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# Children's Gratitude: Implication of Contextual and Demographic Variables in Argentina\*

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• **Abstract:** *This article explores the motives for gratitude expressed by children, taking into account contextual and demographic variables. The sample consisted of 249 participants aged between 8 and 10 years from Argentina, of which 127 were middle SES children (Group 1) and 122 were low SES children (Group 2). The study used a free response technique and Cramér's V tests were performed to analyze whether the responses were associated with SES, gender and age. The most prominent motive for gratitude in Group 1 was related to having a family. Children from the lower SES group demonstrated gratitude for being able to have material objects and the basic elements necessary for survival, among which food was emphasized. Girls focused their gratitude on loving relationships, whereas boys mentioned material objects, borrowed objects, as well as autonomy granted by their parents. The motives for gratitude were also found to be significantly associated with age.*

**Key words:** emotions, childhood, gender, age, socioeconomic status (Isoc Thesaurus).

## La gratitud de los niños: Implicancia de variables contextuales y demográficas en población argentina

• **Resumen:** *Este artículo explora los motivos de agradecimiento que expresan los niños, teniendo en cuenta variables demográficas y contextuales. La muestra estuvo compuesta por 249 participantes argentinos de 8 a 10 años de edad (127 niños de estrato socioeconómico medio -Grupo 1-, y 122 de estrato socioeconómico bajo -Grupo 2). Se utilizó la técnica de respuestas libres y se realizaron pruebas V de Cramer para analizar si los motivos de gratitud se asociaban al estrato*

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socioeconómico, al género y la edad. El Grupo 1 agradece principalmente por la familia, mientras que el Grupo 2 se focaliza en los bienes materiales y elementos básicos para la supervivencia, como el alimento. Las niñas agradecen mayormente por las relaciones afectivas. Los varones mencionan los objetos materiales, los préstamos y la indulgencia parental. Los motivos de gratitud también estuvieron significativamente asociados a la edad.

**Palabras clave:** emociones, niñez, género, edad, nivel socioeconómico (Tesouro Isoc).

### **A gratidão das crianças: Implicações de variáveis contextuais e demográficas na Argentina**

• **Resumo:** Este artigo explora os motivos de agradecimento mais comuns expressados pelas crianças, considerando as variáveis demográficas e contextuais. A amostra foi composta por 249 participantes da Argentina, de 8 a 10 anos de idade (127 crianças de nível socioeconômico médio -Grupo 1-, e 122 de nível socioeconômico baixo -Grupo 2-). Aplicou-se a técnica de resposta livre e Testes de Cramer V foram realizados para analisar se as respostas estavam associadas ao nível socioeconômico, sexo e idade. O grupo 1 agradece principalmente pela família, em quanto o grupo 2 focaliza os bens materiais e elementos básicos para a sobrevivência. A maioria das meninas agradece pelas relações afetivas, em quanto os meninos mencionam os objetos materiais, os empréstimos e a indulgência dos pais. Os motivos de gratidão também estiveram significativamente associados à idade.

**Palavras-chave:** emoções, infância, sexo, idade, nível socioeconômico (Isoc Thesaurus).

**-Introduction. -Method. -Results. -Discussion. -References.**

#### **Introduction**

Gratitude is a psychological resource of great importance, a desirable aspect of human personality which increases personal well-being, benefits the community, and promotes social stability (Emmons, McCullough & Tsang, 2003). The genuine feeling of gratitude feeds back prosocial behaviour, and it is connected with other positive emotional experiences, such as optimism, joy, happiness, and hope, as well as to better health levels and interest in the task (Emmons & Shelton, 2002).

In a broad sense, gratitude can be defined as a psychological state of admiration, surprise, and general appreciation for life (Emmons & Shelton, 2002). According to the object that triggers it, the emotional response may be either interpersonal or transpersonal (Emmons et al., 2003). Interpersonal gratitude involves recognizing a benefit that has been intentionally conceded by another person for one's own personal advantage (Chesney et al., 2005, Emmons et al., 2003, Lazarus, 2000, Strümpfer, 2006). In turn, transpersonal gratitude involves the ability to identify situations which have contributed to personal well-being, and do not

necessarily depend on other people's favours or strengths, but rather they are beyond the limits of human control (e.g. when you experience gratitude towards God, nature, or life) (Emmons et al., 2003).

