Developing Gratitude in Children and Adolescents

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8 The Development of Gratitude and Its Relation to Spending Preferences and Materialism

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The range of *things* in life for which one can be grateful is virtually limitless – things that are intangible, such as viewing a spectacular sunset, having a spiritual experience, or even life itself; interpersonal things, as experienced through social connections and positive interactions with friends and loved ones; essential things, like having security in basic necessities, a roof over one's head, and food on the table; and, of course, the indulgent things, such as having the biggest possible roof over one's head, superfluous wealth, or, perhaps, the latest electronic or big-name toy. Given the wide variation in these many aspects in life for which to be grateful, researchers have increasingly tried to refine how gratitude should best be conceptualized. For instance, one primary debate in the field is whether some of the mainstream measures of gratitude, which seem to assess a general positive disposition or love for life, really capture the spirit of what gratitude actually is (e.g., "I have so much in life to be thankful for" and "Oftentimes I have been overwhelmed by the beauty of nature"; items taken from the Gratitude Questionnaire-6: McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002, and the Gratitude, Resentment, Appreciation Test [GRAT]–Short Form: Watkins, Woodward, Stone, & Kolts, 2003).

Along these lines, many scholars have long argued that true gratitude is deeper than a general appreciation for or positive view on life. The ancient Roman philosopher, Cicero, considered gratitude to be the "parent of all virtues" (p. 1039; cited by Wang, Wang, & Tudge, 2015), and contemporary perspectives have focused to a greater extent on gratitude's role as a moral virtue that promotes social connections and individual well-being (Tudge, Freitas, & O'Brien, 2015). Researchers have

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attempted to move the field forward in conceptualizing gratitude as a moral virtue by differentiating the types of things for which one might be grateful and by also emphasizing the idea that gratitude might not even be directed toward a "thing" per se, but perhaps toward a person or source of that "thing." For example, Fagley (2016) proposed a model that defines a superordinate construct of *appreciation* consisting of eight different dimensions that distinguishes, for instance, *awe* (e.g., the beautiful sunrise) from a *have* focus (e.g., appreciation for what one has) from *gratitude*, which she defined as "a positive emotional response of a beneficiary directed to a benefactor for benefits provided intentionally to the beneficiary" (p. 70).

Indeed, when someone receives a freely given benefit, gift, or favor from another, positive feelings of gratitude can arise about not only what was gained but also about the benefactor (Freitas, Pieta, & Tudge, 2011). Conceptualized as such, gratitude is inherently prosocial and promotive of social connectedness as beneficiaries recognize moral debts and become benefactors themselves. This recognition then creates a gratitude loop that centers on the positive feelings and social connections that are intrinsically tied to objects or wishes, instead of on the actual objects or wishes (Aknin, Dunn, & Norton, 2012; Tudge et al., 2015).

The goal of this chapter is to draw on the gratitude development literature and directly address the interplay between a sense of gratitude to benefactors, as its conceptualization as a moral virtue would imply, and attitudes toward materialism and the "stuff" that individuals might have received as precursors to subsequent feelings of gratitude (e.g., the *have* focus, as conceptualized by Fagley, 2016). In doing so, we hope to illustrate both the unique role that gratitude can play in fostering relationships and the intricate way in which gratitude and materialism represent independent, yet highly related, constructs. We also present some descriptive data from children between the ages of 7–14 years, as part of our work with our larger Developing Gratitude Research Group (DGRG). Our overall approach offers a significant contribution to developmental science due to its implications for positive development, sustainability, and children's self-regulation and well-being.

Defining Constructs

The construct of gratitude has been defined and measured in a myriad of different ways. Unlike some conceptualizations that have focused on affect, feelings of reverence for the sun or the sky, or a general positive disposition (e.g., Watkins et al., 2003), our approach is consistent with

