction – possibly by redirecting attention toward positive aspects of family life. This finding is consistent with previous evidence for the buffering role of trait-like gratitude in family domain. For example, Abidin et al. (2025) found that mothers with higher levels of gratitude showed less burnout due to parental role restriction compared to mothers with lower levels of gratitude. Furthermore, gratitude training has been found to significantly reduce parenting stress among

parents of children with special needs, suggesting that gratitude can buffer stress in highly demanding parenting contexts (Yuniar et al., 2023).

Similarly, our results showed that daily gratitude was significantly associated with family satisfaction on days with low positive affect – days that might feel ‘not as good’ as days characterized by high positive affect. On such days, daily feelings of gratitude may help parents access meaning, appreciation, or reinforce positive interpretation of family experiences even when positive affect is less pronounced (Mosteo et al., 2022). For instance, in Nelson Coffey and Coffey’s (2023) seven-day study, expressing gratitude was associated with enhanced meaning in life and greater parental well-being and family functioning. Taken together, our findings support the idea that gratitude is a context-sensitive resource that matters when parents experience particularly negative or little positive emotions.

Finally, although not hypothesized, our study revealed that both daily positive and negative affect were significantly linked to family satisfaction: parents who generally experienced more positive affect and less negative affect tended to report greater family satisfaction. This pattern may help explain the non-significant association between daily gratitude and family satisfaction: when both gratitude and positive affect were included in the model, daily positive affect showed a stronger link to family satisfaction, potentially overshadowing gratitude’s unique contribution.

Taken together, our findings suggest that that parents who feel more gratitude on average are generally more satisfied with their family. At the daily level, gratitude appears to function as a context-sensitive resource, showing links with family satisfaction on days marked by high negative affect or low positive affect. More work is needed to ascertain the role of numerous other factors that affect parents’ perceptions of family life and satisfaction, such as trait gratitude, coparental involvement, or work-stress effects. Nonetheless, the present study presents initial evidence of the potentially protective effect of feeling of gratitude on a day-to-day basis on parents’ positive views of the family, including their partners, their children, and themselves.

Implications

Our study raises several practical implications. Our findings support the utility of gratitude-based practices in parent-focused interventions, such as gratitude training within Mindful Parenting Training, the Gratitude Conversations program, or the mobile app-based ‘Gratitude’ intervention for parents of young children (Behbahani et al., 2018; Hussong et al., 2019; Ratcliff

et al., 2025). However, since our results revealed a significant moderating role of daily affect, we suggest that gratitude interventions may be most beneficial when timed with especially stressful or emotionally challenging circumstances (e.g. first-time parenthood; pre-school period; raising a child with special needs; COVID-19 pandemic; Le et al., 2017; Spinelli et al., 2020). In these situations – when negative affect can be elevated or positive affect can be diminished – gratitude practices (e.g. gratitude journaling, recalling meaningful family moments, or writing gratitude letters) may serve as powerful buffers of negative cognitions about the family (Abidin et al., 2025; Diniz et al., 2023; Yuniar et al., 2023). Since our findings further revealed the benefits of trait-like gratitude, we suggest that parenting programs should encourage parents to build trait-like gratitude as well as daily gratitude to foster resilience before difficult periods arise.

Limitations and future directions

The present study includes several limitations. First, affect and family satisfaction were measured once daily, which may obscure within-day fluctuations. Emotions and experiences may vary dramatically across morning, midday, and evening (Clark et al., 1989; English & Carstensen, 2014). Therefore, future studies should use ecological momentary assessment (EMA) with multiple surveys per day to capture more nuanced dynamics (Smyth & Heron, 2014). Another limitation is that the correlational nature of the study prevents causal conclusions about the association between gratitude and family satisfaction. Thus, the primary findings are best interpreted as same-day concurrent associations, rather than as directional or prospective effects. Future research should test this link using brief daily interventions to establish a causal relationship between daily gratitude and perceptions of family satisfaction.

The generalizability of the findings is also limited by the composition of the sample. The sample consisted predominantly of mothers, and thus the findings may not fully reflect the daily experiences of fathers or other caregivers. In addition, the sample lacked racial and ethnic diversity, which may limit the extent to which the findings generalize to more diverse parent populations. Future research should examine these processes among diverse caregivers of racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds. An additional limitation concerns statistical sensitivity for some within-person effects. Simulation-based power analysis (Green & MacLeod, 2016) suggested limited power to detect the main effect of daily gratitude on family satisfaction in addition to modest power to detect the interaction between daily

gratitude and negative affect. Accordingly, nonsignificant findings should be interpreted cautiously. Future studies with larger samples and more observations are needed to more precisely estimate these within-person effects.

A further limitation is our limited knowledge of why parents missed certain daily surveys. It is possible that parents were less likely to complete surveys on especially challenging days, meaning our data may not fully capture the daily variability in emotions, gratitude and family satisfaction. Missingness also increased on later study days, suggesting possible participant fatigue across the two-week daily survey period. To address this, future studies using daily diary method should add multiple reminders or post-study follow-ups to better understand the reasons behind missed entries. In addition, because gratitude was assessed via a single daily self-report item, our findings pertain to gratitude as operationalized in daily self-reports rather than to parents' subjective meanings or definitions of gratitude. Future work could complement daily diary measures with qualitative or mixed method approaches to better understand how parents interpret and experience gratitude in family life (e.g. Pearson et al., 2022). Last but not least, testing the link between daily gratitude and family satisfaction in clinical samples of parents could offer a stronger test of its buffering role, revealing whether gratitude is particularly beneficial in protecting family functioning under conditions of significant parental stress or adversity.

Conclusion

The present study advances our understanding of gratitude by highlighting that its daily beneficial effects on daily family satisfaction are context-dependent. Specifically, daily gratitude appears to act as a protective resource: on days when parents experience high levels of negative emotions or low levels of positive emotions, the same-day gratitude may align with greater family satisfaction. On the other hand, on 'good' days, with low levels of negative emotions or high levels of positive emotions, daily gratitude may have limited bearing on family satisfaction. These findings suggest that the role of daily gratitude in perceived family experiences hinges on emotional context and that both general and daily emotional experiences are central to how parents perceive their daily family life. Moreover, the results support the use and potential efficacy of gratitude-based interventions – especially when parents are facing heightened stress – and highlight the value of cultivating trait-like gratitude that can

help parents maintain family satisfaction through the chaotic ups and downs of family life.

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Data availability statement

This study was not preregistered. Limited data are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request

Ethics approval

The current study's procedures were approved by the Simon Fraser University Research Ethics Board (#30001690). All participants provided written informed consent to participate.

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