

Gift Giving Anxieties as a Function of Recipient Characteristics

A Research Paper

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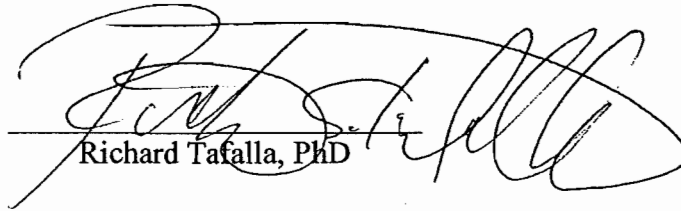
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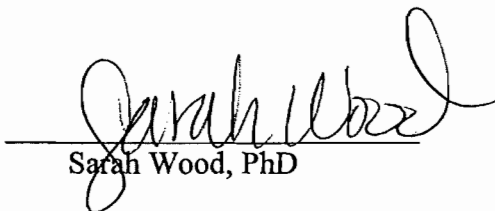
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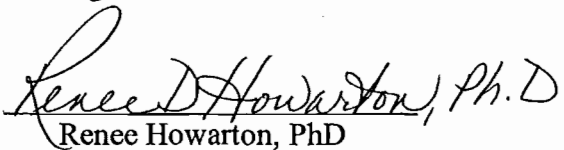


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ABSTRACT

Previous research suggests that gift giving is a form of identity presentation that enables givers to create a desired image of themselves for gift recipients. Sometimes, however, individuals experience anxiety when selecting gifts that best reflect this desired identity (Sherry, McGrath, & Levy, 1993). Furthermore, the influential power of the gift receiver can create mental stress for the giver. This stress may be reflected in greater physiological arousal and longer decision making time.

The purpose of this study was to demonstrate the physiological anxiety caused by gift giving to influential gift recipients. The hypotheses were that, 1) the givers with *difficult recipients*, those with strong emotional significance, would display higher states of anxiety as measured by electrodermal response than those with *easy recipients*, those with weak emotional

significance, and 2) the givers with *difficult recipients* would take longer to select a gift than those with *easy* ones. The results did not support both hypotheses.

The *difficult recipient* group registered the highest gifting anxiety while the weak emotion group took the longest time on gift purchasing. Within the category of *difficult recipients*, in-laws created the most stress on givers, whereas children and same-gender friends produced the least stress.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Gift giving is one of the universal social norms as humans (Gouldner, 1960). Gift giving has been discussed from a theoretical perspective focusing on the functions and effects of giving (Belk, 1976). It has been studied by anthropologists, sociologists, economists, marketers, and psychologists.

Belk (1976) has compared several theories about gift giving. In his book *The Gift*, Mauss (1954) explains that the norm of gift exchange occurred very often in underdeveloped societies before the rise of economic trade. When economic activity was still unspecialized, the gift exchange fulfilled the function of circulating wealth among people in villages. In addition, through gift giving, the elite social stratum was established among the head of the village, his subordinate(s), and those under him. The act of offering gifts implies superiority of the one who gives the gift. Receiving the gift without an equal or greater return gift often implies a sense of dependence and obligation for the receiver. Thus, gifting creates a duty to reciprocate. It is the norm of one's own accord.

Statement of the Problem

This study will examine gift giving anxiety by measuring changes in physiological skin responses and duration of time spent selecting gifts. Previous research has found that not only do gifts help maintain our social ties, but also create and worsen interpersonal conflict. Gift giving anxiety is the givers' fear of being negatively evaluated by the recipients. This is part of social anxiety, similar to other anxieties such as test taking and public speaking (Leary & Kowalski, 1995). A few researchers have investigated this issue using qualitative research. No study to date has randomly assigned participants to be hypothetical gift shoppers and examined their

physiological responses. Therefore, more research should be done to more accurately understand gift giving anxiety, including the measures of physiological responses.

Purpose of the Study

Although there are many gift giving motivators, many gift givers wish to have a positive influence on recipients by presenting them with gifts they perceive as favorable while avoiding gifting perceived as being negative. Since gift recipient feedback emotionally affects the giver, the greater the influence the recipient has on the giver and the more difficult it is to satisfy the recipient, the more anxiety the giver will feel about selecting gifts. In addition, givers use gifts to establish or maintain a positive impression with the recipient. For this reason, givers are expected to spend more time carefully selecting gifts for recipients who are influential and powerful as well as when the giver desires the recipient's approval.

The act of giving gifts can create mental stress by requiring an examination of the standards of propriety and negotiation of identity. It is inauthentic versions of the self which produce stress. In spite of advanced investigation of other forms of social anxiety existence, such as test anxiety, psychologists have not considered gift giving to be a salient research topic. Gift giving anxiety is a serious social phenomenon and deserves more attention by psychologists.

From a retail perspective, the topic of gift giving has been discussed by many marketers due to its economic importance (Sherry, 1983; Sherry & McGrath, 1989; Fisher & Arnold, 1990). In 2006, consumers spent an estimated \$300 billion purchasing gifts, which is approximately 10% of the total \$3 trillion consumer retail market in the United States (Danziger, 2006). Sherry, McGrath, and Levy (1993) consider consumers, "victims of sentiment and symbolism...who are entrapped in rituals and enjoined by cultural ideology from expressing discontent in most ways except fantasy" (p. 225). Therefore, this study could benefit marketers

by providing them insight into how to alleviate consumers' gifting anxiety as well as creating a greater understanding of the cognitive processes involved in gift-giving and gift choice.

Definitions of Terms

1. *Easy recipient.* Otne, Lowrey, and Kim (1993) stated that *easy recipients* are described as those who had correctly interpreted a message in a past gift exchange that a giver had wished to express and ones who offered little resistance when givers tried to enact a specific social role. They are *easy recipients* for the givers because the givers may share a common taste with them (so it may be easy for givers to find a right gift) or recipients are the type of person who will generally accept any gift or contribution with appreciation. Those recipients are likely to be pleased or satisfied when receiving a gift regardless of characteristics descriptive of the gift (design, cost, usefulness, etc.) or the giver's gift-giving intentions. Otne, et al. identified children and same-gender friends as typical *easy recipients*.
2. *Difficult recipient.* According to Otne, et al. (1993), *difficult recipients* tend to misinterpret gifts designed to express specific social roles and are likely to misread a giver's attempt to express a particular role through gift exchange regardless of the giver's conscious or unconscious intentions. *Difficult recipients* also tend to be older or more distant relatives such as grandparents, elderly relatives or in-laws.
3. *Gift giving/gifting anxiety.* Gift giving anxiety is indicated as one of the social anxieties. It is a fear of being negatively evaluated by others. A gift creates internal stress because it represents one's identity and intention. Gift giving anxiety is more likely to arise when

people are motivated to make a positive impression on real or imagined audiences, including gift recipients, but doubt they will do so, through the gift.

4. *Stroop test*. The stimuli are color names (e.g., the words *red*, *yellow*, and *green*) that are printed in different colored ink. The task is to name the ink color as quickly as possible while ignoring the word that the letters form (Jensen & Rohwer, 1966).
5. *Thematic Apperception Test (TAT)*. Typically used to reveal some of the dominant drives, emotions, sentiments, complexes and conflicts of a personality (Murray, 2008).

Limitations

1. This study was conducted in the laboratory and understandably, the experience was far different from actual shopping experiences. The respondents were asked to imagine that they were on vacation. They shopped for their gift recipients in their imagination, using the images and the names of the gift on the computer monitor. When people shop at a store, they consider price, usefulness, design, durability, and other qualities of the product. Using one's senses can greatly influence the purchasing decision-making process. The shopping simulation in this study was almost like online shopping, although no specific information such as price and description were given to the respondents. It was assumed that the shopping simulation in this study would be much less stressful as compared to actual shopping because participants did not have to literally spend their own money to buy a souvenir. They also knew that the product would not be given to the imagined recipient.
2. Reaction time was measured in an unlimited capacity. The respondents might react differently if they had to enter their responses under a limited duration of time.

