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Impact of Gratitude on Music Performance Anxiety for Adult Musicians

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Abstract

This multi-method research investigates the relationship between gratitude and music performance anxiety (MPA) among adult musicians while exploring their subjective experiences and perceptions of this connection. The study encompassed a diverse sample (N= 4) of adult musicians, utilizing the Gratitude questionnaire (GQ-6) and Mazzarolo Music Performance Anxiety Scale (M-MPAS) to assess gratitude levels and MPA. Quantitative findings revealed a weak negative correlation between gratitude and MPA, and this relationship did not reach statistical significance. Qualitative interviews with selected participants shed light on their nuanced experiences, coping mechanisms, and perceptions regarding gratitude and MPA. The results emphasize the complexity of this relationship, offering valuable insights into the subjective experiences of musicians.

Keywords: gratitude, music performance anxiety, adult musicians, subjective experiences

Musicians' ability to express themselves creatively and maintain overall well-being is severely hampered by music performance anxiety (MPA) (Kenny, 2008). The quality of musical performances is hampered by this phenomenon, which is frequently accompanied by perceptible fear and cognitive anguish (Mohd et al., 2011); additionally, it threatens a musician's career trajectory (Kenny et al., 2014; Zuchner& Freeman, 2020). Despite numerous interventions, MPA remains a problem, leading to the investigation of novel mitigation strategies.

In MPA, gratitude—an essential component of positive psychology—emerges as a potential but understudied field (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Wood et al., 2010). This study explores how thankfulness may help adults who are musicians with MPA. It is grounded in well-established psychological theories. Gratitude emerges as a viable remedy for MPA, drawing on positive psychology, which contends that positive emotions improve well-being and lessen negative emotions like anxiety (Fredrickson, 2001).

This viewpoint is strengthened by the Broaden and Build Theory, which claims that joyful feelings increase one's personal resources and cognitive repertoires (Fredrickson, 2004). Gratitude can extend artists' perspectives and improve their coping skills, which can help to lessen MPA. The influence of thankfulness may also be long-lasting because it is thought that happy feelings build up and promote lasting well-being (Fredrickson, 2001). This study incorporates the Cognitive-Behavioral Theory, which considers the interconnectedness of ideas, emotions, and behaviors (Beck, 1976). Negative thoughts and frequent sources of anxiety can spark a cycle of suffering. Interventions that promote gratitude as a cognitive restructuring tool could break this pattern and promote a productive mindset.

The inherent human desires for autonomy, competence, and connectedness are also highlighted by self-determination theory (Deci& Ryan, 2000). Support in meeting these requirements encourages good feelings, such as gratitude, which may reduce anxiety. This study aims to understand the complex relationships between appreciation and MPA in professional musicians.

The lack of thorough research exploring the potential interaction between thankfulness and MPA highlights the importance of this study. While MPA is addressed by current therapies, the psychological and emotional aspects, particularly the impact of thankfulness, still need to be sufficiently investigated. There is a knowledge gap about MPA across various musical genres due to earlier studies' predominant focus on classical musicians. This gap is further highlighted by the need for more studies examining the complex mechanisms by which thankfulness reduces MPA. According to the literature currently available, being grateful can improve well-being and lessen anxiety (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Wood et al., 2010). Studies that explicitly connect appreciation to MPA in musicians are noticeably sparse. Previous studies primarily focused on traditional treatment approaches, ignoring the possibilities of interventions based on thankfulness. This work fills the gap by providing a fresh viewpoint on MPA management.

The main goal is to look into the connection between MPA and gratitude in adult musicians who play a variety of musical genres. The study aims to clarify musicians' experiences and views, offering insightful information about the complex interactions between MPA and gratitude. This study intends to shed light on how thankfulness affects MPA and provide a detailed knowledge of its effects through careful analysis and interpretation. With its foundation in well-established psychological ideas, this study explores the new territory of how thankfulness might help adult musicians with MPA. This study aims to contribute to our understanding of MPA management by filling a gap in the literature and using a thorough, multi-method approach.

The prevalence of music performance anxiety in the literature has rarely been assessed using self-report psychometric assessments rather than ICD or DSM criteria (Fernholz et al., 2019). According to publications, adolescence is a developmental stage where MPA risk increases (Fehm& Schmidt, 2006; Kenny & Osborne, 2006).

