

Gratitude and Addiction Recovery: Theory, Research, and Practice

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Driven to DiscoverSM

School of Social Work

Leadership for a Just and Caring Society

Gratitude and Addiction Recovery

- Part 1: Introduction to Gratitude
- Part 2: Theories about Gratitude
- Part 3: Research on Gratitude

Gratitude and Addiction Recovery

- **Part 1: Introduction to Gratitude**
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What is Gratitude?

“...pleasant ... linked with positive emotions” (Emmons & Shelton, 2002)

What is Gratitude?

Something that typically involves a person benefitting “from the costly, intentional, voluntary action of another person” (McCullough et al., 2008) that person is the “benefactor”

What is Gratitude?

Others say: gratitude doesn't need a "benefactor" it can be for any positive aspect of life: being grateful for the warm sunshine, grateful to be here, grateful for another day of life.

What is Gratitude?

Gratitude is felt especially in response to a gift that cannot be repaid (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000) or a gift that is in some way unearned (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

What is Gratitude?

Gratitude motivates us to reciprocate
(Emmons & Crumpler, 2000) either to the
benefactor or to another person (Bartlett
& DeSteno, 2006).

What is Gratitude?

Gratitude suggests a comparison to an alternative, less valuable state (Emmons & Shelton, 2002; Rusk et al., 2016).

“I’m grateful for this hot meal”

(This is better than a cold meal)

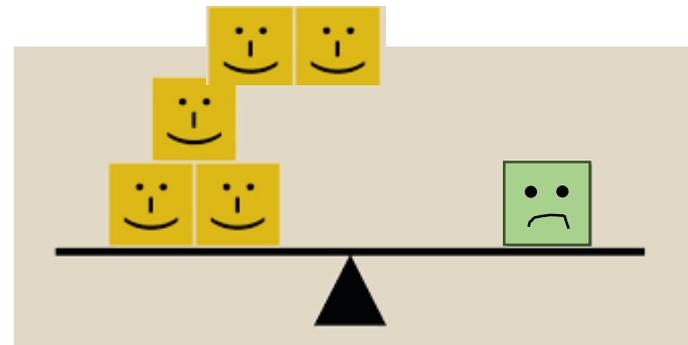
(This is better than going hungry)

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Negativity Bias

- Negative thoughts/ emotions/ experiences have a greater impact than neutral or positive experiences
- Evolutionary purpose
- It takes 5 positive events to neutralize 1 negative event (Gottman, 2000)



Hedonic Treadmill

- When especially good or especially bad things happen, we eventually return to stable level of happiness
- Improvements in life provide short-term happiness, then we become accustomed to them



Theory of the Maintenance of Behavior Change

- Individuals who are maintaining a behavior change regularly ask themselves

Is this worth it?

Is my life better now?

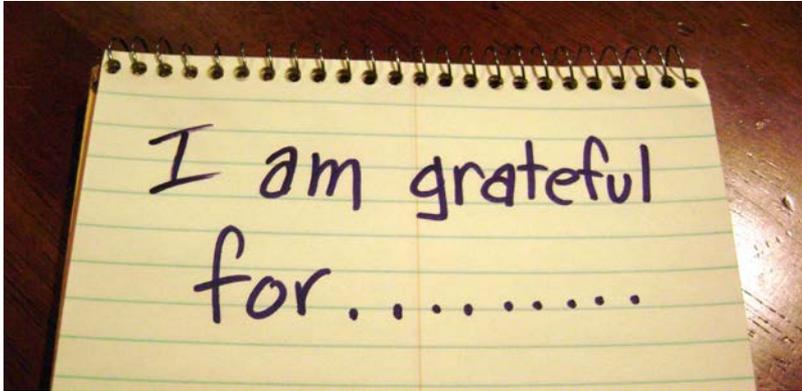
- The answer needs to be **Yes**

Rothman, 2000

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Gratitude in Treatment for Alcohol Use Disorders



How would a gratitude practice impact mood among individuals in treatment for an alcohol use disorder?

