

How Honesty Shapes the Personal and Interpersonal Benefits of Gratitude

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Honesty is highly valued in our close relationships, yet much of our understanding of honesty in interpersonal contexts has focused on the effects of sharing threatening information. In the current work, we examine how honesty may promote benefits in positive contexts, particularly during expressions of gratitude between romantic partners. Specifically, we examined whether expressed, perceived, and accurate perceptions of honesty about gratitude strengthen personal and relationship well-being. Romantic couples ($N_{\text{couples}} = 214$, $N_{\text{individuals}} = 418$) participated in a 14-day daily experience study (Study 1a) and a background survey, in-person lab interaction, and 3-month follow-up survey (Study 1b). Couples reported on their expressed and perceived honesty about a gratitude event, well-being, and felt appreciation. Results indicated that expressed honesty predicted intrapersonal benefits, with those who were more honest in their gratitude expressions experiencing greater personal and relationship well-being in the moment and across daily life. Perceived honesty predicted both intra- and interpersonal benefits. Those who perceived a partner to be honest about gratitude experienced greater personal well-being, relationship satisfaction, and felt gratitude in the moment, across daily life, and over time; additionally, their partners experienced greater relationship well-being in the moment and across daily life. Accurate perceptions of honest gratitude expressions did not predict any outcomes. Results could not be explained by baseline relationship satisfaction, expresser authenticity, or (perceived) gratitude intensity. Collectively, these results indicate that perceiving greater honesty about gratitude—regardless of a partner’s actual honesty or accuracy in perceiving that honesty—is most consequential to couple well-being and feelings of being appreciated.

Keywords: gratitude, honesty, interpersonal relationships, relationship satisfaction, well-being

Honesty is highly valued across societies, being a central component of moral character and relationship development (Anderson, 1968; LaFollette & Graham, 1986; Mogilski et al., 2019). Honesty can be conceptualized as the expression of truthful thoughts while also not lying or omitting information (DePaulo et al., 1996; LaFollette & Graham, 1986; Miller, 2021; Reynolds et al., 2025). Recent models of honesty have highlighted that honesty is not merely the expression of truth without lying but an interpersonal communication process by which the truth is expressed in ways that foster an accurate understanding in others (Cooper et al., 2023; J. H. Fritz, 2020). Conceptualizing honesty as an interpersonal process is important because it emphasizes the need to understand the relational outcomes of honesty.

Within interpersonal contexts, research has indicated that there are both costs and benefits of being honest about threatening or negative information (Fulham et al., 2022; Le et al., 2025; E. E. Levine et al., 2020, 2023). Broadly, findings from this research have indicated that being honest in difficult conversations tends to benefit relationships more than it harms them, despite the fact that people often believe that sharing truthful, but threatening, information will hurt others’ feelings. While the interpersonal outcomes of honesty in negative contexts are well understood, the relational effects of honesty in *positive* contexts have largely been overlooked. Examining the personal and relational effects of honesty in positive contexts affords a unique opportunity to understand the extent to which communicating and (mis)understanding honesty can shape relationship outcomes for better or for worse.

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In the current work, we examine how honesty may promote relational benefits when sharing positive information through *expressions of gratitude*. We focus on gratitude given it is one of the most central positive emotions in promoting relationship well-being (Algoe, 2012) and yet can be challenging to express (Kumar & Epley, 2018). Examining honesty in this relationship-building context can provide insights on how sharing the truth about positive information promotes stronger relationships. Informed by recent interpersonal models of honesty (Cooper et al., 2023; J. H. Fritz, 2020), the current work focuses on three aspects of honesty: an individual's honest expression of gratitude, a recipient's perception of honest gratitude expressions, and the emergent shared perception that occurs when recipients accurately perceive higher levels of expressers' honesty about gratitude. Consistent with the conceptualization of honesty as an interpersonal communication process, we also examine the moderating effects of an expresser's communication style, or the way they share their expression of gratitude. We focus on key forms of communication relevant to honesty, including how benevolent, blunt, disclosing, and restrained individuals are in their expressions of gratitude.

The Relationship-Building Nature of Gratitude

Gratitude, which arises when receiving a benefit or kind act from another person, is central to building close and satisfying relationships (Algoe, 2012). Gratitude helps individuals recognize who is important in their lives. It highlights the valuable actions that are given and received within relationships, fostering care and intimacy (Algoe, 2012; Algoe et al., 2008, 2013). In romantic relationships in particular, gratitude has been found to promote greater satisfaction, relationship maintenance, and perceived relationship strength (Algoe et al., 2010; Gordon et al., 2012; Lambert et al., 2010).

Despite its importance, people are not always honest about their gratitude. Specifically, people may both under- and overexpress their gratitude for different reasons, with research indicating that these omissions and exaggerations of gratitude compromise relational bonds. For example, when people consider the impact of expressing gratitude to a recipient, their forecasts of its effects are often inaccurate. Research has indicated that people tend to overestimate how uncomfortable it would feel to express gratitude and underestimate how positive a recipient would feel from receiving gratitude (Kumar & Epley, 2018). These misperceptions hamper the honest expression of gratitude, creating missed opportunities to strengthen relational bonds.

Although egocentric biases may lead individuals toward dishonest expressions of gratitude through omission, people at the same time realize that gratitude is relationally important and may be inclined to overexpress gratitude they do not feel. Thus, in actual social exchanges, people may be motivated to express gratitude dishonestly in the moment, such as when receiving a gift they do not like. Indeed, people have been found to overexpress or exaggerate gratitude to their romantic partners in daily life; even if well-intentioned, doing so predicts lower well-being and satisfaction for both partners (Shimshock et al., 2025). Thus, how we express gratitude matters when it comes to promoting relationship benefits (Park et al., 2021).

Altogether, research has indicated that biases about gratitude as well as challenges to expressing gratitude in ways that promote positive outcomes can be barriers to leveraging gratitude's benefits.

In the current work, we examine whether honest expressions and perceptions of gratitude may be one avenue for promoting gratitude's benefits. Specifically, truthful expressions of gratitude that detail all that one appreciates about a partner's acts or qualities may be key to overcoming the barriers to benefiting from gratitude.

Honesty as a Key Component to the Benefits of Gratitude

We conducted a multimethod study to examine whether an *expresser's honesty* about a point of gratitude, a recipient's *perceived honesty* about an expresser's gratitude, and a recipient's *accurate perceptions* of higher expresser honesty predict benefits in relationships. We preregistered three sets of hypotheses capturing how each of these components of honesty independently or collectively predict greater personal well-being, relationship satisfaction, and recipient felt appreciation in the moment, in daily life, and in the longer term.

Our first set of hypotheses proposes that greater *expresser honesty about gratitude* would predict personal and relationship benefits. Individuals who express themselves honestly have been found to experience greater subjective well-being and health (Allan & Albal-Fisch, 2015; ten Brinke et al., 2015; Weziak-Bialowolska et al., 2021). Being honest about gratitude in particular may magnify personal well-being given that the expression of positive emotions, and gratitude in particular, is associated with greater well-being (Fredrickson & Cohn, 2008). Being honest about gratitude may boost personal well-being through the combination of promoting feelings of being moral and good from being honest, in addition to broadening and building the honest individuals' thought and behavioral patterns in ways that allow them to engage in and strengthen their relationship with their partner. Thus, being honest about gratitude may provide the opportunity to increase connection with one's partner about a valued element in the relationship and encourage partners to continue these acts, which should boost an expresser's well-being. Honest expressions of gratitude may also magnify the benefits to a recipient whose qualities or kind acts are acknowledged in truthful ways. Relationally, honesty has been theorized to foster closeness and intimacy (LaFollette & Graham, 1986). Given the relational benefits of honesty, being truthful about relationship-promoting emotions such as gratitude should be especially important for strengthening relationships, promoting satisfaction for both expressers and recipients. Thus, we hypothesized that greater expresser honesty about gratitude would promote greater expresser and recipient personal well-being and relationship satisfaction as well as greater recipient felt appreciation in the moment, in daily life, and over time.

In contrast to our first set of hypotheses, in which we expect expressed honesty to be mutually beneficial for the self and partner, we predict that perceiving honesty will benefit recipients more than expressers. Specifically, we propose that greater *recipient perceived honesty about gratitude* will predict greater relationship well-being for both the expresser and recipient, but greater personal well-being for the recipient only. Recipients likely experience greater personal well-being when perceiving their partners as honest, given that they may see their partners as being moral and good. Furthermore, they may see that their partners are expressing themselves in authentic and true ways, indicating that they are sincere in recognizing one of their qualities or kind acts (Leong et al., 2020) rather than behaving in normative, expected, or contrived ways. Additionally, perceiving

a partner to be honest about their gratitude likely contributes to greater recipient well-being because they feel they can trust that their partner's positive regard is truthful, making them feel that they are needed and valued; this perceived honesty may also prompt recipients to feel good about their acts, which may encourage them to continue with such acts in the future. Finally, perceiving a partner to be honest in their gratitude expressions is important for recipient well-being such that it can protect them from the negative feelings that arise when they do not believe their partner is being truthful about their gratitude. While perceiving a partner as honest about gratitude may benefit recipients, expressers are unlikely to experience greater personal well-being from recipients' mere perceptions of honest gratitude given that these positive illusions exist in recipients' own minds and are disconnected from expressers' actual thoughts, behaviors, and outcomes.