There is evidence that the experience and expression of gratitude is regulated by socio-demographic variables. For example, studies conducted by Kashdan, Mishra, Breen and Froh (2009) inform that women consider the expression of gratitude as less complex, conflicting, uncertain, and more interesting and exciting than men. In addition, women derive more pleasure from the benefits obtained and feel less guilt and obligation than males. Studies carried out with children and adolescents have demonstrated that girls report higher levels of gratitude (Froh, Yurkewicz & Kashdan, 2009) and tend to say 'thank you' more frequently and spontaneously than boys (Becker & Smenner, 1986).

With regard to the relationship between gratitude and age, there are fewer studies and there is still much to be learned. The available information reveals that gratitude is consolidated in time and despite the similarities in the experiences and benefits of gratitude among

different ages, it is not suitable to extrapolate the findings between adults and younger populations (Froh, Kashdan, Ozimkowskia & Miller, 2009).

Some authors argue that the level of maturity required for the genuine experience of gratitude -associated with a benefactor figure- is reached at about the age of 7-10 (Emmons & Shelton, 2002, Emmons, 2008, Freitas, Silveira & Pieta, 2009, Froh, Kashdan et al., 2009). However, recent studies show that gratitude can be developed starting at earlier ages (about 5 years old), providing that the child has already acquired the cognitive abilities to understand and discriminate different affective states, to infer mental unobservable conditions (such as the altruistic intentions or motivations of others), and to generate attributions about success and personal well-being (Nelson, 2013, Szcześniak, Falcinelli & Nieznanska, 2010).

Specifically, in regards to the reasons that generate gratitude in childhood, there is a preceding study (Gordon, Musher-Eizenman, Holub & Dalrymple, 2004) which examined school-aged children's responses to find out the most frequent gratitude themes in boys and girls between the ages of 5 and 11 before and after the 9/11 attacks in the United States. The authors found that, in general, the most recurring themes had to do with family, basic needs, friends, and school context. Girls tended to express more gratitude for interpersonal relationships, whereas boys expressed more gratitude for material objects. Older children mentioned a greater number of motives of gratitude and tended to show less appreciation for material objects than younger children. With respect to the time at which the responses were recorded, it was found that after the attacks of September 11, gratitude related to rescue workers (such as police officers and fire-fighters) and North-American values (such as freedom) appeared with greater frequency, which confirmed that the contextual characteristics determine the experience and expression of emotions.

Regardless of the object that induces gratitude, the benefits of this emotion seem to be very positive. Studies conducted with children and adolescents have demonstrated that the feelings of gratitude reduce materialism

(Froh, Emmons, Card, Bono & Wilson, 2011), favour social integration (Froh, Bono & Emmons, 2010), and are positively associated with pride, confidence, forgiveness, inspiration, enthusiasm, satisfaction with life, optimism, social support, and prosocial behaviour (Froh, Yurkewicz et al., 2009). The research carried out by Emmons and McCullough (2003) shows that university students who regularly identify circumstances in which they feel gratitude exhibit less unpleasant physical symptoms, greater optimism, more welfare, enthusiasm, determination, and energy compared to students who experience gratitude less regularly, focus on negative events, or compare themselves to the advantages or benefits obtained by others.

Since the family, social, and cultural characteristics of the environment in which an individual develops can promote or restrict the display of positive emotions (Oros, 2009), many researchers insist on the importance of promoting gratitude from an early age by enriching the most significant environments in childhood and adolescence, namely home and school (Bono & Froh, 2009, Clonan, Chafouleas, McDougal & Riley-Tillman, 2004, Froh, Sefick & Emmons, 2008 Oros & Richaud de Minzi, 2011, Oros & Vargas-Rubilar, 2012).

The relation between the experience of gratitude and the characteristics of the immediate social environment of children and adolescents (family, school, community) has been scarcely explored. However, there are some studies that show its relevance and the need to go in depth into this theme (Bono & Froh, 2009, Greif & Gleason, 1980, Meier & Oros, 2012). Besides, there is still great lack of awareness about macro-social conditions which could be related to the expression of gratitude in childhood (Paludo & Koller, 2006). Literature reviews show there is at least one study that explored the relationship between child gratitude and family socio-economic status (SES). Becker and Smenner (1986) developed an experiment to analyse spontaneous verbal expression of gratitude in the school context. Children participated in a game with their teachers and receive a reward at the end. The authors noted that when receiving the reward, which was material in nature, such as stickers,

low SES children showed more verbal gratitude than middle SES children. Among other causes, researchers attributed this result to the fact that middle SES children were probably more accustomed to receiving these kinds of gifts than low SES children. Actually, behavioural observation in the natural environment of low SES children showed that they exhibited more excitement and surprise when receiving the presents than middle SES children. Therefore, at the time when interpretations are made about the experience or expression of gratitude (frequency, intensity, or motives that originate it), it is important to consider the SES conditions these children belong to. Given these conditions, you might then ask: are there differences between the motives that awaken gratitude in children belonging to difficult environments and the ones of children coming from better social contexts? Without a doubt, psychology owes a debt to this analysis. The study of these topics and related ones would provide a better understanding of the socio-affective processes in childhood and their relationship with the social and cultural environment.

