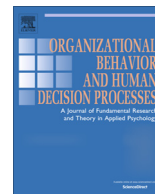




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When doing good is bad in gift giving: Mis-predicting appreciation of socially responsible gifts

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ABSTRACT

Gifts that support a worthy cause (i.e., “gifts that give twice”), such as a charitable donation in the recipient’s name, have become increasingly popular. Recipients generally enjoy the idea of these gifts, which not only benefit others in need but also make individuals feel good about themselves. But do givers accurately predict appreciation of these types of gifts? Across three studies, we show that gift givers mis-predict appreciation for socially responsible gifts, and that their mis-predictions depend on the nature of their relationship to the recipient. Drawing on research on affective forecasting and perspective taking, we propose and find that givers overestimate how much distant others appreciate socially responsible gifts because they focus more than recipients on the symbolic meaning of the gift. Critically, givers have the most to gain from distant others, in terms of strengthened relationship quality, by making better gift choices.

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1. Introduction

Americans’ spending on gifts and charitable donations has increased 47% since 2009 (Intuit Consumer Spending Index, 2013), and winter holiday gift expenditures exceeded \$602 billion in 2013 (Grannis, 2014). As these statistics suggest, giving is an economically important phenomenon. It is also a socially important one, as it helps individuals signal their commitment and caring in social relationships (Belk, 1976, 1979; Caplow, 1982). People face numerous occasions in which they need to choose gifts for others with whom they have either a personal (family, friends, neighbors) or professional (assistants, bosses, interns, coworkers, clients) relationship. In many cases, individuals find themselves in situations where they need to choose a gift for someone whose explicit preferences are unknown.

An increasing number of gift givers are turning to “gifts that give twice”—that is, gifts that support a worthy cause (Maciejewsky, 2008). Organizations such as Oxfam have helped popularize the practice of giving socially responsible gifts across personal and professional relationships (oxfamgifts.com). Numerous organizations and websites, including “Just Give” (justgive.org) and “Shop With Meaning” (shopwithmeaning.org), encourage individuals and

businesses to give “gifts that give twice.” Such gift choices are often motivated by people’s desire to do good (as suggested by the “warm-glow” theory of charitable giving; see Andreoni, 1990) and by their desire to maintain a moral identity (Aquino & Reed, 2002). In this paper, we examine whether such gifts have the expected outcomes. Specifically, we investigate potential gaps between givers’ predicted and receivers’ actual appreciation of socially responsible gifts across close and distant relationships.

Building on prior work documenting mis-predictions in gift giving (Adams, Flynn, & Norton, 2012; Flynn & Adams, 2009; Gino & Flynn, 2011; Zhang & Epley, 2012), we argue that, under certain conditions, socially responsible gifts are substantially less appreciated by recipients than givers anticipate. We propose that reactions to socially responsible gifts and interpretation of their meaning largely depend on *relational closeness* between the gift giver and the recipient. Specifically, we propose and find that givers consistently mis-predict appreciation of socially responsible gifts when choosing for more *distant others*. In distant relationships, givers expect recipients to appreciate socially responsible gifts more than they actually do.

2. Gift giving and socially responsible gifts

Gift giving is commonly defined as the process of selection, transfer, and evaluation of material (tangible) and immaterial (intangible) objects in fulfillment of an obligation or in a

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spontaneous manner (Macklin & Walker, 1988). Most research on gift giving has focused on gifts that benefit the recipient directly, such as products of different values, monetary gifts, or gift certificates. Past research has examined how a variety of gift characteristics and types of gifts impact appreciation, including whether a gift is non-requested versus requested (e.g., gift registry; Bradford & Sherry, 2013; Gino & Flynn, 2011; Ward & Broniarczyk, 2011); inexpensive versus expensive (Flynn & Adams, 2009); or material versus experiential (Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003).

An important type of gift that has grown in popularity is the *socially responsible gift*, which regularly carries symbolic meaning. Socially responsible gifts, such as a charitable donation that a gift giver makes in the recipient's name, do not benefit the recipient directly; rather, they are intended to produce an indirect psychological benefit to the recipient, namely the sense of satisfaction and happiness that comes from helping a third party in need (e.g., a charity) and perhaps the recognition of an altruistic or moral identity. The practice of giving socially responsible gifts has become increasingly popular in today's society (Maciejewsky, 2008), but, to date, no prior study has examined whether and to what extent such gifts are, in fact, actually appreciated by recipients. Moreover, unlike more traditional gifts, socially responsible gifts are often intangible and have a transparent cost (e.g., "a \$50 donation in your name"). As such, socially responsible gifts provide an interesting context for understanding when symbolic meaning is most likely to impact givers' predicted and recipients' actual appreciation.

3. Appreciation of socially responsible gifts: givers, receivers and relationship closeness

Past researchers have noted asymmetries between givers' and recipients' appreciation of traditional gifts (Adams et al., 2012; Teigen, Olsen, & Solås, 2005). Such mis-calibrations may occur due to differences in perspective. People tend to overestimate the extent to which others share their own feelings and attitudes (Ross, Greene, & House, 1977) and focus excessively on their own experience when predicting how others will evaluate them (Epley, Savitsky, & Gilovich, 2002; Savitsky, Epley, & Gilovich, 2001).

When evaluating a potential gift, givers are likely to emphasize different characteristics about the gift or the selection process (e.g., cost or uniqueness) than receivers (Flynn & Adams, 2009; Gino & Flynn, 2011; Steffel & LeBoeuf, 2014). Prior research on affective forecasting has found that the affective intensity of an outcome is lower when making an affective forecast for that outcome versus when a person is actually experiencing it (Buechel, Zhang, Morewedge, & Vosgerau, 2014). Because of such differences, experiencers (i.e., gift recipients) may pay relatively more attention to the outcome of a gift exchange (e.g., the type of gift they received) and less to factors that determined the gift (e.g., who the gift giver is, and what this person wanted to communicate with the gift). That is, recipients tend to focus on the hedonic experience of the gift. By contrast, affective forecasters (i.e., gift givers) are less likely to focus on and be sensitive to the hedonic experience of the gift itself than experiencers. That is, givers are more likely to focus on non-hedonic elements such as the communicative intent of their gift and the symbolic meaning of the exchange, assuming that "it's the thought that counts" (Webley & Wilson, 1989; Zhang & Epley, 2012). This is likely to be especially true for socially responsible gifts, which carry such symbolic meaning.

This difference in sensitivity to non-hedonic factors of the gift exchange, we suggest, contributes to mis-predictions regarding the extent to which recipients appreciate socially responsible gifts. Notably, considering others' (i.e., recipients') thoughts requires attention, effort, motivation (Lin, Keysar, & Epley, 2010), and

inferences about their mental state (Zhang & Epley, 2012)—processes that are not automatic or typical for givers (or for anyone).

