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Why Feasibility Matters More to Gift Receivers than to Givers: A Construal-Level Approach to Gift Giving

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This article looks at the trade-offs that gift givers and gift receivers make between desirability and feasibility using construal level theory as a framework. Focusing on the asymmetric distance from a gift that exists within giver-receiver dyads, the authors propose that, unlike receivers, givers construe gifts abstractly and therefore weight desirability attributes more than feasibility attributes. Support for this proposition emerges in studies examining giver and receiver mind-sets, as well as giver and receiver evaluations of gifts. Furthermore, givers do not choose gifts that maximize receiver happiness or other relationship goals even though givers believe they are doing so. Finally, the authors demonstrate that while givers are sensitive to their distance from the receiver, receivers are not sensitive to this distance.

The tradition of gift giving is as old as culture itself. From the Kula ring formed by the Trobriand islanders (Malinowski 1922), to the pottery gift exchanges organized by the ancient Maya (Tourtellot and Sabloff 1972), to today's frenzied holiday shopping, gift-giving rituals have played a central role in cultures around the world. Gifts can

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serve to tighten social bonds between the giver and the receiver (Schwartz 1967) and can be a natural way to establish and maintain order in a group of social beings (Cosmides and Tooby 1992). Gifts may sometime involve the expectation of reciprocity (Gouldner 1960; Mauss 1925) and may, at times, be unselfish expressions of love and affection (Belk 1979; Belk and Coon 1993). Regardless of its particular form, however, gift giving generally functions to create deep social bonds that are a central component of a complex society (Homans 1958). Indeed, in an attempt to improve social bonds, givers often adopt the goal of choosing the gift that most pleases and singularizes the receiver (Belk 1996; Cheal 1986, 1988; Otnes, Lowrey, and Kim 1993).

Despite givers' intention of giving well-received gifts, the gift giving literature has suggested many barriers to productive gift giving that emerge from gift givers' and receivers' differing perceptions of the gift-giving process. Recent research, for example, has argued that gift receivers would be happier if givers gave them exactly what they requested rather than attempting to be "thoughtful and considerate" by buying gifts they did not explicitly request (Gino and Flynn 2011). Givers may also benefit from relying less on price as a cue to a gift's worth, as research suggests that gift receivers do not really attend to the gift's price when evaluating how much they like the gift (Robben and Verhallen 1994). Thus, givers should note that buying higher-priced gifts will not engender

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more appreciation from receivers (Flynn and Adams 2009). Additionally, cultural, gender, and age-related differences may also cause givers to choose gifts perceived as less ideal by receivers (Joy 2001; Laroche, Cleveland, and Browne 2004).

We propose another way that givers and receivers evaluate gifts differently. Consider giving a gift to a friend for his or her birthday. In making this decision, we believe givers think not about their own preferences (as they do in many situations, as demonstrated by research in areas such as egocentric bias and the false consensus effect, among others; Jones and Nisbett 1987; Ross, Greene, and House 1977; Ross and Sicoly 1979) but rather think about the receiver with the gift; they thereby think about the gift from a substantial social distance. Receivers, on the other hand, evaluate the gift at a short social distance because they are imagining themselves with the gift. They do not think about the giver choosing the gift, although, a priori, one could also imagine that receivers operate at a high social distance within the dyad since they might focus on the giver during the gift exchange. Critically, this hypothesized asymmetric social distance has important implications for how givers and receivers make some key trade-offs. For example, many gift choices involve a trade-off between the desirability of the gift and the feasibility of the gift. Desirability refers to the quality of the item's end-state and is related to the central aspects of the gift, such as the quality of the food at a restaurant, the uses of a piece of software, or the pleasure of a movie. Feasibility refers to the ease, convenience, or other nonessential aspects of the gift, such as the distance to get to the restaurant, the ease of learning how to use software, or the convenience of seeing a movie. Using Construal Level Theory (CLT; Trope and Liberman 2010), we predict that givers' increased social distance will lead them to put more weight on desirability aspects and less weight on feasibility aspects than receivers will. As a result, givers will choose gifts high on desirability over gifts high on feasibility, even though receivers would prefer they did not. Moreover, although gift givers and receivers form a dyadic relationship, we expect that their gift evaluations will be differentially sensitive to the social distance between them. That is, because the receiver's focus when evaluating a gift is on her or his own consumption, receivers' evaluations should not be sensitive to changes in the distance between them; on the other hand, givers, whose focus is on the receiver, should be sensitive to that distance.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Gifts are chosen to satisfy a variety of goals. These goals include improving communication or one's social relationship or acting as a form of socialization, exchange, or agapic love (Belk 1979; Belk and Coon 1993). Essential to many gift-giving goals is the reaction of the receiver to the gift. Therefore, it is important for the giver to anticipate the receivers' reaction and choose a gift that fosters the desired response.

Previous research has suggested that people are often susceptible to egocentric bias, where they perceive the world

through a lens that is strongly anchored in their own perspective, preferences, and beliefs (e.g., Jones and Nisbett 1987; Ross and Sicoly 1979). They even display these egocentric tendencies when explicitly predicting others' preferences and behaviors (see False Consensus Effect: Ross et al. 1977). These biases would be consistent with the prediction that givers imagine themselves using a gift when they are choosing a gift to give to someone else, that is, that givers construe the gift from a near social distance.

We believe that gift giving is different from typical situations exhibiting egocentric responses. Research on gift giving has shown that givers want to make sure that their gift is relevant to the receiver and enjoyable for the receiver to use (Caplow 1984; Cheal 1986, 1988; Gino and Flynn 2011) and that their gift "surprises and delights" the receiver (Belk 1996). In fact, most people give gifts with the intent of pleasing the receiver (Otnes et al. 1993). Even when the intent is not to please the receiver but to socialize them into cultural values or communicate to them (Belk 1979), the focus on the receiver still remains. Thus, we propose that, rather than taking on an egocentric point of view, gift givers imagine the receiver using the gift when they are choosing it. Since the giver is imagining the gift in another person's hands, their psychological distance from the gift will be relatively high.

Given the centrality of the relationship in gift giving, the receiver might be focused on the giver. The giver is focused on the receiver because the receiver is the object of the giver's gift-giving goals. Because receiving a gift does not generally result from relationship goals on the part of the receiver, the receiver is naturally more concerned about the consumption of the gift than any relationship goal. As a result, receivers focus on their own consumption of the gift rather than on the giver's thought when giving the gift, and they therefore adopt a proximal perspective on the gift. That is, although givers and receivers may be in a dyadic relationship characterized by symmetric social distance from one another, their psychological distance from the gift is asymmetric.

