

How can I thank you? Highlighting the benefactor's responsiveness or costs when expressing gratitude.

How should you thank your romantic partner?

Highlighting the benefactor's responsiveness:

Conveying that your partner's kind action met your needs
e.g., "Thank you, that helped me get through the day"

Highlighting the benefactor's experienced costs:

Acknowledging how costly the action was for your partner
e.g., "Thank you, I understand how hard that was for you"



What we did

111 couples were invited to the lab where they were observed taking turns talking about something nice their partner has done for them that they were and are grateful for.



185 of these participants agreed to and completed daily surveys for two weeks asking them how their partner responded when they had to sacrifice or compromise something for them and how positively they felt about expressions of gratitude and their relationship each day.

Following the conversations, independent observers coded the extent to which responsiveness- and cost-highlighting each partner expressed in their gratitude. In daily surveys, participants self-reported the extent to which responsiveness- and cost-highlighting their partner's gratitude included.

What we found

Findings showed that more responsiveness-highlighting in the gratitude expression was associated with more positive feelings from the partner receiving the gratitude about the gratitude expression and about the relationship.



On the other hand, more cost-highlighting in the gratitude expression had no effect on positive feelings either towards the expression of gratitude or towards the relationship.

In Conclusion



These findings highlight that how you thank your partner can influence how good they feel towards the relationship such that, compared to thanking your partner for going through the trouble, it may be better to thank your partner for making things better.