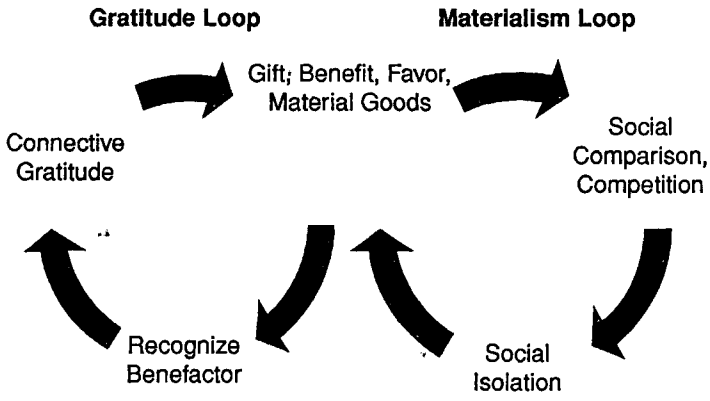

Figure 8.1 The gratitude and materialism loops

early philosophical views in defining gratitude as a moral virtue that is reflected in a beneficiary's positive emotional responses directed toward a benefactor (Freitas et al., 2011). As stated earlier, feelings of gratitude can create a positive feedback loop and strengthen social bonds as individuals recognize and feel happy about the help and goodwill of others, and then reciprocate by returning the favor in some way that will help the benefactors or make them feel good. In this way, gratitude is inherently prosocial in that it focuses not on what was gained, but rather on the feelings and actions toward the person or persons who provided that gain. The left side of Figure 8.1 conceptually depicts the process whereby an individual might acquire a gift, favor, benefit, or material item; recognize the good intention of a person or persons who might have helped provide these gains; and ultimately respond with a sense of gratitude that encourages generosity and repayment toward the responsible individuals and/or other individuals in need.

By contrast, materialism can be seen as being in almost direct opposition to gratitude, referring to individuals' values, goals, and beliefs about the importance of material goods (e.g., money, possessions) that emphasize status or wants beyond needs (Dittmar, Bond, Hurst, & Kasser, 2014). Unlike the prosocial nature of gratitude, materialism's emphasis on wants beyond the satisfaction of basic needs can foster social competition by encouraging individuals to possess more and better material goods than others (Kasser, 2002). Indeed, materialism can create its own feedback loop, but in ways that might be problematic for both individuals and the world around them. One of the underpinnings of materialism is the idea that materialistic individuals engage in a constant process of

upward social comparison; as such, the desire to obtain more and more wealth and possessions has no limits (Sirgy, 1998). This spiral of materialism, as illustrated on the right side of Figure 8.1, resembles the idea of a "hedonic treadmill" in which individuals' satisfaction that is derived from buying new things dissipates and the "retail therapy" of buying and wanting begins again and again (Dunn, Gilbert, & Wilson, 2011). As shown, the acquisition of a gift, benefit, or material item could activate a sense of social competition that motivates individuals to continue wanting more and perhaps also to feel socially isolated, which, in turn, instigates even more valuing and more possession of material items to satisfy one's yearnings.

In terms of measurement, both gratitude and materialism have been assessed using absolute, Likert-type scales in which individuals are asked to indicate their agreement with or importance attributed to these values (Dittmar et al., 2014; Fagley, 2016). Relative assessments of gratitude and materialism have also been conducted when, for instance, individuals are asked to rate the importance of a variety of values and goals (e.g., the Aspiration Index, in which individuals rank materialistic versus socially oriented and other non-materialistic goals; Kasser, 2016).

Our own work in the DGRG has used both absolute and relative assessments. For example, survey measures have yielded continuous scores of higher or lower *levels* of gratitude and materialism (Freitas & Tudge, 2010; Tudge & Freitas, 2011). Open-ended responses that reflect individuals' greatest wish and what they would do for the individuals who helped them attain that wish have also been coded as indicators of *types* of materialism and gratitude, respectively (Freitas, Tudge, & McConnell, 2008; Tudge, Freitas, Wang, Mokrova, & O'Brien, 2015). Such responses can be seen as relative assessments given that individuals have the freedom to determine what their greatest desires are to begin with, as well as what responses they might convey if their desires were fulfilled; thus these responses reflect a natural prioritization of values and goals (e.g., material versus interpersonal). For instance, in our work, wishes have been coded as hedonistic (e.g., material wish, money, recreational wish, fame), self-oriented (e.g., academic or career goals, spiritual well-being, general wish for personal well-being or happiness), or social-oriented (e.g., philanthropic or wishes directed toward family, friends, or community).

We have also categorically coded individuals' type of gratitude or reciprocation in response to their wish being granted (Freitas et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2015). Verbal gratitude is indicated by beneficiaries who offer verbal thanks (e.g., "I would say 'thank you'"). Concrete gratitude can be seen when individuals offer the benefactor something in

return for the wish, but without consideration of the benefactor's own desires. For example, if granted a wish for a trip to Disneyland, the beneficiary states that he or she will take the benefactor along. Or, if given a dollhouse, the beneficiary will give the benefactor a doll. Connective gratitude also focuses on the beneficiary giving the benefactor something in return, but the exchange does take the benefactor's own wishes into account, thereby serving to please the benefactor and create positive connections. For instance, a beneficiary might state that he or she will "do anything" for the benefactor or "help in something she needs."