This difference in psychological distance can influence an important trade-off that is faced in many decisions, including decisions about which gift to give. Gift options often vary on two important dimensions: desirability and feasibility. As mentioned above, desirability refers roughly to the attractiveness of the gift, and feasibility refers roughly to its convenience or ease of use. In many situations, though definitely not all, gift givers are choosing among gifts that vary on their feasibility and desirability. For example, a gift giver might be choosing between a gift certificate to a high-quality restaurant that is difficult to get to versus a gift certificate to a somewhat lower-quality restaurant that is close by.

Research conducted within the framework of Construal Level Theory (Trope and Liberman 2010) has shown that high psychological distance leads people to adopt abstract representations that focus on an item or activity's central attributes, whereas low psychological distance leads to concrete representations that focus on more peripheral aspects.

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For example, studies of temporal distance find that people tend to represent distant future events more abstractly than near future events (Lieberman, Sagristano, and Trope 2002) and thus weight desirability more than feasibility when making choices for the distant future (Lieberman and Trope 1998). Similar results have been found for other dimensions of psychological distance, including spatial distance (Fujita et al. 2006a), hypotheticality (Todorov, Goren, and Trope 2007; Wakslak et al. 2006), and social distance (Liviatan, Trope, and Liberman 2008).

Of most direct relevance to the current gift-giving context, research comparing decisions made for the self versus for others has provided evidence consistent with the idea that decisions for the self are made from a shorter psychological distance than decisions made for others. For example, participants making decisions for others tend to overweight central attributes (Kray 2000; Kray and Gonzalez 1999), a finding consistent with a construal account given that construal level theory posits that distance increases one's focus on central and defining, versus more peripheral and supporting, aspects (Trope and Liberman 2010). In fact, people choosing for themselves point to factors such as convenience (a feasibility concern) as an attribute that they care about more than those who give advice to someone else about the same choice (Kray 2000). People are also more creative when thinking of items for other people than when thinking about items for themselves (Polman and Emich 2011), which is consistent with the idea that they adopted a more abstract orientation. Moreover, people tend to weigh desirability more than feasibility when making decisions for others versus the self, as evidenced in studies ranging from choosing majors to vacations (e.g., people advise others to choose highly desirable vacations, but they themselves consider feasibility issues when selecting a vacation; Lu, Xie, and Xu 2013; Xu and Xie 2011).

Building on and extending this research, we predict that, in a gift-giving situation, both givers and receivers will focus on receivers when thinking about the gift, despite the existence of symmetric distance between givers and receivers. As a result, givers will construe gifts from a greater psychological distance than receivers will; accordingly, givers will choose gifts with high desirability over gifts with high feasibility, whereas receivers will give greater weight to feasibility when evaluating the gifts.

Of course, in the gift-giving context, many other factors can come into play in choosing a gift, such as social norms, creativity, and knowledge about the receiver. Even so, once a giver decides on a product category that fulfills social norms and singularizes the receiver, he or she may still face a trade-off between desirability and feasibility. For example, suppose a giver narrows a gift choice to a gift certificate to an Italian restaurant because a friend loves Italian food. Among Italian restaurants, there may still be a trade-off between desirability and feasibility. For instance, one restaurant may have slightly better food but be located much farther away. A construal account would predict that givers show a greater preference for this more desirable but less feasible option than gift receivers do. These gifts are preferred precisely because givers

think that they will please the receiver but, unfortunately, they may not due to the receiver's low-level construal of the gift.

In this way, our predictions highlight one potentially negative effect of focusing on the other rather than the self. In the perspective taking literature, taking the perspective of another person (as the giver usually does) has been shown to be a positive force leading to decreasing stereotype expression (Galinsky and Moskowitz 2000), enhanced social competence and self-esteem (Davis 1983), and even increasing liking of the perspective target (Davis et al. 1996). We predict, however, that a giver's tendency to consider the other may actually increase rather than decrease self-other differences in decision making, highlighting a rare downside to perspective taking.

To explore the proposed desirability/feasibility difference in giver-receiver preference, its basis in the different levels of construal adopted by givers and receivers, and related predictions, we conducted a series of eight studies. In three studies, we show asymmetries in givers' and receivers' preferences (study 1, study 3, and study 6). We also show that givers and receivers are in different construal modes (study 2). Additionally, we show an asymmetry in givers' and receivers' sensitivity to the social distance between them (studies 4A–4B). Finally, focusing on the relationship consequences of giving gifts, we show that givers think that they are maximizing certain relationship benefits with their gift choice when, in fact, they are not (studies 5–6).

STUDY 1: GIVER/RECEIVER PREFERENCE ASYMMETRIES

The present research explores construal differences that may underlie the trade-offs that givers and receivers make between desirability and feasibility in the gift-giving context. Study 1 begins by testing our proposition that givers prefer giving more desirable gifts and receivers prefer receiving more feasible gifts. To examine this asymmetry, we use a variety of potential gifts, examining the robustness of this effect across the gift-giving domain. We set target sample sizes and established participant removal conditions before data collection in this and all subsequent studies, as recommended by Simmons, Nelson, and Simonsohn (2011). We established sample sizes such that most studies had at least 100 participants per condition. Notable exceptions include study 1 and study 4B, which were completed early in the research before we increased our power.

Method

Recruitment was open for 100 US-based participants from Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk in exchange for a small payment. Eighty participants were left in the study after removing those who did not complete the consent form, those who failed an attention check that asked what condition they were in (giving a gift vs. receiving a gift), and those who failed an instructional manipulation check (IMC; Oppenheimer, Meyvis, and Davidenko 2009). The IMC

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TABLE 1
OVERALL LIKING RATINGS BY GIFT (STUDY 1)

Gift	Givers			Receivers			Differences in liking differences
	Desirable	Feasible	Desirable-feasible	Desirable	Feasible	Desirable-feasible	
Video game	5.17	3.25	1.92	4.09	3.75	.34	1.58
Coffee maker	4.34	4.51	-.17	4.26	4.91	-.65	.48
Newspaper subscription	3.11	2.98	.13	3.29	4.24	-.95	1.08
Restaurant gift certificate	5.21	4.79	.42	5.50	5.56	-.06	.48
Movie tickets	5.70	2.54	3.16	5.49	4.05	1.44	1.72
Photo-editing program	3.98	3.88	.10	4.40	4.71	-.31	.41

asked them to fill in a blank on a specific question in the demographics section with a specific word. A similar IMC was used in all subsequent studies as the exclusion rule.