One non-hedonic element of the gift exchange that may be particularly salient to givers is the type of relationship they have with the recipient (e.g., how close they are to that person). Prior work suggests that relationship closeness may impact gift choices (Ward & Broniarczyk, 2011). We suggest that, when choosing gifts for close others, givers have greater ability and motivation to take the receiver's perspective due to familiarity with their preferences (e.g., a history of gift exchanges and feedback). Individuals are more likely to take the perspective of close others, and such perspective-taking increases perceived psychological closeness (Cialdini, Brown, Lewis, Luce, & Neuberg, 1997; Pickett, Gardner, & Knowles, 2004). Moreover, givers may assume that close others will prefer tangible, material items rather than items that help others, mirroring the predictions individuals typically make regarding which purchases will make themselves most happy (Dunn, Aknin, & Norton, 2014). Thus, we predict that gift givers will place less weight on the symbolic value of a socially responsible gift for a close other.

Due to their lack of social and psychological closeness with *distant others*, gift givers are unlikely to be privy to the same preference information had for close others and more likely to be left to their own thoughts and devices when choosing a gift. If givers believe that their own thought processes count in a receiver's evaluations (Zhang & Epley, 2012), then they are likely to attend to the symbolic meaning of a gift, particularly when giving to distant others. Defined by their intangible attribute of prosociality, socially responsible gifts are imbued with symbolic meaning. By definition, socially responsible gifts benefit others and carry associations of caring, selflessness, and altruism—traits valued in relationships. If motivated to make a good impression and demonstrate thoughtfulness, givers may gravitate toward socially responsible gifts and value them more highly than other gifts. Thus, we predict that givers will weight the thought and symbolic value associated with a socially responsible gift more heavily when choosing gifts for distant others—i.e., those with whom social bonds are more tenuous and perspective taking less likely. This tendency also seems particularly likely when the interpersonal stakes of choices are high and anxiety-ridden (Wooten, 2000), as would be the case when choosing gifts for distant others.

Gift characteristics serve as a powerful statement of how a giver perceives the recipient (Schwartz, 1967). When giving to *distant others*, givers are often motivated to elicit desired reactions (Wooten, 2000). Because gifts are seen as symbols of commitment (Belk & Coon, 1993), a giver may be more likely to choose a socially responsible gift for a distant other and to predict that the distant other will appreciate such a gift more. We predict that when choosing gifts for distant others, givers' reliance on and assumptions about the importance of symbolic meaning will lead them to overestimate these recipients' appreciation of socially responsible gifts. With more distant relationships, givers may be more prone to overvaluing gift characteristics they believe will create a more positive impression of the gift and of themselves.

In sum, we predict that givers mis-predict recipients' appreciation of socially responsible gifts and that relationship closeness moderates their mis-prediction. Specifically, we expect givers to overestimate how much distant others appreciate socially responsible gifts because they focus more than recipients on the symbolic meaning of the gift.

4. Overview of the present research

We test our main hypotheses in three studies. In Study 1, we examine how givers anticipate and receivers experience appreciation in response to socially responsible gifts and test for the role of

relational closeness as a moderator. Study 2 provides further support for our hypotheses using real gifts and real relationships (close and distant) in a university environment. Finally, Study 3 provides additional data from a second behavioral study and extends our investigation by examining the psychological processes underlying our effects.

In our studies, we focus on how recipients evaluate socially responsible gifts as compared to more traditional gifts. We compare non-tangible, socially responsible gifts (e.g., a charitable donation in the recipient's name) to more traditional gifts, namely both tangible and non-tangible gifts that produce direct benefits to the recipient (e.g., a gift basket or a gift certificate).

5. Study 1: Relationship closeness influences gift appreciation

In Study 1, we vary relational closeness and examine how perceptions of appreciation for socially responsible gifts differ when giving and receiving gifts from close vs. distant others.

5.1. Method

5.1.1. Participants and design

One hundred fifty-one participants ($M_{age} = 29.59$, $SD = 8.20$; 57% male) recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk completed an online survey for pay. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (role: giver vs. receiver) \times 2 (relational closeness: close vs. not close) between-subjects design.

5.1.2. Procedure

Participants first read initial instructions welcoming them to the study and answered an attention check. Those who failed the attention check were automatically taken to a screen that informed them that, based on their answers, they did not qualify for the study. Thus, their data was not recorded.

Depending on the role condition they had been assigned to, participants were asked to imagine that they [or a friend] needed to choose a birthday gift for a friend [or for them]. Participants were told that the birthday gift was being selected for [or by] a close friend [or not close friend], whom they had named. They were then told what gift they [or their friend] had chosen: a socially responsible gift for a microenterprise (i.e., a \$50 donation to Oxfam to support coffee farmers). The alternative gift was also visible and known to participants: a comparable and equally priced traditional gift (i.e., a \$50 coffee gift box). The gifts are shown in Fig. 1.

Participants then answered a short questionnaire with a few measures of interest.

5.1.3. Measures

Participants completed measures for feelings of appreciation (5 items; Flynn & Adams, 2009), thoughtfulness (4 items; Flynn & Adams, 2009), offensiveness (8 items: annoyed, irritated, disgusted, upset, offended, insulted, awkward, uncomfortable), and favorability (1 item: "How favorably do you feel about the choice that was made?"). We used these measures as our main dependent variables in the analyses. We also asked participants to indicate the extent to which the gift symbolized commitment to the recipient (1 item: "To what extent do you view the product chosen as symbolizing commitment to the gift-recipient?"). We used this measure to capture our mediating variable.

The way the questions for our measures were phrased varied depending on the role. So, for instance, givers were asked "To what extent do you think your friend would appreciate this gift?" and receivers were asked "To what extent would you appreciate this gift?" on 7-point scales (1 = not at all, 7 = to a great extent).

Participants also answered manipulation checks asking them whether they remembered some of the details they read about in the gifting scenario and demographic measures (gender, age, ethnicity).

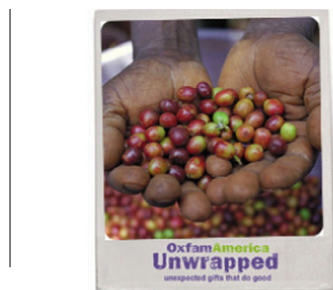
5.2. Results

We first confirmed that all participants remembered the information they had been presented with correctly.

Table 1

Means and standard deviations of main variables assessed by condition in Study 1.

	Close relationship		Distant relationship	
	Giver	Recipient	Giver	Recipient
Appreciation ($\alpha = .97$)	3.12 (1.57)	4.29 (1.87)	5.77 (1.23)	3.90 (2.00)
Thoughtfulness ($\alpha = .94$)	2.66 (1.41)	3.95 (1.86)	5.24 (1.48)	3.48 (1.81)
Favorability	2.63 (1.84)	3.95 (2.09)	5.42 (1.61)	3.51 (2.10)
Overall appreciation (composite measure)	2.80 (1.46)	4.07 (1.88)	5.48 (1.35)	3.63 (1.90)
Offensiveness ($\alpha = .95$)	3.59 (1.43)	2.65 (1.66)	1.54 (1.24)	2.32 (1.32)
Symbolizing commitment to the recipient	2.79 (1.58)	3.45 (1.74)	4.42 (1.80)	3.27 (1.90)



Donation Given on Your Behalf to Oxfam

A donation has been made on your behalf to Oxfam to support coffee growers. This investment supports training programs that help farmers build their skills and organize fair trade coffee cooperatives to better their communities, giving them greater financial independence and helping them out of poverty.