Taken together, the multitude of ways in which gratitude and materialism have been operationalized contribute to the field's lack of clarity about how these constructs might be related: Are they on different ends of the same spectrum and directly negatively related to each other, or do they represent dual forces that intertwine to shape development? In the next section, we discuss possible theoretical mechanisms for how gratitude and materialism might be linked. We also explore their independent and potentially interactive influences in child development and outcomes.

Conceptualizing Links between Gratitude and Materialism

Gratitude – with its emphasis on positive retribution, giving back, and thinking about others – and materialism, with its emphasis on material goals that are most often directed toward personal gain, are fundamentally linked. However, despite their conceptual overlap, it is surprising that little theoretical or empirical work has examined the ways in which gratitude and materialism might be related. Nonetheless, there are some exceptions, and a growing number of empirical efforts have been made to better understand the developmental processes that shape and are shaped by dually evolving levels of gratitude and materialism. Specifically, classic Piagetian views (1972), values theory (Bilsky & Schwartz, 1994; Schwartz, 2012), and self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2002), can each be drawn on to help support and explicate their integral associations and how the nature of these constructs might change over time.

Developmental Explanations. From a Piagetian perspective, children's changing cognitive sophistication influences their thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors toward others. Piagetian theory suggests that children in the concrete operational stage, roughly 7–12 years of age, focus on the "here and now" (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958). Children in this stage have the ability to use logical thought and concrete operations,

but are limited in that they can only apply their thinking to objects that are tangible and real. Hence, abstract, future-oriented thought tends to be challenging. While children in this developmental period are less egocentric than their younger counterparts in the preoperational period of development, they are still in the process of fully developing their orientation toward others (Piaget, 1972).

Piaget also discussed changes in children's socioemotional development that parallel their cognitive development. For example, children in middle childhood are able to move beyond the immediate stimuli that are needed for preoperational thinking and might use their concrete operations to focus on specific ways to "pay back" their benefactors. Their ability to think of others might revolve around concrete gratitude, because they are less practiced in thinking outside of the self. However, as children mature, they also become better able to self-regulate and perhaps "will" themselves to go beyond the immediate satisfaction of egocentric needs or wants (Piaget, 1968). In terms of their attitudes and views on material items, it is likely that these children in middle childhood will begin by placing great value on material, physical items and expressing strong desires to have tangible things in the "here and now." If they have resources to spend, they might do so on concrete, palpable objects for their own or for others' use or immediate consumption, and be less likely to think about goals or wishes to be fulfilled in the abstract future (Freitas, Tudge, Palhares, & Prestes, 2016). Self-regulatory skills and the ability to delay instant gratification could improve over time, particularly as children enter their adolescent years and the next stage of formal operations.

As children move from late childhood to early adolescence, they also become more capable of abstract thinking, both in general as well as with regard to society as a whole (Piaget, 1972). According to Piaget (1965), the ability to think abstractly coincides with the understanding that a broader social collective exists that might be distinct from the values of the self. With increasingly advanced cognitions, as well as this greater social awareness, older children and adolescents are presumably able to think more prosocially, outside of the self (Eisenberg, Cumberland, Guthrie, Murphy, & Shepard, 2005). For example, in a study examining age and gender effects on prosocial tendencies, middle adolescents were more likely to report both anonymous and altruistic prosocial tendencies than were early adolescents (Carlo, Hausmann, Christiansen, & Randall, 2003). They might also be better at thinking about the future, conceivably with respect to saving money and resources for later use for gift giving because such forethought is abstract and intangible (Freitas et al., 2016).

Hence, with development, we might expect changes whereby children's interests shift from within the self to outside of the self. Older children and adolescents might engage in more connective gratitude compared to concrete gratitude, given their more advanced competence in envisioning what others are feeling. Self-regulatory skills also coincide with increased cognitive development, and as such, the ability to delay instant gratification might also be observed (Tobin & Graziano, 2010). Age might, therefore, be positively linked with less hedonistic materialism, more prosocial spending preferences, and more of a focus on allocating resources toward community betterment (e.g., through socially centered materialism, gift giving, or donations to charity) (Kasser, 2005).

In summary, Piagetian views and foundational perspectives on development offer some explanations for how the nature of gratitude and materialism might change with cognitive maturation. As children become better able to think less egocentrically and more abstractly and outside of the self, corresponding shifts in gratitude and materialism might be observed. In this way, we might expect age-related variation in how gratitude is expressed (e.g., from relatively simple expressions such as a verbal "thank you" to deeper, more complex expressions of connective gratitude) and in how materialism is emphasized (e.g., hedonistic versus self- versus social-oriented). These developmental changes can be largely seen as orthogonal, with changes in each being independently driven by the common factors of cognitive and socioemotional sophistication. However, to the extent that these constructs represent different motivational drives and values within individuals, other theoretical perspectives can be used to describe how gratitude and materialism are interrelated.