Interpersonally, perceived honesty about gratitude may shape relationship outcomes holistically for the self and partner. When recipients perceive their partners as being honest, this may shape their interactions, prompting them to engage in more pro-relationship behaviors that benefit their partners. Seeing a partner as honest may facilitate feelings of trust, satisfaction, and commitment in recipients, promoting relationship well-being for both expressers and recipients. Indeed, meta-analytic research has indicated that the characteristics we perceive in relationship partners, relative to their actual characteristics, are more predictive of relationship satisfaction (Joel et al., 2020). Thus, recipients benefit relationally from seeing positive qualities and expressions from their partners, and expressers also benefit relationally from pro-relationship behaviors and feelings that recipients adopt when they perceive their partners as honest, truthful, and moral. Taken together, we hypothesized that perceived honesty would shape outcomes most for recipients who see their partners in a positive light through promoting their personal well-being and felt appreciation in the moment, in daily life, and over time. Additionally, expressers may also benefit relationally from being perceived as honestly grateful, with both relationship partners experiencing greater satisfaction in the moment, in daily life, and over time.

Our final set of hypotheses proposes that greater *recipient accuracy of higher, relative to lower, expresser honesty about gratitude* would predict personal and relationship benefits for both partners. That is, for the benefits of honest gratitude expressions to emerge, it may be important that recipients are able to discern that gratitude messages are truthful. It may not be enough that expressers are truthful in what they are grateful for if this message is lost upon their partners. In other words, if recipients do not believe their partners mean what they say, or are skeptical of the veracity or sincerity of their partner's gratitude, they are unlikely to see the good in their partner or reap the benefits of feeling that they did something that benefited their partner; instead, they may feel as though their kindness was not acknowledged or internalized by their partner, compromising, rather than boosting, their well-being. Similarly, partners with an inaccurate positive illusion for a truthful gratitude expression may feel and foster closeness with a partner who does not feel sentiments as positively as they believe. That is, recipients who have a misplaced belief that their partners are moral, truthful, and sincere in their acknowledgments about the good in their relationship may build unwarranted trust in their partner, maintaining a relationship built on false pretenses or beliefs to the detriment of their well-being. Thus, it may be that couples need to be accurate in

their perceptions of truthful gratitude expressions to foster positive feelings and mutual understanding (Andersen & Przybylinski, 2018; Sened et al., 2017). And more specifically, accurate perceptions of expressed honesty may benefit the self and others most when expressers are more truthful about their gratitude. That is, accurately perceiving a partner's low levels of honesty would likely compromise personal and relationship well-being, given the betrayed sense of trust recipients may feel when they realize they cannot believe what their partner is saying in the good times of their relationship; this likely causes strain for both expressers, who may be "caught" fibbing about the good in their relationship, and recipients, who may feel hurt from their partner's lack of sincerity. This is in contrast to the benefits of accuracy at high levels of honesty. Here, both expressers and recipients are likely to benefit. Expressers may reap the benefits of feeling good, moral, and having broadened thought and behavioral patterns that promote their relationship. Recipients may feel greater well-being through seeing their partner as good and sincere, with those perceptions being grounded in actual positive qualities versus misplaced or misjudged illusions about their partner; further, recipients would feel valued and important, with these feelings being tied to a partner that does in reality possess these positive, relationship-building feelings. Thus, we predicted that accurate perceptions of higher, relative to lower, honest gratitude expressions would predict greater personal and relationship well-being for both partners in the moment and over time. We also predicted that greater accuracy would be associated with greater recipient felt appreciation in the moment and over time.

We test our hypotheses in a multimethod study of romantic couples. In Study 1a, a dyadic 14-day daily experience survey, we examined whether expressed and perceived honesty during daily exchanges of gratitude shapes well-being and felt appreciation naturalistically in daily life. In Study 1b, we examined whether expressed, perceived, and accurate perceptions of honesty shaped outcomes during a lab exchange of gratitude and 3 months later. Given social desirability concerns related to reporting on honesty, we examined the effects of both self-reported and observer-rated honesty on outcomes in the lab. Further, given that the way an honest message is conveyed may impact a recipient's reception of this information (J. H. Fritz, 2020; E. E. Levine et al., 2020), we tested whether an expresser's communication style—including how benevolent, blunt, disclosing, and restrained expressers were—shaped the benefits of honesty. Finally, we sought to rule out third-variable explanations for our effects, including whether partners were simply more satisfied in their relationships to start and whether the benefits of honesty could be explained by an expresser's authenticity and the (perceived) intensity of an expresser's gratitude expression.

Study 1a: The Benefits of Expressed and Perceived Honesty About Gratitude in Daily Life

In Study 1a, couples completed a 14-day daily experience survey that allowed us to capture multiple instances in which partners expressed and perceived gratitude in daily life, providing high reliability and capturing couples' interactions naturalistically (Bolger et al., 2003). In this study, expressers and recipients reported on instances in which they expressed or perceived gratitude in their relationship each day. We tested the independent effects of expressed and perceived honesty about gratitude, and not accurate perceptions of gratitude, in this study, given that partners may not

have always reported on identical gratitude events due to the diary design. We also sought to rule out that any effects of expressed and perceived honesty could be explained by an expresser's gratitude intensity or a recipient's perceived gratitude intensity. In Study 1b, then, we additionally test questions about accuracy given we could ensure that partners reported on the same gratitude event during an in-person discussion.

Method

We recruited 214 romantic couples (428 individuals) using ads posted on Facebook and around our university. Participants were informed to complete their daily surveys independent of one another and to not discuss their responses. Our target sample size was 200 couples, which aimed to exceed sample sizes in previous research examining similar questions (Le et al., 2020; Overall et al., 2006, 2009). When we reached our target sample size in 2023, we had 14 additional couples registered to complete the study. We retained these couples for increased power and to account for attrition (i.e., survey nonresponses). We did not compute a priori power analyses. Thus, using our collected data, we estimated effective sample sizes, or the sample sizes that would be needed to detect the observed effects in our data based on the degree of nonindependence in our data (Gordon & Thorson, 2024). First, we used G*Power 3.1 to calculate the effective sample size needed to detect a small effect ($r = 0.10$) at 90% power as 1,046 participants. We then used the design effect equation to calculate the required sample size based on the number of repeated measures (i.e., diaries) and intraclass correlation coefficients (ICCs) of all expresser and recipient outcome variables. The ICCs revealed that 23%–44% of the variance in the outcomes was attributed to between-person variability. Therefore, across these outcomes, the required sample size ranged from 299 to 498 participants, each completing 14 diaries (i.e., 4,187 to 6,974 total observations) in order to detect a small effect size at 90% power. Additionally, the effective sample size is further reduced due to additional nonindependence in the data due to both couple members completing each diary on the same day.

Our materials (e.g., preregistrations, measures, analysis scripts, and supplement) are posted online on the Open Science Framework for Studies 1a and 1b at the following links, respectively: <https://osf.io/63fxj/> and <https://osf.io/5zh4g/>. We posted our preregistrations prior to the completion of data collection. No modifications to the preregistrations were made after they were posted on the Open Science Framework. Any deviations from the preregistered plan have been fully reported. Data are posted but remain private to protect participant confidentiality. The first author can be contacted to access the data.

Participation in the study was open to individuals of all sexual orientations. Couples were in a relationship for 15.15 years on average ($SD = 11.96$), with 53.27% of participants being in monogamous marriages; 43.94% being in unmarried, monogamous relationships; and the remaining participants being in open or polyamorous marriages or relationships, being unmarried, or not reporting their status. The demographic characteristics of our sample are as follows: The average participant age was 35.94 years old ($SD = 13.68$; range = 18–87); 46.73% of participants reported being male, 49.77% reported being female, and the remaining reported being gender variant/nonconforming or other or did not report their gender; 80.61% of participants reported being White,

7.71% Asian, 3.50% biracial, 2.34% Black or African American, 2.10% other ethnicity (e.g., Hispanic, Puerto Rican, Afro-Caribbean, Guyanese), and 1.64% multiracial; one participant was American Indian or Alaskan; and eight participants did not report their ethnicity. For their highest level of education, 37.62% of participants held a bachelor's degree; 22.90% held a master's degree; 20.79% completed high school or some university; 7.94% held an associate's, vocational, or 2-year degree; 3.74% held a PhD or MD degree; 2.57% held a JD, MBA, or other 2- or 3-year graduate degree; 14 participants stated "other" for their education level; three participants did not complete high school; and two participants did not state their education. Participants reported an average annual income in the range of \$30,000 to \$39,999 ($Mdn = \$40,000$ to \$49,999; range = less than \$100,000 to \$250,000 or more), with 53% identifying as middle class, 23.36% identifying as upper middle class, 17.06% identifying as lower middle class, 20 participants identifying as lower class, five identifying as upper class, and two not stating their social class.