Price: \$50



Gourmet Coffee Gift Box

A gold box filled with a deluxe sampling of the world's finest coffees, tools, and treats. Renowned for superior quality and indulgent flavors, this box brings a rich history of the world's best coffee experiences to life. This unique sampler allows you to master the art of the perfect cup.

Price: \$50

Fig. 1. Stimuli used in Study 1.

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations of the main variables assessed in the study by condition. We conducted a principal components factor analysis (varimax rotation) and found that appreciation, thoughtfulness, and favorability loaded onto the same factor, while the items assessing offensiveness loaded onto a second factor. Thus, we created a composite measure for overall appreciation by averaging the items on appreciation, thoughtfulness, and favorability ($\alpha = .98$).¹

5.2.1. Overall appreciation

A 2 (role: giver vs. recipient) \times 2 (relationship closeness: close vs. distant) between-subjects ANOVA using the overall appreciation composite measure as our dependent variable revealed the predicted interaction, $F(1,147) = 32.55$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .18$. The two-way interaction was such that givers were sensitive to relationship closeness and recipients were not. Specifically, recipients appreciated socially responsible gifts about the same whether the gift was received from a close friend or a distant other ($F(1,147) = 1.23$, $p = .27$). But givers predicted that a distant recipient would appreciate the socially responsible gift much more than a close friend would ($F(1,147) = 47.08$, $p < .001$). In close relationships, givers underestimated how much recipients would appreciate socially responsible gifts ($F(1,147) = 10.66$, $p = .001$). But in distant relationships, givers overestimated recipients' appreciation for such gifts ($F(1,147) = 21.80$, $p < .001$).

5.2.2. Offensiveness

A similar 2 (role) \times 2 (relationship closeness) ANOVA using perceived offensiveness as our dependent variable revealed the predicted role \times relationship closeness interaction, $F(1,147) = 13.83$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .086$. Recipients perceived socially responsible gifts to be similarly offensive independent of whether they received them from a close friend or a distant other ($F < 1$, $p = .33$). But givers predicted that distant others would find the socially responsible gift much less offensive than a close friend would ($F(1,147) = 38.28$, $p < .001$). In close relationships, givers overestimated how much recipients would find socially responsible gifts to be offensive ($F(1,147) = 5.32$, $p = .023$). In distant relationships, instead, givers underestimated recipients' perceived offensiveness of such gifts ($F(1,147) = 7.98$, $p = .005$).

5.2.3. Gift as a symbol

In their responses, participants also indicated the extent to which the gift symbolized commitment to the relationship. We used this measure as the dependent variable in a 2 \times 2 ANOVA and found a significant interaction between role and relationship closeness ($F(1,147) = 10.00$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .064$). Following the same pattern of results we observed for overall appreciation and offensiveness, we found that recipients perceived socially responsible gifts to symbolize commitment to the relationship independent of whether they received them from a close friend or a distant other ($F < 1$, $p = .67$). But givers predicted that a distant recipient would consider the socially responsible gift to be much more of a symbol of commitment to the relationship than a close friend would ($F(1,147) = 15.79$, $p < .001$). In close relationships, givers marginally underestimated how much recipients would find socially responsible gifts to symbolize commitment to the relationship ($F(1,147) = 2.62$, $p = .108$). In distant relationships, instead, givers overestimated recipients' reactions to such gifts in terms of the symbolic meaning they conveyed ($F(1,147) = 7.66$, $p = .006$).

5.2.4. Mediation analysis

Next, using mediation analysis, we tested whether perceptions of the symbolic meaning of the gift explained why givers overestimated distant recipients' appreciation for such gifts (Baron & Kenny, 1986). The effect of role (giver vs. receiver) was reduced (from $\beta = .49$, $p < .001$, to $\beta = .30$, $p < .001$) when perceived symbolic meaning of the gift was included in the equation, and such symbolic meaning of the gift predicted overall appreciation ($\beta = .64$, $p < .001$). A bootstrap analysis showed that the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval for the size of the indirect effect excluded zero (.22, 1.34), suggesting a significant indirect effect (MacKinnon, Fairchild, & Fritz, 2007). These results show that perceived symbolic meaning of the gift mediated givers' overestimation of distant recipients' appreciation of socially responsible gifts.

5.3. Discussion

In Study 1, we find that givers expect a recipient who is distant from them will appreciate a socially responsible gift more than they actually do. In fact, givers significantly mis-predict the reactions of distant recipients, overestimating how appreciative they are of the gift and how symbolic they consider it to be of commitment to the relationship, and underestimating how offensive they consider it to be. At the same time, givers also underestimated how appreciative close friends were of the socially responsible gift.

A limitation of Study 1 is its reliance on scenarios and a stylized choice set consisting of only two options: one traditional vs. one socially responsible gift. We address these limitations in Study 2, a behavioral study that employs a larger set of gift choices and observes real gift choices and reactions among friends varying in relationship closeness.

6. Study 2: Giving and receiving actual gifts

We designed a three-stage study intended to systematically document the interactive effect of relationship closeness and gift choice on feelings of appreciation. Specifically, Study 2 addresses three outstanding questions: (1) How frequently do gift givers actually choose socially responsible gifts for others? (2) Are gift givers more likely to choose socially responsible gifts for people with whom they have certain types of relationships (i.e., close vs. not close)? and (3) Do gift givers' anticipated reactions and gift-recipients' actual reactions to these gifts differ as a function of relationship closeness in a consequential choice setting? We manipulated relationship closeness by randomly assigning gift recipients to receive a gift from either a close or distant friend who made a real gift choice for them. To increase response and eventual show-up rates across conditions, we contacted our participants prior to their previously scheduled lab session.

6.1. Method

6.1.1. Participants and design

Two hundred and forty-five participants ($M_{age} = 20.90$, $SD = 4.75$; 48.6% male) took part in a study in exchange for course credit or a \$5 Amazon gift card. Two hundred and nineteen completed all measures.

The study consisted of a 2 role (gift giver/gift recipient) \times 2 relationship closeness (close/not close) \times 2 gift type (socially responsible gift/traditional gift) design.

6.1.2. Procedure

Approximately one week before their upcoming lab session, we asked subject pool participants to identify multiple friends. Based on these responses, we randomly selected and contacted one of

¹ We note that the nature and significance of our analyses do not change when including gender of the recipient as a covariate in our studies.

the listed friends per participant and offered them a \$5 Amazon gift card for their participation, which involved choosing a gift for their friend. When the student participants arrived at the lab for their in-person session, they received the gift chosen by their friend.

6.1.2.1. Phase 1: Identification of friends varying in relationship closeness. In the first stage of the study, participants (gift recipients) were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (relationship closeness: close/not close). In the instructions, all participants were told that we would ask them to provide email addresses for a few friends and that we would contact one or more of these friends to choose a gift. To make the choices consequential, we elaborated that in each session, “1 in 10 participants will be randomly selected to receive the actual gift” as part of their compensation for participation.

To increase the pre-lab-session response rate, participants were further told that they would receive a snack of their choice at the session for completing this pre-session survey. Depending on the condition to which they had been randomly assigned, participants were asked for the names of a particular type of person: “a close [not close] friend.” We further specified: “By a close [not close] friend we mean a person who you do [do not] consider being a close friend and [but still] see often.” Participants were then requested to provide the names and email addresses for three individuals who fit this description and indicate their perceived relationship closeness with them using 7-point scales (1 = not my closest, 7 = my very closest).