Values Theory. Values are crucial in predicting social interactions and behaviors (McClelland, 1985; Mischel, 1990). Defined as concepts or beliefs that guide and evaluate end states or behaviors, values represent motivational goals that vary across and within individuals (Bilsky & Schwartz, 1994). Perspectives that stem from values theory further suggest that some values are naturally incompatible (Schwartz, 2012). For instance, prior work has identified 10 core value types that differ in what goals or motivations they emphasize, and conflict could occur between the values of benevolence and hedonism (Schwartz, 1992).

To the extent that gratitude reflects a sense of benevolence (i.e., preservation and enhancement of others, including being helpful, forgiving, honest, and loyal) and that materialism reflects the value of hedonism (i.e., pleasure or self-gratification; Bilsky & Schwartz, 1994), we might expect conflict in the way in which they are manifested in individuals'

lives. As some scholars have argued, gratitude and hedonistic materialism, due in part to their underlying values, might therefore be inversely related, if not orthogonal (Freitas et al., 2016; Froh, Emmons, Card, Bono, & Wilson, 2011).

Social Connectedness and Motivational Drives. Similar to values theory, self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2002) can also explain how values, goals, and motivational drives shed light on the link between gratitude and materialism: According to this theory, individuals are driven by three primary goals – autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Well-being is optimized when each of these three basic psychological needs is attained. Chiefly relevant to our work, some research suggests that materialism might interfere with individuals' fulfillment of these motivational goals, with relatedness especially (Kasser, 2016). For example, Dittmar et al. (2014) found support across multiple studies for the idea that individuals who are high in materialism are generally less socially connected. Through their meta-analysis, they also established evidence in support of unmet psychological needs (e.g., competence, autonomy, relatedness as measured by SDT) as specific mediators of the links between materialism and outcomes. Hence, while gratitude can be seen to promote positive social relationships, materialism appears to hinder such social connections and relatedness.

The opposite directionality has also been supported. For instance, some research focusing on materialism as an outcome variable has found that psychological insecurity, perhaps due to poor social relationships, can contribute to higher levels of materialism (Kasser, Ryan, Zax, & Sameroff, 1995; Sheldon & Kasser, 2008). According to these perspectives, one reason why individuals turn to material items is because of a lack of fulfillment in other areas of their personal life (Kasser, 2002).

Ultimately, then, it appears that social relationships might be key in considering how gratitude and materialism are related. Poor social relationships can both undermine feelings of gratitude and correlate with higher levels of materialism (Dittmar et al., 2014; Kasser, 2016). That is, low levels of gratitude might be more likely if individuals have poor relationships to begin with, and in this way, a negative feedback loop might be perpetuated in that individuals who express less connective gratitude would have less of an opportunity to improve already poor social relationships. At the same time, low social connectedness might drive individuals toward materialistic pursuits that, in turn, could further thwart the development of positive relationships. Some of these putative processes are illustrated in Figure 8.1.

Indeed, given this proposed cycle of events, it is possible that gratitude, in boosting relationships, could actually moderate negative effects

of materialism on developmental outcomes. Some perspectives do suggest that gratitude could counteract materialism's negative effects, given that materialism is associated with poor quality relationships and more social isolation, while gratitude is associated with decreases in these negative outcomes (Froh et al., 2011). There is also empirical evidence for gratitude serving as a moderator of the negative association between materialism and life satisfaction (Roberts, Tsang, & Manolis, 2015), supporting the value of continuing to explicate such possible moderating effects among other variables or domains. Notably, much of this prior work on gratitude and materialism has been limited in its measurement of gratitude, which has tended to be assessed with self-report items that tap into a more general sense of happiness or life appreciation. Conceptualizing gratitude as a moral virtue that explicitly emphasizes dyadic retribution motivated by social connectedness could result in even stronger associations with materialism and other key outcomes.