3. There was no comparable study conducted in the past because no previous ones directly examined imagined gift shoppers' physiological responses. As a result, there is no way to verify that increases of their electrodermal activity were solely caused by their gift giving related anxiety or by other related anxieties, such as anxiety of participating in this study in a laboratory setting.
4. A majority of the respondents were college students and they may be inexperienced gift buyers or givers. If so, they might be anxious simply due to a lack of gift shopping experience.
5. The research population may or may not be reflective of other gift givers because the study was conducted at a small Midwestern university. The subcultures of the givers, such as beliefs, income, location, education, and economic status might affect their gift giving behaviors and thus the levels of anxiety.
6. The study was conducted in April. It is possible that their levels of anxiety may differ depending on the time of the year and actual holiday or all-occasion shopping experiences.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Gift giving is a central part of our behavior and culture as humans (Mysterud, Drevon, & Slagsvold, 2006). Anthropologists Marcel Mauss (1925) and Bronislaw Malinowski (1922) viewed gift-giving as a fundamental social system (Mauss, 1925; Malinowski, 1922, as noted in Giesler, 2006). Gift giving theory is a theory of social solidarity for humans (Douglas, 1990; Komter, 2005). This total social function continues to play an important role in today's society.

Gift giving has a great impact in maintaining social ties and serves as means of symbolic communication in social relationships (Ruth, Otnes, & Brunel, 1999). However, there may also be negative effects. Throughout the gift giving process, individuals contribute to the general welfare of recipients, they hope to repay/receive something based on past generosity (Lampel & Bhalla, 2007), or expect to reap future generosity. Gift giving generates an obligation to reciprocate, which Gouldner (1960) called the "norm of reciprocity". This social norm may produce gift anxiety. "Norms" exist for people to follow, and if violated, it may result in individuals being directly punished by others and made to feel guilt, shame, embarrassment, anxiety, or some other negative feelings (Basu, 2001).

The topic of gift anxiety has recently been studied by researchers who are interested in investigating America's gift giving culture, inspired by gift giving research in other countries. This social culture can create gifting anxiety because it may necessitate a negotiation of identity (Sherry, et al. 1993). For instance, gift anxiety may be created when the giver is knowingly gifting *difficult recipients* (Otnes et al., 1993) or the giver is uncertain about adequately satisfying the receiver (Wooten, 2000).

The four primary elements of gift giving: norm of reciprocity, social distinctions (identity, attention and impression management), social influence and emotional significance and

the impact they have on social anxiety will be discussed. The social anxiety associated with the entire process of gift giving as well as the physical responses caused by social anxiety will also be explored.

Power of Giving: Norm of Reciprocity

Gift giving may create the obligation to reciprocate. Lévi-Strauss referred to this with the example of Potlatch, a festival or ceremony of dance and gift giving found among the Indians of the Northwest Coast from Alaska to Oregon. At these gatherings, a family or inherited leader hosts guests and re-distributes and receives reciprocity of wealth (Lévi-Strauss, 1959, as noted in Cole, 1991). The norm of Potlatch is based on a reciprocation system which establishes the giver's superiority, while recipients must return an equal or greater gift.

Although Gouldner (1960) elected to call the gift giving system a norm of reciprocity he did not completely agree with its definition. He believed that this norm is the motive to entice return for profit however gift giving necessarily create neither compulsion to return nor violate another person's right to refuse to reciprocate. Instead, reciprocity contributes to maintaining a stable societal system by creating interdependency and strong relationships. Komter (Lévi-Strauss, 1949/1969; Sahlins, 1972, as noted in Komter, 1997, p.747) also noted that anthropologists Malinowski, Lévi-Strauss, and Sahlins said that gift exchange plays an important role in the development and stability of society and culture. In addition, they identified the existence of reciprocal feelings of moral obligation being expressed through gift giving. Sociologist Gouldner (1973a, 1973b) separated the gift reciprocity norm from a more altruistic gifting norm. In many cases, though pure gifts which are altruistic gifts for which nothing is expected in return (Komter, 1997) are excluded, givers expect some type of benefits from the gift giving activity. The benefits are directly related to the giver's personal intentions which may

include receipt of a gift from the recipient, the maintenance and/or improvement of a relationship, or the establishment of the giver's superiority.

Belk, benefiting from a book about gift giving by Mauss (1954), concluded that gift giving is a self-perpetuating system of reciprocity. His idea is based on four types of obligations: *perpetual gift giving*, *the obligation to give*, *the obligation to receive*, and *the obligation to repay*. Applying this system of reciprocity to our society is not a difficult job. First, the obligation of *perpetual gift giving* is mainly traditional. Christmas and the annual gift exchange associated with it is a typical example of perpetual gift giving. Second, *the obligation to give* may include the sense of social obligation toward spouses, parents, and teachers. For example, a husband treats his wife to a dinner at a nice restaurant on their wedding anniversary. Third, *the obligation to receive* can be explained by the following norms, "I give so that I receive in return (as a return gift)," which is no less constraining than the donor's obligation to give. It is the norm to receive feelings of affection, obligation, kindness, or respect, or they accept gifts as a tradition or courtesy. Last, *the obligation to repay* could be indicative of the norm "I receive therefore I must give". Referring to Levi-Strauss's idea (1959), one supposes that receiving a gift often provides the receiver with a kind of burden. A gift might be repaid to oneself or others, as a self-reward or a reward for other's effort or achieved goals. It may also be a gift linked to receiving assistance in the future. All four of these factors overlap each other.

Social Distinctions: The Gift as Identity Builder

Gifts provide recipients with images that help build a giver's identity. Gifts represent the giver's feelings toward recipients and gift giving behavior is derived from a giver's perceptions of others. Cooley (1902, as cited in Schwartz, 1967) called gifts "ideas of others", suggesting that gifting is a way of free associating about the recipient in the absence of self and others. If

gifts aid in creating identity, the giver's gift selection process would likely differ depending upon individual gift giving intentions. For gift givers, they express their image of recipients when choosing a gift. For example, by giving a war toy, a father shows the image of his boy as "a little soldier" which represents a masculine sex role (Schwartz, 1967).

Givers also exhibit social roles through gift giving. Social roles refer to sets of behaviors that individuals adopt within a group and are expected to perform during the gift exchange (Baron & Byrne, 2000). Individuals perform different roles in the groups they belong to. The type and level of social roles of givers may affect their giving behavior differently.

Throughout one's life, a person plays several social roles. This collection of diverse social roles is called social identity. Social identity is a self-definition of how one conceptualizes and evaluates his or herself. It is one of the factors influencing gift giving behavior. Social identity is created by a variety of subculture influences. Mowen (1990) described these subcultures according to such demographic variables as nationality, age, religion, gender, occupation, marital status, income, ethnicity, and education. Gift giving norms appear to be impacted by both demographic variables and actual consumer behavior. In an interesting study by Fischer and Arnold in 1990, the researchers found gender differences in Christmas gift shopping. Women's gift giving behaviors differed from men's. Since their self-identities are based on showing love to others, women are the primary gift givers. According to the results of the survey, female respondents stressed that Christmas shopping was a responsibility to be executed. Fischer and Arnold (1990) concluded that gender-role attitudes and gender identities all affect gift-purchasing patterns.

Another example, which shows a strong correlation between social identity and gift giving, occurred when people donated more money to a public radio station if they were told that

a previous donor who shared their identity also made a large contribution (Shangs, Reed II, & Croson, 2008). Moreover, Schwartz (1967) discussed that donating to charity is a source of prestige in the United States especially when it is made by individuals rather than corporations. People present their altruistic identity publicly by the noticeable presentation of gifts.