Along with the 14-day daily experience survey, couples completed a background survey and lab interaction (prior to the diary) and a 3-month follow-up survey after completing the diary (these other portions of the study are described in Study 1b). For the daily surveys, couples received short 10–15 min surveys via email over 16 consecutive days. Couples were asked to complete surveys for 14 days and were provided two extra diaries to complete in the case that they missed days during the 2-week period. Couples received the surveys after 5 p.m. each day to ensure they had time to interact that day prior to answering the survey. They were asked to complete their surveys before midnight, when the survey automatically closed each day, to ensure they both reported on events within the same day. Compliance was good, with couples completing 89% ($M = 12.56$; $SD = 2.92$) of the diaries on average (Min = 1, Max = 17;¹ total diaries = 5,340). On average, participants reported expressing gratitude on 63% of days. Participants reported perceiving gratitude from their partner on 56% of days. In addition, the average amount of days that participants reported expressing gratitude, and their partner reported perceiving gratitude, was 37% of days.

Measures

Unless otherwise noted, all measures were averaged into a composite and measured on 7-point Likert scales (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). Within-person reliability for all measures is reported (R_c ; Bolger & Laurenceau, 2013).

Diary Measures. *Expresser honesty* was assessed on days when participants reported expressing gratitude to their partner. Specifically, these were days that participants reported 2, 3, 4, or 5 on at least one of the following three questions (1 = *not at all*, 2 = *a little*, 3 = *somewhat*, 4 = *a lot*, 5 = *very much so*, 6 = *prefer not to say*): "Today, I told my partner about something that I appreciated in our relationship," "Today, I told my partner about something they did that made me feel grateful," and "Today, I told my partner about something they did that I liked." Participant responses of a 6 (i.e., *prefer not to say*) were excluded from analyses. Expresser honesty

¹ One participant received an extra diary and completed 17 survey responses. We retained all diary reports to capitalize on as many instances of expressed and perceived gratitude that occurred over the course of the study.

was assessed using seven items tapping honest communication in relationships (Le et al., 2025; Reynolds et al., 2025). This measure captures key facets of honesty, including truthfulness (e.g., “I shared my honest thoughts with my partner”), (reverse-scored) omission of information (e.g., “I withheld some of my thoughts and feelings from my partner”), and (reverse-scored) lying and deceit (e.g., “I said something that was not true”). The expressed honesty items were answered in response to the stem, “When you told your partner about something that you liked, appreciated, or were grateful for, how much did you do the following?” ($R_c = 0.81$, $M = 6.55$, $SD = 0.64$).

Recipient perceived honesty was assessed on days when participants reported they perceived partner expressed gratitude. These were days that participants reported 2, 3, 4, or 5 on at least one of the following three questions (1 = *not at all*, 2 = *a little*, 3 = *somewhat*, 4 = *a lot*, 5 = *very much so*, 6 = *prefer not to say*): “Today, my partner told me about something that they appreciated in our relationship,” “Today, my partner told me about something I did that made them feel grateful,” and “Today, my partner told me about something I did that they liked.” Responses of a 6 were excluded from analyses (i.e., *prefer not to say*). Participants answered seven perceived honesty items mirroring those for expressed honesty (Le et al., 2025; Reynolds et al., 2025) in response to the stem, “When your partner told you about something that they liked, appreciated, or were grateful for, how much did they do the following?” ($R_c = 0.80$, $M = 6.49$, $SD = 0.66$).

Expresser emotional well-being was assessed with positive (one item) and negative (four items) emotions (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *a lot*; Le et al., 2020). These emotions were assessed following the stem, “When you told your partner about something that you appreciated, were grateful for, or liked, how much did you feel the following?”: “happy, pleased, joyful,” “sad, depressed, down,” “anxious, stressed, nervous,” “angry, irritable, frustrated,” and “resentful toward my partner.” Negative emotion items were reverse-scored and averaged with the positive emotion item to create an emotional well-being composite ($R_c = 0.80$, $M = 6.52$, $SD = 0.65$).

Recipient emotional well-being was assessed with three items after the stem, “Please answer the following statements about how you felt when your partner told you about something they liked, appreciated, or were grateful for”: “happy, pleased, joyful,” “My partner’s gratitude made me feel good,” and “My partner’s gratitude made me feel bad/uncomfortable/annoyed” (1 = *not at all* to 5 = *very much so*; Shimshock et al., 2025). The negative emotion item was reverse-scored and then averaged with the remaining three items to create a composite emotional well-being measure ($R_c = 0.57$, $M = 4.38$, $SD = 0.63$).

Expresser relationship quality was assessed with five items (Impett et al., 2013) answered after the following stem, “Please rate the following based on how you felt when you told your partner about something that you appreciated, were grateful for, or liked”: “I felt satisfied with my relationship,” “I felt close to my partner,” “I felt love for my partner,” “I experienced tension in my relationship with my partner (reversed),” and “I experienced conflict with my partner (reversed)” ($R_c = 0.70$, $M = 6.41$, $SD = 0.73$).

Recipient relationship quality was assessed with the same five items as described for expresser relationship quality. Due to an oversight, we inadvertently excluded recipient relationship quality items for the specific days in which recipients reported perceiving a point of gratitude from their partner. Thus, we assess recipient

relationship quality as reported for the day generally ($R_c = 0.74$, $M = 6.21$, $SD = 0.90$).

Recipient felt appreciation was assessed with the item “appreciated” in response to the stem, “Please answer the following statements about how you felt when your partner told you about something they liked, appreciated, or were grateful for” (1 = *not at all* to 5 = *very much so*; Gordon et al., 2012; $M = 4.17$, $SD = 0.86$).²

Results

We conducted analyses in R 4.4.3 (R Core Team, 2025) using the *lme4* (Bates et al., 2015) and *lmerTest* (Kuznetsova et al., 2017) packages. We conducted multilevel modeling with participants nested in couples and with days crossed. Nesting participants in couples allowed us to account for dependencies between partners’ reports, and crossing days allowed us to account for dependencies that occur from partners completing diaries on the same day. Intercepts were specified as random and slopes as fixed. Actor expressed honesty and recipient perceived honesty were entered as simultaneous predictors of the outcomes, with both predictors being decomposed into their within-person (Level 1, person-centered) and between-person (Level 2, aggregated and grand-centered) components. Both within and between components of the predictors were entered in all models to test our key hypotheses in the diary, allowing us to examine how daily fluctuations and chronic individual differences in honesty predict outcomes. To prevent singular fit and model convergence issues, we did not model correlations between the random parameters and/or used maximum likelihood, rather than restricted maximum likelihood, estimation as needed. However, we note that in all models, modeling correlations between the random parameters and specifying restricted maximum likelihood estimation negligibly change all reported estimates. We were primarily interested in testing our hypotheses at the daily, within-person level (Level 1) but also explore if we find consistent effects between person (at Level 2). All results appear in Table 1. Bivariate variable associations appear in additional online Tables S1 and S2 (<https://osf.io/7vz2n/files/7jgqb>). All tables and figures with numbers preceded by an S appear in the supplement.

First, in examining the descriptive statistics of expressed and perceived honesty, we find that people tended to be highly honest about their gratitude and see their partners as highly honest about their gratitude in daily life. Turning to our tests of hypotheses, we found that these expressions and perceptions of honesty had positive effects for couples. Specifically, we found that greater expresser honesty predicted benefits for expressers at both the within- and between-person levels. Specifically, the more honest expressers were about gratitude on a given day relative to their average across days, the greater their daily emotional well-being and relationship quality; greater daily expresser honesty also marginally predicted greater recipient emotional well-being and relationship quality. Additionally, expressers who were higher, relative to lower, in their chronic levels of honesty about their daily gratitude for their partner experienced greater emotional well-being and relationship quality. Higher chronic expresser honesty also marginally predicted greater recipient relationship quality across the diary days. Within- and

² We note that retesting our hypotheses using all outcomes measured generally at the daily level, rather than specific to the gratitude experience, yields consistent results to those reported in the current article.