Participants completed a survey in which they imagined either giving or receiving various birthday gifts. Participants responded to six possible gifts in total (a video game, a coffee maker, a newspaper subscription, a restaurant gift certificate, movie tickets, and photo-editing software). Each gift was randomly selected to be either highly desirable but not very feasible (e.g., a high-quality video game that is hard to learn) or highly feasible but not very desirable (e.g., a medium-quality video game that is very easy to learn). Feasible versus desirable gifts and product category orderings were randomized separately for each participant (see the appendix for stimuli and corresponding desirability/ease of use ratings obtained in a separate posttest). Gifts were selected based on factors identified as influencing desirability and feasibility in previous research (Lieberman and Trope 1998; Thompson, Hamilton, and Rust 2005; Thompson and Norton 2011). For each gift, participants indicated the degree to which they liked the item as a gift, how good the gift was, how appropriate the gift was, and how positive the gift was (all on 1–7-point scales anchored on “not at all” to “very much”). Finally, participants completed an attention check asking for their role in the gift exchange as well as an instructional manipulation check. Attention checks were always asked after the study’s main dependent variables.

Results and Discussion

Averaging the four gift evaluation questions created a gift liking score for each gift ($\alpha = .95$). Because gift type (desirable vs. feasible) was randomly manipulated separately for each participant and product category, we analyzed the data using a linear regression with the liking score as the dependent variable. The linear regression contained participant role (coded as 1 for giver and 0 otherwise), gift type (coded as 1 for highly desirable and 0 otherwise), and the interaction of participant role and gift type, as well as gift and participant fixed effects to control for systematic differences in gift or participant liking ratings.

As predicted, there was a significant interaction of participant role and gift type ($\beta = .23$, $t(392) = 3.21$, $p < .01$). Specifically, givers liked desirable gifts significantly

more than feasible gifts ($\beta = .29$, $t(392) = 4.49$, $p < .01$). Receivers, on the other hand, did not exhibit a preference between the two gifts ($\beta = .01$, $t(392) = .23$, $p = .82$; see table 1 for individual item means by condition). Overall, the results support our hypotheses in that highly desirable gifts were preferred over highly feasible gifts more by givers than receivers.

STUDY 2: ABSTRACT/CONCRETE GIFT FRAMES

Having demonstrated a desirability/feasibility preference asymmetry between givers and receivers, we next sought to show that construal level is the mechanism behind this preference asymmetry. We also wanted to examine participants’ actual gift-giving/gift-receiving experiences. Therefore, rather than asking participants to imagine specific gifts, we asked them to recall and write about a time they gave or received a gift. We predicted that recalling an episode of gift giving would trigger a higher level of construal than recalling an episode of receiving a gift. To determine the level of construal induced by the task, participants, as part of an ostensibly unrelated study, completed the Behavioral Identification Form (Vallacher and Wegner 1989), a widely used measure of construal in which participants choose whether to identify actions in terms of their more abstract ends or more concrete means (Lieberman and Trope 1998; Smith and Trope 2006; Wakslak et al. 2006). We expected participants in the gift-giving condition to choose more abstract identifications than those in the gift-receiving condition.

Method

We recruited 350 participants from an online subject pool of Yale University for a chance to win an Amazon.com gift certificate. but we were left with only 274 after removing participants who clicked on but did not continue with the study or failed the IMC. All except two of the participants removed completed no measures. This is likely due to participants dropping out of the study because they did not want to do a writing exercise. This is also the case for our subsequent studies with similarly high levels of exclusions.

Participants spent at least 2 minutes writing about a time

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when they gave a gift to a friend or received a gift from a friend. The time requirement was instantiated by making sure that 2 minutes had elapsed before the continue button appeared to allow participants to move on to the next section. Subsequently, participants completed an ostensibly unrelated study consisting of the BIF questionnaire. The BIF questionnaire contains 25 items, each of which presented two identifications for an action (e.g., locking a door): one of these is an abstract end the action accomplishes (e.g., securing the house), while the other is a concrete means by which the action is accomplished (e.g., turning a key). Participants had to choose the identification that they thought best fit each action.

Results and Discussion

We compared the total BIF score (calculated by summing the number of abstract identifications chosen) across conditions. As predicted, participants who were asked to write about a time they gave a gift attained a higher score on the BIF than those who were asked to write about a time that they received a gift ($M_{\text{Giver}} = 15.34$ vs. $M_{\text{Receiver}} = 13.89$; $t(272) = 2.44, p < .05$). That is, being in a gift-giver mind-set produced more abstract thinking, even when abstract thinking was measured on a subsequent, ostensibly unrelated task, thus showing that givers and receivers approach gift exchange from different levels of construal.

STUDY 3: MANIPULATING THE GIFT OCCASION

While the previous studies looked at birthdays as a gift-giving occasion, the generality of this effect is important as one can give a gift for a birthday, for an anniversary, for the holidays, or even just because. Therefore, study 3 compares two gift-giving occasions that come with different gift-giving expectations. Since Valentine's Day includes expectations and traditions that focus on highly desirable gifts (e.g., flowers: Belk 1979; Otnes, Ruth, and Milbourne 1994), we wanted to examine whether the asymmetry found in study 1 extends to this occasion. We contrast this to a birthday occasion, which seems less constrained. This study also directly tests whether the different construal levels of givers and receivers mediate differences in preferences.

Method

We recruited 400 US-based participants on Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk, but 329 participants remained after removing those who did not complete the study, failed an IMC, or incorrectly reported their condition in the study. Participants were divided into a 2 (participant role: giver vs. receiver) \times 2 (gift occasion: Birthday vs. Valentine's Day) between-subjects design. Thus, each participant was asked to imagine that they were either picking out a gift or receiving a gift for either a birthday or Valentine's Day. Each participant was asked to imagine a choice between a highly desirable gift (a highly rated Italian restaurant that

is 1 hour away) and a highly feasible gift (a less well rated Italian restaurant that is 5 minutes away) and to give their relative preference (1–7: “prefer Gift A” to “prefer Gift B,” where Gift A was the high-desirability option). Participants were told to imagine that either they (if they were the receiver) or the receiver (if they were the giver) really liked Italian food. In addition, participants were told that the gift certificates under consideration would cost the same and that entrée prices were roughly equivalent at both restaurants. After stating their preference, participants were asked whether they focused more on how the gift was going to be used or why the gift was going to be used (1–100: “focus on how” to “focus on why”) to measure their level of construal (Irmak, Wakslak, and Trope 2013). CLT suggests that people thinking in an abstract mind-set would focus more on why, whereas people thinking in a concrete mind-set would focus more on how.