6.1.2.2. Phase 2: Gift choices made by actual gift givers. In the second stage of the study, participants (gift givers) were contacted to make actual gift selections and complete accompanying measures.

6.1.2.2.1. Gift choice. Friends identified by the participant were randomly selected and contacted via email. These individuals (gift givers) were told that someone they knew was participating in a campus-based research study on choices for others and that we would like them to make a gift choice for the person named. We explained that we would present them with a set of gift options and ask them to make a choice for this person, and that this person would be presented with their gift choice when they came to the lab in a few days.

The gift givers were asked to envision an upcoming gifting occasion and choose one \$25 gift for the named recipient from a set of six options. The set of gift options consisted of three gender-neutral traditional gifts (an executive pen, a travel mug, or a flash drive) and three socially responsible gifts in the form of donations to socially responsible initiatives by Oxfam (supporting fair-trade coffee farmers, school children, or female entrepreneurs). The socially responsible gifts were modeled on current donation offerings available on the Oxfam website.² A color³ photograph and brief description was provided for each choice option (see Fig. 2). These gift-type choices were later collapsed to create a dichotomous variable commensurate with our other experiments (0 = traditional gift vs. 1 = socially responsible gift).

6.1.2.2.2. Gift evaluation by gift giver. After making their choice, gift givers were asked to complete measures for feelings of appreciation (5 items), thoughtfulness (4 items), and symbolizing commitment to the recipient (1 item) using the same items as in Study 1. We also included a measure of decision difficulty (1 item).

6.1.2.2.3. Closeness check and background measures. Finally, we asked the gift givers to indicate their perceived relationship closeness to the gift recipient by rating the extent of their agreement with five statements on 7-point scales (sample items: “I consider

him/her one of my closest friends,” “I know him/her well,” and “overall relationship closeness with this person”). We also asked the gift givers to complete a few demographic questions (gender, age, ethnicity).

6.1.2.3. Phase 3: Gifts received and reactions from actual gift recipients. In the third stage of the study, participating gift recipients arrived in person for their scheduled lab session. They were reminded that we had contacted one of the friends that they had suggested and that 1 in 10 participants would receive the actual gift that day. After entering some identifying information, participants were asked to raise their hand to “let the experimenter know you are ready to receive your gift.” Each participant walked to the front of the room in turn and learned both the name of the gift giver and the gift chosen. The participant then returned to his/her computer to complete a series of measures.

As an attention check, participants were asked to indicate their friend's name and which gift had been chosen for them in blanks provided. Participants then proceeded to complete measures for feelings of appreciation (5 items), thoughtfulness (4 items), symbolizing commitment to the recipient (1 item), and decision difficulty (1 item). Finally, participants answered a few manipulation checks about the gift (e.g., expensiveness, attractiveness, ethicality) and questions about the relationship. They also answered demographic questions (gender, age, ethnicity).

6.2. Results

The frequency with which each of the six gift options was chosen is provided in Table 2, and the proportion of givers choosing socially responsible gifts is provided in Table 3. After collapsing across gift options, the results show that 39.1% of givers chose a socially responsible gift and 60.9% chose a more traditional gift for their friends. Givers were more likely to choose socially responsible gifts for distant others (47.7%) than for close friends (34.1%), but this difference did not reach conventional levels of significance, $X^2 = 2.22$, $p = .14$.

6.2.1. Analyses regarding manipulation checks

The manipulation check items reported below were presented only to those in the gift-recipient condition.

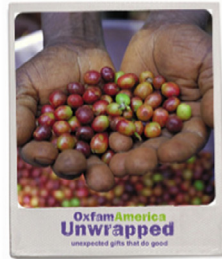
6.2.1.1. Manipulation check: Attractiveness of the gift. A 2 (type of gift) \times 2 (relationship closeness) ANOVA using gift recipients' perception of the attractiveness of the gift as the dependent variable revealed no significant effects for type of gift, $F < 1$, NS , $\eta_p^2 = .004$, relationship closeness, $F(1, 108) = 2.44$, $p < .12$, $\eta_p^2 = .022$, or their interaction, $F < 1$, NS , $\eta_p^2 = .000$.

6.2.1.2. Manipulation check: Expensiveness of the gift. A 2 (type of gift) \times 2 (relationship closeness) ANOVA using gift recipients' perception of the expensiveness of the gift as the dependent variable revealed a marginally significant main effect of type of gift, $F(1, 108) = 3.27$, $p < .07$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. Participants rated the traditional gift ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 1.86$) as marginally more expensive than the socially responsible one ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 1.64$). The main effect of relationship closeness, $F < 1$, NS , $\eta_p^2 = .001$, and the interaction, $F < 1$, NS , $\eta_p^2 = .006$, were not significant.

6.2.1.3. Manipulation check: Ethically produced gift. A 2 (type of gift) \times 2 (relationship closeness) ANOVA using gift recipients' perception of the extent to which the gift was ethically produced as the dependent variable revealed a significant main effect of type of gift, $F(1, 108) = 108.36$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .50$. Participants rated the traditional gift ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 1.49$) as less ethical than the socially responsible one ($M = 6.17$, $SD = 1.48$). The main effect of

² <https://www.oxfamamericaunwrapped.com/all-gifts/>.

³ For interpretation of color in Fig. 2, the reader is referred to the web version of this article, which contains full color versions of the stimuli.



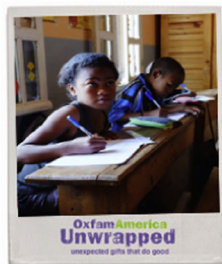
Fair Trade Coffee Farmers Were Supported In Your Honor

Card inside reads: "A donation has been made in your honor to support coffee growers working to earn a living wage. Proceeds from this gift support Oxfam's efforts to right the wrongs of poverty, hunger, & injustice. This investment means that farmers can build their skills and organize cooperatives to better their communities, giving them greater independence and helping them out of poverty."



Ballpoint Pen

An executive-styled ballpoint pen that combines both sophisticated quality and design. Made with a quality lacquer finish, this classically styled pen provides a smooth writing experience and has an exclusive gel ink rollerball formula that flows flawlessly onto any writing surface.



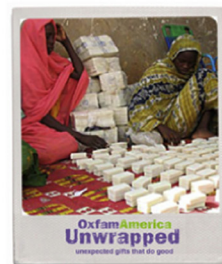
School Children Were Supported In Your Honor

Card inside reads: "A donation has been made in your honor to support children's education in rural communities. Proceeds from this gift support Oxfam's efforts to right the wrongs of poverty, hunger, & injustice. This investment means that children will have the necessary supplies (rulers, pencils, books) and tools to learn in their local schools, giving them greater independence and helping them out of poverty."



Travel Mug

A 16 oz. travel size mug that combines both functionality and simplicity in its design. Made with a double wall exterior, this travel mug is built to withstand day-to-day usage and is insulated to keep your favorite hot drinks hot and cold drinks cold.