Social Distinctions: Attention and Impression Management Theories

Charles Derber (2000), the author of *The Pursuit of Attention* discussed that exchange of attention is an essential pleasure in our social life. Getting attention helps to satisfy fundamental human needs from respect to self-esteem. In today's society, more individuals are seeking attention for themselves. This pattern seems particularly strong in individualistic cultures like the U.S.

Derber also discussed that gift giving not only expresses one's feelings to others, it also calls attention to a giver's choice in selecting gifts relative to appropriate style and occasion as well as serves as a self-display of her or his generosity to others. Some gifting exchanges are used for getting attention while others are used to give attention to others. The choice of actions is influenced by one's personality, social role (e.g., gender, professional role), economic, and political power. For example, occupational roles such as a social worker or nurse are more attention-giving types while a movie actor or fashion model are more attention-getting. Gift exchange satisfies both attention-getting and attention-giving needs. The gift giving can be attention-giving when a mother gives a Christmas present to her child. It is a mother's social role to take care of her children which includes giving enough attention to their needs. In other words, the task of a mother is to give attention to children which includes giving adequate attention even relative to gift giving. In contrast, a child gives a Mother's Day gift to his mom which can end up

being attention-getting behavior. It is because children are more likely to receive attention from adults.

Effectively getting/giving expected attention is an aspect of good impression management. According to Sherry (1983), gift giving requires “preparation of the gift and self in the service of impression management” (p. 164). Many sociologists and social psychologists have studied impression management and processes that people go through in their attempt to control the impression other people construct of them. It is also defined as self-representation which refers to the activities used to influence the perception one has of her or his image. The theory of impression management is the goal-directed attempt to establish and maintain impressions between personal or organizational goals (Goffman, 1959). The goal is followed by people’s intentional behavior to present themselves the way in which they want to be perceived by individuals or groups they are interacting with. Since a first impression is very important for one’s future relationships with individuals and organizations, gift givers undertake a variety of efforts to establish and maintain a desirable recipient impression. Their efforts often become transparent under the pressure of satisfying recipients’ demands and desires. Concerned about how their gifts will be interpreted, they may even feel a lack of control over those interpretations which triggers social anxiety (Wooten, 2000). As a result, gifts have the power to control one’s emotions, attitude, or behavior. For example, givers may feel the need to devote more attention and time to the selection of a gift for someone who is identified as being difficult to satisfy.

There has been discussion regarding whether or not reaction time (time to respond to each question) truly reflects “thinking time” needed for completing a task, such as the Stroop test. Reaction time can be related to the time needed for thinking (premotor time) or for some secondary variable to indicate the response, such as the actual time needed to move one’s hand to

make the response (motor time). Halpern (2000) concluded that the longer the mean reaction time, the more cognitive abilities used. Simply put, longer reaction time may indicate more mental involvement on the part of givers.

Social Influence through Gift Giving

People have power to influence others (Cialdini, 1994, as cited in Baron & Byrne, 2000). A company president may use her/his authority to make important employee decisions while a movie actress may use her physical appearance and charisma to attract fans. Cialdini also said that the power to influence individuals to change their attitude, beliefs, perceptions or behaviors is called social influence. People subconsciously use social influence in the gift giving process. For example, many parents benefit from Santa Claus who has control over their children by giving them Christmas gifts (Whyte, 1964). Although the role of Santa Claus is often filled by parents or other adults, the iconic character is historically known for only “bringing Christmas gifts to good little boys and girls”.

According to Baron and Byrne (2000), there are three components of social influence: conformity, compliance, and obedience. Conformity refers to a type of social influence in which individuals change their attitudes or behavior in order to adhere to existing social norms. Compliance is a form of social influence involving a direct request from one person to another. Lastly, obedience necessitates that a person obey another’s direct order to perform a desired action(s) in specific situations. They believed that a gift giving culture is associated with these three factors. Church donations (conformity), receiving small gifts from a salesperson (compliance), and bringing food to the potluck party (obedience) are examples of social influence impacting gift giving.

In addition, Cialdini (1993) introduced the rule of reciprocity as a successful tactic used within societies to achieve social influence. In this rule, one tries to repay what another person has provided. Implementation of the rule however often overpowers other factors which would normally adopt compliance with a request as an acceptable response. It is so powerful that recipients feel a sense of future obligation even if the gift or favor was unwanted or uninitiated. Whyte (1964) noted that gift-givers often assure recipients that the benefits rendered to others need not be fully repaid.

Wooten (2000) introduced social influence as an anxiety factor that relates to a relationship between the giver and receiver. The giver's desire is to have a positive influence on recipients by presenting appropriate gifts and avoid a negative reaction from recipients. Fear associated with actually presenting or imagining presenting a gift occurs when givers recognize recipients as "influential" and "important" persons in their personal life including romantic partners, close friends, favorite relatives, and in-laws. These recipients' feedback is more likely to affect givers' emotions.

Otnes et al. (1993) explored the meaning of *easy* or *difficult recipients* from the giver's view in terms of gift selection. The informants of their study labeled their gift recipients as being *easy* or *difficult*. *Easy recipients* were described as ones who had correctly interpreted the message in the gift exchange and offered little resistance as givers tried to express a specific social role such as the giver's relationship with children and same-gender friends. On the other hand, *difficult recipients* tend to misinterpret gifts designed to express specific social roles and are likely to misread a giver's attempt to express a particular role through gift exchange regardless of the giver's conscious or unconscious intentions. *Difficult recipients* also tend to be older or more distant relatives.

Gift Message and Emotional Significance

As previously described, when giving gifts, givers take various factors into consideration such as norm of reciprocity, their relationship with recipients, social role/identity of givers/recipients, and influential power that recipients have toward givers. Because gift giving influences the relationship between giver and recipient, the giver's emotions toward the recipient make a difference to the giver's decision-making process. Therefore, gifts may or may not correctly reflect givers' intentions.

Sunwolf (2006) introduced the Psychosocial Noise Model of Gift Giving. This model illustrates that psychosocial "noises" interfere with intended gift messages which describe receiver-centered variables and explains miscommunication which may occur during interpersonal gift giving. After a gift is given, a gift message is filtered by a recipient through specific noises: a) expectations, b) self-concept, c) relational perceptions, d) assumptions, e) relational goals, f) gifting history, g) gender, h) cultural values, i) social roles, and j) attributions. The gift can turn into a failed gift experience due to any of these noises and the giver has no control over the recipient's interpretation of the gift. For the gift giving to be a successful event, receivers are challenged to correctly interpret the meaning. Although the giver does her/his best to attach personal meaning to the gift, it does not always result in a successful interpretation because receivers may possess their own assumptions about gift occasions, gift intent, and the social meaning of objects (Sunwolf, 2006). A gift is a communication tool, and this is why it is difficult to communicate correctly through gifts, as Brucker (as cited in Sunwolf, 2006, p.1) states: *"The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn't being said"*. To avoid having a failed gift giving experience, the donor is required to consider what an ideal gift is. As a receiver, an ideal gift is like a pure and pristine handmade gift from a child (Sherry, 1993). The

pure gift tends to avoid miscommunication. The pure gift or ideal gift should be the one as Komter and Vollebergh (1997) described: "...felt to be essentially noneconomic, spontaneous and an altruistic activity that is meant to communicate personal feelings" (p.750).

Although no attempt is made in this paper to cover monetary value of gifts, the relationship between the monetary value of the gift and the sentiment attached to it by the giver is not always a positive linear function. For instance, in the situation of a Christmas party or a baby shower, the gift is usually opened publicly and results in exposing the giver to observers. According to Sherry (1993), enough effort and money must be spent in order to do the right thing and save the giver from embarrassment.