Since gratitude is an emotion which involves cognitive and social aspects at the same time, it is likely to be evoked by different situations and to be experienced in several ways depending on individual characteristics such as age, gender, as well as the person's environment, among others. The study of gratitude responses in childhood can provide a better understanding of these processes and contribute to the design of new programs, or redefinition of ongoing programs for children's positive emotional development. This work aims to explore the most frequent gratitude motives among children belonging to different socioeconomic classes (low vs. middle) and to differentially analyze those motives according to their age and sex.

## Method

### Participants

The sample consisted of 249 argentinian children (122 boys and 127 girls) aged 8 to 10 years old ( $M = 9.14$ ;  $SD = .95$ ), residing in the city of Paraná, Province of Entre Ríos,

Argentina. It included 127 middle SES children (group 1) who attended a school located near the city centre, as well as 122 low-socioeconomic status children (group 2) who attended schools located in poor urban areas. The indicators to determine low SES of children from group 2 where the ones adopted by the National Ministry of Education through its National Program *A Thousand Schools Under the Poverty Level*. The schools in poor urban areas to which we had access to were included in this plan and selected according to criteria and priorities set by the Federal Council of Culture and Education, based on students' SES and absenteeism level. Additionally, according to the Graffar Scale (adaptation by Méndez-Castellano, 1982), the children from poor urban schools who participated in this study are placed in the 4th and 5th strata (relative poverty and critical poverty) out of five possible strata defined by: (a) the head of the family's occupation, (b) the mother's education, (c) the main source of family income, and (d) housing conditions.

Since comparisons between the groups were set as a goal of this study, it was necessary to make a deliberate selection of the participants so that some homogeneity criteria among the subsamples could be met. As shown in Table 1, both groups had a similar proportion of males and females, and they are the same age. The mean age of group 1 ( $M = 9.08$ ;  $SD = 0.96$ ) did not significantly differ from the mean age ( $M = 9.20$ ;  $SD = .96$ ) of group 2 ( $t_{(258)} = 1.04$ ;  $p = 0.30$ ).

**Table 1.** Gender and Age distribution in both groups of children.

	Group 1	Group 2
Female	65	62
Male	62	60
8 years old	53	46
9 years old	11	5
10 years old	63	71
TOTAL	127	122

### **Measures**

To collect the data, a free response technique, commonly used in gratitude research, was employed (Emmons et al., 2003). Each participant was asked to identify and mention everyday aspects in which they experienced gratitude. When presenting the instructions a brief vignette was used as a trigger for the task: "Once upon a time there was a boy/girl your same age named Peter/Mary, who wanted to write a list of reasons for which s/he was grateful. So s/he grabbed a paper and a pencil and started writing those things for which s/he felt grateful. But suddenly, the pencil broke and s/he couldn't finish the task. Would you like to help Peter/Mary finish the list with your own reasons to be grateful? What are you grateful for? You can write your answers in the following space."

### **Procedures**

All participants counted with their parents' or tutors' informed consent, and were authorized by the school's principal and teachers to complete the task during a class period. The assessments were completed collectively within each classroom/grade (3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> grades of elementary school). The answer was neither limited to time nor space. Children took about 20 minutes to answer the question.

The responses collected were carefully studied by means of the technique of content analysis. Children's textual outcomes were classified into categories and subcategories of analysis to which previously coded answers were assigned. To determine the category each response belonged to, phrases and words were analysed within the situational context presented by each child. Thus, the grouping of answers was not performed following identical word criteria, but rather considering the similarity of meaning and connotations expressed by the participants. Afterwards, a frequency analysis for each code was employed to determine its repetition rate.

In order to analyse whether the answer distribution varied as a function of childrens' SES, sex and age, Cramér's V tests were

carried out. To make comparisons by age, the independent variable was polarized considering just its extreme values: 8 and 10 years.