Table 1*Within- and Between-Person Effects of Honesty About Gratitude on Daily Outcomes (Study 1a)*

Outcome	Expresser honesty				Recipient perceived honesty			
	<i>b</i>	95% CI		<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	95% CI		<i>p</i>
		<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
Within-person effects								
Expresser emotional well-being	0.292	0.237	0.347	<.001	0.039	-0.023	0.100	.219
Expresser relationship quality	0.406	0.348	0.464	<.001	0.078	0.013	0.144	.019
Recipient emotional well-being	0.043	-0.004	0.091	.073	0.431	0.376	0.484	<.001
Recipient relationship quality	0.078	-0.003	0.158	.060	0.404	0.314	0.494	<.001
Recipient felt appreciation	0.050	-0.020	0.119	.162	0.504	0.425	0.581	<.001
Between-person effects								
Expresser emotional well-being	0.571	0.492	0.65	<.001	0.058	-0.013	0.129	.110
Expresser relationship quality	0.777	0.701	0.852	<.001	0.125	0.054	0.196	<.001
Recipient emotional well-being	0.049	-0.029	0.127	.223	0.578	0.506	0.649	<.001
Recipient relationship quality	0.095	-0.003	0.194	.059	0.743	0.654	0.833	<.001
Recipient felt appreciation	0.028	-0.020	0.119	.626	0.717	0.616	0.819	<.001

Note. Values are unstandardized multilevel coefficients and associated 95% CIs and *p* values. Both within- and between-person components of expresser honesty and recipient perceived honesty served as predictors in the daily models. Within-person effects indicate values for the person-mean-centered Level 1 effects. Between-person effects indicate values for the aggregated, grand-centered Level 2 effects. Significant effects are presented in bold. CI = confidence interval; *LL* = lower limit; *UL* = upper limit.

between-person effects for expressed honesty about gratitude did not significantly predict any outcomes for recipients. Thus, people who were more honest about their gratitude in daily life and chronically higher in honest gratitude expressions experienced greater personal and relationship well-being.

Recipient perceived honesty also predicted benefits at both the within- and between-person levels, with these benefits observed for both expressers and recipients. Specifically, the more that recipients perceived their partners to be honest about their gratitude expressions on a given day relative to their average across days, the greater their emotional well-being, relationship quality, and felt appreciation; greater daily recipient perceived honesty also predicted greater expresser relationship quality. Additionally, recipients who were higher, relative to lower, in their chronic perceptions of expresser honesty experienced greater emotional well-being, relationship quality, and felt appreciation across diary days; additionally, their partners (expressers) experienced greater relationship quality across the diary days. Thus, people who perceived more honesty in their partners' gratitude in daily life and were chronically higher in perceived partner honesty experienced greater personal and relationship well-being themselves, with their partners experiencing greater relationship quality as well.³

Last, we sought to rule out the possibility that the benefits of expressed and perceived honesty could simply be explained by greater expresser gratitude intensity or greater recipient perceived gratitude intensity. Specifically, expressions and perceptions of gratitude are reliably linked to greater personal and relationship well-being (Algoe, 2012); thus, it could simply be that more intense expressions and perceptions of gratitude are strengthening relationships in daily life, rather than greater truthfulness of these gratitude expressions. To this end, in a set of exploratory analyses, we retested our hypotheses controlling for expresser gratitude intensity (using the average of the three items previously described capturing the extent expressers reported gratitude on a given day). In a separate set of models, we retested our hypotheses, controlling for recipient perceived gratitude intensity (using the average of the three items

previously reported capturing recipients' reported perception of partner gratitude on a given day). As shown in additional online Tables S3 and S4 (<https://osf.io/7vz2n/files/7jgqb>), all of the observed effects of expressed and perceived honesty held after accounting for expresser and recipient perceived gratitude intensity. Thus, the benefits of expressed and perceived honesty in daily life could not be explained by expressers being higher in gratitude intensity or recipients perceiving greater gratitude intensity.

Study 1b: Honesty and Gratitude During Social Interactions

In Study 1b, we examine the effects of expressed, perceived, and accurate perceptions of honesty concurrently after expressions of gratitude in the lab and over time 3 months later. To test our hypotheses, we use both subjective self-report (all measures) and observational measures (for expressed honesty and well-being), the latter of which are devoid of self-presentation and social desirability concerns. In addition to testing our full three sets of hypotheses, we examine whether an expresser's communication style magnifies honesty's benefits (J. H. Fritz, 2020; E. E. Levine et al., 2020). Finally, we sought to rule out third-variable explanations that expressers' and recipients' baseline satisfaction, expressers' authenticity, and expressers' and recipients' perceived gratitude intensity may explain the benefits of honesty.

Method

Study 1b included the same 214 couples from Study 1a. Our effective sample size for our first two sets of hypotheses—that the main effects of expressed and/or perceived honesty would predict outcomes—is the same as in Study 1a. Power analyses for the statistical technique we use to test our third set of hypotheses

³ We also explored whether expressed and perceived honesty predicted benefits 3 months later. These analyses yielded few significant effects, and of those effects, a consistent pattern did not emerge.

concerning accuracy—multilevel response surface analysis (ML-RSA)—have yet to be determined (Nestler et al., 2019); however, it is estimated that a sample of approximately two or three times the size as that needed to detect a linear effect is needed to test similarity effects using RSA given the inclusion of nonlinear terms in the model (Schönbrodt et al., 2018). Thus, while tests of our linear effects are adequately powered, a larger sample size is likely needed to best test our effects concerning accuracy.

Participants in Study 1b completed a background survey, lab interaction, and 3-month follow-up survey. In the background survey, participants reported on two points of gratitude about their partner, with one selected for discussion in the lab. Participants were asked to be as honest as possible about their points of gratitude and were told their responses would be kept confidential. As informed by research on lying (DePaulo & Kashy, 1998), participants were given the definition of honesty, which included “the truthful expression of [their] thoughts and feelings” and “not lying, omitting information, or use of deception.” Points of gratitude reported on focused on support (e.g., growing together), children (e.g., being a good parent), and chores (e.g., getting groceries, cooking, or housework), among other points.

In the lab, participants engaged in four video-recorded conversations, including a baseline neutral conversation about their day, exchanges of gratitude, and two other conversations not assessed in the current work. Our study structure was informed by previous research (H. L. Fritz et al., 2003; Le et al., 2020). We included filler questions in all parts of the study to mask the focus of our work, with no participants identifying the study goals to be related to honesty in pilot sessions. Partners were randomly assigned to be the expresser or recipient of gratitude for the first discussion; then, they switched roles for the second discussion. Before each discussion, expressers were given an envelope that included a paper copy of their response about a point of gratitude from the background survey. Expressers were asked to read their responses silently to themselves, after which they returned the envelopes to the research assistants. These original responses were provided as a consideration for observer coding of honesty, allowing us to ensure that any discrepancies between what participants stated privately in the survey and to their partner in the lab were not due to forgetting their original response.

Expressers were told to share as much or as little as they preferred about their point of gratitude. Each discussion lasted 2 min, with expressers sharing their point of gratitude for 1 min and then recipients responding for 1 min. After each discussion, participants completed self-report measures on (perceived) honesty, emotional well-being, and relationship satisfaction and recipients reported their felt appreciation. Three months later, participants completed the follow-up survey, reporting on their well-being and felt appreciation.

Measures

Unless otherwise noted, each measure described below was averaged into a composite of its items, which were measured on 7-point Likert scales (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). Two teams of research assistants completed observer ratings, with one team of five research assistants coding expressers and a separate team of five research assistants coding recipients and couple conflict. Reliability for all observer codes was computed with ICCs using two-way random effects models assessing absolute agreement among

raters (Bliese, 2000). We preregistered analyses only including variables with ICCs that equaled or exceeded .60. One outcome and one moderator variable fell short of this requirement; however, we report full results including these variables for comprehensiveness.

Background Measures.

Expresser’s Point of Gratitude. Participants completed two free-response questions:

Please think about two things [partner name] has done that you appreciate and why you appreciate these acts. You can think about something that [partner name] has done that happened once before or something that [partner name] continues to do. Please be as honest as possible.

Participants read a definition of honesty and then completed two prompts: “In at least three to four sentences, please describe the one [another] thing [partner name] has done that you appreciate.”

Expresser’s Willingness to Discuss Point of Gratitude.

Participants rated the following item: “How willing are you to discuss this point of appreciation with [partner name] when you come to the lab (i.e., for the next part of the study)?” (1 = *not at all willing* to 7 = *extremely willing*; $M = 6.47$, $SD = 1.05$). As an ethical consideration for the study, participants had to report ≥ 2 for this response to be considered for discussion in the lab.

Expresser’s Comfort Discussing Point of Gratitude.

Participants rated the following item: “How comfortable would you feel expressing this point of appreciation with [your partner]?” (1 = *extremely uncomfortable* to 7 = *extremely comfortable*; $M = 6.44$, $SD = 1.07$). We expected that the gratitude conversations participants had would be generally positive in tone. Because of this, and of the two points of gratitude previously described, we chose the response rated *lowest* in comfort. This decision was made given we expected that the point that would be lowest in comfort would be the one that would be most challenging to be honest about. Prompting participants to share more challenging points of gratitude allowed us to meaningfully compare honest expressions to relatively less honest expressions. If both of the topics participants reported on were rated equally, one topic was chosen at random for expressers to share with their partner.

Concurrent Measures.

Expressed Honesty. *Self-reported expresser honesty* was measured with 12 items tapping honest communication in relationships as described in Study 1a (Le et al., 2025; Reynolds et al., 2025; $\alpha = 0.88$, $M = 6.61$, $SD = .58$). *Observer-rated honesty* was assessed using a measure that captured the same key theoretical components as assessed in the self-report measure of honesty (Le et al., 2025; see additional online Appendix A for full details at <https://osf.io/7vz2n/files/7jgqb>). Raters compared what expressers stated they were grateful for in the background survey to what they actually shared with their partner in the lab, rating the following item: “How honest would you characterize this person to be in this conversation?” (ICC = .74, $M = 6.54$, $SD = 0.58$). Lower observer-rated discrepancies between self-reported gratitude (measured in isolation from their partner) and gratitude expressed in the lab corresponded with higher honesty scores.