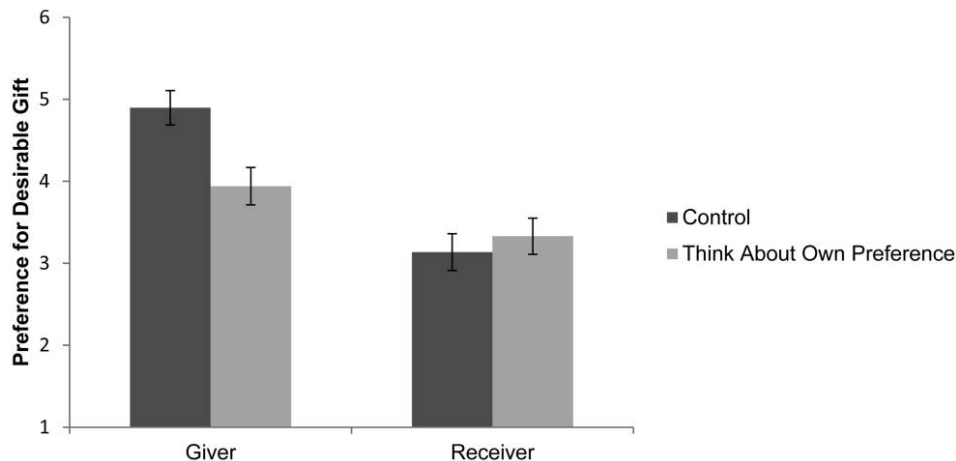
Results and Discussion

There was a main effect of participant role that was consistent with our earlier findings whereby givers preferred a highly desirable gift compared to receivers ($M_{\text{Giver}} = 2.98$ vs. $M_{\text{Receiver}} = 3.72$; $F(1, 325) = 9.56, p < .01$), as well as a main effect of gift occasion ($M_{\text{Birthday}} = 3.65$ vs. $M_{\text{Valentine's Day}} = 3.01$; $F(1, 325) = 7.15, p < .01$). The interaction was not significant ($F(1, 325) = .05, p = .82$). That is, the preference asymmetry between givers and receivers was very similar in magnitude for participants considering a birthday gift and those considering a Valentine's Day gift. Both occasions revealed significant differences between givers and receivers (Birthday: $M_{\text{Giver}} = 3.24$ vs. $M_{\text{Receiver}} = 4.03$; $t(174) = 2.33, p < .05$; Valentine's Day: $M_{\text{Giver}} = 2.67$ vs. $M_{\text{Receiver}} = 3.35$; $t(151) = 2.07, p < .05$). Additionally, there was a significant effect of role on construal level such that givers in both occasions focused more on why than how compared to receivers (Birthday: $M_{\text{Giver}} = 57.91$ vs. $M_{\text{Receiver}} = 46.55$; $t(174) = 2.21, p < .05$; Valentine's Day: $M_{\text{Giver}} = 66.15$ vs. $M_{\text{Receiver}} = 54.38$; $t(151) = 2.21, p < .05$). To explore mediation of the gift giver-receiver preference asymmetry by construal-focus, we performed a bootstrapping mediation (Preacher and Hayes 2008) with 5,000 samples separately for each gift-giving occasion. Preferences in both the birthday and the Valentine's Day gift-giving situations were mediated by self-reported construal-focus (0 was not included in the 95% confidence interval; Birthday: [.0495, .8658], Valentine's Day: [.0626, .9285]). As predicted, participants in the giver condition focused more on desirability-related why issues, resulting in more desirability-related gift preferences. Based on these results, it seems that the gift-giving role does have a marked effect on construal focus, even on gift-giving occasions as laden with expectations as Valentine's Day. Thus, the current study suggests that the giver/receiver preference asymmetry we demonstrate may extend to many gift-giving situations.

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FIGURE 1

STUDY 4A: PREFERENCE FOR PHOTO-EDITING PROGRAM
(1 = PREFERENCE FOR FEASIBLE, 7 = PREFERENCE FOR DESIRABLE)



STUDY 4A: MANIPULATING THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE GIVER

Study 4A tests our argument that both givers and receivers focus on the receiver. This study asks both givers and receivers to first consider their own preference for the item before evaluating it as a gift. For givers, thinking about their own usage of the gift should change their perspective since they typically think about the receiver. However, this instruction should not affect receivers, since they are already focused on their own perspective. Thus, considering their own preference should move givers' preferences toward receivers' preferences.

Method

We recruited 425 US-based participants from Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk. However, 365 were left after removing those who clicked to enter but did not finish the study, failed the IMC, or incorrectly answered whether they were in the giver or receiver condition. Participants were divided into a 2 (participant role: giver vs. receiver) \times 2 (perspective: control vs. own preference) between-subjects design. First, participants imagined a specific friend and wrote down that friend's initials. Then they imagined either giving that friend a gift or receiving a gift from that friend for a birthday occasion. Each participant was asked to imagine a choice between a highly feasible gift (a photo-editing program with few features that was easy to use) and a highly desirable gift (a high-quality photo-editing program that was hard to learn) and to give their relative preference on a 1–7 bipolar scale anchored at "prefer Gift A" and "prefer Gift B," where Gift B was the high-desirability option. Right before answering, half of the participants were asked to take

a moment to think about which software they would prefer for themselves.