Procedure

- 23 individuals in treatment for alcohol use disorder
- Recruited from out patient substance use disorder treatment program
- Randomized into gratitude intervention or placebo

Gratitude Group

- Description of the first good thing that happened in the past 24 hours
- What was its cause? (what made this happen?)
- Description of the second good thing that happened in the past 24 hours
- What was its cause? (what made this happen?)
- Description of the third good thing that happened in the past 24 hours
- What was its cause? (what made this happen?)

Gratitude Group

- Description of the first good thing that happened in the past 24 hours
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- What was its cause? (what made this happen?)
- Description of the third good thing that happened in the past 24 hours
- What was its cause? (what made this happen?)

Comparison Group

- When and where slept, dozed, napped
- Exercise and when
- Caffeinated products consumed
- TV, computer, lights on while sleeping?
- Hour before you last feel asleep
- Hour after your final awakening

Procedure, Continued

- Participants answered questions (gratitude or sleep hygiene) and rated mood daily for 14 days
- 8 week follow up
- Qualitative exit interviews

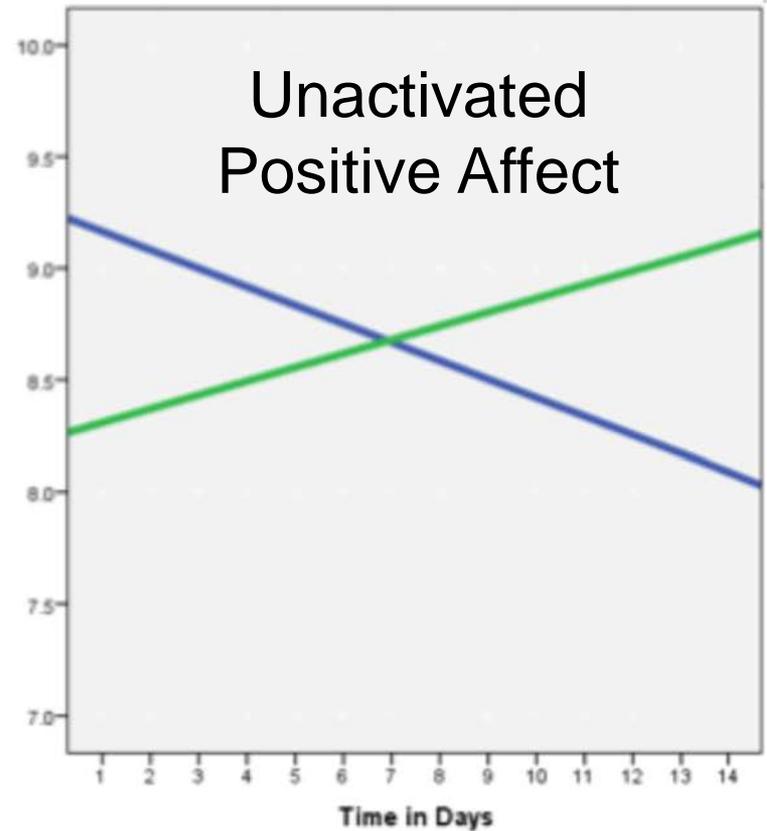
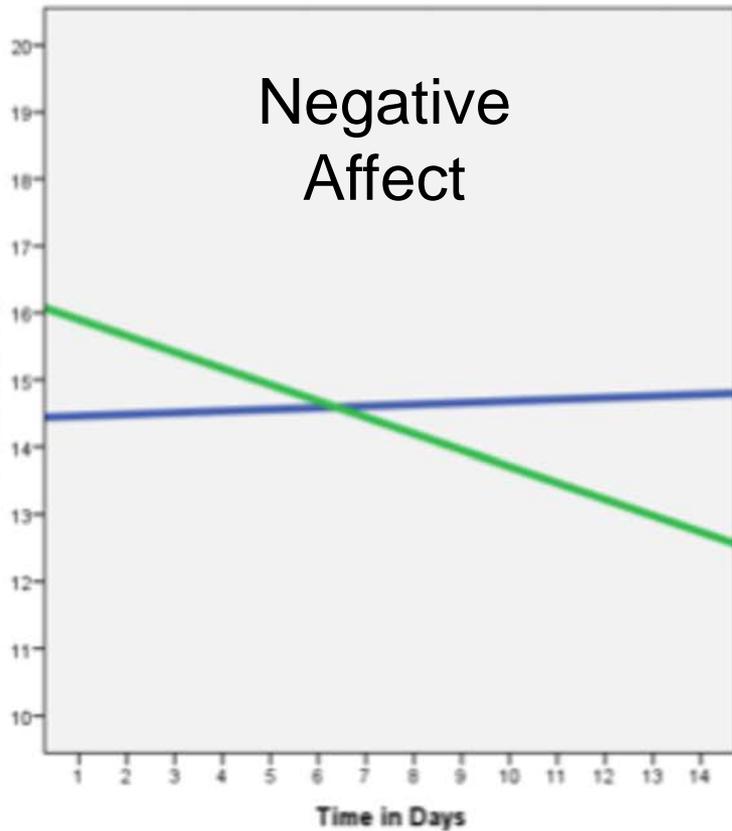
Major Outcomes