### **Results**

Based on the information provided by the participants from both groups, 13 nominal categories were produced, which do not keep any hierarchical relationship between each other. Some of these categories, in turn, were divided into subcategories. These involve both interpersonal and transpersonal gratitude. For instance, the school category includes not only punctual gratitude towards teachers (interpersonal) but also general gratitude feelings without a specific addressee, such as when children show gratitude for being able to receive education (transpersonal). Table 2 presents these categories, their description, and response examples.

**Table 2.** Diagram of Categories and Subcategories for the analysis of Gratitude Motives.

CATEGORIES	SUB-CATEGORIES	Description	Examples
Friendship		Gratitude for friendship bonds	'Because I have friends'; 'For my friends'
Materials		Gratitude for having valued temporal or permanent goods.	
	General	No particular element is mentioned	'For the things I have'; 'For the things I receive or get'
	Ludic elements	Elements that aim at amusement or recreation	'Because I have a doll'; 'For the ball'; 'Because I received bottle rockets'
	Useful elements	Useful elements for the fulfilment of everyday or responsibility activities (not recreational). They are non-essential elements	'Because I receive things for school'; 'Because I have a bunk bed'
	Basic elements – food	Basic and/or essential elements for survival, related to feeding	'Because I have something to eat'; 'For the food'
	Basic elements – housing	Basic and/or essential elements for survival, related to housing and its conditions	'Because I have somewhere to live'; 'For my house'
	Basic elements - economic resources	Basic and/or essential elements for survival, related to economic resources	'For the money'; 'For having money'
Schooling	Basic elements - parents' employment	Basic and/or essential elements for survival, related to parents' employment	'Because my mother still has a job'; 'Because my father has found a job'
		Gratitude for situations or people connected with school life	
	Attendance	Possibility to attend school	'Because I am at school'; 'Because I can come to school'
	Absenteeism	Possibility to be absent from school	'I'm grateful when it rains because I don't have to come to school';
	Learning	Significant learning achievement	'Because I'm taught to learn more things'; 'Because I have learned to read'
	Teachers	Positive bond with teachers	'Because the teacher is nice'; 'For my teachers'
Affection	Partners	Positive bond with partners	'Because I get along with my classmates'; 'For having good classmates'
		Gratitude for affection and protection from significant people	
	General	No person in particular is identified as the affection-giver	'Because people love me'; 'Because I'm hugged'
	Family	Affection and care by family members	'Because my mother loves me'; 'Because my grandma asks me how I feel'; 'Because my family looks after me'
	Friends	Affection and care by peers	'Because my classmates love me'

CATEGORIES	SUB-CATEGORIES	Description	Examples
Family		Gratitude for having a family or for the presence of each member separately	
	General	No member in particular is identified	'Because I'm with my family'; 'For having a family'
	Parents	The presence of a father or mother	'Because I have a mother and a father'; 'Because I have what other people don't, such as a mom'
	Siblings	The presence of siblings	'For my siblings'; 'Because I have a stepbrother'
	Grandparents	The presence or interaction with grandparents	'Because I can be with my Grandparents'; 'Because I have a grandma'
Ludic activity		Gratitude for the possibility of playing or having fun	'Because I play a lot'; 'Because I can play and enjoy myself'
Pets		Gratitude for having pets	'Because I have a dog'; 'For my hamster'
Parenting styles		Gratitude for parental permission, for the freedom to move around independently, and setting the limits to appropriate behaviour.	
Autonomy		Gratitude for parental permission, for the freedom to move around independently	'Because my parents give me anything I want'; 'Because they let my dog sleep with me'
Parental Discipline		Gratitude for setting the limits to appropriate behaviour	"Porque me enseñan que mentir es malo"; "Porque me enseñan a no robar"
Prosocial Behaviour		Gratitude for behaviours that benefit others, which includes gestures of assistance, relief, cooperation from or to others	'Because when I don't bring my snack, my friends give me some; and when I bring it, I give them some'; 'Because my classmates teach me things'; 'Because I help my mom clean and tidy up the house'
Generalized gratitude		Generalized transpersonal gratitude for positive events that transcend human will	
	Events	Occurrence of desirable events	'Because it's my sister's birthday'; 'Because I enjoyed yesterday walk'; 'Because I received visits'
	Life	Personal existence, presence, behaviour in the world	'For the life God gave me'; 'Because I'm alive'
	Happiness	Experience of positive emotions: happiness, joy, contentment.	'I feel grateful for being happy'; 'Because I'm glad'
	Health	Lack of illness and/or well-functioning of the body or its organs separately	'For not being ill'; 'Because I can see and walk'
	Climate/Nature	Pleasant situations related to nature and climate	'Because the sun shines'; 'Because it's a nice day'



Following, each group's gratitude motives are presented, and sex and age differences are analysed.