Results and Discussion

There was a main effect of participant role ($M_{\text{Giver}} = 4.46$ vs. $M_{\text{Receiver}} = 3.24$; $F(1, 361) = 28.74$, $p < .01$) and a marginal effect of perspective ($M_{\text{Own}} = 3.61$ vs. $M_{\text{Control}} = 4.06$; $F(1, 361) = 3.00$, $p = .08$; see fig. 1). However, this was qualified by the predicted significant interaction between participant role and perspective ($F(1, 361) = 6.80$, $p < .01$). As expected, receivers did not differ in preference based on whether or not they were asked to think about their own preference, suggesting that they do this naturally ($M_{\text{Own}} = 3.33$ vs. $M_{\text{Control}} = 3.14$; $F(1, 184) < 1$). Givers' preference for the feasible photo-editing program (as opposed to the more desirable photo-editing program) was greater when asked to think about their own preference ($M_{\text{Own}} = 3.94$ vs. $M_{\text{Control}} = 4.90$; $F(1, 179) = 9.58$, $p < .01$). This suggests that encouraging givers to think about their own preference can shift their perspective and change their construal level.

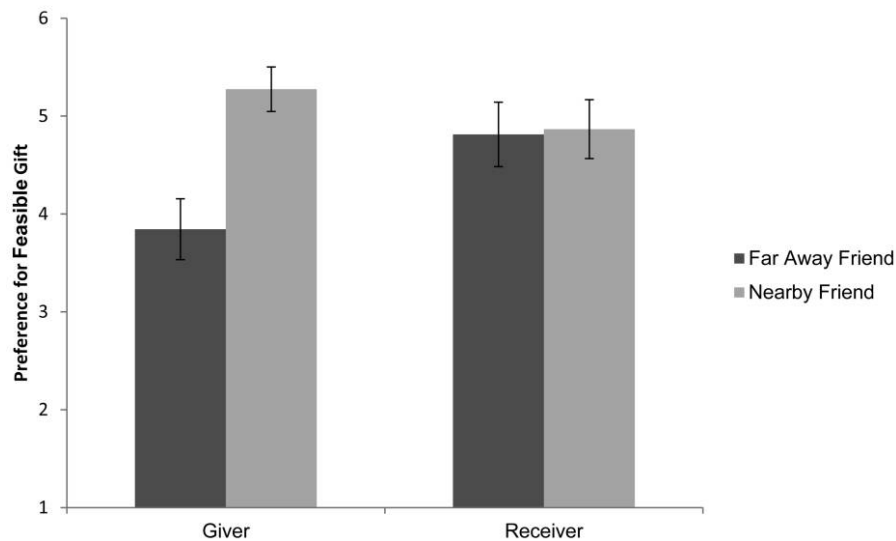
STUDY 4B: MANIPULATING SOCIAL DISTANCE THROUGH PHYSICAL PROXIMITY

Study 4B further tests our proposition that both givers and receivers focus on the receiver by manipulating the distance between the giver and receiver and exploring the effect this has on givers' and receivers' gift preferences. Past research suggests that those who live further away are more socially distant (Festinger, Schachter, and Back 1950). Based on this research, we examine the effect of increasing

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FIGURE 2

STUDY 4B: PREFERENCE FOR PHOTO-EDITING PROGRAM
(1 = PREFERENCE FOR DESIRABLE, 7 = PREFERENCE FOR FEASIBLE)



the social distance between giver and receiver by comparing gift choices involving friends who live far from versus close to each other. If receivers are indeed focused on themselves (rather than on the giver), then they should not be affected by increases or decreases in distance between themselves and the giver. In contrast, if givers are focused on the receiver, then their construal should be affected by the distance between themselves and the receiver: when that distance is large, they should exhibit a higher construal level than when that distance is small.

Method

We recruited 220 participants from an online panel at Yale University in exchange for a chance at an Amazon.com gift certificate, but we were left with 189 participants after removing those who did not complete the study, failed an IMC, or did not correctly report their condition at the end of the study. Participants were randomly assigned to one condition in a 2 (participant role: giver vs. receiver) \times 2 (distance: friend lives in same town or greater than 500 miles away) between-subjects design. First, participants were asked to think of a specific friend, either in their hometown or in a town at least 500 miles away. Then participants indicated the friend's initials and imagined either giving that friend a gift or receiving a gift from that friend for a birthday occasion. Each participant was asked to imagine a choice between a highly desirable gift (a high-quality photo-editing program that was hard to learn) and a highly feasible gift (a photo-editing program with fewer features that was easier to use) and to give their relative preference on a 1–7 bipolar

scale anchored at “prefer Gift A” and “prefer Gift B,” where Gift B was the high-feasibility option.

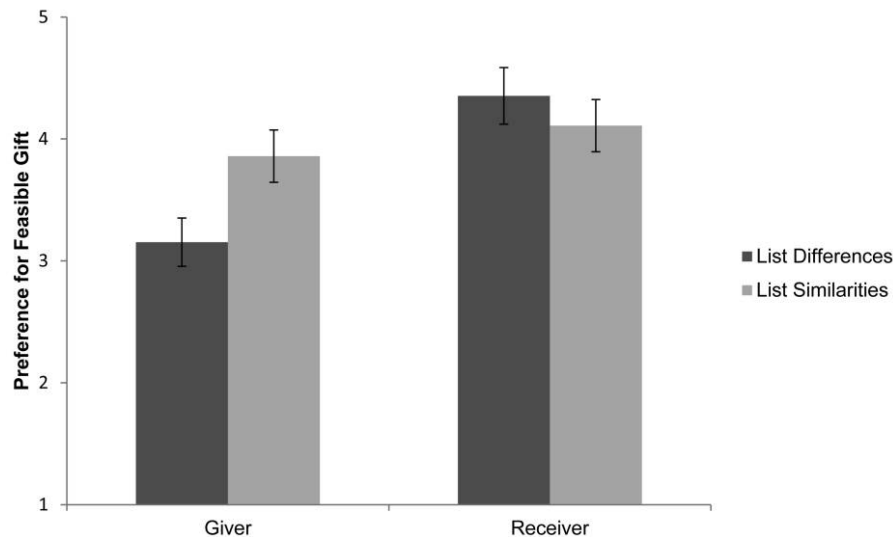
Results and Discussion

While there was no main effect of participant role, there was a main effect of distance such that there was a stronger preference for the feasible gift when thinking about someone in their current town as opposed to someone who is far away ($M_{\text{Near}} = 5.08$ vs. $M_{\text{Far}} = 4.34$; $F(1, 185) = 6.41$, $p < .05$; see fig. 2). However, this was qualified by the predicted significant interaction between participant role and social distance ($F(1, 185) = 5.51$, $p < .05$). As expected, receivers' preferences did not differ based on the giver's distance ($M_{\text{Near}} = 4.87$ vs. $M_{\text{Far}} = 4.81$; $F(1, 185) < 1$), but givers' preference for the feasible photo-editing program (as opposed to the more desirable photo-editing program) was greater when thinking about a closer receiver than a more distant receiver ($M_{\text{Near}} = 5.28$ vs. $M_{\text{Far}} = 3.84$; $F(1, 185) = 12.08$, $p < .01$). Indeed, both receiver conditions and the giver hometown condition did not differ significantly from each other ($F(2, 185) < 1$). This suggests that highlighting the physical proximity of a giver to a receiver lowered the givers' construal level to a point that it was similar to the receivers' construal level. The finding that the distance manipulation is not affecting receivers is consistent with our argument that receivers are imagining their own usage of the gift during the gift exchange (something that we would not expect to be influenced by distance to the giver).