The emotions of the giver toward the recipient play an important role in gift giving. No matter if it is positive or negative, closeness that the giver feels to the recipient may affect selection of the gift, selecting time spent, monetary value of the gift, and giver's anxiety while selecting and giving. Malinowski and Sahlins's idea, as discussed in Komter and Vollebergh (1997) article, describes an association between the closeness of social relationships and the purity of the gift. They acknowledged the difference between pure/altruistic gifts (give something for nothing) and obligatory gifts (derived from the norm of reciprocity), and then empathized that the greater the emotional distance, the less pure the connected feelings of disinterestedness, sympathy or involvement, and the stronger the feelings of reciprocal obligations and quid pro quo. In addition, Komter and Vollebergh (1997) found that gift giving to friends more frequently occurs with feelings of affection while gift giving to primary family members is accompanied by both feelings of affection and moral obligation. They also added that gift giving still plays an important role even in the Western, individualistic societies. As the

gift may carry the giver's message, emotional closeness can be one of the major causes of gifting anxiety.

Social Anxiety in Gift Giving

Schlenker and Leary (1982) indicated that social anxiety arises when people are motivated to make a positive impression on real or imagined audiences but doubt they will do so. The closer the relationship between the giver and the recipient and the more difficult the recipients are, the more anxiety givers feel about selecting gifts.

Sherry et al. (1993) noted that, "Gifts create internal stress by requiring an examination of the canons of propriety and a negotiation of identity: imputation and resistance of inauthentic versions of the self are critical elements of this stress" (p. 237). Frustrated givers often blame *difficult recipients* who are hard to satisfy (e.g., picky ones) or hard to accurately determine their gift preferences (e.g., unfamiliar ones). They are difficult because they prevent givers' attempts to enact desired social roles (Otnes et al, 1992, as cited in Wooten, 2000). Thus, an unfavorable reaction by a recipient may humiliate not only the gift itself but also the giver.

Sherry et al.'s (1993) study showed that many of the respondents felt a strong pressure to "do the right thing" within gift giving situations. They also found that the wrong gift could be read as an "unfortunate mistake" but still "long remembered." The wrong gift can be a "waste, which disappoints, frustrates, annoys, upsets, embarrasses, hurts, and disheartens." Moreover, it is "thoughtless, impersonal, useless or inexcusable." Even worse, "it makes me feel unknown or does not contain caring" (p. 229).

It is not surprising that Green and Alden (1988) reported that consumers often describe Christmas shopping as "particularly anxiety-producing and exhausting" (p.163). On the whole,

gifting anxiety can be categorized as social anxiety just like other forms of anxiety such as test and competition anxiety (Leary & Kowalski, 1995, as cited in Wooten, 2000).

Physical Responses caused by Social Anxiety

Social anxiety refers to an excessive concern about the prospect of being negatively evaluated by others (Schlenker & Leary, 1982). Recognized social anxiety for the general public includes stage fright and audience anxiety, public speaking anxiety, and competition anxiety. Although there are countless examples of social anxiety, two major distinctions among conditions are identified. That is, anticipatory, people feel anxious due to a situation that might arise, and reactive anxiety due to an event that has already occurred. Gift giving anxiety can be categorized as both anticipatory and reactive anxiety. The term “social anxiety” is mostly used to refer to the anticipatory variety. However, the reactive form, which we popularly call embarrassment, also involves social anxiety as well (Leary & Kowalski, 1995).

Regardless of its cause, anxiety is accompanied by changes in the autonomic nervous system. This refers to the parts of the body that control involuntary responses involving the smooth muscles and glands such as heart rate, respiration and digestion. The autonomic nervous system is comprised of two branches, sympathetic and the parasympathetic systems. The sympathetic and the parasympathetic systems tend to have opposite effects. For example, sympathetic activity increases heart rate while parasympathetic activity decreases it. However, some emotional reactions may involve both activations (Leary & Kowalski, 1995).

People who feel socially anxious show clear evidence of sympathetic arousal. Episodes of social anxiety are associated with increased heart rate, respiration, galvanic skin response, blood pressure and decreased hand temperature. That is why anxious people often have cool hands and pale faces (Houtman & Bakker, 1991).

Although it mostly shows opposite results, parasympathetic activity may also accompany certain aversive emotions, such as disgust, dejection, anger, and anxiety (Leary & Kowalski, 1995). Parasympathetic response patterns often accompany strong negative emotions in situations in which there is no way to control the outcome. Normally, an anxious person first experiences pure sympathetic reactions such as heart pounding, followed by parasympathetic activity such as feeling dizzy due to the blood pressure decrease (Frijda, 1986).

Frijda (1986) observed that when an embarrassing event happened unexpectedly, a person's physiological responses became predominantly sympathetic and closely resembled those of preventative social anxiety. On the other hand, when the person expected and had time to prepare psychologically to be embarrassed, evidence of parasympathetic involvement was obtained (Leary et al., 1994). This data is consistent with Frijda's (1986) suggestion that parasympathetic activity is involved in passivity. People would be expected to react to unexpected embarrassment with active attempts to deal with the situation. In contrast, people who have been forewarned and who realize they cannot avoid or escape the embarrassing event may resign themselves to it. Gifting anxiety may be mostly sympathetic at the situation where the giver is embarrassed when her/his gift is opened in front of many people though it was not expected to be displayed that way. In addition, a Christmas gift exchange or a baby shower gift may cause parasympathetic dominant anxiety because of the expectations surrounding public opening of gifts.

When anxious, people think about the source of their fear, whether the source is non-social (e.g., snakes, thunderstorms, or hypodermic needles) or social (e.g., interacting with one's boss, taking tests, or speaking in public). A person who was aroused physiologically but who did

not think worrisome thoughts would be characterized as agitated, aroused, or discombobulated, but not as anxious (Frijda, 1986).

In the case of social anxiety, these apprehensive thoughts are likely to center around three things: 1) the actual or imagined evaluations and reactions of other people, 2) the potentially latent negative consequences of those reactions, and 3) the personal limitations and behaviors that the socially anxious person believes are creating his or her social difficulties. Whichever dominates a person's thoughts at a given time, these irritating cognitions may burden the anxious individual's attentional capacity. Switching attention away from task-relevant information preoccupies her or his mind and causes self-presentational difficulties (Hamilton, 1975).

As mentioned earlier, anxious people experience various physical reactions (Frijda, 1986). The individual experiences a feeling of tension, uneasiness, and agitation. With increasing levels of anxiety, people are able to detect specific physiological signs of arousal such as heart palpitations or bodily tension that are often unpleasant. When anxious, people sometimes experience a sinking or nauseated feeling in their stomach or feelings of weakness or dizziness (Amies, Gelder, & Shaw, 1983). Besides those physical reactions, anxious people tend to have greater difficulty remembering information about tasks that require a great deal of attention. When anxious, the mind is preoccupied and it bothers an anxious individual's cognitive processes. A good example of memory deficits caused by anxiety is test anxiety. Test anxious persons always have poorer capability recalling information they have learned. Instead of devoting their full attention to the test itself, test anxious persons set their concern on how poorly they may do on the test, the expected reactions of other people to what they see as inevitable failure, or other devastating consequences of poor performance (Sarason, 1980; Wine, 1971, as cited in Amies et al., 1983). If memory deficit bothers an individual while selecting a gift, the

person might focus on future failure of satisfying the recipient. Anxiety may cause the giver troubles in processing the existing information or evaluating new information about the product. Here is an example. Because a person was very anxious about her dish being evaluated by guests at a potluck party, she forgot the host's tastes preference and added a sauce to her dish that the host disliked.

Gift giving plays a role in status continuation and locomotion. Regardless of its importance, the difficulties that gift givers feel tend to be overlooked. The fact is that many givers face dilemmas which create fears such as of being evaluated, choosing a wrong gift, or being misinterpreted. This study attempts to demonstrate gifting anxiety not only psychologically but also at a physiological level.