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A few cohort studies looked at how MPA evolved throughout adolescence. As older teenagers appear more anxious, there is evidence that MPA increases with age (Osborne et al., 2005; Patston& Osborne, 2016). According to Dempsey and Comeau (2019), MPA levels increase with age, with teenage musicians (aged 13–17) experiencing significantly higher levels of anxiety than young children (aged 7–12).

Developmental trajectory differences may result from elements including the performer's personality and preferred musical genre. In their study of musicians aged 14 to 19 years old, Sarbescu and Dorgo (2014) found that younger students with lower levels of emotional stability and fewer performance opportunities reported higher levels of MPA. Another factor that needs to be considered is the possibility that the MPA's maturation trajectory will vary depending on the type of music being performed, with differing MPA profiles for classical and famous musicians. In research on music school students aged 7 to 20 years old, Nusseck et al. (2015) discovered that younger classical musicians (under 16) were more worried than their older peers. In contrast, older famous musicians (age 16 and up) demonstrated greater MPA levels.

Gratitude has evolved as a multidimensional concept involving an emotion, a personality trait, or a coping mechanism due to positive psychology study (Emmons, McCullough, 2003). The two concepts of appreciation—trait thankfulness and state gratitude—have been the subject of several studies, especially in the academic setting (Wood et al., 2010). Individual differences in the threshold for feeling appreciative without reference to specific events or experiences are shown by trait gratitude, which is the tendency to notice when one benefits from others (McCullough et al., 2002). Separately, when a person feels they have achieved a positive outcome, they may experience thankfulness as a state-level emotion that makes them want to help others or engage in other prosocial activities (Emmons et al., 2001).

Previous meta-analyses and systematic reviews have found beneficial effects of gratitude interventions on well-being, including life satisfaction, happiness, and positive affect (Dickens et al., 2016), physical health, including blood pressure, glycemic control, and inflammatory markers (Jans-Beken et al., 2019), and mental health, including depression and anxiety (Thomas, 2019). These interventions have been shown to benefit populations, including clinical, resident, and school populations.

Therefore, even though research on the relationship between appreciation and MPA is still in its early stages, the literature suggests that thankfulness practices may help manage MPA among musicians. The current study aims to contribute to this increasing knowledge by studying the subjective perspectives and experiences of musicians who practice gratitude and how they perceive its impact on their sense of performance anxiety. This study aims to uncover musicians' subjective experiences and perceptions of this relationship and the effects of gratitude on musicians' anxiety related to music performance. Understanding how gratitude may affect musicians' anxiety during performances may help them incorporate gratitude rituals into their daily lives, improving the quality of their performances and reducing worry.

Method

Participants were included based on their status as adult musicians, regardless of their musical genre or proficiency level. Exclusion criteria involved individuals under 18 and those not actively engaged in musical activities.

Sample: The study involved 54 adult Indian musicians from diverse demographic backgrounds, musical genres, and professional experiences. Detailed demographic information, including age, gender, musical background, and performance experience, was collected to understand the participants comprehensively.

Tools: Participants completed the Gratitude Questionnaire-6 (GQ-6) and the Mazzarolo Music Performance Anxiety Scale (M-MPAS) through an online survey platform (Redcap). Clear instructions were provided, and participants had the opportunity to seek clarification if needed. The data collection process ensured anonymity and confidentiality.

Four participants were purposefully selected from the larger quantitative study for the qualitative component. Sampling criteria included participants with high levels of gratitude and low levels of Music Performance Anxiety (MPA), participants with low levels of gratitude and high levels of MPA, participants with high levels of gratitude and high levels of MPA, and participants with low levels of gratitude and high levels of MPA. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with these participants to explore their experiences of gratitude and MPA in depth. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Participants were recruited from local music schools, organizations, and music programs. A systematic approach ensured representation from various musical genres and proficiency levels. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants and their parents/guardians for those under 18. The intended sample size was 50 participants for the quantitative component, as determined by power analysis, ensuring adequate statistical power to detect significant relationships between gratitude and MPA. The achieved sample size matched the intended size, and no interim analyses or stopping rules were employed during the study. For the qualitative component, a sample size of four participants was deemed appropriate, including low levels of MPA and high levels of gratitude, low levels of gratitude, and high levels of MPA to achieve data saturation, ensuring in-depth exploration of