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FIGURE 3

STUDY 4C: PREFERENCE FOR RESTAURANT
(1 = PREFERENCE FOR DESIRABLE, 7 = PREFERENCE FOR FEASIBLE)



STUDY 4C: MANIPULATING SOCIAL DISTANCE THROUGH SIMILARITY FOCUS

To further bolster and extend the findings of studies 4A and 4B, we conducted an additional test of our proposition that psychological distance is driving the difference between givers and receivers by manipulating social distance another way. Study 4C uses a similarity manipulation (Liviatan et al. 2008) that manipulates social distance while keeping other aspects of the relationship, including the friend's identity, constant.

Method

We recruited 500 US-based participants from Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk. However, 454 participants were left after participants were removed for not completing the study, failing an IMC, incorrectly answering whether they were in the giver or receiver condition, incorrectly answering whether they wrote about similarities or differences, or not writing anything when prompted to write about their friend. Participants were divided into a 2 (participant role: giver vs. receiver) \times 2 (distance: near vs. far) between-subjects design. First, participants imagined a specific friend by indicating that friend's initials and were told to think about giving that friend a gift for the friend's birthday or receiving a gift from the friend. On the following page, participants were asked to take a minute and write all of the ways that they were similar to (near condition) or different from (far condition) the friend whom they were imagining. Participants were allowed to continue only after 1 minute had elapsed. Next, participants had a choice between a highly desirable gift (A: a restaurant gift certificate to a highly rated

restaurant an hour away) and a highly feasible gift (B: a restaurant gift certificate to a less highly rated restaurant 5 minutes away). It was specifically mentioned that these distances were in reference to the receiver and the gift certificates as well as that the entrées were roughly equivalent in price at both restaurants. Participants then gave their preference between the two gifts (1–7: “prefer Gift A” to “prefer Gift B”).

Results and Discussion

There was a main effect of participant role ($M_{\text{Giver}} = 3.49$ vs. $M_{\text{Receiver}} = 4.23$; $F(1, 450) = 11.16$, $p < .01$) and no effect of social distance ($M_{\text{Near}} = 4.00$ vs. $M_{\text{Far}} = 3.77$; $F(1, 450) = 1.13$, $p = .29$; see fig. 3). However, this was qualified by the predicted significant interaction between participant role and social distance ($F(1, 450) = 4.78$, $p < .05$). As expected, givers preferred the desirable restaurant more in the far social distance condition than in the near social distance condition ($M_{\text{Far}} = 3.15$ vs. $M_{\text{Near}} = 3.86$; $F(1, 208) = 5.85$, $p < .05$), while there was no difference among receivers ($M_{\text{Far}} = 4.35$ vs. $M_{\text{Near}} = 4.11$; $F(1, 242) < 1$, $p > .44$). Thus, even while controlling for the identity of the people in the gift exchange, giver, but not receiver, preferences are affected by social distance, consistent with our predictions.

STUDY 5: SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF GIFT CONSTRUAL

While a receiver may express a preference for a more feasible gift, it is not clear how receiving the more desirable gift will influence the relationship between the giver and the receiver.

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This study examines the broader relationship effects of givers choosing more desirable over more feasible gifts.

Method

In an effort to understand the motivations of gift givers, a pretest was conducted on 100 US-based Amazon.com Mechanical Turk participants. They were asked to rank the reasons why they would give gifts to a friend on that friend's birthday based on goals derived from Belk (1979), Belk and Coon (1993), and Camerer (1988), as well as the open-ended responses in study 2. The reasons available to be ranked included wanting to pick a gift that will be liked, be reciprocated, improve the relationship, improve communication, show caring, show unselfishness, make the receiver happy, and be a true expression of the givers' feelings. Overall, showing caring about the receiver, making the receiver happier, and giving a gift that is well liked were the three highest-ranked gift-giving goals.

Using this information, we recruited 750 US-based participants from Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk for a 2 (participant role: giver vs. receiver) \times 3 (question asked first: caring vs. liking vs. happiness) between-participant design. However, 662 were left after participants were removed for failing to complete the study, failing the IMC, or incorrectly answering whether they were in the giver or the receiver condition. First, participants imagined a specific friend and indicated that friend's initials. They imagined giving or receiving the restaurant certificates from study 4C. After being exposed to the gift certificates, they were asked three questions about these options, corresponding to the three most common gift-giving goals from the pretest (the order of relationship questions was randomized and questions appear in table 2). These questions were asked on a 1–7 scale ("most likely Gift A" [desirable item] to "most likely Gift B" [feasible item]).

Results and Discussion

Examining only the first question each participant answered, all three measures produced results consistent with our hypothesis (see table 2 for individual means and relevant statistical tests) suggesting that giver/receiver construal differences can have effects on the most important gift-giving goals such as showing caring, giving a receiver a gift they

like, and making the receiver happier. The results suggest that givers may expect highly desirable gifts to have better social consequences than they actually do. Analyses reported in table 2 are based only on the first question each participant was asked about the gift. Since there were no reliable main effects or interactions arising from the order of questions, we also analyzed the data collapsing across order of the measures. This analysis produced the same pattern of results with even greater reliability (all $p < .01$).

STUDY 6: GIFT GIVING IN THE FIELD

Although our findings to this point support a difference in preference and construal between givers and receivers, one important limitation of the previous studies is that they asked people to choose among hypothetical gifts. To ensure that our results extend to situations where people are making consequential decisions, we ran a final study where we approached two friends in a variety of locations and had them give gifts to each other.