The hypotheses of the study were:

1. Participants giving gifts to *difficult recipients* with whom they have a strong emotional significance with will display higher states of anxiety, as measured by electrodermal response than those with *easy recipients* and have weak emotional significance with. The *difficult recipient* group with a weak emotion and *easy recipients* with a strong emotion would show moderate levels of anxiety.
2. Participants giving gifts to *difficult recipients* whom they have strong emotional significance with will take longer to select a gift than those with *easy recipients* with whom they have weak emotional significance with. The *difficult recipient* group with weak emotion and *easy recipients* with strong emotion will show moderate of reaction time.

Figure 1 illustrates the expected EDA and RT in this study.

		Types of gift recipients	
		Easy recipient	Difficult recipient
Emotional significance	Weak emotion	Highest EDA Longest RT	Med EDA Med RT
	Strong emotion	Med EDA Med RT	Lowest EDA Shortest RT

Figure 1. The Expected EDA and RT

Chapter III: Method

Participants

Participants were 70 undergraduate and graduate students from the University of Wisconsin - Stout (18 males, mean age = 21 years, 45 females, mean age = 22 years). Research participants were recruited from three undergraduate/graduate courses with some receiving course credit for their involvement.

Data from seven of the respondents was excluded because two of them did not have souvenir purchasing experience, one ignored the instructions, two provided data that were invalid, one had to retake the experiment three times due to her lack of understanding of the instructions, and one became extremely agitated and exaggerated her physiological response to an abnormal, unusable level.

Research participants were randomly assigned to one of two imagined gift recipient groups: *easy recipients* or *difficult recipients*. Participants had a choice to pick one specific person in their life from the recipient lists so that they could easily relate to the actual person in their life. If they did not have one of these people in their life, they were asked to imagine having a pretend recipient from these recipient options.

Materials

The pieces of equipment used in this experiment were: Biopac™ MP30 acquisition unit, Biopac™ STP 100, Biopac™ SS3LA EDA finger transducer, Biopac™ 44L interface cable, SuperLab™ 4.0, electrode gel, rubbing alcohol, cotton balls, and cotton swabs.

Gifts Instrument. Twenty-three stimuli were presented in this experiment (See Appendix A). These stimuli were photographs of gifts in Florida that were found on the websites. In order to manipulate situations/rituals of gift giving (Christmas, birthday, etc.),

selected gifts were limited to souvenirs only. Most gift items were neutral, appropriate for all ages and gender. Some gifts were more oriented for older ages, some were more for children, and some were more gender specific. Relative to price, a statement was included in the questionnaire indicating that the cost of all displayed gift items was similar. A sample of gift images is shown in Figure 2.



How likely would you choose this gift to the person?

1. Definitely would not choose
2. Might not choose
3. Might choose
4. Definitely would choose

Figure 2. A Sample of a Stimuli and a Rating Question Presented

The actual gift images presented on the computer monitor were approximately 3.15-in. (0.08 m) \times 3.9-in (0.09 m). Along with every stimulus, a 4-point Likert scale was presented ranging from “definitely would not choose” to “definitely would choose” (see Figure 2). Although the rating scale was used for the participant to rate the gift images, this study did not

intend to analyze the rating scale results. Instead, the purpose of using the rating scale was to allow the participant to imaginary shop for a gift for the recipient so that EDA and RT could be measured. Using those stimuli and the rating scale, the researcher created a stimulus presentation in SuperLab™ 4.0. SuperLab™ is experimental lab software used for building experiments, implementing them and collecting data. It is useful software for presenting visual stimuli on a computerized screen. Each participant rated the 23 stimuli presented on a computer screen in the following order: 1) Wooden Sail Boats, 2) Swarovski Cube Beach Style Bracelet (Kids ~ Adults), 3) Black Choker with Surfboard Pendant, 4) Florida Gator Handbag Purse, 5) Palm Tree Photo Frame, 6) Flamingo Bird Feeder, 7) Nautical Compass Spoon Rest, 8) Cabana Beach Hut Shade, 9) Seascapes Cube Candle, 10) “Welcome to the Beach” – Tin Sign, 11) Florida Palm Tree Tropical Cookie Jar (with Cookies), 12) Flip Flop Wind Chime, 13) Flamingo Mascot, 14) Florida Chocolate Candies, 15) Raffia Shell Handbag, 16) Dump Truck Sand Beach Toy Kids Play Set – 5 Piece, 17) Florida T-Shirt (kids ~ Adults), 18) Flip Flops ~ Kids Room Décor ~ Personalized Sign ~ Beach, 19) Florida Gators Orange Franchise Fitted Hat, 20) PALM TREES Beach Towel, 21) Florida Souvenir Orange Purse on Card, 22) Florida Vintage Palm Tree Sailfish & Flamingo Planter Pics, and 23) Large Mixed Nut Sampler.

Demographic Questionnaire. Participants completed a three-item demographic questionnaire pertaining to their gender, age, and ethnicity (Appendix A).

Experimental Questions. Participants were asked if they had a souvenir purchasing experience prior to the experiment. After rating all gifts, they were asked to rate the difficulty of selecting an appropriate gift for their imagined recipient. Participants were then asked to indicate their real or imaged emotional closeness to the selected recipient.

Electrodermal Activity Measures (EDA). EDA was measured while the participant rated 23 stimuli (gift images). In those 23 stimulus presentation, the participant was asked to wait seeing the instruction: “Please wait...” for 6 seconds. This 6-second inter-trial period before going to the next rating question allowed the participant enough time for EDA measurements to return to baseline.

EDA was recorded as a measure of autonomic arousal in response to stress. It is a measure of a change in skin conductance resulting from endocrine sweat gland activity, which is modulated by states of emotional stress (Lim, Edis, Kranz, Mendelson, Selwood, & Scott, 1983). EDA was recorded using a BiopacTM MP30 recording system (BiopacSystems, Inc., n.d.). The device measured small changes in electrical conductance across the skin under a noninvasive procedure. EDA was measured in the electrical conductance unit μmho , which is .000001 times the unit mho and the direct, reciprocal of the standard electrical resistance unit μohm . There is no harm to participants in this process of measuring EDA (Cacioppo, Tassinari, & Berntson, 2007).

Reaction Time Measures (RT). Reaction time is measured in thousandths of a second or milliseconds (ms). It may take 100 ms to withdraw our hand from a stove and 500 ms to read out the number on the paper. The difference in reaction time occurs due to the different amount of time it takes for the central nervous system to process the sensory signals and to choose the appropriate course of action (Rothwell, n.d.).

In this experiment, the reaction time was measured from the point where a stimulus was presented until the moment where the participant inputted the answer (see Figure 3) as duration of time in selecting a gift. The BIOPACTM STP100 is a device to measure the participant responses to stimuli including reaction time. Participants were asked to manually press a keyboard as soon as they were ready to rate each stimulus. Then, the synchronization signals

from the STP 100 directly went to the MP30 running on a first computer. A second computer where the SuperLab software and a Digital I/O card be placed received the signals for data synchronization and collection purposes (Biopac Systems, Inc., n.d.).