### ***Socio-economic differences***

Results of the analysis showed that there is a moderate and statistically significant association between SES and the 13 categories of gratitude in children (Cramér's  $V = 0.21$ ;  $p = 0.00$ ). Additionally, a crosstab between SES and the subcategories of reasons for gratitude were created with the aim of providing a more detailed interpretation of these results.

The most prominent theme in group 1 refers to having a family. This single theme, which includes gratitude for having a family with one or two parents, siblings, and/or grandparents, represented almost the 30% out of the total reasons of gratitude. In addition, there were other three gratitude categories with a high percentage of mentions related to: (a) situations or general and/or abstract events (mainly for being able to enjoy outdoor activities or because of health), (b) schooling (especially for being able to attend school), and (c) the possession or ownership of material elements (including basic needs elements, such as food and housing, as well as useful and ludic elements). These three themes reflect about the 75% of all the mentions registered in this group of children; and they are followed by other themes in order of frequency, namely (a) friendship, (b) affection from behalf of family, friends, and other significant ones; (c) having pets, and gratitude for certain characteristics of their upbringing (parenting styles), which were mentioned in the same proportion; (d) the possibility of being able to play and develop recreational activities; and finally, (e) prosocial behaviour performed by others or by themselves. In turn, lower SES children demonstrate gratitude for being able to have different material objects and basic elements for survival, among which food is emphasized, in a higher frequency. In the second place, the importance of having a family was highlighted as a motive of gratitude, within which the presence of one or both parents occupy a

relevant position. The third reason for gratitude, in order of frequency, stresses the role of the school during childhood (being able to attend school was mentioned nearly 30 times in this group), immediately followed by transpersonal gratitude of a general nature, among which birthday parties and extracurricular rides or activities (sporting events, cultural events, etc) are emphasized. These four gratitude motives cover more than 70% of all the responses expressed by lower SES children. Such motives are followed, in order of appearance, by: (a) friends, (b) affection from significant people, (c) parenting style exerted by their parents; being able to play (these two categories with the same frequency), and (e) prosocial behaviour showed by or towards them (See Table 3).



**Table 3.** *Distribution of Gratitude Categories for Group 1 and Group 2.*

Gratitude	Group 1		Group 2	
	f	%	f	%
<b>Friendship</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>9.7</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>7.8</b>
<b>Materials</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>14.4</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>23.4</b>
General	8	2.7	18	6.4
Ludic elements	8	2.7	6	2.1
Useful elements	3	1	4	1.4
Basic ones-food	11	3.7	20	7.1
Basic ones-housing	13	4.3	8	2.8
Basic ones-economic resources	0	0	5	1.8
Basic ones-employment	0	0	5	1.8
<b>Schooling</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>13.4</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>16.3</b>
Attendance	24	8	29	10.3
Absenteeism	1	0.3	2	0.7
Learning	12	4	8	2.8
Teachers	3	1	7	2.5
<b>Affection</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>6.7</b>
General	7	2.3	8	2.8
Family	10	3.3	11	3.9
Friendship	2	0.7	1	0.4
<b>Family</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>27.1</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>18.8</b>
General	24	8	24	8.5
Parents	30	10	18	6.4
Siblings	20	6.7	8	2.8
Grandparents	7	2.3	2	0.7
<b>Parenting styles</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>4.6</b>
Autonomy	7	2.3	13	4.6
Parental discipline	2	0.7	0	0
<b>Ludic activity</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>4.6</b>
<b>Pets</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Prosocial behaviour</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2.8</b>
<b>Generalized gratitude</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>19.1</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>14.9</b>
Events	15	5	13	4.6
Life	7	2.3	12	4.3
Happiness	7	2.3	4	1.4
Health	14	4.7	7	2.5
Nature	14	4.7	6	2.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>299</b> <b>mentions</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>282</b> <b>mentions</b>	<b>100</b>



**Differences by gender and age in Group 1: Middle SES children**

There were significant differences (Cramér's  $V = 0.29$ ;  $p = 0.00$ ) among the gratitude reasons registered by middle SES girls and boys from Group 1. As shown in Table 4, some themes presented certain variability between gender, such as friendship, schooling, affection, and family being more frequently mentioned by girls, and material goods, parental discipline (specially low parental control and high autonomy) and prosocial behaviour (focused on receive loans and benefits) more commonly mentioned by boys.