experiences. Two primary measures were utilized: the Gratitude Questionnaire-6 (GQ-6) to assess gratitude levels and the Mazzarolo Music Performance Anxiety Scale (M-MPAS) to measure MPA intensity, frequency, and aversion. Demographic variables such as age and gender were included as covariates in the analyses.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis. Descriptive statistics summarized demographic characteristics and mean scores on the GQ-6 and M-MPAS. Pearson correlation analysis examined the relationship between gratitude and MPA, while multiple regression analysis investigated gratitude's unique contribution to MPA prediction, controlling for covariates.

Qualitative data were analyzed using simple content analysis. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings provided a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between gratitude and MPA among adult musicians. Data collectors were trained to maintain consistency and reliability during data collection. Multiple observations were conducted to enhance the reliability of responses. Both instruments, GQ-6 and M-MPAS, demonstrated high internal consistency and reliability in previous studies, ensuring the quality of measurements.

Participants were unaware of the specific hypotheses under investigation to minimize response bias. However, due to the nature of the study, where participants were aware of the constructs being measured, more than complete masking of participants or data collectors was needed. The study adhered to ethical guidelines, obtaining approval from the institutional review board. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and their parents/guardians, ensuring voluntary participation and confidentiality of responses.

This multi-methodological approach ensured a comprehensive investigation into the relationship between gratitude and MPA among adult musicians, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods. Integrating quantitative and qualitative data provided a holistic understanding of musicians' experiences, shedding light on the impact of gratitude on their performance anxiety. According to McCullough, the GQ-6, the reliability coefficient was found to be $\alpha = 0.86$, indicating high internal consistency within the gratitude measure. Similarly, for the M-MPAS, Cronbach's alpha was $\alpha = 0.78$, demonstrating good internal consistency for the Music Performance Anxiety Scale by Ponterotto and Ruckdeschel, 2007.

Participants who provided incomplete or inconsistent responses and those exhibiting patterns of random or careless responding were considered for exclusion. Exclusion criteria included missing responses exceeding 10% of the total questionnaire items and obvious patterns of response bias identified through qualitative inspection. Missing data were inferred when participants skipped individual items within the questionnaires. Skewness and kurtosis statistics were calculated to evaluate the distributions' shape further.

Results

Initially, a total of 71 participants were enrolled in the study. After screening and excluding incomplete assessments, 54 participants were selected for analysis. This exclusion process ensured data accuracy and reliability. The study encompassed a diverse group of participants, including 77.8% male and 22.2% female musicians, emphasizing gender inclusivity in the analysis. Furthermore, the age range of participants (18 to 39 years) with a mean age of 25.54 years (SD = 4.859) ensured representation across various stages of musicians' careers, enhancing the study's applicability and relevance. The participants' mean age was 25.54 years (SD = 4.859), ranging from 18 to 39 years. The median age was 25.54 years. The Shapiro-Wilk test for normality showed that the age data did not significantly deviate from normal distribution ($p = 0.142$). Gratitude scores exhibited a slightly left-skewed distribution, while M-MPAS SUM scores showed a slightly right-skewed distribution.

Table 1Correlations between Mean Gratitude and M-MPAS SUM

	Mean Gratitude	M-MPAS SUM
Mean Gratitude	1	-0.153
M-MPAS SUM	-0.153	1

A correlational analysis explored the relationship between gratitude (Mean Gratitude scores) and music performance anxiety (M-MPAS SUM scores). The Pearson correlation coefficient was -0.153 ($p = 0.270$), suggesting a weak negative correlation between gratitude and music performance anxiety, as shown in Table 1. However, the relationship did not achieve statistical significance ($p < 0.05$). The non-significant p-value (0.270) indicated a 27% chance of observing this correlation by random chance.