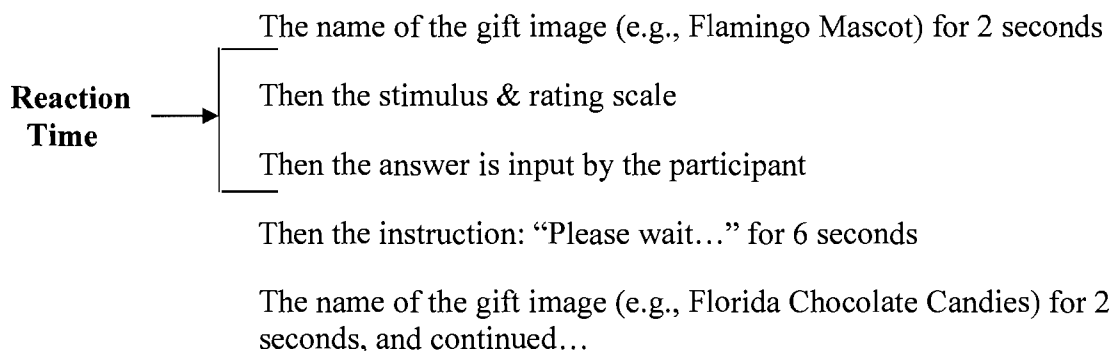


Figure 3. Recorded Reaction Time

Design and Procedure

This study was a 2×2 between-subjects factorial design. One independent variable was experimental (difficulty of recipient and the other quasi-experimental (emotional significance). Participants were randomly assigned to give to either easy or difficult recipients. Respondents rated emotion toward the imagined recipients on a 4-point Likert scale: 1 = not close at all, 2 = not close, 3 = close, and 4 = very close. The respondents' answers were classified into two levels of emotional states. Not close and not close at all were combined into not close which is labeled as weak emotion

The dependent variable in the experiment was anxiety (EDA) and duration of time in selecting a gift (reaction time).

Pilot Test. In order to determine whether participants could understand every instruction, and to measure the experiment time, a pilot test was conducted. The researcher asked two peers

to verify all instructions and questions to make sure that they were understandable. The pilot test was also helpful in measuring approximately how long each experiment would take including consenting and debriefing of each participant. Sign-up sheets were created based on the results which set a 15-minute time period per experiment.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions, *easy* or *difficult*, before they entered the experimental room. Thirty-two participants were assigned to the *easy recipient* group while another thirty-two were assigned to the *difficult recipient* group.

To measure EDA and RT, the Biopac™ STP100 cable was connected to the I/O port of the rear of the Biopac™ MP30 unit in the first computer. The other side of the cable was connected into the Digital I/O card on the second computer where SuperLab™ was placed.

The researcher wore a lab coat all the time during the experiment, behaved in a professional manner and was as consistent in each experiment as possible. She also avoided any behavior that might negatively affect their anxiety level (e.g., wearing perfume or extreme makeup). After signing an informed consent (see Appendix B) in a different room, participants were asked to enter an experimental room and told to relax. The experiment was conducted in an 8-ft × 4-ft. (2.44 m × 1.22 m) room, and the stimuli were presented on a Hewlett-Packard™ computer with an *Insignia* 23" Widescreen color monitor approximately 16.5-in. (0.42 m) from the participant. To measure EDA, a participant's index and middle fingers of their non-dominant hand were swabbed with a cotton ball soaked in alcohol, scrubbed with sandpaper, and wiped off to remove any dead skin cells and skin oils that might cause artificial, inaccurate readings. After letting their fingers dry, a small amount of electrode gel was placed on each electrode. The participant, with finger electrodes attached, was seated in a chair in a quiet room at normal ambient temperatures and instructed to look at the monitor situated in front of them. Then they

were told to begin the experiment whenever they were ready. The researcher left the room and began measuring the participant's EDA and RT using a computer set up in an observation room. The researcher stayed in the observation room all the time during the experiment so that she was able to observe the participant's reactions through a one-way mirror from the observation room.

Participants began to read written instructions. In both condition groups they were given a common scenario which asked them to imagine a situation of choosing a gift for a recipient. In the condition they were assigned, they were asked to pick one specific person in their life from these recipient options or to imagine having a pretend recipient. After they picked one specific person, they saw the questionnaire instructions and were asked to read a story on the next page. The questionnaire instructions told them to imagine they were on vacation at the San Pompano Beach, Florida. The researcher made up the name of the place in order to manipulate participants' travel/shopping experience at the place. They then envision themselves being at a local gift shop and buying a gift for the person they had just picked. The name of the gift came up on the screen for 2 seconds. Then a picture of the gift along with the rating question appeared. As an imagined gift giver, the task was to rate how likely she/he would be to select each gift for their imagined recipient. After rating each gift, the participant was asked to wait for 6 seconds by seeing an instruction: "Please wait..." After rating all gifts, they were asked to rate the difficulty of selecting an appropriate gift for their imagined recipient. Participants were then asked to indicate their real or imaged emotional closeness to the selected recipient. For the final research activity, they filled out a computer-based questionnaire which included demographic information (age, gender, and ethnicity). After indicating their choices, the instruction told the participant to let the researcher know that they were finished with the experiment. In the end the participants were debriefed orally, given a printed debriefing form (see Appendix C), thanked and dismissed.

Chapter IV: Results

The purpose of this study was to demonstrate the physiological anxiety caused by gift giving to influential gift recipients. The hypotheses were: 1) participants giving gifts to *difficult recipients* with whom they have a strong emotional significance with will display higher states of anxiety, as measured by electrodermal response than those with *easy recipients* and have weak emotional significance with. The *difficult recipient* group with a weak emotion and *easy recipients* with a strong emotion would show moderate levels of anxiety and 2) participants giving gifts to *difficult recipients* whom they have strong emotional significance with will take longer to select a gift than those with *easy recipients* with whom they have weak emotional significance with. The *difficult recipient* group with weak emotion and *easy recipients* with strong emotion will show moderate reaction time.

The *difficult recipient* group with a weak emotion and *easy recipients* with a strong emotion were predicted to show moderate levels of anxiety and reaction time which would be between *difficult recipients* with a strong emotion and *easy recipients* with a weak emotion groups. Those two groups would not show much difference between each other.

Data Analysis

First, reaction time (RT) and electrodermal activity (EDA) were analyzed to find if there were differences in the levels of difficulty of respondents when imagining a gift recipient. Next, the RT and EDA data were analyzed to see if participants were influenced by the types of recipients, *easy recipient* and *difficult recipient* from Otne et al. (1993) study and by the participant's emotional significance, weak and strong emotion, toward the imaginary recipient. Then, more detailed analysis of the differences in the level in recipient types and emotional significance were explored.

Mean difference between the two experimental conditions

An independent-samples t-test was employed to determine whether respondents labeled difficult recipients as “it was difficult to choose” and easy recipients as “it was easy to choose”. There was no difference between recipient groups and the easy/difficult perception in choosing a gift ($t(60) = 1.29, p > .05$).

RT by recipient types and emotional significance

A 2 (recipient type) \times 2 (emotional significance) between subject analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to see the overall effect of recipient types and emotional significance on RT and the interaction effect of RT between the two variables.

Table 1

RT by Recipient Types and Emotional Significance

		<i>Emotional significance</i>				<i>Total</i>	
		<i>Weak emotion</i>		<i>Strong emotion</i>			
		<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Recipient types</i>	<i>Easy recipients</i>	3232.6	1183.6	2194.8	708.9	2382.6	715.8
	<i>Difficult recipients</i>	2388.4	1166.5	2208.1	525.9	2197.0	764.3
<i>Total</i>		2583.2*	1179.5	2205.5*	557.9		

* $p < .05$

RT for the weak emotion groups was the slowest in both the *easy* and *difficult* groups. No significant main effect of recipient type on RT was found for the *easy/difficult recipient* group. RT did not differ significantly ($F(1, 60) = 2.430, p > .05$) between *easy recipient* ($M = 2382.6$) and *difficult recipient* ($M = 2197.0$) groups. A main effect for emotional significance ($F(1, 60) =$

5.215, $p = .026$) showed that RT with weak emotion ($M = 2601.9$) was significantly longer than with strong emotion ($M = 2214.9$). Moreover, no interaction effect existed between the types of recipient and emotional significance ($F(1, 60) = 2.59, p > .05$).

EDA by recipient types and emotional significance

A 2 (recipient type) \times 2 (emotional significance) between subject ANOVA was used to see the overall effect of recipient types and emotional significance on EDA. EDAs differed significantly by the type of recipients ($F(1, 58) = 14.2, p = .000$). The *difficult recipient* group showed higher EDA ($M = .44$) than the *easy recipient* group ($M = .20$) did.