Perceived Honesty. Recipients completed a 12-item measure capturing perceptions of a partner’s honest communication (Le et al., 2025; Reynolds et al., 2025). This measure was identical to that used for expresser honesty but adapted to assess partner perceptions (e.g., “My partner truthfully shared their thoughts and feelings with me”; $\alpha = .91$, $M = 6.47$, $SD = 0.67$).

Emotional Well-Being. We assessed emotional well-being with both self-reported and observer-rated measures. Self-reported emotional well-being was assessed with positive and negative emotions (expresser: $\alpha = .61$, $M = 4.41$, $SD = 0.66$; recipient: $\alpha = .65$, $M = 4.43$, $SD = 0.62$; Impett et al., 2012). Expressers and recipients responded to the stem instructions: “How much did you feel the following emotions during this discussion with your partner?” (1 = *not at all* to 5 = *extremely*). *Positive emotion* for both expressers and recipients was assessed with the item “happy” (expresser: $M = 4.14$, $SD = 1.01$; recipient: $M = 4.15$, $SD = 0.97$). *Negative emotion* was assessed with the three items “annoyed” (expresser: $M = 1.11$, $SD = 0.46$; recipient: $M = 1.11$, $SD = 0.46$), “sad” (expresser: $M = 1.32$, $SD = 0.76$; recipient: $M = 1.33$, $SD = 0.73$), and “embarrassed” (expresser: $M = 1.50$, $SD = 0.82$; recipient: $M = 1.43$, $SD = 0.78$).

Observer-rated emotional well-being was also assessed as a composite measure of positive and (reverse-scored) negative emotions (1 = *none at all* to 5 = *an extreme amount*; expresser: $ICC = .47$, $M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.42$; recipient: $ICC = .74$, $M = 1.11$, $SD = .21$).⁴ Expresser and recipient positive emotion was assessed with the item, “How much happiness did this person express in this conversation?” (expresser: $ICC = .80$, $M = 2.73$, $SD = 0.66$; recipient: $ICC = .69$, $M = 3.23$, $SD = .60$). Expresser negative emotion was assessed with the item, “How anxious/uncomfortable/nervous did this person feel in this conversation?” ($ICC = .61$, $M = 1.45$, $SD = 0.36$). Recipient negative emotions were assessed with two items: “How much embarrassment did this person express in this conversation?” ($ICC = .72$, $M = 3.23$, $SD = 0.60$) and “How bad/uncomfortable/annoyed did this person feel in this conversation?” ($ICC = .70$, $M = 1.09$, $SD = 0.25$).⁵ We found that the self-report and observer-rated measures of emotional well-being were correspondent between romantic partners’ reports (expressers: $b = 0.173$, 95% CI [0.115, 0.231], $p < .001$; recipients: $b = 0.131$, 95% CI [0.084, 0.178], $p < .001$), consistent with research indicating the validity and correspondence between self- and informant assessments of well-being (Zou et al., 2013).

Relationship Satisfaction. Self-reported relationship satisfaction was assessed with a composite of five items preceded by the stem, “In this discussion”: “I felt satisfied with my relationship,” “I felt close to my partner,” “I felt love for my partner,” “I felt there is tension between my partner and me” (reverse-scored), and “My partner and I experience conflict” (reverse-scored; Impett et al., 2013; expressers: $\alpha = .87$, $M = 6.52$, $SD = 0.74$; recipients: $\alpha = .88$, $M = 6.48$, $SD = 0.80$). *Observer-rated relationship satisfaction* was rated using the item, “In this conversation, how satisfied and happy do you think this person is with their relationship?” (expresser: $ICC = .83$, $M = 3.66$, $SD = .58$; recipient: $ICC = .70$, $M = 3.74$, $SD = .43$). Finally, *observer-rated conflict* was assessed for the couple with the item, “How much conflict did the COUPLE experience in this conversation?” ($ICC = .80$, $M = 1.06$, $SD = 0.23$). Both observer-rated items were assessed from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*an extreme amount*).

As with our measures of emotional well-being, we found correspondence between self- and observer-rated variables. Specifically, expresser and recipient relationship satisfaction was positively associated with their analogous observer-rated variables (expressers: $b = 0.173$, 95% CI [0.115, 0.231], $p < .001$; recipients: $b = 0.131$, 95% CI [0.084, 0.178], $p < .001$). Further, observer-rated conflict was negatively associated with both self-reported expresser ($b = -0.745$,

95% CI [-0.980, -0.512], $p < .001$) and recipient satisfaction ($b = -0.926$, 95% CI [-1.079, -0.774], $p < .001$).

Recipient Felt Appreciation. Recipients responded to the item, “How much did you feel the following emotions during this discussion with your partner?”: “appreciated” (1 = *not at all* to 5 = *extremely*; $M = 4.45$, $SD = 0.78$).

Communication Styles. Four observer-rated variables were measured to assess the expresser’s communication style in the lab: *benevolence* ($ICC = .61$, $M = 3.43$, $SD = 0.45$), *bluntness* ($ICC = .516$, $M = 3.74$, $SD = 0.47$), *disclosure* ($ICC = .80$, $M = 3.55$, $SD = 0.52$), and *restraint* ($ICC = .67$, $M = 1.77$, $SD = 0.43$; 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *extremely*; Le et al., 2025).

Control Variables. *Baseline relationship satisfaction*, as measured after the first baseline, neutral conversation in the lab, was used as a control variable ($\alpha = .83$, $M = 6.07$, $SD = 0.97$) and assessed with the same five items measured for relationship satisfaction after the gratitude conversation. This same measure was also used as a covariate in the longitudinal analyses to assess change over time when predicting relationship satisfaction longitudinally 3 months later. *Expresser authenticity* was measured with two items: “In this discussion: I felt authentic (true to myself)” and “I behaved in a genuine manner with my partner” ($r = 0.889$, $p < .001$; $M = 6.59$, $SD = 0.58$). *Expresser gratitude intensity* was measured with the average of two items measured in response to the stem, “How much did you feel the following emotions during this discussion with your partner?”: “grateful” and “appreciative” ($r = .780$, $p < .001$; $M = 4.52$, $SD = 0.74$; 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *extremely*). Analogously, *recipient perceived gratitude intensity* was measured with the average of two items measured in response to the stem, “How much did your partner feel the following emotions during this discussion with you?”: “grateful” and “appreciative” ($r = .924$, $p < .001$; $M = 3.22$, $SD = 0.48$; 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *extremely*).

Longitudinal Measures.

Recipient Felt Appreciation. Recipients reported on seven items from the appreciated subscale from the Appreciation in Relationships Scale (Gordon et al., 2012), which were averaged with the face-valid item, “In the last week, please indicate to what extent you felt: appreciated by my partner” (1 = *not at all* to 5 = *extremely*). Items were assessed on different rating points and thus standardized before creating the composite ($\alpha = .91$, $M = .00$, $SD = .78$).

Satisfaction With Life. Satisfaction with life was assessed with the five-item Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985; $\alpha = .88$, $M = 4.98$, $SD = .81$).

Emotional Well-Being. Emotional well-being ($\alpha = .89$, $M = 3.88$, $SD = .71$) was assessed with a composite of positive (e.g.,

⁴ For expresser negative emotion, the initial reliability was below our preregistered cutoff for inclusion ($ICC \geq .60$); thus, we dropped one coder to achieve higher reliability, with this decision made and executed prior to data analysis. Even so, the reliability for the composite measure of expresser emotional well-being did not reach our threshold of .60, but we include these results for comprehensiveness.

⁵ We posted our preregistration prior to finalizing our observer codes, given that data analysis was to commence for a separate project using part of the same data. To this end, we originally preregistered that we would assess observer-rated negative emotions using four codes tapping “annoyance/irritation,” “uncomfortableness/anxiousness/nervousness,” “embarrassed,” and “sad/upset.” However, because most of these negative emotions did not emerge highly, we focused our codes on the emotions that were most prevalent, yielding the negative emotion observer codes reported in the current article rather than all of those stated in the preregistration.

happiness) and (reverse-scored) negative emotions (10 items) felt in the last week (Positive and Negative Affect Scale; 1 = *very slightly or not at all* to 5 = *extremely*; Watson et al., 1988).

Relationship Satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction was assessed with the Couples Satisfaction Index (Funk & Rogge, 2007). As in the published scale, items had their own unique scale points and were summed ($\alpha = .97$, $M = 128.86$, $SD = 25.66$).

Results

In examining the descriptive statistics of expressed and perceived honesty, we find, as in Study 1a, that partners tended to be highly honest about their gratitude and see their partners as honest in their expressions of gratitude. Turning to our results, we first examine whether our measures of honesty were correspondent with one another to identify whether perceptions within and external to the relationship were in agreement or distinct. We then turn to tests of our key hypotheses examining how expressed, perceived, and accurate perceptions of honesty during gratitude conversations predict outcomes.

