

The Gratitude Witnessing Effect in Adolescents

👤 Lisa Walsh, Karynna Okabe-Miyamoto, Annie Regan, & Sonja Lyubomirsky

🏛️ University of California, Riverside (UCR)

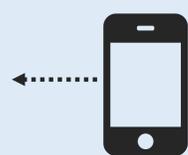
INTRODUCTION

- Past gratitude research has often overlooked the experience of witnesses—namely, those observing someone sharing gratitude with a benefactor
- This study explored the “gratitude witnessing effect” in adolescents

METHOD

- We recruited adolescents ($N = 296$; ages 14-19; grades 9-12) from a public high school in Florida via the Character Lab Research Network for a pre-registered, single-timepoint study
- Assigned to 1 of 3 conditions:
 - Gratitude**
Read 3 gratitude letters
($n = 96$)
 - Positive**
Read 3 positive letters
($n = 99$)
 - Neutral**
Read 3 neutral letters
($n = 101$)
- Letters were written by a hypothetical peer to a parent, teacher, or friend
- Letters varied as to whether they:
 1. Expressed **gratitude** (for kind acts received)
 2. Reported **positive** news (e.g., winning a game)
 3. Described **neutral** events (e.g., going to class)
- Adolescents completed brief pretest measures, read their assigned letters, then completed posttest measures
- Analyses: Regressed change predicting posttest scores from hypothesized condition dummy codes (controlling for pretest scores)

Relative to those who read neutral letters, adolescents who read gratitude and positive letters reported greater increases in positive emotions and elevation.



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lwals001@ucr.edu

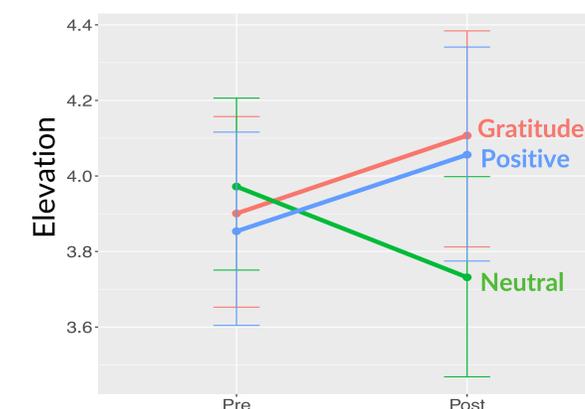
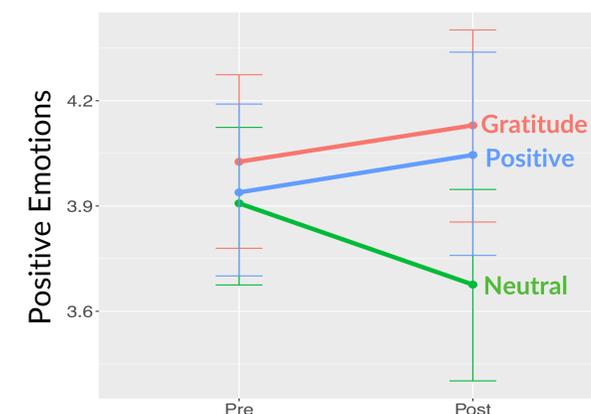
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Character LAB

RESULTS

- Relative to neutral letters, adolescents who read gratitude letters experienced greater increases in positive emotions ($\beta = 0.13, p = .006$) and elevation ($\beta = 0.16, p = .002$), and marginally larger decreases in gratitude ($\beta = -0.07, p = .07$)
- Those who read gratitude and positive letters experienced similar boosts
- No significant effects for negative emotions, life satisfaction, or connectedness



DISCUSSION

Observing gratitude may provide hedonic benefits for witnesses in part because those letters are positively-valenced