Demographic Considerations

Clearly, developmental age is important to consider in understanding constructs of gratitude and materialism. As we have argued thus far, predictable advancements in children's cognitive sophistication, self-regulatory skills, and pursuit of values and motivational goals can each determine the way in which children view others as well as view themselves. Although the empirical work that directly addresses developmental changes in these constructs or that focuses exclusively on child and early adolescent samples is relatively scarce, some research does support the idea that more prosocial forms of gratitude are more common among older versus younger children. For instance, there is evidence that older children tend to express more connective gratitude and social-oriented wishes compared to younger children, who tend to emphasize concrete gratitude and hedonism (Tudge, Freitas, Mokrova et al., 2015). However, it is important to note that this developmental pattern is not necessarily consistent or identical across different societies (see Payir et al., Chapter 6, this volume). Furthermore, the precise roles that gratitude and materialism play in development could vary with age. Dittmar et al. (2014) found that the link between materialism and well-being was stronger among 18-year-olds and older than among those under the age of 18. One explanation for this effect is that materialism is still developing in childhood and becomes more stable and more impactful as children enter adulthood.

Another primary demographic variable to discuss is gender. In many societies, girls are socialized to be relationally oriented and, as a result,

girls might be more prone than boys to exhibit forms of gratitude that reflect a prosocial or connective orientation (Jaffe & Hyde, 2000; Kashdan, Mishra, Breen, & Froh, 2009). Societal values and trends in socializing boys as primary breadwinners and as financially responsible might push the expectation and acceptance of higher materialism in boys than in girls (Kasser, 2005). In fact, in Dittmar et al.'s (2014) meta-analysis, the negative link between materialism and well-being appeared stronger for females than for males, perhaps because of these social expectations. That is, the social pressure for and acceptance of materialism in boys could result in protecting them from any detrimental effects of materialism on well-being. Moreover, girls might be more privy to external values and image concerns, and thus, their self-worth might be more strongly tied to images of materialism and superficiality (Harter, 1999).

Above and beyond child characteristics, family income is also important to consider. Although there is little research that systematically investigates the effect of socioeconomic status on children's gratitude and materialism, it seems that families that are more or less financially secure than others could show differences in values and priorities. On a broader scale, Dittmar et al. (2014) found that the impact of materialism (e.g., the association between materialism and well-being) was stronger in countries that exhibited more stable levels of socioeconomic status, as indicated through slower economic growth and more equal income distributions. We address this understudied area by exploring the role of family socioeconomic status, as measured by a proxy variable reflecting parental educational levels, in predicting average levels of children's gratitude, materialism, and spending preferences.

Empirical Analysis of Gratitude and Materialism Links

Thus far, we have discussed how gratitude and materialism have been defined and operationalized in the literature, how they are simultaneously shaped by similar processes (e.g., cognitive sophistication), and how they might reflect either orthogonal or opposing motivational forces. In light of their conceptual overlap, we now turn to our own data collected through the DGRG to explore some of these discussed links. More precisely, we used questionnaires, including Likert-type and open-ended assessments, to address three primary questions: (1) how demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, and socioeconomic status, are related to children's gratitude and materialism, (2) how children's types and levels of gratitude and materialism are related to each other, and (3) how gratitude and materialism are associated with other child

outcomes, specifically, their altruism, as measured through prosocial spending preferences in an imaginary windfall scenario.

Participants and Procedures

Our sample consisted of 456 U.S. children (49% male; 28% Latino, 26% Black, 33% White, 13% "Other"; 7–14 years of age; M age = 10.00 years, SD = 2.09; 61% working-class and 39% middle-class families) who were recruited through public and private schools in central North Carolina. Questionnaires were answered individually, but administered in group settings during school hours, with younger children receiving help in comprehension if needed.

Measures

To assess types of gratitude and materialism, children were open-endedly asked to state their greatest wish, as well as what they would do for the person who granted them their wish. Based on prior work (Tudge, Freitas, Mokrova et al., 2015), wishes were coded into three categories to reflect different levels of materialism: hedonistic materialism (e.g., wishes for something of immediate benefit, such as money, a car, or a video game), self-oriented (e.g., wishes for something of future benefit that is directed toward the self, such as going to college or being successful), or social-oriented (e.g., wishes for the well-being or something of benefit to family, friends, or the world, such as world peace or family happiness). Based on foundational work by Baumgarten-Tramer (1938), we coded the second part of this question to categorize children's responses to the people who hypothetically granted these wishes into three expressions of type of gratitude: verbal (e.g., "thank you"), concrete (e.g., repayment with things important to the child, rather than in consideration of what the benefactor might appreciate), and connective (e.g., repayment that takes the benefactor's wishes or needs into account).