Activated Positive Affect	Unactivated Positive Affect	Negative Affect
Active Enthusiastic Determined Strong Inspired	Calm At ease Relaxed	Scared Afraid Upset Distressed Nervous

Results

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█ = Three Good Things (TGT) Gratitude group
█ = Control group

Implications for Practice

- The exercise was difficult for some people: provide coaching

Places to Find Good Things

- Weather
- Nice exchange with another person
- Small accomplishment
- Anything fun or enjoyable
- Moment of kindness or encouragement
- Good idea you had
- Saw or heard something beautiful
- Feeling relief about something

Implications for Practice, Continued

- Some individuals could not think of 3 good things
- They had lower levels of education
- Provide structure and positive reinforcement
- Encourage ongoing practice: mood benefit did not persist at 8 week follow up

Gratitude and Future Drinking among Individuals Treated for Alcohol Use Disorder



Do high levels of gratitude 6 months after treatment predict abstinence 12 months after treatment?

Procedure

- 67 individuals with alcohol dependence
- All entered abstinence-based treatment at baseline
- Treatment did not include gratitude practices
- This was not a study of gratitude interventions

Results

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Gratitude at 6 Months Did Not Predict Percent Days Abstinent at 12 Months

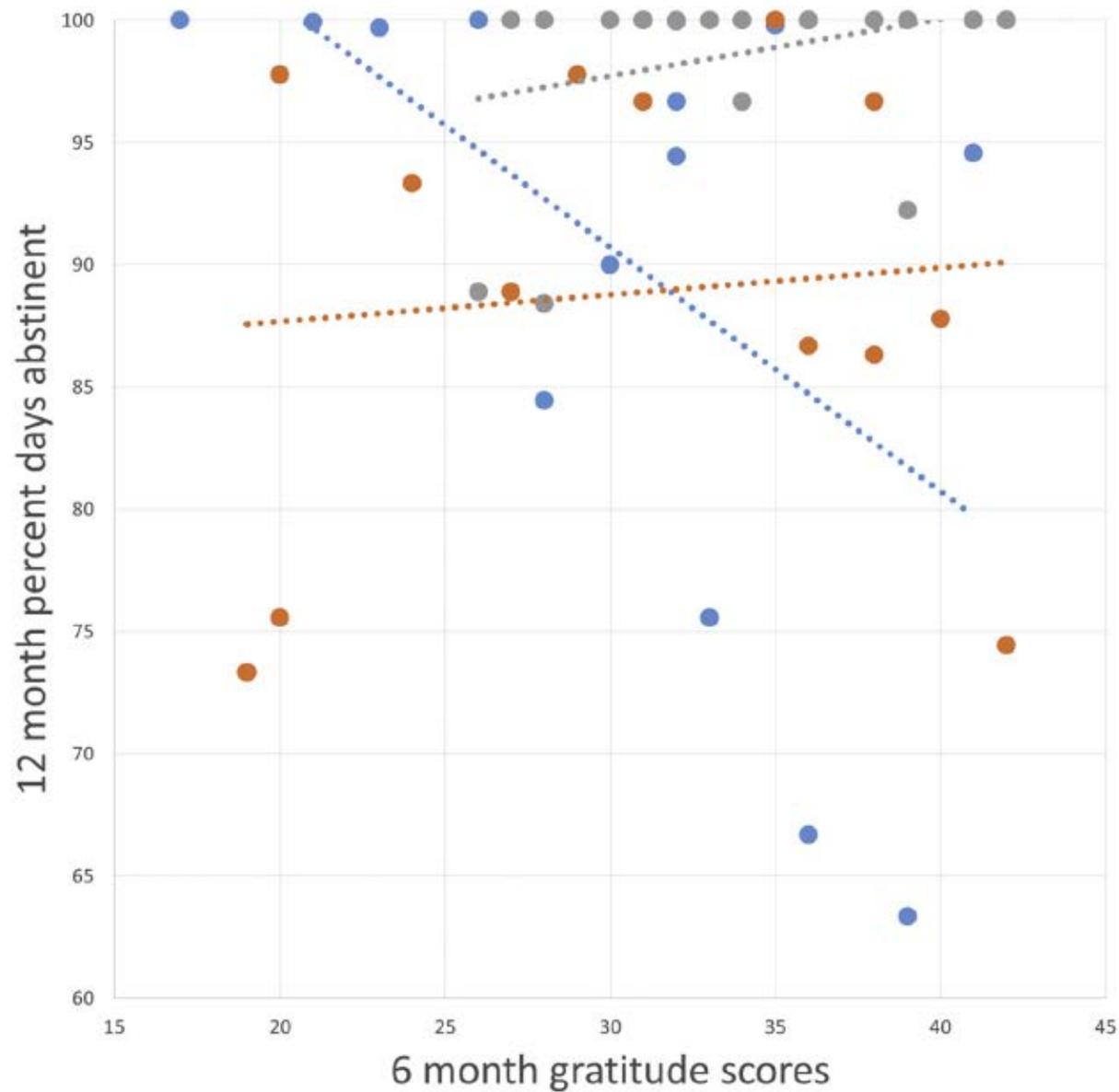
Outcome: 12-month Percent Days Abstinent (arcsine transformed)	Model 1
6-Month Gratitude	0.0022