ANOVA tests were performed as seen in Table 2, to assess differences in mean gratitude and M-MPAS SUM scores among amateur, semi-professional, and professional musicians. The ANOVA for mean gratitude scores revealed no statistically significant

differences between the expertise levels (F=0.567, p=0.571). The mean gratitude scores for amateur (M=5.375), semi-professional (M=5.7115), and professional musicians (M=5.8194) did not vary significantly, suggesting that levels of gratitude were similar regardless of musical expertise. Similarly, the ANOVA for M-MPAS SUM scores indicated no significant differences between expertise levels (F=1.734, p=0.187). The mean M-MPAS SUM scores for amateur (M=13.500), semi-professional (M=12.5385), and professional musicians (M=10.2500) did not show significant variation. This implies that music performance anxiety levels remained relatively consistent across different levels of musical expertise. ANOVA tests revealed no significant differences in gratitude levels and music performance anxiety among musicians of different expertise levels. These findings suggest that, based on the provided data, expertise levels do not significantly impact the participants' gratitude or music performance anxiety.

Table 2Frequency Distribution of Current Level of Musical Performance

Level of music performance	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Amateur	4	7.4	7.4	7.4
Semi-professional	26	48.1	48.1	55.6
Professional	24	44.4	44.4	100
Total	54	100	100	

The correlational analysis explored the relationships between participants' ages, music performance anxiety (M-MPAS SUM scores), and mean gratitude scores. The correlation coefficient between age and M-MPAS SUM scores was 0.089 (p = 0.520). This indicates a weak positive correlation, suggesting no significant relationship between participants' ages and their music performance anxiety levels. The non-significant p-value suggests that this correlation is likely due to chance. The correlation coefficient between age and mean gratitude scores was 0.131 (p = 0.345). Similar to the correlation with M-MPAS SUM, this correlation is weak and not statistically significant. This implies that participants' ages are not significantly related to their levels of gratitude. There was no significant correlation between music performance anxiety (M-MPAS SUM) and mean gratitude scores. The correlation coefficient was not statistically significant (r = 0.089, p = 0.520). This indicates a very weak positive correlation, suggesting that, on average, higher levels of gratitude are associated with slightly higher levels of music performance anxiety. However, due to the non-significant p-value, this relationship is likely due to chance.

Qualitative research using content analysis focused on four participants representing varying levels of gratitude. Three distinct participant profiles emerged from those with high music performance anxiety (MPA) and high gratitude, individuals with low MPA and high gratitude, and participants with low gratitude and high MPA. Unfortunately, a participant displaying low gratitude and low MPA was not identified during the data analysis. The qualitative exploration aimed to delve deeply into the subjective perceptions and experiences of these musicians, shedding light on the intricate relationship between gratitude, anxiety, and coping mechanisms within the context of music performance. Through simple content analysis, Participant A, with High MPA and High Gratitude, expressed an initial positive impact of gratitude on anxiety. However, gratitude practice became less effective over time, indicating the complexity of managing anxiety through gratitude. Participant B, with Low MPA and High Gratitude, emphasized the transformative power of gratitude in managing anxiety. Gratitude practiced daily provided a sense of purpose and reduced performance-related stress significantly. Participant C, with Low Gratitude and High MPA, described persistent anxiety despite attempts to practice gratitude sporadically. The struggle to cultivate gratitude highlighted the challenges of managing anxiety without a positive mindset.

Here are the themes identified by exploring an individual's subjective experiences,

Participant A (High MPA, High Gratitude):

Anxiety Experience: Overwhelmed by anxiety, underconfident, impaired expression.

Gratitude Practice: Initially practiced gratitude to ease tension before performances felt carefree.

Effectiveness: Gratitude was initially beneficial but later found it counterproductive due to increased self-awareness of anxiety.

Challenges: Practicing gratitude requires self-awareness discontinuation due to ineffectiveness.

Participant B (Low MPA, High Gratitude):

Anxiety Experience: Faced anxiety during challenging periods but found solace on stage and felt high while performing for genuine music lovers.

Gratitude Practice: Incorporated gratitude naturally, daily journaling, expressed gratitude for small things, valued audience presence.
Impact: Improved body language, body image, creativity, and well-being.
Recommendation: Strongly recommends gratitude practice for fellow musicians who see music as a blessing.