Correspondence Between Self and Observer Reports of Honesty

We first examined whether self-reported expressed and perceived honesty were correspondent with observer ratings of honesty. We conducted multilevel modeling analyses to examine these associations, accounting for the interdependence between couple members. Specifically, for all models reported in Study 1b, individuals were nested in couples, intercepts were specified as random, and slopes were specified as fixed. We found self-reported expresser honesty was positively associated with observer-rated expresser honesty ($b = 0.122$, 95% CI [0.026, 0.238], $p = .013$) and recipient perceived honesty ($b = 0.272$, 95% CI [0.165, 0.379], $p < .001$). However, observer-rated expresser honesty was not associated with recipient perceived honesty ($b = -0.008$, 95% CI [-0.120, 0.104], $p = .890$). These results indicate that expressers' self-reports of honesty correspond with recipients' perceptions and outside observers' ratings of their honesty, suggesting some validity in self-reports of expresser honesty (Fleeson et al., 2022; Le et al., 2025). However, we find that recipients' perceptions of honesty correspond more with expressers' self-reports than observers' ratings of expresser honesty, suggesting that agreement about honesty occurs more internally between romantic partners rather than with outside observers, who may not have the same level of intimate knowledge about the relationship dynamics as couples do themselves. Accordingly, and consistent with our preregistration, we report results for self-reported and observer-rated honesty in separate models. However, we note that results remain unchanged when both measures serve as simultaneous predictors in the same model (see additional online Table S5 for full results at <https://osf.io/7vz2n/files/7jgqb>).

The Personal and Interpersonal Effects of Honesty

We tested all three sets of hypotheses in one model using ML-RSAs (Nestler et al., 2019). We conducted analyses with R 4.4.3 (R Core Team, 2025) using the RSA (Schönbrodt & Humberg, 2023), lme4 (Bates et al., 2015), and lmerTest (Kuznetsova et al., 2017) packages and additional functions by Nestler et al. (2019). A strength of ML-RSA is it allows us to parsimoniously test all three

sets of our hypotheses in one model. Further, ML-RSA allows for preserving all information from continuously measured variables by modeling effects in three-dimensional space; doing so prevents inferential errors that may occur from other methods of testing accuracy (i.e., difference scores; Edwards, 2002; Nestler et al., 2019). All models included the predictors of expresser self-reported (or observer-rated) honesty, recipient perceived honesty, squared terms of expresser self-reported (or observer-rated) honesty and recipient perceived honesty, and the interaction between expresser self-reported (or observer-rated) honesty and recipient perceived honesty (the linear terms).

Hypotheses concerning expresser honesty were tested with the main effect of expresser self-reported (or observer-rated) honesty, controlling for all other models. The effects of recipient perceived honesty were tested with the main effect of recipient perceived honesty, controlling for all other model variables. For hypotheses concerning accuracy, we examined five response surface coefficients derived from the effects estimated in the multilevel polynomial models: $\hat{\alpha}_1$, $\hat{\alpha}_2$, $\hat{\alpha}_3$, $\hat{\alpha}_4$, and $\hat{\alpha}_5$ (Nestler et al., 2019). These response surface coefficients are computed using combinations of the five polynomial coefficients (see Nestler et al., 2019), allowing us to test new slopes along the three-dimensional graph. We focused on $\hat{\alpha}_4$ along the line of congruence (LOC; computed by adding the squared coefficients of expressed and perceived honesty and subtracting their interactive term). The LOC is where values of expressers' honesty match with values of recipients' perceived honesty (i.e., matching vs. not, regardless of the level of honesty)—or where *accurate perceptions of honesty* occur. Specifically, the $\hat{\alpha}_4$ coefficient tests the slope across the line of incongruence, which is perpendicular to the LOC, thus indicating whether values along the LOC (i.e., congruence between expressed and perceived honesty) predict higher or lower values of the outcomes relative to values outside of the LOC (i.e., incongruence between expressed and perceived honesty). We also focus on $\hat{\alpha}_1$ along the LOC (computed as the sum of the main effect coefficients of expressed and perceived honesty). This additional slope tests whether a positive or negative mean-level effect is observed. Specifically, the $\hat{\alpha}_1$ slope tests whether the combined main effects of expresser and recipient perceived honesty predict outcomes. Testing the effects of both the $\hat{\alpha}_1$ and $\hat{\alpha}_4$ slope allow us to examine whether accurate perceptions of honesty ($\hat{\alpha}_4$) that occur at higher, rather than lower, levels of expressed and perceived honesty ($\hat{\alpha}_1$) predict higher (or lower) values on the outcome. Altogether, the following pattern of parameters must be observed to support the hypotheses that accurate perceptions of higher levels of honesty predict benefits: $\hat{\alpha}_1 > 0$, $\hat{\alpha}_2 = 0$, $\hat{\alpha}_3 = 0$, $\hat{\alpha}_4 < 0$, $\hat{\alpha}_5 = 0$ (Nestler et al., 2019). Example graphs of the hypotheses are in additional online Figure S1 (<https://osf.io/7vz2n/files/7jgqb>).

All concurrent and longitudinal analyses use the same predictors as described above. The longitudinal models also included an additional variable to model change over time. We included a lab variable that was conceptually analogous to the longitudinal dependent variable (i.e., when predicting emotional well-being at follow-up, we control for emotional well-being measured concurrently in the lab). We had one longitudinal outcome, satisfaction with life, that we did not assess in the lab and thus controlled for satisfaction with life assessed in the background survey.

Expresser Honesty. For results that follow, we refer to self-reported measures as SR and observer-reported measures as OR. All SR honesty results appear in Table 2, which includes key results

Table 2*Concurrent Effects of Expresser Self-Reported and Recipient Perceived Honesty on Outcomes (Study 1b)*

Predictor	Expresser emotional well-being (SR)			Expresser emotional well-being (OR)			Expresser relationship satisfaction (SR)			Expresser relationship satisfaction (OR)			Couple conflict (OR)		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept	4.414	0.038	<.001	3.746	0.029	<.001	6.478	0.037	<.001	3.664	0.039	<.001	1.054	0.016	<.001
Expresser honesty	0.470	0.069	<.001	0.050	0.048	.300	0.707	0.069	<.001	0.161	0.065	.013	-0.062	0.026	.018
Recipient perceived honesty	-0.001	0.060	.985	0.066	0.042	.120	0.240	0.060	<.001	0.159	0.056	.005	-0.040	0.023	.082
Slope along the LOC ($\hat{\alpha}_1$)	0.469	0.089	<.001	0.116	0.066	.077	0.946	0.088	<.001	0.320	0.088	<.001	-0.102	0.035	.004
Curvature along the LOIC ($\hat{\alpha}_4$)	0.017	0.101	.868	0.082	0.069	.235	0.145	0.103	.159	0.036	0.092	.700	0.001	0.037	.986

Predictor	Recipient emotional well-being (SR)			Recipient emotional well-being (OR)			Recipient relationship satisfaction (SR)			Recipient relationship satisfaction (OR)			Recipient felt appreciation (SR)		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept	4.475	0.036	<.001	4.052	0.023	<.001	6.531	0.039	<.001	3.738	0.029	<.001	4.492	0.043	<.001
Expresser honesty	0.083	0.065	.202	0.108	0.035	.002	0.113	0.072	.120	0.117	0.046	.012	0.058	0.074	.430
Recipient perceived honesty	0.394	0.057	<.001	0.060	0.030	.049	0.701	0.063	<.001	0.134	0.040	.001	0.671	0.065	<.001
Slope along the LOC ($\hat{\alpha}_1$)	0.477	0.083	<.001	0.167	0.048	.001	0.813	0.092	<.001	0.250	0.063	<.001	0.729	0.097	<.001
Curvature along the LOIC ($\hat{\alpha}_4$)	0.103	0.104	.321	0.010	0.048	.833	0.113	0.106	.285	0.026	0.065	.692	0.271	0.118	.022

Note. Values are unstandardized multilevel coefficients and associated standard errors and *p* values. The coefficients from the multilevel polynomial model include the intercept, expresser honesty, and recipient perceived honesty. The response surface coefficients that capture accurate perceptions of honesty include the slope along the LOC (line of congruence; $\hat{\alpha}_1$) and curvature along the LOIC (line of incongruence; $\hat{\alpha}_4$). Full results of the polynomial model and all response surface coefficients can be seen in additional online Table S4 (<https://osf.io/7vz2n/files/7jgqb>). Significant effects are presented in bold. SR = self-report; OR = observer rating; *SE* = standard error.

required for testing our three sets of hypotheses (i.e., the main effect of expresser honesty, the main effect of recipient perceived honesty, and accuracy, as captured by $\hat{\alpha}_1$ and $\hat{\alpha}_4$). Full results of the polynomial model and response surface coefficients can be seen in additional online Table S6 (<https://osf.io/7vz2n/files/7jgqb>). As seen in Table 2 and additional online Figures S2 and S3 (<https://osf.io/7vz2n/files/7jgqb>), an expresser's SR honesty about gratitude significantly predicted greater expresser SR emotional well-being and SR and OR relationship satisfaction. Expresser SR honesty also predicted greater recipient OR emotional well-being and relationship satisfaction. Finally, SR expresser honesty about gratitude also predicted lower OR couple conflict. While an expresser's SR honesty predicted positive personal, partner, and relationship outcomes, OR honesty was unassociated with all other outcomes (see additional online Table S7 at <https://osf.io/7vz2n/files/7jgqb>). Finally, as seen in Table 3 and additional online Table S8, respectively (<https://osf.io/7vz2n/files/7jgqb>), both SR and OR expresser honesty did not predict any outcomes 3 months later. Overall, an expresser's subjectively felt honesty about gratitude was particularly predictive of benefits for the self and partner in the moment, but not over time.