Female Entrepreneurs Were Supported In Your Honor

Card inside reads: "A donation has been made in your honor to support female villagers starting soap-making businesses. Proceeds from this gift support Oxfam's efforts to right the wrongs of poverty, hunger, & injustice. This investment means that women can have training, build their skills, and better their communities, giving them greater independence and helping them out of poverty."



USB Flash Drive

A 32 GB USB flash drive that combines both technical quality and design. Made with a quality chrome finish, this contemporarily styled USB is made to provide robust mobile storage and has an exclusive cap-less sleek retractable design that allows for less hassle.

Fig. 2. Stimuli used as options for real gift choices in Study 2.

Table 2
Frequencies of actual gifts chosen in Study 2.

	Oxfam coffee	Pen	Oxfam school	Travel mug	Oxfam entrepreneur	USB flash drive
Frequency	8	15	29	45	13	18
Percentage	6.3	11.7	22.7	35.2	10.2	14.1

Table 3
Proportion of socially responsible gifts chosen by relationship closeness in Study 2.

	Close relationship (%)	Distant relationship (%)
Socially responsible gift	34.1	47.7
Traditional gift	65.9	52.3

relationship closeness, $F < 1$, NS , $\eta_p^2 = .02$, and the interaction, $F < 1$, NS , $\eta_p^2 = .007$, were not significant.

6.2.1.4. Manipulation check: Relationship closeness. To assess whether our manipulation of relationship closeness worked, we analyzed ratings of relationship closeness separately for givers and recipients. Givers in the close friend condition ($M = 5.90$, $SD = 1.19$) reported significantly higher levels of relationship closeness than those in the distant friend condition ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 1.62$); $F(1,132) = 37.54$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .221$. Similarly, recipients in the close friend condition ($M = 5.91$, $SD = 1.18$) reported significantly higher levels of relationship closeness than those in the distant friend condition ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.62$); $F(1,109) = 35.39$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .245$. Thus, our manipulation of relationship closeness was effective.

6.2.2. Main analyses

To offset power limitations resulting from the real gift choice design and sample size constraints (we used every available participant in the pool), we used participants' ratings of relationship closeness and a composite of all the appreciation and thoughtfulness items as our dependent measure. We ran a 2 (role, coded 1 = giver and 0 = receiver) \times continuous (relationship closeness) \times 2 (gift type, coded 1 = socially responsible gift and 0 = traditional gift) regression examining the focal dependent measure.

We note that we conducted a principal components factor analysis (varimax rotation) and found that appreciation and thoughtfulness loaded onto the same factor. Thus, we created a composite measure for overall appreciation by averaging the items on both measures ($\alpha = .90$).

Preliminary analyses also revealed a significant effect for gender, such that females reported greater appreciation of gifts regardless of condition; thus, it was included as a covariate in the following analyses. We note that results remain substantively the same when gender is not included as a covariate, and the focal interactions of role-by-gift-type, relationship-closeness-by-gift-type, and role-by-gift-type-by-relationship-closeness remain significant or marginally significant (all $p < .07$).

6.2.2.1. Dependent variable: Appreciation composite measure. The regression model for the composite measure of appreciation of the gift as the dependent variable revealed a simple effect of role ($B = -1.49$, $SE = 0.76$; $t = -1.96$, $p < .05$) and gift type ($B = -1.86$, $SE = 0.84$; $t = -2.23$, $p < .03$), which were qualified by a significant role-by-gift-type interaction, ($B = 3.39$, $SE = 1.20$; $t = 2.81$, $p < .005$), a significant relationship-closeness-by-gift-type interaction, ($B = 0.32$, $SE = .16$; $t = 2.09$, $p < .04$), and a significant three-way role-by-gift-type-by-relationship-closeness interaction, ($B = -.50$, $SE = .22$; $t = -2.25$, $p < .02$). Of most focal interest, the simple role-by-relationship-closeness interaction was significant for socially responsible gifts ($B = -.39$, $SE = .18$; $t = -2.17$, $p < .03$) but not for traditional gifts ($B = 0.07$, $SE = .13$; $t < 1$, $p < .57$).

We probed the role-by-relationship-closeness interaction for socially responsible gifts using the Johnson–Neyman (JN) technique.⁴ This technique is used for visualization and interpretation of interactions involving one or more continuous variable. In this case, it is used to probe a significant interaction between a continuous predictor (relationship closeness) and a categorical

predictor (role). The JN technique allows one to obtain more precise information regarding where differences are in the interaction by identifying regions of significance. In particular, the technique allows one to ascertain at what points the two subgroups (here, givers and recipients) differ significantly from each other.

Examining the conditional effect of role across values of relationship closeness revealed the significant and marginally significant regions of the interaction. Givers significantly overestimated recipients' appreciation for socially responsible gifts at low levels of closeness (below 3.1030)—i.e., distant relationships (see Fig. 3). In close relationships, givers' underestimation of recipients' appreciation for socially responsible gifts approached but did not achieve traditional levels of significance.

6.2.2.2. Dependent variable: Symbolizing commitment. The regression model for symbolizing commitment to the relationship as the dependent variable revealed a simple effect of role ($B = -1.90$, $SE = 1.05$; $t = -1.81$, $p < .07$) and gift type ($B = -2.02$, $SE = 1.13$; $t = -1.78$, $p < .08$), which were qualified by a significant role-by-gift-type interaction, ($B = 4.33$, $SE = 1.65$; $t = 2.62$, $p < .009$), a marginally significant relationship-closeness-by-gift-type interaction, ($B = 0.35$, $SE = .21$; $t = 1.66$, $p < .10$), and a marginally significant three-way role-by-gift-type-by-relationship-closeness interaction, ($B = -.55$, $SE = .30$; $t = -1.83$, $p < .07$). Of most focal interest, the simple role-by-relationship-closeness interaction approached significance for socially responsible gifts ($B = -.35$, $SE = .23$; $t = -1.52$, $p < .13$) but was not significant for traditional gifts ($B = 0.14$, $SE = .18$; $t < 1$, $p < .45$).

We probed the role-by-relationship-closeness interaction for socially responsible gifts using the JN technique. Examining the conditional effect of role across values of relationship closeness revealed the significant regions of the interaction. Givers significantly overestimated the extent to which socially responsible gifts symbolized commitment at low and moderate levels of closeness (below 5.001)—i.e., distant relationships (see Fig. 4). However, in close relationships, the conditional effect of role was not significant; that is, no differences were found between givers and recipients.

6.2.2.3. Dependent variable: Choice difficulty. The same regression model substituting choice difficulty as the dependent variable revealed no significant simple effects or interactions (all $t < 1.45$).

6.2.2.4. Robustness checks. We note that when using the dichotomous measure of closeness (close/not close), a 2 (role) \times 2 (relationship closeness) \times 2 (type of gift) ANOVA for the composite

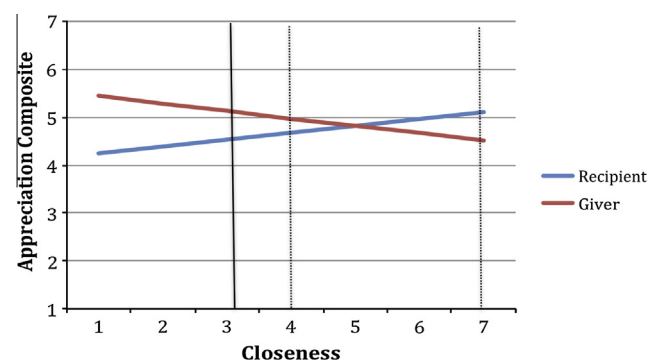


Fig. 3. Appreciation composite measure for socially responsible gifts in Study 2. Solid vertical line (3.1030) indicates the region of significance based on the Johnson–Neyman technique; all points in the region left of the solid line are significant ($p < .05$). The dotted vertical lines indicate the regions of marginal significance; at low levels of closeness, the area between the dotted line and the solid line, and at high levels of closeness, points in the area right of the dotted line represent areas that are marginally significant ($p < .10$).