Participant C (Low Gratitude, High MPA):

Anxiety Experience: Fear of mistakes, nervousness, consciousness on stage, attempts to distract self from fear.
Gratitude Practice: Rarely practiced gratitude, open to trying but still determining its effectiveness.
Correlation: Indirectly noticed gratitude helped in overcoming fear occasionally.
Future Consideration: Open to trying gratitude practices but uncertain about their effectiveness, currently relies on considering stage as a practice ground.

Common Themes:

Anxiety Variability: Participants experienced varying anxiety levels, with different triggers and coping mechanisms.
Gratitude Practice: Gratitude was seen as a potential coping strategy, with differing levels of acceptance and effectiveness among participants.
Self-Awareness: Participants highlighted the importance of self-awareness in practicing gratitude and managing anxiety.
Performance Perception: Participants' perception of their performance and audience interaction influenced their anxiety levels and gratitude practices.

The qualitative analysis revealed diverse experiences and perspectives among participants regarding music performance anxiety and gratitude practices. While gratitude showed potential benefits for some, its effectiveness varied based on individual factors and self-awareness. Participants emphasized the significance of genuine audience connection and self-belief in managing anxiety, indicating the complex interplay between psychological strategies and personal perceptions in the context of music performance.

During the qualitative analysis, key insights were derived from participants' narratives, revealing nuanced perspectives on gratitude and its impact on music performance anxiety. Participant A Shared, "My body knew I was trying to camouflage anxiety. Gratitude felt like a loophole." This statement emphasizes the participant's anxiety struggle and attempts to use gratitude as a coping mechanism. Participant B Stated, "Gratitude changed my stage presence. Even if the show went bad, I would be thankful for the experience." This quote highlights the transformative effect of gratitude on stage presence, emphasizing the participant's ability to find positivity in challenging situations. Participant C Expressed, "Gratitude might help me distract from my fears, but I am not sure it is the solution." This statement reflects a nuanced perspective, indicating a participant's uncertainty about the efficacy of gratitude in addressing their fears. The findings highlight the nuanced relationship between gratitude practices and MPA. While gratitude positively impacted confidence, its effectiveness varied. Participants' experiences underscored the need for tailored interventions considering individual differences. Gratitude, though beneficial in specific contexts, may not serve as a universal remedy for MPA. Acknowledging limitations and exploring diverse coping mechanisms are essential in addressing musicians' anxiety effectively.

Discussion

The primary hypothesis posited that "Adult musicians with higher levels of gratitude will experience lower levels of music performance anxiety (MPA) compared to those with lower levels of gratitude." The results from both quantitative and qualitative analyses provide mixed support for this hypothesis. While a weak negative correlation was observed between gratitude and MPA in the quantitative analysis, it was not statistically significant. Additionally, the qualitative findings revealed diverse perspectives among participants, indicating that gratitude's impact on MPA varies individually. Therefore, the primary hypothesis receives partial support, indicating a need for further investigation. The secondary hypotheses explored nuanced aspects of the relationship between gratitude and MPA, capturing participants' subjective experiences. These hypotheses were not explicitly confirmed or refuted, given the complex and multifaceted nature of the participants' narratives. Instead, the study provides rich qualitative insights, offering a deeper understanding of the interplay between gratitude and MPA.

The qualitative data findings elaborate on gratitude's role as a potential psychological resilience factor among musicians. Understanding how gratitude influences emotional responses and coping mechanisms provides valuable insights into musicians' mental health, contributing to the discourse on psychological well-being in artistic communities.

This study challenges conventional beliefs about the relationship between gratitude and music performance anxiety (MPA). Exploring musicians' nuanced experiences adds depth to the understanding of how gratitude practices interact with MPA, challenging simplistic assumptions in the existing literature. The study supports the integration of positive psychology interventions, specifically gratitude practices, in the realm of music education and performance training. Educators, mentors, and mental health professionals can utilize these findings to design interventions that foster gratitude, potentially mitigating MPA and enhancing musicians' overall mental health. While the findings align with prior research suggesting a connection between

gratitude and reduced anxiety, the study's emphasis on individual differences and the potential pitfalls of gratitude practices adds a novel dimension. It enriches existing theories by emphasizing the importance of self-awareness and context in implementing gratitude interventions.