Controlling for baseline gratitude and age

Gratitude at 6 Months Did Not Predict Percent Days Abstinent at 12 Months

Outcome: 12-month Percent Days Abstinent (arcsine transformed)	Model 1	Model 2
6-Month Gratitude	0.0022	0.0008
6-Month Percent Days Abstinent	0.0062*	0.0103***
6-Month Gratitude x 6-Month Percent Days Abstinent		0.0007*

Controlling for baseline gratitude and age



- 44-88% days abstinent at 6 months (n=14)
- 92-99% days abstinent at 6 months (n=13)
- 100% days abstinent at 6 months (n=39)

Implications for Practice

- Gratitude exercises might be most beneficial for individuals who are maintaining abstinence
- Gratitude exercises might not help initiate abstinence

Overall Conclusions

- Potential for gratitude exercises to be used to improve mood
- Provide coaching and modeling for gratitude exercises
- Gratitude exercises might not be helpful for initiation of abstinence but appear useful for maintenance of abstinence

Gratitude Exercises

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Gratitude Exercises

Good things that happened today	Things I am grateful for

Gratitude Exercises

Good things that happened today	Things I am grateful for
Reached 90 days clean and sober	My recovery
Enjoyed watching it snow	Doctors and nurses
New yarn for blanket	Dogs
My daughter painted me a butterfly	Not being in jail

With Thanks!

- NIAAAA
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- Colleagues
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- Research Assistants

Thank You and Best Wishes!

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