⁴ The JN technique was implemented using MODPROBE (Hayes & Matthes, 2009) to estimate the regions of significance for relationship closeness as a function of role. The MODPROBE macro produces tests of the conditional effect of the focal predictor (role) at values of the moderator variable (relationship closeness). By requesting use of the JN method, MODPROBE produces a table of estimated values from the model for various combinations of these two variables and indicates regions of significance by providing confidence intervals (LLCI and ULCI) for the conditional effect (b). For additional background, see Hayes and Matthes (2009).

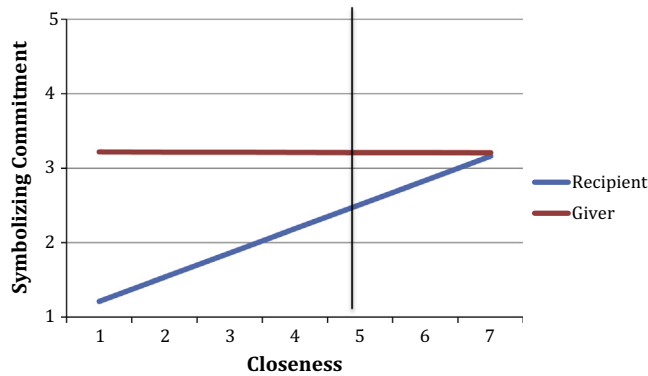


Fig. 4. Symbolizing commitment measure for socially responsible gifts in Study 2. Solid vertical line (5.001) indicates the region of significance based on the Johnson–Neyman technique; all points in the region left of the solid line are significant ($p < .05$).

Table 4
Means and standard deviations of perceived appreciation by condition in Study 2.

	Close relationship		Distant relationship	
	Giver	Recipient	Giver	Recipient
Socially responsible gift	5.07 (1.19)	5.12 (1.24)	5.01 (1.11)	4.42 (1.82)
Traditional gift	4.35 (1.09)	4.94 (1.23)	3.91 (1.22)	5.03 (1.07)

measure of appreciation yields a significant main effect of role, $F(1,205) = 4.08$, $p < .04$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$, and a marginal main effect of gift type, $F(1,205) = 3.30$, $p < .07$, $\eta_p^2 = .016$, which were qualified by a significant role-by-gift-type interaction, $F(1,205) = 10.50$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .049$, and a marginal role-by-gift-type-by-relationship-closeness interaction, $F(1,205) = 3.34$, $p < .07$, $\eta_p^2 = .016$ (see Table 4). This approach yielded a consistent pattern of results as compared to those reported above using the continuous measure of closeness. Notably, we do not find the same pattern of mis-prediction of appreciation with traditional gifts.

6.3. Discussion

In Study 2, in a consequential gift-giving study, givers chose socially responsible gifts approximately 40% of the time. Givers chose socially responsible gifts regardless of relationship closeness. In addition, those who chose socially responsibly gifts anticipated that the gifts they selected for distant others would be more appreciated than they actually were and would communicate greater commitment to the relationship. However, recipients' perceptions do not match those of givers. Recipients actually appreciated socially responsible gifts less than what givers predicted and viewed them as symbolizing less commitment to them, particularly when the gifts came from friends to whom they were not close. In contrast, recipients appreciated socially responsible gifts and traditional gifts from close friends to the same degree.

7. Study 3: The symbolic meaning of socially responsible gifts

We extend our investigation in Study 3 by providing more direct evidence for the psychological mechanism explaining why gift givers overestimate appreciation of socially responsible gifts in distant relationships. As in Study 2, we used a three-stage study to document the interactive effect of relationship closeness and gift choice on appreciation of a real gift. As before, we varied

relationship closeness by randomly assigning gift recipients to receive a gift from either a close or distant friend who made a real gift choice for them.

In this study, however, we focus on recipients' reactions to socially responsible gifts only. Thus, we over-recruited participants in the role of recipients for Phase 1 and then only contacted those for which givers had selected socially responsible gifts in Phase 2. In this way, we could assure we had appropriate power to test our relationships of interest, which focus on comparing givers' predicted and recipients' actual appreciation of socially responsible gifts.

7.1. Method

7.1.1. Participants and design

The study employed a 2 role (gift giver/gift recipient) \times 2 relationship closeness (close/not close) design. Six hundred forty-two participants (51% male) took part in Phase 1, and 603 participants ($M_{age} = 23.83$, $SD = 3.51$; 55% male) took part in Phase 2. Two-hundred fifty-six participants ($M_{age} = 22.56$, $SD = 2.55$; 54% male) – a subset of the participants who completed Phase 1 – took part in Phase 3.

7.1.2. Procedure

We first contacted participants to serve in the role of recipients and told them that the study involved two parts. We recruited participants through email lists and flyers we posted in undergraduate and graduate dorms. We asked them to complete Phase 1 in exchange for a \$5 Amazon gift card and told them that if they were chosen for the second part of the study, they could complete it in about two weeks in exchange for an additional \$10 Amazon gift card. We chose this dollar amount in the hope that all participants invited to complete the second part of the study would in fact do so. In Phase 1, we asked participants to identify multiple friends. Based on these responses, we randomly selected and contacted one of the listed friends and offered him or her a \$5 Amazon gift card for participating in the study in the role of gift giver. Out of the total 642 friends we contacted, 603 responded by completing an online survey as gift givers. We presented givers with a set of possible gift options: three traditional gifts and three socially responsible ones. We then focused on socially responsible gifts chosen by the givers, contacting recipients of such gifts (256 of the participants who took part in Phase 1) to gauge their reactions.

7.1.2.1. Phase 1: Identification of friends varying in relationship closeness. In the first stage, participants (gift recipients) were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (relationship closeness: close/not close). In the instructions, all participants were told that we would ask them to provide email addresses for a few friends and that we would contact one or more of these friends and ask him or her to choose a gift for the participant. As in Study 2, we told participants that in each session, “1 in 10 participants will be randomly selected to receive the actual gift” as part of their compensation for participation. Participants received a \$5 Amazon gift card for completing this survey. They were also told that if they were chosen for the second part of the study, they would be contacted again by email and could complete it for an additional \$10 Amazon gift card.

Depending on the condition to which they had been randomly assigned, we asked participants for names of a particular type of person: “a close [not close] friend.” As in Study 2, we further specified: “By a close [not close] friend we mean a person who you do [do not] consider being a close friend and [but still] see often.” We then asked participants to provide the names and email addresses of three individuals who fit this description and to indicate their

perceived relationship closeness with these people using 7-point scales (1 = not my closest friend, 7 = my very closest friend).