On the other hand, Cramér's  $V$  results (Cramér's  $V = 0.25$ ;  $p = 0.04$ ) seem to indicate that gratitude motives are significantly associated with age. Table 4 shows that the main differences are evidenced in 10-year-old children who more frequently mention the family, friendship and affection. Moreover, younger children (aged 8) identified a greater number of 'general motives of gratitude', especially for being able to enjoy nature. (e.g. the sun and outdoors).

**Table 4.** Distribution of Gratitude Categories for Group 1, according to Gender and Age.

Gratitude	Frequency of appearance	Percentage	Female f	Male f	8 years old f	10 years old f
<b>Friendship</b>	29	9.7	<b>18</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Materials</b>	43	14.5	<b>18</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>20</b>
General	8	2.7	2	6	2	3
Ludic elements	8	2.7	2	6	5	2
Useful elements	3	1	2	1	1	2
Basic ones-food	11	3.7	5	6	6	4
Basic ones-housing	13	4.3	7	6	4	9
Basic ones-economic resources	0	0	0	0	0	0
Basic ones-employment	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Schooling</b>	40	13.4	<b>30</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>22</b>
Attendance	24	8	20	4	8	16
Absenteeism	1	0.3	0	1	1	0
Learning	12	4	8	4	7	5
Teachers	3	1	2	1	2	1
<b>Affection</b>	19	6.4	<b>12</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>12</b>
General	7	2.3	4	3	0	6
Family	10	3.3	7	3	2	6
Friends	2	0.7	1	1	1	0
<b>Family</b>	81	27.1	<b>49</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>52</b>
General	24	8	13	12	6	16
Parents	30	10	18	12	8	20
Siblings	20	6.7	14	5	6	12
Grandparents	7	2.3	4	2	2	4
<b>Parenting styles</b>	9	3.0	<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
Indulgence/Autonomy	7	2.3	1	6	3	4
Parental discipline	2	0.7	0	2	2	0
<b>Ludic activity</b>	7	2.3	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Pets</b>	9	3	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Prosocial behaviour</b>	5	1.7	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Generalized gratitude</b>	57	19.1	<b>30</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>23</b>
Events	15	5	7	8	7	7
Happiness	7	2.3	5	2	3	4
Health	14	4.7	6	8	8	5
Nature	14	4.7	7	7	11	2
Life	7	2.3	5	2	2	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>299 mentions</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>157</b>



**Differences by gender and age en el Grupo**

**2: Low SES children**

When analysing the most common gratitude themes as a function of gender, no significant differences were found (Cramér's  $V = 0.13$ ;  $p = 0.78$ ). The most important gratitude themes are likely to occur similarly in both subgroups (See Table 5).

As for the association between gratitude reasons of Group 2 and age, results were significant from a statistical standpoint (Cramér's  $V = 0.36$ ;  $p = 0.00$ ).

The most prominent difference was that younger children are most frequently grateful for being able to play and for the temporary or permanent possession of ludic elements and toys; whereas 10-year-old children exalt their family, firstly parents and then siblings, and mention all material elements (except for ludic ones) as well as transpersonal elements (especially life and health) above other reasons (See Table 5).

**Table 5.** Distribution of Gratitude Categories for Group 2, as a function of Gender and Age.

Gratitude	Frequency of appearance	Percentage	Female f	Male f	8-9 years old f	10-12 years old f
<b>Friendship</b>	22	7.8	<b>10</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Materials</b>	66	23.4	<b>32</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>47</b>
General	18	6.4	11	7	5	13
Ludic elements	6	2.1	3	3	6	0
Useful elements	4	1.4	1	3	3	1
Basic ones-food	20	7.1	10	10	0	20
Basic ones-housing	8	2.8	3	5	1	7
Basic ones-economic resources	5	1.8	1	4	2	3
Basic ones-employment	5	1.8	3	2	2	3
<b>Schooling</b>	46	16.3	<b>20</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>19</b>
Attendance	29	10.3	13	16	15	12
Absenteeism	2	0.7	1	1	2	0
Learning	8	2.8	3	5	3	3
Teachers	7	2.5	3	4	1	4
<b>Affection</b>	19	6.7	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>12</b>
General	8	2.8	6	2	3	5
Family	10	3.9	5	5	2	7
Friends	1	0.4	0	1	1	0
<b>Family</b>	53	18.8	<b>25</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>47</b>
General	24	8.5	15	10	2	21
Parents	18	6.4	5	13	1	17
Siblings	8	2.8	4	4	1	7
Grandparents	2	0.7	1	1	0	2
<b>Parenting styles</b>	13	4.6	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>11</b>
Indulgence/Autonomy	13	4.6	4	9	2	11
Parental Discipline	0	0				
<b>Ludic activity</b>	13	4.6	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Prosocial behaviour</b>	8	2.8	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Pets</b>	0	0	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Generalized gratitude</b>	42	14.9	<b>24</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>32</b>
Events	13	4.6	6	7	7	6
Life	12	4.3	8	4	0	12
Health	7	2.5	6	1	0	7
Nature	6	2.1	3	3	3	3
Happiness	4	1.4	1	3	0	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>282 mentions</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>175</b>