In addition to these categorical measures of gratitude and materialism types, we also employed Likert-type assessments. We measured levels of gratitude through a 4-item questionnaire that tapped into a range of attitudes regarding gratefulness toward people who had helped them or given them material goods (e.g., "Do you think it's good to do something nice for people who have given you things?"; Freitas & Tudge, 2010). These items reflect the concrete or connective aspects of gratitude in which children recognize the kindness or generosity of a benefactor and assert the importance of returning the favor. A 5-item scale was used

to assess levels of children's materialism attitudes using questions that measure the importance they attributed to material goods and money (e.g., "When you grow up, do you want to have a really nice house filled with all kinds of cool stuff," "Is it important to you that you make a lot of money when you grow up?"; Tudge & Freitas, 2011). Items for both measures were rated on a 5-point scale, and internal consistencies ranged from .62 to .72.

The imaginary windfall measure was adapted from Kasser (2005) for clarity and developmental appropriateness (Tudge & Freitas, 2011). Children were asked to imagine receiving $100 and then were instructed to split the money into $10 increments across any of four categories: buy stuff for yourself, give to charity or the poor, get presents for friends or family, and save for the future. For each of the four options, possible total responses for each child ranged from 0 (never circled) to 10 (circled in every one of the 10 boxes). The number of times children circled each category was summed across the 10 boxes.

Results and Discussion

For our empirical analysis, we began by exploring the possible influence of the children's age, gender, or family socioeconomic status on the types and levels of gratitude and materialism that they reported. We next examined gratitude as a predictor of materialism, and vice versa. Lastly, we explored how both gratitude and materialism are associated with children's spending preferences. We used logistic regressions when considering types of gratitude (i.e., verbal, concrete, connective) and materialism (i.e., hedonistic, self-oriented, social-oriented), and a series of *t*-tests, correlations, and linear regressions when considering factors that might be related to levels of gratitude and materialism, and with spending preferences.

Demographic Differences in Gratitude and Materialism. Age clearly was related to materialism or the type of wishes children expressed. For example, with each additional year of age, children were 1.4 times less likely to express hedonistic wishes, 1.45 times more likely to express a future self-oriented wish, and 1.55 times more likely to express a social-oriented wish. With regard to types of gratitude, age was not related to the likelihood of expressing verbal gratitude, but every additional year increase in age was associated with children being 1.2 times less likely to express concrete gratitude and 1.35 times more likely to express connective gratitude. Although associations between age and continuously measured levels of gratitude and materialism were not statistically significant, the patterns were consistent such that

greater age seemed to be linked with overall higher gratitude and lower materialism.

Drawing on developmental theories (e.g., Piaget, 1965, 1972), there are conceptual reasons to expect age to be related to different expressions of both gratitude and materialism, particularly as children's cognitions and socioemotional development become increasingly sophisticated. As children mature, they are able to think more abstractly and more outside of the self (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958). There is also improvement in children's self-regulation skills, which relate to increases in their ability to delay gratification and plan for the future (Freitas et al., 2016; Tobin & Graziano, 2010). As our work demonstrates, older children appear to think less egocentrically and report less concrete gratitude and deeper levels of connective gratitude.

With age, the nature of children's wishes evolves as well. For example, drawing on our participants' responses, consider the arguably hedonic wishes to "be a princess," "have a lot of dolls," "for everything to be made out of candy," or have a "Batman suit" as compared to slightly more abstract self-oriented wishes, such as to "never get into trouble again," "get rid of my worries," or "to be the best person I can be." Deeper, social-oriented wishes included desires to "bring all my family members that died back to life," "grow up and save all hurt pets," "help the elderly or the homeless," or "for all kids to get a quality education no matter who they are or where they live." Older children are more likely to think toward the future and express a self-oriented wish, are more likely to think outside of the self through social-oriented wishes, and are less likely to express hedonistic wishes reflective of the "here and now."

Notably, few demographic differences with respect to gender and family socioeconomic status were found for either gratitude or materialism types. One exception was that gender was associated with verbal gratitude, such that girls were 98% more likely to express verbal gratitude than were boys. In addition, independent samples *t*-tests revealed that girls reported significantly ($p < .05$) higher levels of gratitude ($M = 29.75$, $SD = 3.45$) than did boys ($M = 27.92$, $SD = 3.87$). Differences with respect to family socioeconomic status were also notable in that children from working-class families reported significantly higher levels of materialism ($M = 18.19$, $SD = 4.26$) than those from middle-class families ($M = 16.63$, $SD = 4.11$), and lower levels of gratitude ($M = 28.72$, $SD = 3.71$) than did children from middle-class families ($M = 29.50$, $SD = 2.87$).