7.1.2.2. Phase 2: Gift choices made by actual gift givers. In the second stage of the study, participants (gift givers) were contacted to make actual gift selections and complete accompanying measures.

7.1.2.2.1. Gift choice. We randomly selected gift givers from the names of friends identified by the participants in Phase 1. We contacted them via email and offered them a \$5 Amazon gift card for completing a survey online. These individuals (gift givers) were told that someone they knew was participating in a research study on choices for others and that we would like them to make a gift choice for the person named. We explained that we would present them with a set of gift options and ask them to make a choice for this person and that this person may be presented with their gift choice later on. As in Study 2, the gift givers were asked to envision an upcoming gifting occasion and choose a gift from a set of six options (the same used in Study 2, depicted in Fig. 2).

7.1.2.2.2. Gift evaluation by gift giver. After making their choice, gift givers were asked to complete measures for symbolic meaning and appreciation. First, they indicated the extent to which (1) The gift they chose had a symbolic meaning; (2) The gift communicated something meaningful; and (3) The gift symbolized something important ($\alpha = .96$). Second, they answered the same measure for feelings of appreciation (5 items, $\alpha = .95$) that we used in Studies 1 and 2.

7.1.2.2.3. Closeness check and demographics. Finally, gift givers indicated their perceived relationship closeness with the gift recipient using the same five statements as in Study 2. They also answered a few demographic questions (gender, age, ethnicity).

7.1.2.3. Phase 3: Gifts received and reactions from actual gift recipients. In the third stage of the study, we contacted gift recipients for whom gift givers selected socially responsible gifts and asked them to complete a second online study in exchange for a \$10 Amazon gift card and the potential of receiving a real gift (that they would have to pick up from the university lab in the following two weeks). They were reminded that we had contacted one of the friends that they had suggested and told that 1 in 10 participants would receive an actual gift. Each participant was told and shown a picture of the gift that one of the gift givers they identified had chosen for them.

Participants then completed measures for the symbolic meaning of the gift (3 items, the same as those used for givers; $\alpha = .94$) and feelings of appreciation (5 items; $\alpha = .98$). Finally, they answered demographic questions (gender, age, ethnicity).

7.2. Results

Table 5 shows the frequency with which each of the six gift options was chosen, and Table 6 reports the proportion of givers choosing socially responsible gifts. After collapsing across gift options, the results show that 42.5% of givers chose a socially responsible gift and 57.5% chose a traditional gift for their friend.

As shown in Table 6, givers were more likely to choose socially responsible gifts for distant others (49.0%) than for close friends (35.5%), $X^2 = 9.00$, $p = .003$.

Table 5
Frequencies of actual gifts chosen in Study 3.

	Oxfam coffee	Pen	Oxfam school	Travel mug	Oxfam entrepreneur	USB flash drive
Frequency	51	22	122	162	83	163
Percentage	8.5	3.6	20.2	26.9	13.8	27.0

Table 6

Proportion of socially responsible gifts chosen by relationship closeness in Study 3.

	Close relationship (%)	Distant relationship (%)
Socially responsible gift	35.5	49.0
Traditional gift	64.5	51.0

We predicted that givers are more likely to choose socially responsible gifts for distant others rather than close friends because they focus more on the symbolic meaning of the gift when they do not have a very close relationship with the recipient. To test this hypothesis, we conducted mediation analysis. We focused only on socially responsible gifts, and we examined whether givers' perceived symbolic meaning of the gift explained the higher percentage of socially responsible gifts chosen for distant others rather than close friends. The effect of relationship closeness was reduced (from $B = .14$, $SE = .04$, $p = .001$, to $B = .07$, $SE = .03$, $p = .018$) when perceived symbolic meaning of the gift was included in the equation, and such symbolic meaning of the gift predicted overall choice of gift ($B = .17$, $SE = .01$, $p < .001$). A bootstrap analysis showed that the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval for the size of the indirect effect excluded zero (.07, .80), suggesting a significant indirect effect (MacKinnon et al., 2007).

7.2.1. Manipulation check: Relationship closeness

As in Study 2, we examined participants' ratings of relationship closeness separately for givers and recipients. Givers in the close-friend condition ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 1.77$) reported significantly higher levels of relationship closeness than did those in the distant-friend condition ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 0.96$), $F(1,597) = 190.57$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .24$. Similarly, recipients in the close-friend condition ($M = 6.19$, $SD = 1.04$) reported significantly higher levels of relationship closeness than did those in the distant-friend condition ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.66$), $t(254) = 16.31$, $p < .001$. Thus, our manipulation of relationship closeness was effective.

7.2.2. Main analyses¹

Table 7 presents the means and standard deviations of the main variables assessed in the study by condition.

7.2.2.1. Symbolic meaning of the gift. A 2 (role: giver vs. recipient) \times 2 (relationship type: close vs. distant friend) mixed ANOVA using participants' perceived symbolic meaning of the gift revealed the expected interaction, $F(1,254) = 4.40$, $p = .037$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. Givers and recipients perceived the symbolic meaning of the gift to be similar in close relationships, $F < 1$, $p = .58$, $\eta_p^2 = .003$. But in distant relationships, givers overestimated the extent to which recipients found the socially responsible gift to have symbolic meaning, $F(1,151) = 16.95$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$.

7.2.2.2. Appreciation. A similar 2 (role) \times 2 (relationship type) mixed ANOVA using participants' perceived appreciation for the gift mirrored these results. The role \times relationship type interaction was significant, $F(1,254) = 7.42$, $p = .007$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. Givers' predicted appreciation and recipients' actual appreciation of the socially

Table 7

Means and standard deviations of main variables assessed by condition for socially responsible gifts in Study 3.

	Close relationship		Distant relationship	
	Giver	Recipient	Giver	Recipient
Appreciation	5.53 (1.02)	5.21 (1.81)	5.89 (0.89)	4.89 (1.73)
Symbolic meaning of gift	5.15 (1.61)	5.02 (1.78)	5.66 (1.12)	4.93 (1.79)

responsible gift were similar in close relationships, $F(1, 103) = 2.38$, $p = .13$, $\eta_p^2 = .023$. But in distant relationships, givers' predicted appreciation was higher than recipients' actual appreciation for the socially responsible gift, $F(1, 151) = 41.42$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .22$.

7.2.2.3. Mediation analysis. Next, we tested whether perceptions of the symbolic meaning of the gift explained why givers overestimated recipients' appreciation of socially responsible gifts in the case of distant relationships. We first computed the difference between givers' predicted appreciation and recipients' actual appreciation. Next, we computed the difference between givers' ratings of the gift as having symbolic meaning and recipients' ratings. We then conducted a series of regression analyses.

The effect of relationship closeness (close vs. distant) was reduced (from $\beta = .17$, $p = .007$, to $\beta = .09$, $p = .068$) when the difference in ratings of perceived symbolic meaning of the gift was included in the equation, and such difference predicted the difference between givers and recipients in appreciation ($\beta = .58$, $p < .001$). A bootstrap analysis showed that the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval for the size of the indirect effect excluded zero (.03, .61), suggesting a significant indirect effect (MacKinnon et al., 2007). These results show that perceived symbolic meaning of the gift mediated givers' overestimation of how much recipients appreciate socially responsible gifts.