Alternative explanations, such as the influence of cultural, social, or environmental factors on gratitude perceptions, should be considered. These factors impact how musicians interpret and engage with gratitude practices, offering avenues for further exploration.

Comparing the study's results with existing literature, quantitative and qualitative findings align with previous research, indicating a potential link between positive psychological factors (such as gratitude) and reduced anxiety. However, the study's unique contribution lies in the nuanced exploration of individual experiences, shedding light on the complexities of this relationship. The interpretation of results considers potential biases, measurement imprecision, and the study's exploratory nature. Despite efforts to reduce bias, the subjective nature of qualitative data and individual differences in perception influenced the findings. Imprecise measurement could have influenced the quantitative results, emphasizing the importance of fine-tuned measuring techniques in future studies.

Limitations and strengths

The study's strengths lie in its qualitative approach, allowing for in-depth exploration of participants' subjective experiences. However, limitations include the small sample size and potential bias due to self-reporting. The qualitative nature limited the quantification of gratitude levels, suggesting the need for future mixed-methods research for a comprehensive understanding. The specific sample of adult musicians examined limits the study's generalizability. While efforts were made to ensure diverse representation, the findings may only partially extend to musicians in different contexts or age groups. Further research with broader samples is essential to enhance the study's generalizability and validate the observed patterns. Ethical dilemmas related to participant confidentiality and informed consent were carefully addressed. Future researchers should continue prioritizing ethical guidelines, ensuring participant well-being and privacy.

Conclusions and implications

The findings suggest that neither age nor gratitude significantly correlates with music performance anxiety within the studied sample of participants. These results emphasize the need for considering more nuanced factors beyond age and general gratitude levels when exploring the complexity of musicians' anxiety. While the correlations were weak and non-significant, this study provides valuable baseline data. Future research could delve deeper into more specific aspects of gratitude, age-related factors, or other psychological variables that might influence music performance anxiety. Additionally, a larger and more diverse sample might reveal subtler relationships that were not apparent in this analysis. Understanding these relationships could inform targeted interventions to support musicians' mental well-being in various performance contexts. Despite the lack of statistical significance, the negative correlation suggests a promising avenue for interventions to reduce music performance anxiety. Incorporating gratitude-focused practices or interventions within music education or performance contexts could be explored further as potential strategies to help musicians manage anxiety and enhance their overall well-being.

Researchers should consider refining measurement tools, incorporating diverse samples, and exploring contextual factors influencing these experiences. Music education and performance training programs could also benefit from integrating interventions targeting musicians' psychological well-being, potentially incorporating gratitude-based practices to address performance anxiety. Policymakers and practitioners should prioritize mental health support in music education and consider tailored interventions based on individual musicians' needs and perceptions. Music education and training programs could combine gratitude practices and mindfulness approaches. Musicians can cope with performance-related anxieties and improve their overall well-being by cultivating present-moment mindfulness and gratitude at the same time. Music institutions and mental health specialists should work together to support musicians' mental health. This entails treating MPA and cultivating a happy psychological state through gratitude exercises. Including tools and instruction on appreciation cultivation in mental health support programs could be beneficial.

Educators and music mentors can be important in instilling gratitude among musicians. Musicians' emotional resilience can be improved by encouraging reflective practices, gratitude journaling, and creating a supportive environment. Gratitude workshops and training sessions for educators could be incorporated into professional development programs. Early detection of MPA and thankfulness levels in musicians can allow for timely interventions. Early interventions, such as gratitude-focused workshops or counseling, can help prevent anxiety from escalating and foster a positive performance mentality from the start of a musician's musical journey.

Opening up a conversation about MPA and thankfulness within the music community can help to decrease stigma. Musicians should be encouraged to share their experiences and coping mechanisms, creating a supportive network in which appreciation may be openly acknowledged and celebrated. More study is needed to investigate the efficacy of thankfulness therapies in lowering MPA. Research into the long-term influence of thankfulness practices on musicians' mental health could lead to evidence-

based interventions. Advocacy campaigns can increase awareness of the need of mental health support in the music industry, urging institutions and policymakers to prioritize these programs.

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