Recipient Perceived Honesty. As seen in Table 2 and additional online Figures S2 and S3 (<https://osf.io/7vz2n/files/7jgqb>), recipients' perceptions of expressers' honesty significantly predicted greater recipient SR and OR emotional well-being, SR and OR relationship satisfaction, and SR felt appreciation concurrently. Recipient perceived honesty also significantly predicted greater expresser SR and OR relationship satisfaction and marginally predicted lower couple conflict concurrently. Further, and as seen in Table 3, recipient perceived honesty, accounting for self-reported expresser honesty, had longer term benefits for recipients, predicting greater recipient relationship satisfaction and felt appreciation 3 months after hearing a partner's expression of gratitude in the lab. All other long-term effects were not significant ($ps > .154$). The

concurrent and longitudinal effects of recipient perceived honesty were consistent when accounting for expressers' SR (Tables 2 and 3) and OR honesty (see additional online Tables S5 and S15 at <https://osf.io/7vz2n/files/7jgqb>). Overall, recipient perceived honesty predicted benefits for the self and partner in the moment and longer term benefits for the recipients themselves.

Accuracy About Honesty. We found no support for accurate perceptions of honesty predicting concurrent benefits. Specifically, neither accurate perceptions of SR and OR expresser honesty predicted outcomes (see Table 2 and additional online Figures S2 and S3 at <https://osf.io/7vz2n/files/7jgqb>). Specifically, there were no simultaneous positive mean-level associations (i.e., $\hat{\alpha}_1$) and congruence effects (i.e., $\hat{\alpha}_4$) between expressed and perceived honesty predicting expresser and recipient outcomes, with $\hat{\alpha}_2$, $\hat{\alpha}_3$, and $\hat{\alpha}_5$ effects also being nonsignificant. Instead, and as previously described, there were only consistent significant $\hat{\alpha}_1$ effects such that an expresser's honesty and/or recipient's perceived honesty predicted benefits for expressers and recipients.

Additional Analyses

We additionally examined whether expressers' communication style shapes the benefits of honesty. Theoretical models of honesty have argued that the way in which individuals express the truth may shape whether recipients receive the truth in relatively positive, versus negative, ways. More specifically, communicators can share honest messages with *benevolence* (i.e., kindness), *bluntness* (i.e., directness without consideration of a recipient's feelings), *restraint* (i.e., controlled and careful expression), and *disclosure* (i.e., forthcomingness in the degree of thoughts and feelings shared; J. H. Fritz, 2020; E. E. Levine et al., 2020). In the context of positive disclosures, we expected that honest expressions and perceptions of gratitude that are benevolent, less restrained, and more disclosing

Table 3
Over Time Effects of Expresser Self-Reported and Recipient Perceived Honesty on Outcomes (Study 1b)

Predictor	Expresser satisfaction with life			Expresser emotional well-being			Expresser relationship satisfaction		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept	5.267	0.056	<.001	3.908	0.047	<.001	125.503	1.661	<.001
Expresser honesty	-0.103	0.106	.331	-0.022	0.088	.804	-0.932	3.124	.766
Recipient perceived honesty	0.030	0.092	.746	0.055	0.073	.450	3.621	2.496	.148
Control	0.678	0.036	<.001	0.250	0.059	<.001	6.495	2.030	.001
Slope along the LOC ($\hat{\alpha}_1$)	-0.073	0.131	.576	0.033	0.111	.764	2.689	4.175	.519
Curvature along the LOIC ($\hat{\alpha}_4$)	-0.353	0.164	.031	-0.024	0.131	.853	-1.228	4.528	.786

Predictor	Recipient satisfaction with life			Recipient emotional well-being			Recipient relationship satisfaction			Recipient felt appreciation		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept	5.226	0.050	<.001	3.875	0.042	<.001	125.511	1.631	<.001	0.005	0.048	.913
Expresser honesty	-0.047	0.110	.671	-0.041	0.088	.643	3.976	2.712	.143	-0.077	0.090	.393
Recipient perceived honesty	0.046	0.095	.631	0.115	0.080	.149	8.253	2.707	.002	0.300	0.086	.001
Control	0.676	0.037	<.001	0.136	0.064	.034	4.180	1.863	.025	0.146	0.058	.012
Slope along the LOC ($\hat{\alpha}_1$)	-0.001	0.141	.994	0.074	0.117	.524	12.229	3.954	.002	0.223	0.122	.069
Curvature along the LOIC ($\hat{\alpha}_4$)	-0.099	0.126	.430	-0.044	0.100	.660	-5.958	4.014	.138	-0.006	0.103	.951

Note. Values are unstandardized multilevel coefficients and associated standard errors and *p* values. The coefficients from the multilevel polynomial model include the intercept, expresser honesty, and recipient perceived honesty. The response surface coefficients that capture accurate perceptions of honesty include the slope along the LOC (line of congruence; $\hat{\alpha}_1$) and curvature along the LOIC (line of incongruence; $\hat{\alpha}_4$). Full results of the polynomial model and response surface coefficients could be seen in additional online Table S8 (<https://osf.io/7vz2n/files/7jgqb>). All control variables are analogous assessments of the outcome as measured in the lab with the one exception of satisfaction with life (controlled for at baseline given it was not assessed in the lab). All outcomes were self-reported. Significant effects are presented in bold. *SE* = standard error.

should magnify the benefits of (perceived) honesty, given that these messages would be received as kind and amplify the amount of positive information shared with a recipient. While bluntness has been theorized to be negative in the context of negative disclosures, we expected that a blunt positive message would have fairly neutral effects, given that being extremely direct about a point of gratitude can be positive (by being clear about a point of gratitude) as well as negative (i.e., lacking a social grace or sensitivity in communicating gratitude). Thus, we tested preregistered hypotheses that greater benevolence, lower restraint, and higher disclosure would strengthen the effects of honesty; we further predicted that bluntness would not significantly moderate the effects of honesty, given that a blunt positive message may have fairly neutral effects. Overall, we found no consistent pattern of any of the communication styles shaping the outcomes of honesty, suggesting that the benefits of honesty about gratitude are consistent regardless of how expressers communicate their gratitude (details appear in additional online Appendix B at <https://osf.io/7vz2n/files/7jgqb>).

We additionally conducted preregistered control analyses examining whether the benefits of honesty could be explained by couples' baseline satisfaction. It is possible that couples who are more satisfied in their relationships to start may express or perceive more honesty about gratitude and/or experience more benefits when sharing gratitude. Those who are more satisfied in their relationships to start may also simply feel happier in their relationships across contexts. Thus, we retested our key hypotheses, accounting for each control variable in separate sets of models. Given we observed support for the benefits of expressed and perceived honesty, but not accurate perceptions of honesty, we focus on examining how these main effects of honesty change after accounting for these controls. After accounting for expressers' and recipients' baseline relationship satisfaction, we

found that the vast majority of the concurrent effects held with the exception of a few (see additional online Tables S8 and S9 at <https://osf.io/7vz2n/files/7jgqb>). Specifically, expressers' baseline satisfaction accounted for some of the interpersonal benefits of expresser SR honesty, including recipients' concurrent OR emotional well-being ($p = .105$), recipients' concurrent OR relationship satisfaction ($p = .102$), and concurrent couple conflict ($p = .081$). Finally, recipients' baseline satisfaction could account for recipients' longer term relationship satisfaction ($p = .077$).

We also explored whether an expresser's self-reported authenticity could explain the benefits we observed. Authenticity—or the extent to which one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors reflect one's true, or core, self (Kernis & Goldman, 2006)—is related to honest communication (Bailey & Iyengar, 2022). It is possible that expressers' genuine and sincere self-expression, rather than their truthful communication, could explain the benefits observed in the current work, especially given that authenticity itself has been found to predict relationship benefits (Brunell et al., 2010). Thus, we retested our hypotheses, controlling for authenticity to rule out this possibility. When examining expressers' authenticity, we found that it was associated with both expresser SR ($b = .663$, 95% CI [0.602, 0.724], $p < .001$) and OR ($b = .093$, 95% CI [0.022, 0.206], $p = .043$) honesty. The majority of the key effects remained significant with a few exceptions (see additional online Table S10 at <https://osf.io/7vz2n/files/7jgqb>). Specifically, expresser authenticity could account for some of the concurrent, interpersonal benefits of expresser SR honesty, including recipient OR emotional well-being ($p = .053$), recipient OR relationship satisfaction ($p = .122$), and OR couple conflict ($p = .244$). Collectively, accounting for third-variable explanations suggested that baseline satisfaction and (to a lesser extent) expresser authenticity could account for some of the interpersonal

benefits of expresser honesty about gratitude on recipient outcomes and couple conflict. Further, recipients' baseline satisfaction could account for some of the longer term intrapersonal benefits of recipients' perceived honesty.