Given that our results uncover some notable similarities, as well as differences, across gender and socioeconomic status, more work that examines these influences would be worthwhile. Specifically, girls were more

likely to report higher overall levels of gratitude than were boys, and they also reported engaging in different types of gratitude; namely, expressing more verbal gratitude. Although no other significant effects were found, these gender differences are consistent with prior work suggesting that girls are socialized more than boys to be more socially connected (Jaffe & Hyde, 2000; Kashdan et al., 2009).

In terms of socioeconomic status, children from working-class families tended to report more materialism and lower levels of gratitude compared to their counterparts from middle-class families. Perhaps for youth from less privileged economic backgrounds, material goods are more of a commodity and take on a stronger prominence in their values and everyday lives. More generally speaking, many of the wishes described by the children in our sample did directly reference financial security, either in and of itself (e.g., "to be the richest person," "that I have so much money I can't run out") or in relation to other people in their lives (e.g., "to be rich so that I can take care of my family").

Associations between Gratitude and Materialism. In addition to demographic variation, we were also interested in examining how gratitude and materialism affect each other. Our results show that higher levels of materialism increased the odds of children expressing hedonistic wishes by 13% and decreased the odds of expressing social-oriented wishes by 76%. Higher levels of materialism were also associated with a 6% decrease in the likelihood of children expressing connective gratitude, but this effect was not as strong. Consistent with the fact that few associations between types of materialism and gratitude were found, a bivariate correlation between levels of gratitude and materialism was also nonsignificant ($r = -.08$, *ns*), suggesting that these variables reflect relatively orthogonal constructs.

As perspectives from values theory (Schwartz, 2012) and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002) would argue, gratitude and materialism might share mechanisms that are related to attaining gifts or benefits, but are also represented by distinct underlying values. We attempted to model these processes as shown in Figure 8.1 and via the idea that individuals might have different reactions to the same gift, favor, or material item. One possibility is for children to see a gift as a generous, freely given benefit and to recognize the role of a benefactor in making that benefit possible. In this way, a positive feedback loop that enhances social connectedness might occur whereby beneficiaries appreciate the benefactors' efforts and respond with positive feelings toward the benefactors and feel a moral obligation to return the favor. Indeed, some of the wishes that children described were completely social-oriented and focused on other people who had presumably

helped them in the past. For example, one child's greatest wish was "that my family is safe and healthy and happy."

Alternatively, individuals could focus not on the benefactors but on the gift itself, which could then spiral into a different series of events whereby children place such high value on the material items that they become more and more focused on the status and prestige associated with the items. In turn, such materialism could lead to less connectedness and more isolation as individuals see others as competitors for resources.

Hence, although gratitude and materialism are likely interrelated, the precise relation appears to be complex and not reflective of a direct, inverse correlation. For example, our work found a negative, but not statistically significant, association between the two constructs when conceptualized in terms of absolute levels. Associations between types of gratitude and materialism were also vague. Higher levels of materialism were linked with a lower likelihood of expressing connective gratitude, as well as a greater likelihood of having a hedonistic wish and a lower likelihood of having a social-oriented wish, but no other associations were found.

To further extend these preliminary findings, future work could use more advanced analytical techniques and approaches to capture the way in which these key constructs are shaped. One strategy is to use latent class analysis (LCA) to determine whether there are groups of children who are more socially oriented, overall, than others and to try to uncover predictors of such characteristics. For instance, we suspect that there are classes of children who are uniformly prosocial and exhibit low materialism and high gratitude, as well as more social-oriented wishes and connective gratitude. In contrast, some groups of children could report more materialistic leanings across the board. LCA could be used to differentiate these typologies and possibly find more variation. For example, might there be youth who are hedonistic but express deep gratitude for the things that they do acquire? We did find evidence, albeit marginally so, that hedonistic wishes are positively associated with expressions of connective gratitude. However, prior work has found evidence for the opposite pattern of effects (Tudge, Freitas, Mokrova et al., 2015).

Associations with Spending and Altruism. Another topic we were interested in is how gratitude and materialism are associated with children's allocation of money earned through an imaginary windfall scenario, which could give us insight into children's altruism and prosocial spending preferences. We used a series of linear regressions to examine predictors of children's preferences to use their money to buy, save, give gifts to friends/family, and give to charity. Interestingly, we found that greater levels of materialism were associated with more money allocated

toward buying and saving, and less money allocated to charitable giving. In addition, children whose greatest wish was coded as social-oriented (i.e., less emphasis on material goods for oneself) reported giving more of their windfall to charity. We again examined the role of demographic variables and found only one significant effect for age, whereby older children compared to younger children reported the allocation of fewer resources to giving gifts to others.