Table 2

EDA by Recipient Types and Emotional Significance

		<i>Emotional significance</i>				<i>Total</i>	
		<i>Weak emotion</i>		<i>Strong emotion</i>			
		<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Recipient types</i>	<i>Easy recipients</i>	.17	.097	.20	.18	.19*	.17
	<i>Difficult recipients</i>	.72	.448	.35	.30	.44*	.38
<i>Total</i>		.54	.47	.27	.25		

* $p < .001$

Emotional significance was tested to see if there was a main effect on EDA. There was a moderate, but not significant mean difference of EDA ($F(1, 58) = 3.6, p > .05$) between weak emotion ($M = .54$) and strong emotion ($M = .27$). Next, the potential interaction effect was examined. There was a significant interaction effect for EDA ($F(1, 58) = 4.62, p = .036$) between recipient types and emotional significance.

Since both hypotheses were not supported, but some conditions were significant, further analyses were explored below.

RT and EDA by each recipient

In order to determine if RT or EDA differed by type of gift recipient a one-way ANOVA was employed. Table 3 shows the mean RT and EDA by each gift recipient. There was no significant difference on RT by recipient type ($F(3, 60) = .118, p > .05$). However, there was a statistically significant difference of mean EDA μ mho change by recipient type ($F(3, 60) = 5.736, p = .002$).

Table 3

RT and EDA by each recipient

	<i>Recipient</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
RT	Child	2306.9	540.3
	Same-gender friend	2361.9	838.3
	Grandparent or elderly relative	2230.1	824.6
	In-law	2230.2	484.7
EDA	Child	.20*	.14
	Same-gender friend	.19*	.20
	Grandparent or elderly relative	.38	.31
	In-law	.72*	.61

* $p < .005$

Then a Tukey HSD post-hoc test was revealed to see where the differences were. The mean EDA was significantly differed in two pairs: child ($M = .20$) and in-law ($M = .72$), $p = .004$, and same-gender friend ($M = .19$) and in-law ($M = .72$), $p = .003$.

Chapter V: Discussion

The literature review demonstrated that the major function of the gift exchange process contributes to individuals in society in both negative and positive ways (e.g. Komter, 1997; Komter & Vollebergh, 1997; Mysterad et al., 2006; Sherry, 1983). Only a few studies conducted in the past have discussed the negative side of gift exchange (e.g. Otnes et al., 1993; Sherry et al., 1993; Sunwolf, 2006; Wooten, 2000). This study examined factors that contribute to an individual's anxiety when giving gifts. Anxiety was operationalized as a measure of change in electrodermal response and time required to select a gift. Gift giving anxiety was thought to be influenced by the level of emotional connection to the recipient and the type of recipients. It was hypothesized that giving gifts to *difficult recipients*, and with strong emotional significance to the recipients, would create higher states of anxiety in gift givers as measured by electrodermal response (EDA) and longer reaction time (RT) than those with *easy recipients* and weak emotional significance. In addition, the *easy recipient* group with strong emotion and the *difficult recipient* group with weak emotion were expected to show neutral EDA and RT, which would not be over or less than the *difficult recipient* with strong emotion and those with *easy recipients* with weak emotional significance.

Overall the *difficult recipient* groups showed higher anxiety than the *easy recipient* group. The respondents who selected gifts for *difficult recipients*, who had a weak emotional connection to the recipient, felt the highest anxiety thus not supporting the first hypothesis. The givers who shopped for *difficult recipients* with weak emotion might have found choosing a gift for an unfamiliar recipient the most difficult. On the other hand, as the results showed the *easy recipient* group with weak emotion showed the lowest anxiety. Those who selected gifts for easy-to-please recipients who they had weak emotional significance with might have imagined

that they did not need to worry about their gift selection because the recipients would like it no matter what. Furthermore, the *easy recipient* with weak emotion group, and *easy recipient* with strong emotion showed the comparable result. The recipients' characteristics of being "easy" created the lower gifting anxiety once again.

Those with *difficult recipients* who held a strong emotion toward the recipient considered this a difficult task but still felt less anxious than the highest anxiety group. They may have had a better idea of what the recipient would like or they may have enjoyed imagining the recipients were pleased by the gifts rather than feeling anxious and worried. Although, the data did not match the hypotheses, the results showed that when the type of recipient and emotional significance were combined it became a great predictor of the states of anxiety in terms of gift selection.

RT was analyzed to see whether types of recipient and emotional significance influenced their time of selecting gifts. RT was not affected by the type of recipient but was affected by emotional significance toward the recipients. The combination of the recipient types and emotional significance did not influence the givers' reaction time; therefore the second hypothesis was also rejected. Contrary to the prediction, the weak emotional significant group spent longer than the strong emotion group in selecting gifts. Although not significant, the *easy recipients* who had a weak emotion for the recipient took the longest to select gifts.

Several reasons could be considered as to why the results did not support the prediction. First, the respondents' shopping experience was only in their imagination. No decision-making was needed for the participants about the gift's monetary value. Although five senses (touch, sight, sound, smell, and taste) might be the important factors to attract customers' shopping experiences (Kim, 2002), the experiment in this research limited the participants to their visual

sense for a purchasing decision. Another reason could be methodological. The amount of time the respondent took to select each gift was unlimited. The respondents might have shown different results if they were given limited time for responses.

In a detailed analysis of each recipient, in-law was the most anxiety-provoking gift recipient of the four types of recipients studied. Moreover, there was a great difference when comparing the in-law group to the child and the same-gender friend group respectively. Santos and Levitt (2007) identified in-laws as often causing strong emotional stress to their families. Once again, the typical characteristic of *difficult recipients* was that this group tended to misinterpret gifts. They are likely to misread a giver's attempt to express a particular role through gift exchange regardless of one's conscious or unconscious intentions (Otnes et al., 1993). In general, interpersonal relationships and social roles among family members are good predictors of family satisfaction and their emotional stress (Weigel & Weigel, 1990).

Conclusions

A gift helps to communicate one's identity, express one's feelings, and maintain one's social relationships. Gift giving is a human social norm that every culture has, which plays an important part in keeping the society running more efficiently.

Givers aim to handle this significant norm well, which often causes them emotional stress. Gift giving anxiety is an accepted topic of study among marketers, sociologists, and anthropologists. It was my desire to consider this issue from a physiological and psychological point of view and to show that many givers are literally stressed by this norm.

The purpose of this study was to examine gift giving anxiety in measuring changes in physiological skin responses and duration of time spent selecting gifts. Hypotheses of this study were created based on *easy/difficult* gift recipient tendencies from Otne et al's 1993 research. In

their study, *difficult recipients* tended to be older, such as grandparents or more distant relatives, while *easy recipients* were most commonly categorized as being children and same-gender friends, in terms of gift selection. However, these labels were tendencies in their study and not a generalized fact. Due to there being considerable differences between Otne et al's (1993) research population and mine, my participants were asked to rate their levels of difficulty as givers as a means of identifying and verifying their perceptions of difficulty in the gift giving process.

The results showed that the giver's emotional significance toward the recipient affected their shopping time but the types of recipient did not. When looking at their anxiety level, the *difficult recipient* group showed higher gifting anxiety than the *easy recipient* group. Above all, in-laws stressed givers the most whereas children and same-gender friends caused the least stress. Particular types of recipient groups or social roles caused more stress on the givers.

In addition, emotional significance is also an essential factor in predicting gifting anxiety. The respondents who shopped for gifts for a recipient in their imagination who they were close to were more likely to show higher states of anxiety thus shorter shopping time than those who were not close to the recipients. The findings from this study confirmed that people apparently had gift giving anxiety which was differentiated by the types of recipients and also by their sentiment toward gift receivers. Hence the amount of time givers spent in selecting gifts differed depending on their emotions toward the recipient which they held in their mind.