7.3. Discussion

Using a design that involves real gift giving, Study 3 provides further evidence for our hypothesis that givers mis-predict receivers' appreciation of socially responsible gifts in distant relationships and the symbolic meaning receivers assign to the gift. Givers believe recipients will appreciate socially responsible gifts more than is actually the case when the recipient is a *distant* friend. This occurs because givers overestimate how much symbolic meaning the gift actually has in the eyes of recipients. By contrast, as in our previous studies, givers more accurately predict recipients' appreciation of socially responsible gifts in close relationships.

8. General discussion

Gift giving serves an important function, creating either social distance or closeness between giver and recipient (Belk, 1976, 1979; Otnes, Lowrey, & Kim, 1993; Prendergast & Stole, 2001; Sherry, 1983). Across three studies, we find that gift givers mis-predict appreciation for socially responsible gifts and that the nature of their mis-predictions depends on the nature of their relationship to the recipient. We found that givers overestimate the appreciation of distant others for socially responsible gifts because they focus more than recipients on the symbolic meaning of such gifts. Givers typically have more to gain, in terms of strengthening the relationship, by making better gift choices for distant others. In spite of this fact, givers consistently mispredict meaning conveyed and choose less appreciated gifts for distant others.

8.1. Theoretical and practical implications

These findings extend and contribute to the gift-giving literature in multiple ways. First, we introduce a previously overlooked type of gift: socially responsible gifts. Second, we highlight a unique dynamic surrounding socially responsible choices made for others. Third, we show that the symbolic meaning attached to gifts by givers systematically varies with relationship closeness, in this case for socially responsible gifts.

Prior research has focused on understanding recipient reactions to traditional tangible gifts (e.g., Caplow, 1982; Ruth, Otnes, &

Brunel, 1999) and socially responsible choices for the self (e.g., Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Strahilevitz & Myers, 1998). Our research shifts attention to situations in which socially responsible choices are made for others—that is, when they are given as gifts. Varying relationship closeness, we show that the nature of the relationship has important implications for when and why recipients appreciate these types of gifts.

Socially responsible gifts clearly have the potential to reflect a virtuous identity for the giver. This very quality, however, may not be valued by recipients as much as givers think, as we found in the case of distant relationships. In such instances, a recipient may perceive a gift as saying more about the giver than about the giver's commitment to the relationship, causing perceived relationship commitment to suffer. While our focus has been on socially responsible gifts, there are likely to be other circumstances in both close and distant relationships in which similarly perceived violations may occur.

Belk (1976) has argued that a key message of the perfect gift is that the recipient is singular, extraordinary, and special; a well-chosen gift displays these same qualities. The tangible-gift alternatives in our studies were relatively mundane and impersonal (i.e., a pen, a flash drive). By contrast, a socially responsible gift made in the gift recipient's name might well be perceived as more unique, thoughtful, and personal. As such, our studies present a relatively conservative test of our hypotheses.

Extending Belk's framework, Ruth et al. (1999) identified an additional characteristic of the perfect gift: it must be appropriate to the relationship. Our results suggest that a "perfect gift" needs to be appropriate not only based on the closeness of the relationship between giver and recipient but also needs to consider the perspective of those giving and receiving the gift.

Our findings also contribute to research on egocentric biases in decision making and perspective taking in social judgment, showing that people often fail to put themselves in others' shoes when making decisions or forming judgments (e.g., Epley, Keysar, Van Boven, & Gilovich, 2004; Epley, Morewedge, & Keysar, 2004). Even in the case of gift giving, where people have experience being on either side of the gift-exchange relationship (as givers and receivers), we seem unable to predict the extent to which recipients will appreciate socially responsible gifts.

8.2. Limitations and directions for future research

We acknowledge that our studies may have potential limitations. First, while we find evidence of underestimation of appreciation for close others (Study 1) and overestimation of appreciation for distant others (Studies 1, 2 and 3), our real-choice studies provide stronger evidence of overestimation distant others' appreciation (Studies 2 and 3). Second, our studies involved donations already designated by the gift giver, as is typical of socially responsible gifts. It is also possible for gift givers to allow the recipient to designate the beneficiary of a donation (e.g., a women's soap-making business vs. coffee farmers). On one hand, allowing the recipient to designate the beneficiary may further personalize the gift, allowing him or her to take greater ownership of the donation decision. On the other hand, neglecting to designate the beneficiary in advance may be perceived as lazy or as a sign that the giver does not know the recipient well enough to make an informed choice. The question of how beneficiary designation or beneficiary focus (Cavanaugh, Bettman, & Luce, 2015) would influence perceived commitment and appreciation remains an open question. To the extent that giving gifts designated by close friends (i.e., a registry) has been shown to result in identity-threat for givers (i.e., when a gift preferred by the recipient is identity-incongruent for the giver; Ward & Broniarczyk, 2011), additional research is needed to more fully understand the

symbolic meaning of gifts, particularly in the donations and cause-related context where recipient preferred beneficiaries could also be identity-threatening.

Third, socially responsible gifts can present themselves in forms other than donations. Socially responsible gifts could be tangible gifts that have a socially responsible component (e.g., fair-trade chocolates or pesticide-free flowers). The socially responsible component of the gift may be integral to the product (i.e., having to do with how it is produced) or a simple cause-related association (e.g., a percentage of the product's sale goes to charity). To the extent that these gifts have enduring (vs. fleeting) impact or involve a public (vs. private) display of ethicality or social responsibility, they raise additional research questions about how recipients' appreciation and perceptions of the thoughtfulness and commitment of socially responsible gifts will be influenced.

We suggested that the inability of givers to take the recipients' perspective when choosing among gift options may account for the overestimation of appreciation we noted for distant relationships. Future research could empirically test this prediction by examining whether chronic propensity to perspective-take moderates the overestimation effects we observed across our three studies. Future studies could also test for the role of perspective-taking in explaining mis-predictions of appreciation between givers and recipients by prompting givers to perspective-take prior to purchasing gifts. This type of intervention could help optimize gift giving, improving both gift givers' and recipients' satisfaction with the exchange.

In our first study, we found evidence that givers underestimate how much close friends appreciate socially responsible gifts. However, we did not find support for this relationship in Studies 2 and 3. Future research could further examine givers' predictions and recipients' reactions to both socially responsible and traditional gifts in the case of close relationships.

9. Conclusion

Gift giving is a unique domain of choice, as most people likely have been in the role of giver and recipient on numerous occasions throughout their lives. Thus, they have acquired knowledge of what it means to be on each side of the gift-exchange relationship. Our research extends prior gift-giving research by examining individuals' reactions to socially responsible gifts received from a close or distant friend. We find that the predicted reactions to socially responsible gifts depend on the nature of the giver's relationship to the recipient. Our results also show that gift recipients interpret the meaning of these gifts very differently based on the giver's relationship to them.

Webley, Lea, and Portalska (1983, 237) has argued that "Gift-giving clearly fulfills an important social function and it is the act of giving (...) which is of prime importance, not the actual gift itself." Our results cast some doubt on this assertion. When it comes to socially responsible gifts, the act of giving counts much more in the eyes of the giver rather than the recipient.

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