The broader, social reach of children's materialism thus has implications for spending preferences and, presumably, actual consumer behavior. Higher levels of materialism were associated with less altruistic spending, as reflected by a lower likelihood of sharing one's windfall with charity and a greater likelihood of buying or saving resources for later spending. As might be expected, children who reported more social-oriented wishes (e.g., as shown through the desire to improve the lives of vulnerable populations) also reported more altruistic spending preferences by allocating more of their resources to charity.

In the consumer-driven markets of the United States and other industrialized nations, our work on the study of gratitude and materialism addresses the increased targeting of children for material spending, and it supports the need for parents and other adults to teach their youngest children to be savvy consumers (Calvert, 2008). Although expressing hedonistic wishes is not inherently detrimental, it seems that fostering children's social orientation and sense of gratitude as a moral virtue would be advantageous not only for children but also for the relational and community connections that are tied to children, particularly as they get older. Boosting self-regulatory skills and supporting children's prosocial awareness could help reduce reckless spending and promote altruism and sustainability. The immense implications for understanding how these pieces fit together can be illustrated by one child's simply stated wish for "world peace."

Developmental Implications and Concluding Summary

Framed as a moral virtue, gratitude and the meaning it creates in children's lives encompass two dimensions – children's response to benefactors who might be responsible for granting their wishes and the nature of those wishes themselves (Freitas et al., 2011). Indeed, Fagley (2016) has argued that gratitude can be seen as being inextricably linked to materialism, given that being grateful for something also encompasses an inherent recognition and appreciation for what one has. Moreover, feelings of gratitude do not only arise as a result of material gifts or benefits but can also be directed toward help that one has received or the

nonmaterial gifts that someone has provided. Gratitude can thus promote a more sustainable way of living by leading to less emphasis on material goods or benefits themselves and more on the thought or action behind the people who helped provide those benefits. Deep feelings of gratitude can evolve into prosocial connectedness as beneficiaries honor a moral obligation to "pay it forward" and become benefactors in turn.

Although philosophers, scholars, and researchers have long expounded on the virtues of gratitude (Tudge, Freitas, & O'Brien, 2015), there are still many unexplored areas. We addressed one small piece of the underexamined literature by discussing how gratitude and materialism are related to each other, to children's demographic characteristics, and to their self-focused versus altruistic spending preferences in an imaginary windfall; however, more empirical work is needed to fully understand the intricate and dynamic associations between gratitude and materialism, as well as their developmental influence.

One idea for future research that can potentially address the important issue of directionality is to examine how these complex processes of gratitude and materialism unfold on a day-to-day basis. Are the constructs in opposition, so that feeling grateful on the one hand necessarily leads to decreases in materialism, and vice versa? Daily diary approaches could also be used to investigate the well-being implications of gratitude and materialism. For instance, on days in which children do receive a freely given benefit, do they feel happier? Are these feelings enhanced even more if children recognize the benefactor who might be involved and work toward paying that benefactor back? In contrast, how is daily well-being affected when children acquire a material possession without the recognition of a benefactor? Using daily diaries to examine such processes at a micro-longitudinal level would be informative, as would longer-term longitudinal studies to examine causality and associations over time.

Another research direction is to move toward a better understanding of the developmental implications of gratitude and materialism by examining the possibility that they might interact in affecting child outcomes and well-being. In some of the other work that the DGRG has done with a subset of this sample, we indeed found that the tendency for greater materialism to be associated with greater saving preferences was attenuated by high levels of gratitude (Kiang et al., 2016). More specifically, the pattern of results suggested that the best savers of resources are children who report simultaneously high levels of materialism and low levels of gratitude, perhaps preparing for the future in ways that are focused on the self. In contrast, children with higher levels of gratitude were more likely to spend at least some of their financial resources

in explicitly prosocial ways. These results are generally consistent with prior work supporting gratitude's role as a positive buffer that promotes prosocial development (Polak & McCullough, 2006), but more research is necessary to fully grasp these possible interactions.

Indeed, as others have argued (e.g., Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005) and as the theoretical perspectives that were discussed in this chapter and our empirical findings suggest, it seems that encouraging children to appreciate what they actually have and stressing the role of individuals who have helped them amass those "haves" and benefits could perpetuate a prosocial cycle of gratefulness. Moreover, in contrast to perspectives that view materialism and gratitude as being on opposite ends of a spectrum (e.g., Froh et al., 2011; Schwartz, 2012), our work suggests that their relations with each other are complex and further work that systematically examines how they reflect independent, dual, or potentially opposing forces in development would be useful in optimizing well-being and promoting positive relationships with others.

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