Although it did not support the first hypothesis, combining two independent variables of types of recipients (*easy/difficult*) and emotional significance (*weak/strong*) was found as a great predictor of gift anxiety. Moreover the second hypothesis was also rejected yet emotional significance was found as an important factor to influence shopping time.

The findings confirmed that people apparently had gift giving anxiety which was differentiated by the types of recipients and also by their sentiment toward gift receivers. Gift consumers expect gaining rewards or avoiding punishments through gifts. A gift should come with a “premium” for their relationship.

Most marketers aspire to understand consumers, while psychologists aim to study human behavior in general. It would be a good collaboration for marketers and retailers to not just privately but dynamically work with psychologists to understand vital consumer insights about gift buying customers. Gift giving does not exist to create stress or conflict between giver and receiver but to bring some benefits to their relationship. Marketers may be able to help gift purchasers buffer their tensions by using a psychological perspective of consumers, such as providing more gift advisors who can give professional advice and guidance on gift giving. Thus, advertising gift advisors may foster awareness of their tensions that could stimulate further study and resolution for customers.

Gifts hold meaning for both the giver and the receiver therefore, they should not be considered as a simple object. Some individuals are very attached to the object in order to achieve their goals as a gift giver. I hope that the findings from this study will encourage others, including social psychologists, to further investigate the existing conflicts that people are facing when performing the traditional norm of gift giving.

Recommendations

1. Future researchers may want to use multiple and/or different approaches to measure anxiety both qualitatively and quantitatively.

2. In future studies, more experienced gift givers could be the target population so that their gift giving anxiety could be analyzed relative to the broader, more mature shopping experiences and social roles they possibly possess.
3. A similar experiment could be applied to measuring the physiological responses of actual online shoppers.
4. Reaction time could be measured in a limited time setting.
5. A comparative study of students from campuses throughout the United States could be conducted for the purpose of understanding how beliefs, income, location, education, and economic status, may affect their gift giving behaviors and levels of anxiety.

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Appendix A
Stimulus Presentations and Questionnaire

Gift-giving anxiety study

Please answer the following questions

a. Have you ever purchased souvenir before?

Yes No

You are going to be asked to select gifts for one of the following two people, a child or a same-gender friend.

Please select only ONE SPECIFIC PERSON. If you do not have one of these people in your life imagine that you do.

- A. Child
- B. Same-gender friend

Close your eyes, and think about the person you selected for 10 seconds.

Now, you will read a story.

Survey Instruction: Imagine you are on vacation, and read the following story. After finish reading, you will be asked to answer some questions about the person.



Welcome to San Pompano Beach Florida!

San Pompano beach is located on a small island of Florida's western Gulf coast. Imagine a clear blue sky, palm trees, and warm ocean breeze. You are staying at a cottage along the coast. While your five-days stay, you enjoyed local foods, arts, and relaxing time on the beach.

You are going back tomorrow and would like to purchase some souvenirs. Now you

are at a local gift shop.

You are going to buy a gift for the PERSON YOU JUST PICKED. You are not going to see images of gifts at the store.



Instruction:

For each of the following gifts, you are going to be asked to rate how likely you would choose that gift for the person you just picked.

Those gift items are in similar price range. You will give your rating after you see the picture.

In the actual presentation, the rating question was asked as follows:

Question X: How likely would you choose this gift to the person?

Definitely would not choose	Might not choose	Might choose	Definitely would choose
--------------------------------	------------------	--------------	----------------------------

1

2

3

4

1. Wooden Sail Boats



2. Swarovski Cube Beach Style Bracelet (Kids ~ Adults)



3. Black Choker with Surfboard Pendant



4. Florida Gator Handbag Purse



5. Palm Tree Photo Frame



6. Flamingo Bird Feeder



7. Nautical Compass Spoon Rest



8. Cabana Beach Hut Shade



9. Seascapes Cube Candle



10. "Welcome to the Beach"-Tin Sign



11. Florida Palm Tree Tropical Cookie Jar (with Cookies)



12. Flip Flop Wind Chime



13. Flamingo Mascot



14. Florida Chocolate Candies



15. Raffia Shell Handbag



16. Dump Truck Sand Beach Toy Kids Play Set - 5 Piece



17. Florida T-Shirt (kids ~ Adults)



18. Flip Flops ~ Kids Room Décor ~ Personalized Sign ~



19. Florida Gators Orange Franchise Fitted Hat



20. PALM TREES Beach Towel



21. Florida Souvenir Orange Purse on Card



22. Florida Vintage Palm Tree Sailfish & Flamingo Planter Pics Sampler



23. Large Mixed Nut Sampler



a. How easy or difficult was it to think about choosing
a gift for the person?

Very easy

Easy

Difficult

Very difficult

- | | | | | |
|---|---------------------|-----------|-------|------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| b. How emotionally close are you to the person? | Not close
at all | Not close | Close | Very close |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
- c. What is your gender?
- Male Female
- d. Race:
- White
- Black American Indian and Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander
- Some other race
- Two or More Races
- e. Age
- _____ years old

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix B
Informed Consent Form

Consent to Participate In UW-Stout Approved Research

Title: Gift-giving anxiety and reaction time

Investigators:

Miki Nomura, email: nomuram@uwstout.edu , phone: 715-235-2044

Dr. Richard Tafalla, Professor, Psychology Department, 326 McCalmont, email: tafallar@uwstout.edu phone: 715-232-1662

Description:

This study examines gift giving anxiety in measuring changes in physiological skin responses when selecting gifts. You will be asked to rate each sample gift for the imagined recipient. You will be also asked to pick one gift from the list of sample gifts. While answering the questions, your anxiety level will be measured physiologically. Reaction time from the point where the image is presented until the moment of your response will be measured as well.

Risks

No significant risks are anticipated. You will have the complete study procedures explained to you ahead of time. You will not be asked any sensitive information in a questionnaire. The physiological measures of anxiety are largely unobtrusive and create no pain or discomfort at all.

Benefits

Gift giving is a universal social norm in all cultures; it is a way of establishing and maintaining relationships between groups and individuals. Gifts are used as tools for presenting one's identity to others. A benefit of this research is to help us better understand the cognitive processes involved in gift-giving and gift choice.

Time Commitment

The experiment will take approximately 15 minutes.

Confidentiality

Your responses will be completely anonymous. We will not ask for or record their names nor for personalized information either on paper or electronically. Each participant will be assigned by a random participant number, which cannot be traced back to any identifying information.

Right to Withdraw

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate without any adverse consequences to you. Should you choose to participate and later wish to withdraw from the study, you may discontinue your participation at this time without incurring adverse consequences.

IRB Approval

This study has been reviewed and approved by The University of Wisconsin-Stout's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study meets the ethical obligations

required by federal law and University policies. If you have questions or concerns regarding this study please contact the Investigator or Advisor. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB Administrator.

Investigators:

Miki Nomura, email: nomuram@uwstout.edu , phone: 715-235-2044

Dr. Richard Tafalla, Professor, Psychology Department, 326 McCalmont, email: tafallar@uwstout.edu phone: 715-232-1662

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Appendix C
Debriefing Form

Debriefing Form
Gift-giving and social anxiety

The topic of gift giving has been discussed by many marketers due to the importance. The gift givers desire is to have positive influence to recipients by presenting appropriate gifts and avoid a negative reaction from recipients. Previous research has found that not only do gifts help maintain our social ties, but also create and worsen interpersonal conflict. In this study, I examine if there is an association between gift giving and social anxiety.

I appreciate your time and contribution to the field of psychology. If you would like to know how the results turned out or have any questions regarding the study, you can feel free to contact us anytime.

Contact information:

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