Finally, as in Study 1a, we explored whether the benefits of expressed and perceived honesty could be explained by expressers simply being higher in their gratitude intensity or recipients perceiving higher gratitude intensity from their partners. Thus, we retested our hypotheses, controlling for expresser gratitude intensity (in one set of models) and recipient perceived gratitude intensity (in a second set of models). As shown in additional online Tables S13 and S15 (<https://osf.io/7vz2n/files/7jgqb>), after accounting for expresser gratitude intensity, all of the benefits of expressed and perceived honesty remained. Additionally, as shown in additional online Tables S14 and S15 (<https://osf.io/7vz2n/files/7jgqb>), after accounting for perceived gratitude intensity, we found that the vast majority of the effects remained. Specifically, expresser honesty continued to predict concurrent benefits for both expressers (higher emotional well-being, SR and OR relationship satisfaction) and recipients (greater OR emotional well-being and OR relationship satisfaction), as well as lower couple conflict. Turning to recipient perceived honesty, the vast majority of the effects held. While recipient perceived honesty no longer predicted concurrent recipient SR and OR emotional well-being and recipient OR relationship satisfaction, it continued to predict concurrent expresser SR relationship satisfaction and concurrent recipient SR relationship satisfaction and felt appreciation. Recipient perceived honesty also continued to predict greater recipient relationship satisfaction and felt appreciation 3 months later. Thus, the benefits of expressed and perceived honesty about gratitude were generally robust after accounting for expresser gratitude intensity and recipient perceived gratitude intensity.

Discussion

In the current work, we found that expressed and perceived honesty can promote the benefits of gratitude. Specifically, greater expressed honesty about gratitude predicted greater personal and relationship well-being for expressers in the moments after expressing gratitude, in daily life, and chronically over a 2-week period. Recipients who perceived their partners to be honest about gratitude experienced greater personal and relationship well-being and felt more appreciated in the moments after gratitude is expressed, in daily life, chronically over a 2-week period, and over time. Further, recipient perceived honesty predicted greater expresser relationship quality chronically over the course of weeks and after an expression of gratitude in the lab. These effects were consistent regardless of the expressers' communication style. Further, when accounting for baseline satisfaction and expressers' authenticity, we found that a large majority of these effects held. Taken together, the current results suggest that when it comes to gratitude, the benefits of expressed and perceived honesty are largely intrapersonal; when interpersonal benefits for a partner were observed, it was due to perceiving, rather than expressing, honesty about gratitude.

The current findings shed new light on our understanding of the benefits of honesty in positive contexts. Previous research has indicated that there are barriers to benefiting from gratitude (Kumar & Epley, 2018), creating missed opportunities to strengthen intimacy and relational closeness. In the current work, we had expected that expressed honesty about gratitude would have widespread

benefits for both the self and partner. Interestingly, when it comes to expressed honesty about gratitude, it was the expressers themselves who largely benefited rather than their partners (after accounting for baseline satisfaction and expresser authenticity), and these benefits arose in the moment but did not persist over time. Greater honesty about a point of gratitude largely did not predict benefits for a recipient (after accounting for baseline satisfaction) and, in particular, did not predict whether a recipient felt more appreciated in the moment, across daily life, or over time. These results suggest that honesty about positive information, and gratitude in particular, may feel good for the self and in the short term, but paradoxically may not benefit the recipient as much as we believe or hope it will. Research has shown that the way in which we express gratitude matters for whether a partner benefits from this message or not (Park et al., 2021; Shimshock et al., 2025); it could be that honest expressions of gratitude may highlight information that partners receive in both positive (i.e., highlighting positive partner attributes) and negative ways (i.e., misplaced enthusiasm over a gift itself rather than a partner's kindness), neutralizing any positive effects of honest gratitude expressions on a recipient. An important future direction will be to uncover why honest expressions of gratitude have neutral effects on a partner. Nonetheless, the personal benefits of honest gratitude we observed are consistent with research indicating that gratitude expressions can benefit personal well-being (Dang et al., 2025; Folk & Dunn, 2023).

While honest expressions of gratitude only predicted positive outcomes for the self, *perceived* honesty about gratitude predicted benefits for both the self and partner. This was true regardless of whether expressers were actually honest about their gratitude and regardless of whether recipients accurately perceived their partner's honesty. Our results dovetail with existing work highlighting the important role of perception, rather than reality or accuracy, in shaping relationship outcomes (Joel et al., 2020; Reis et al., 2004). Specifically, perceiving a partner to be honest in their gratitude may promote positive sentiment override—or taking a positive lens to the relationship in ways that create more positive outcomes (Gordon & Diamond, 2023). It could be that these positive illusions about partner honesty facilitate positive relationship orientations and feelings toward a partner, encouraging constructive relationship behaviors, buffering against relationship strain, and promoting feelings of happiness and satisfaction. Indeed, we found that perceived honesty about gratitude promoted recipients' personal well-being, relationship satisfaction, and felt appreciation. It is notable that we found that the benefits of positive perceptions persisted over time, particularly for recipients. This suggests that seeing a partner as honest about gratitude can benefit a recipient's feelings in their relationship over the longer term, but these benefits over time are limited to the self rather than a partner.

In the current work, we also found that the expresser's self-reported honesty corresponded with observer-rated honesty. These findings are consistent with existing work indicating that self-reports of honesty have some validity given their association with other related measures (Fleeson et al., 2022; Le et al., 2025). However, it is important to note that while recipients' perceptions of honesty corresponded with expressers' self-reported honesty, they were unrelated to observer-rated honesty. Taken together with the fact that recipients' perceptions of expresser honesty were most predictive of benefits, regardless of expressers' actual honesty and recipients' accurate perception of honesty, the current findings

buttress the overall pattern of findings that the benefits of honesty about gratitude are in the eyes of the beholder, and namely, the recipient.

Constraints on Generality

One important limitation of the current work is that the couples who willingly volunteered for this study may be especially comfortable with communicating in their relationship. Indeed, ratings of honesty were high in our sample, indicating that couples were, on average, generally honest in their expressions of gratitude, with few partners engaging in outright lying about their points of gratitude. Although this pattern is consistent with research indicating that lying in close relationships most commonly takes the form of omitting information and telling white lies (T. R. Levine & Knapp, 2018; Metts, 1989), it does not fully capture the effects of (perceived) honesty among couples who blatantly lie about gratitude to one another (i.e., expressing gratitude for a gift they do not like or want) or those who conceal their gratitude (i.e., to avoid feeling uncomfortable or vulnerable). Nonetheless, our results suggest that many couples may already be behaving, and seeing their partners, in ways that benefit their relationships when it comes to being truthful about what they appreciate. That said, high expressed honesty in the relationship may have contributed to the pronounced benefits of perceived honesty in the current work. That is, when partners are highly honest, chronic perceptions of these partners being high in honesty may not be so harmful as in couples in which expressers are generally less honest. Relatedly, greater variability in honesty from expressers may have provided more opportunity for (in)accuracy to occur in the eyes of perceivers, perhaps providing more predictive effects of (in)accurate perceptions of honesty.

While our daily experience study afforded ecological validity in assessments of gratitude and honesty, another important limitation of our work is that the lab study was brief and highly structured. Future observational work may benefit from observing couples in a more naturalistic setting. This could include observing more spontaneous expressions of gratitude (i.e., those that were not reported on and chosen before the lab study) as well as expressions of gratitude that occur in less structured settings (i.e., allowing couples to discuss more freely rather than in a given time frame asked of them). Finally, future work should examine whether the benefits of expressed and perceived honesty about gratitude that we observed generalize to a broader range of couples and relationships. For example, in some cultures, expressions and perceptions of gratitude can signal distance (Yu & Chaudhry, 2024) and not carry the same benefits as we observed in the present study. Thus, expanding the study of honesty about gratitude beyond a Western sample is an important future direction.

Conclusion

While it will be important to address the limitations of this study in future work, the current findings contribute to our understanding of honesty and gratitude nonetheless. Altogether, the current findings indicate that honest expressions about gratitude tend to benefit the self, while perceiving a partner's gratitude as honest benefits the self and partner, regardless of whether these perceptions are accurate or expressers are actually honest. Further, the benefits of perceived honesty in particular were most predictive of actual

feelings of appreciation, and this was true in daily life, after receiving an expression of gratitude, and over time. Thus, when it comes to honesty about gratitude, couples benefit most when they see their partner's truthful expressions of gratitude in a positive light, regardless of whether those perceptions are grounded in reality.

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