Method

One hundred and eighty-nine pairs were approached in a variety of locations, including a shopping mall, a food court, and a local beach, to participate in a brief study in exchange for \$3.00. They were not told any details about the study, including that the study was about gift giving, prior to taking it. Six participants, two who were unable to complete the survey and four who had completed the survey previously, were removed from the sample.

One person in each pair received a giver survey and one received a receiver survey. Each completed the survey with a separate research assistant while standing about 10 feet away from their friend. Participants in the giver condition first completed a word search puzzle. As a reward for completing the word search puzzle, they had a choice of giving one of two pens to their friend. Pen A (the desirable pen) was described as "A state of the art pen which is considered very fancy. It has a nice hand feel and highly rated aesthetics and is perfect for formal business functions. However, it is not as portable or practical due to its weightiness," while Pen B (the feasible pen) was "A very practical pen that has a long ink life and is retractable so that it is easily portable.

TABLE 2

GIVER VERSUS RECEIVER RESPONSES FOR FIRST QUESTION ASKED (STUDY 5)

	Question for giver/receiver	Giver response	Receiver response	t-value	P-value	N
1	Giver: Which gift will be liked more by your friend? Receiver: Which gift do you like more?	3.21	3.84	2.02	$p < .05$	215
2	Giver: Which gift shows that you care more about your friend? Receiver: Which gift shows that your friend cares about you more?	2.96	3.51	2.11	$p < .05$	213
3	Giver: Which gift will make your friend happier? Receiver: Which gift will make you happier?	3.56	4.20	4.25	$p < .05$	234

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The aesthetics are medium rated and it is suitable for all practical occasions.” The giver indicated the pen they preferred to give on a 6-point scale (1: prefer pen A, 6: prefer pen B). At this point, their research assistant texted the receiver research assistant, simply letting the receiver research assistant know to continue the survey.

The receiver completed a word search at the same time as the giver. After their research assistant received a text message, they were told that their friend had given them a gift, and were presented with a pen alongside its description, which they then had to transcribe using the pen. Each receiver received, randomly (i.e., not based on the text message), either the desirable or the feasible pen, regardless of what his or her giver chose. The text message sent between the giver research assistant and the receiver research assistant did not affect the actual gift given or contain information about the giver’s choice. It only served to maintain the cover story that the receiver’s friend was selecting the gift. Receivers then answered three questions about the pen they had received. “How much do you like this gift?” “How much does this gift show your friend cares about you?” and “How much does this gift make you happier?” on a 7-point scale (1: very little, 7: very much). After answering these questions, receivers were given the other pen’s description and asked which gift they would have preferred on the same 6-point scale as the givers.

Results and Discussion

Receivers’ ratings of the pen they received corroborated the results of study 5: they thought the feasible pen showed the giver cared about them more, the feasible pen made them happier, and they liked the feasible pen more (caring: $M_{\text{Feasible}} = 4.99$ vs. $M_{\text{Desirable}} = 4.38$; $t(184) = 2.72$, $p < .01$; happiness: $M_{\text{Feasible}} = 4.80$ vs. $M_{\text{Desirable}} = 3.94$; $t(184) = 3.35$, $p < .01$; liking: $M_{\text{Feasible}} = 4.87$ vs. $M_{\text{Desirable}} = 4.41$; $t(184) = 1.84$, $p = .07$). Also corroborating earlier results, givers expressed a stronger preference for the desirable pen than receivers ($M_{\text{Giver}} = 3.44$ vs. $M_{\text{Receiver}} = 4.00$; $t(185) = 3.30$, $p < .01$).

It is possible that givers preferred desirable gifts because they knew their particular friend would actually appreciate desirable gifts more than feasible gifts. To test this idea, we examined whether givers had insight into whether their particular receiver preferred the pen they happened to choose. For those receivers who received a desirable pen, their ratings of the pen did not differ by whether their giver had chosen to give them a feasible or desirable pen (all three $p > .55$). Similarly, for receivers who received a feasible pen, their ratings did not differ based on what their givers chose to give them (all three $p > .68$). These results provide evidence that givers are not choosing based on accurate insight into their friend’s preferences.

These results extend our previous findings to a consequential gift exchange. However, the context in which we explored gift exchange does have its limitations. For instance, the gift giving was induced rather than naturalistic in that we instructed participants to give a gift. In addition,

the choice of gifts was limited to two pens. Finally, in order to minimize the role of cost in the gift choice, we made the gift of no financial cost to the giver. However, it is likely that the receiver did not realize that the gift was zero cost but rather assumed that the giver paid some money or potentially received the product as payment for taking their own portion of the study, thus attaching some perceived cost to the gift. We do not believe that any of these limitations affected our main results.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Across eight studies, we find evidence that the trade-offs gift givers make between desirability and feasibility are not in line with gift receivers’ preferences. Givers prefer giving highly desirable gifts when faced with desirability/feasibility trade-offs. Receivers, in contrast, do not share the same willingness to trade off feasibility for desirability, but rather rely more on feasibility when making gift judgments. These giver/receiver preference asymmetries have social implications, with givers expecting highly desirable gifts to show more caring and to make their friend happier than these gifts actually do. The differing psychological distances of givers and receivers to the gift can explain giver and receiver preferences. Givers’ construal level becomes similar to receivers’ construal level when the proximity of the receiver is made salient. Similarly, directly instructing givers to first think of their own preference before choosing among gifts helps them to make choices more in line with receivers’ by decreasing their construal level.

By pointing to such asymmetries within the giver/receiver relationship, we extend prior CLT research, which has been surprisingly intrapersonal (rather than interpersonal) in nature. Indeed, even CLT research that has explored inherently dyadic processes such as negotiation has manipulated distance and/or construal in a consistent manner for all members of the dyad (e.g., Henderson, Trope, and Carnevale 2006) rather than focusing on the way members of the dyad might naturally adopt different construal levels. Interestingly, our findings point to a case where there exists symmetric distance between two parties, and yet their level of construal differs for a particular object (i.e., the gift). We hope that our approach will therefore encourage other researchers to explore CLT effects within other interpersonal arenas (e.g., employer/employee relationships, romantic relationships, group dynamics) where natural construal asymmetries may exist. As we believe our research highlights, focusing on differential construal within a naturally occurring dyad opens up important questions about consequences of that differing construal for relationship-relevant outcomes.