## Discussion

The experience of gratitude depends on a complex range of demographic factors, cognitive (perceptual) processes and contextual factors, such as the social stratus, family and school environment, daily events, etc. In this work we have focused particularly on analysing the differences in the objects of gratitude as a function of gender, age, and SES context to which children aged 8 to 10 belong to.

In general, our findings indicate that the reasons for gratitude most frequently mentioned by children are family, material objects or elements, school, friends, and other general reasons such as life, health, nature, etc. These results replicate the findings of Gordon et al. (2004), who distinguished the same themes when analysing situations that evoke gratitude in American children aged 12 and below, with a mean age of 9, similar to that of children in this study, except for the category of generals or abstract acknowledgments that the studio of Gordon et al. (2004) were less mentioned.

Family, food, housing, friends, teachers, and school are elements which acquire vital importance in childhood since they provide nothing less than survival, security, affection, stability, sense of belonging, and education. In particular, contextual factors external to the family exert great influence on children's psychosocial and moral development in contrast to the previous stage (early childhood) in which parental education prevails (Papalia, Wendkos-Olds & Duskin-Feldman, 2001).

With respect to gender, we found statistically significant results just for Group 1. Girls focus their gratitude on relationships with friends and family, whereas boys mention material objects, loans or assistance given as well as the autonomy granted by their parents with more frequency. Gordon et al. (2004) found the same trends, when analysing gender differences in school aged children. These results could be explained by the fact that females are likely to show a marked tendency towards filial affection and are more empathetic than males (Bromnick & Swallow, 2001, Calvo, González & Martorell, 2001, Garaigordobil & Durá, 2006, Infante et al., 2002, Garaigordobil & García de Galdeano,

2006). In the latter, however, materialism is more accentuated (Beutel & Marini, 1995), what might also explain why they feel more grateful for receiving loans or assistance. On the other hand, it is worthy to note that boys, unlike girls, have clearly emphasized gratitude for the autonomy granted by their parents. Different studies (Joussemet et al., 2008, McKee et al., 2007) indicate differential characteristics of parents' behaviour depending on children's gender. Generally, in Latin cultures major autonomy is granted to boys due to the fact that the cultural expectation concerning their role differ from that of girls (in fact, the former will be expected to assume the role of household heads, they will have to work outside the home, etc.) (Domenech-Rodríguez, Donovanick & Crowley, 2009). Particularly, in the Argentine culture, it can be noticed that girls need to feel safer and more protected by their fathers and they have to know that their mothers will be available for them when necessary so as to feel more competent. In this sense, boys are more autonomous and seem to depend less on their parents (Richaud, 2010, Richaud, Lemos & Vargas-Rubilar, 2014).

The fact that these differences did not surface in Group 2, is an invitation to continue studying the association between the experience of gratitude, the social construct of gender, and the particularities of the parent-child relationship, since its dynamic may take different nuances according to the cultural characteristics of the different social strata.

Regarding age, significant differences between gratitude motives of children were evidenced. Eight-year-old children are frequently grateful for being able to play, having toys, participating in enjoyable outdoor activities; whereas older ones highlight their family, first parents and then siblings, and mention useful material elements (except for ludic ones) as well as life. Once again, our results are similar to those reported by Gordon et al. (2004). Although family relationships are important for both younger and older children, games and ludic activities are two essential and priority elements of the early childhood experience. As children get older, their preferences and interests change. Their positive

emotions linked to ludic activities decrease while the ones linked to material possessions increase, giving place to more complex reasoning that allows, for instance, to be grateful for their own existence. Similar results have been reported in studies which have analysed the association between age and other positive emotions such as joy and happiness (Chaplin, 2008, Oros & Greco, 2009). This sudden change and appreciation for interpersonal relationships in early adolescence confirms the notion that as the child matures, egocentrism decreases and the social environment becomes more important (Gordon et al., 2004, Rose-Krasnor, 1997).

With regard to macrosocial differences, it seems that children who are in better SES conditions view as natural (but without ingratitude) the fact that their family has various material goods and basic attributes, such as food or a job; whereas children belonging to a less favourable SES show more gratitude for these aspects. Such difference could be explained by means of the adaptation principle, by which one could estimate that the capacity of wonder and assignment of value to particular advantages tends to decrease if they become more common. The possibility of having food on a daily basis and a stable family income is less uncertain and worrying for middle SES children than for lower SES children, which explains why the latter tend to overvalue these elements when they have them. Becker and Smenner's findings (1986) provide information that could support this interpretation. These authors found that middle SES children, unlike low SES children, showed less enthusiasm and were less frequently grateful for small presents, such as stickers, probably because they were used to receiving them in a family context. This situation in low SES children, however, was less habitual.

Another relevant difference relates to the sort of gratitude that children of group 1 frequently demonstrate for being able to enjoy outdoor activities, in contact with nature. This theme has not been significantly mentioned by children from group 2 and this might be due to the fact that while low SES children homes

are located in marginal neighborhoods with extensive opened spaces, uncultivated lands and quiet streets, that allow children to freely play outside and becoming their principal places of recreation, middle SES children spend most of their time in more urbanized and artificial habitats, playing mainly indoors or in regulated spaces, such as the club or school, being less habitual for them those activities that promote a free contact with nature.

For both groups, family and goods constitute the main objects of gratitude. Their ranking positioning, however, differs between the groups. Middle SES children mention the family (27.1% of the cases) over goods (14.4% of the cases, in which 8% corresponds to basic elements); whereas low SES children express more gratitude for goods (23.4%, in which 13.5% corresponds to basic elements) than family (18.8%). Once again, the focus on aspects that guarantee economic stability prevails in low SES children. Although this could be the result of genuine appreciation for basic needs, a more in-depth explanation could be essayed. It is likely that low SES children are conscious of the side effects that failing to satisfy basic needs entails over other aspects valued by them. Hence, they may place economic stability within most important gratitude themes. Quizá, many children from Group 2 may have been direct witnesses of the family's deterioration produced by unemployment, when there is not enough money to buy food, no housing, or when the latter does not fulfil the minimum comfort conditions. Marginalization and lack of basic survival elements impact on family cohesiveness and increase the number of crisis, produce chronic stress, irritability, depression, and anxiety. Additionally, they can further increase the probability of a parent being involved in alcoholism, committing suicide, getting involved in crime, and can predispose harmful parenting practices characterized by a lack of emotional support, low affection, and severe physical punishment (Bradley et al., 1994, Garrett, Ng'andu & Ferron, 1994, Lazarus, 2000, Patel & Kleinman, 2003, Smith & Sandhu, 2004). It seems reasonable to believe



that low SES children manifest gratitude, in the first place, for having certain economic stability which not only ensures their survival but also fosters better family connections as well as personal development.

In summary, the results of this study show that it is important to consider the demographic and contextual factors when analysing and interpreting the manifestation and expression of gratitude.

It is necessary to highlight the great similarity between the results of this study and the ones found in studies of different latitudes with the same aim (e. g., Gordon et al., 2004, Becker & Smenner, 1986), which can lead us to think that there is some kind of universality in the elements that arouse children's gratitude. Nevertheless, this question needs to be further examined.

Lastly, it is important to stress that literature shows gratitude as a tool that could improve youth's physical and psychological well-being (Froh, Yurkewicz, et al., 2009). The intervention to strengthen positive emotions should rely on psychological theory and current empirical work that guarantee effective results. Recognising the events that evoke gratitude in the different stages of childhood could be the main link to the subsequent design of intervention programs which adapt to children's needs considering their age, gender, and social context.

This study followed an exploratory and descriptive design using mixed methods (qualitative-quantitative) so new studies with an explanatory scope are required, which include the analysis of personal, familiar, and social predictive variables that influence the child's ability to detect motives of gratitude.

Moreover, this study did not include children of a high SES, which might have contributed more specific and representative information about the associations between gratitude and macrosocial differences. Another limitation of this study is that the association between the reasons for gratitude and age was evidenced through a cross-sectional design, thus making it recommendable to confirm these results with future studies with a longitudinal design.

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