The studies we described all use an experimental methodology that allows us to control for many variables in the gift-giving exchange, such as norms, wealth, expectations, and so forth. This methodology has several advantages; most notably it allows us to ascertain causal relationships and to analyze the processes underlying our effects. This work should be viewed in the context of other gift giving research, especially research of an ethnographic nature that allows for

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a richer understanding of some of the complexities involved in gift giving that we inherently simplify in our experimental studies. We consider these two approaches as complementary, and we hope that our experimental approach has helped to shed light on one critical way that givers and receivers differ from one another.

One important variable we did not consider is whether the giver has direct experience with the object being given. While our research and, indeed, many actual gift-giving situations involve givers choosing among objects that they themselves have not used, there are some situations where givers choose among objects they have directly experienced. Recent research (Hamilton and Thompson 2007) suggests that the effects of social distance may not operate the same in this context so future research could fruitfully explore how gift giving differs when givers have experience with the gift.

It is also important to note that social distance may also have positive effects on gift giving, such as increasing creativity (Polman and Emich 2011). There may be situations where creativity, rather than a desirability/feasibility trade-off, has a greater effect on receiver happiness and higher social distance turns out to be a good thing. Determining when one effect is stronger than the other may lead to more productive gift giving. In particular, the receiver may come to enjoy the more creative gift in the future as time puts psychological distance between the receiver and the original gift receipt.

There may also be some gift-giving situations where the nature of the gift, rather than one's role in the gift-giving process, is the main determinant of construal level. Consider, for example, a vacation bought for the distant future. In that scenario, both givers and receivers may adopt the same abstract construal in thinking about the distant future and therefore both may place greater weight on desirability, removing the asymmetric preferences that we have found in our studies.

Additionally, there are situations with strong norms and traditions in place that may preclude trade-offs between desirability and feasibility. In spite of the perceived norm for giving a highly desirable (rather than feasible) gift during an occasion like Valentine's Day, however, we still found a difference in preference between givers and receivers in study 3. This suggests that trade-offs between desirability and feasibility may exist in many situations. For example, flowers may be a normative gift for Valentine's Day, but

one can still choose flowers that are very beautiful but that die in one day or ones that are less beautiful but that will last for a while. Since highly symbolic occasions like Valentine's Day still leave room for giver/receiver preference asymmetries, our conclusions may apply fairly broadly.

The construal level differences identified here might have other interesting implications for gift giving. For example, givers may underestimate the need for self-control in the use of potential gifts because of their abstract mind-set (Fujita et al. 2006b). For instance, they may give their friends a highly desirable gift such as a box of chocolates thinking that their friend will be able to consume them over a long period of time so as not to conflict with weight-loss goals. Unfortunately, they do not count on the chocolates causing the friend to feel bad because the friend consumes all of the chocolates in one sitting due to self-control failures that are more apparent from a lower construal.

On a practical level, our research also suggests strategies for those who are marketing objects whose competitive advantage relates to feasibility: while typically givers may overlook such items, if marketers can encourage a low-level construal of these items, givers may be more likely to choose them, benefiting both the firm and the gift giver. For instance, building on study 4A, marketers might encourage givers to imagine themselves using the gift. Imagining themselves using the product will put givers into a lower construal level that will better match receivers' construal, thereby leading givers toward the choices that make the receivers happier and yield more relationship benefits. Overall, weighing feasibility aspects more when choosing gifts may help givers to give gifts that are more highly appreciated, thus improving their social relationships and avoiding a common pitfall in the social-exchange process.

DATA COLLECTION INFORMATION

For all studies except study 6, the first author collected and analyzed the data. Study 6 was collected by research assistants in the summer of 2013 and was supervised by the first author as well as the behavioral lab director at the Yale School of Management. Data were transcribed by research assistants and then spot-checked against raw data by the first author. The data for all studies in the article were collected between fall 2010 and summer 2013.

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APPENDIX

TABLE A1

STIMULI USED IN 1A ALONG WITH POSTTEST DESIRABILITY AND FEASIBILITY RATINGS
(1–7: NOT AT ALL–VERY MUCH) BASED ON 99 PEOPLE FROM THE SAME POPULATION AS THE MAIN STUDY

Stimulus	Stimulus description	Desirability	Feasibility
Video game	A video game that has been rated by magazine reviewers as high quality with state of the art 3D graphics. Unfortunately, it has a large learning curve and requires at least 10 hours to learn how to play.	4.51	2.71
	A video game that has been rated by magazine reviewers as being of normal quality with poor graphics. However, the game is easy to pick up and play with friends.	3.41	5.81
Coffee maker	A high-end coffee maker, which is able to brew a variety of coffee types including espresso and cappuccino. However, it requires a while to learn how to use it correctly and also requires frequent cleaning and part replacement.	4.67	3.19
	An ordinary coffee maker that does its job and is easy to use. It can only make basic coffee. It is extremely reliable and does not usually break down.	4.86	6.19
Newspaper subscription	A subscription to a popular newspaper (like the <i>New York Times</i>) with high-quality content that arrives unreliably and therefore contains some outdated information	2.89	4.54
	A subscription to a local newspaper with no special content that arrives regularly every morning by breakfast.	3.60	6.09
Restaurant gift certificate	A gift certificate to an upscale Italian restaurant (30/30 rating in Zagat's restaurant guide) that is about a 1-hour drive away.	5.40	4.15
	A gift certificate to an ordinary Italian restaurant (15/30 rating in Zagat's restaurant guide) that is about a 5-minute drive away.	4.75	6.19
Movie tickets	Movie tickets to a brand new hit 3D IMAX movie that is premiering in your local area. Since this is a new movie that has not been in theaters before, these tickets are only for a Tuesday night several nights after the premiere. Reviews have suggested that this is a very exciting, well-done movie.	5.69	4.99
	Movie tickets to a movie released about 2 months ago in your local area. As this movie has been in theaters for a while and a lot of people have seen it, these tickets can be redeemed for any showtime during the week. Reviews have suggested that the movie might at times be somewhat boring.	3.53	5.87
Photo-editing program	A high-end photo-editing program that is able to do advanced photo-editing. It is professional grade and can be used for both business and personal uses. However, it is hard to use and requires going through many hours of tutorials in order to understand how to use all of the many features.	4.63	2.43
	A normal photo-editing program that can do common tasks but is not able to do advanced photo-editing. It is not suitable for business needs and can only fulfill simple consumer functions. Since this is a program aimed at the consumer market, the few features that it possesses are easy to use.	4.00	5.76

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