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Motivated gifts: A self-determination perspective

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Abstract

Gift-giving can strengthen relationships and facilitate favor requests. Previous researchers have found that “motivated gifts” (gifts given with the intention of asking a favor) decrease recipients' satisfaction and willingness to help. The current study investigated the role of basic psychological need satisfaction (BPNS) in this effect. Past researchers have argued that BPNS facilitates the integration of autonomous motivation, which the current study hypothesized to mediate the relationship between motivated gifts and prosociality. In the current study, a sample of 426 undergraduate students was randomly given a hypothetical scenario in which they imagined receiving a motivated gift or not, while also being asked a favor. Along with their satisfaction and willingness to help, their BPNS and other measures were taken to test the hypothesis. The findings demonstrated that there were no significant variations in participants' BPNS, but that motivated gifts did negatively impact autonomous motivation. Despite this, there were no significant differences in a participant's willingness to perform the favor or their anticipated satisfaction, which suggests that while motivated gifts may reduce autonomous motivation, they do not appear to significantly reduce prosociality. Limitations and future directions are further discussed.

Keywords: motivated gifts, self-determination theory, basic psychological needs, happiness, gift-giving

Motivated Gifts: A Self-Determination Perspective

Gift-giving, for many, is a central component in how people build and strengthen relationships (Aknin & Human, 2015). Whether those are strong or weak social ties, gifts signal that the benefactor cares about the recipient, which leads to emotional benefits for both the giver and receiver (Aknin & Human, 2015; Givi & Galak, 2021). For instance, researchers have shown that giver-centric gifts (gifts that reflect the “giver”) promoted closeness, that anticipated happiness for non-occasion-based (“just because”) gifts was higher compared to occasion-based (birthday, anniversary) gifts, and that spending money on others led to more happiness compared to money spent on ourselves (Aknin & Human, 2015; Givi & Galak, 2021; Aknin et al., 2011; Dunn et al., 2008). In most cases, it seems as though gift-giving has positive impacts on both the recipient and beneficiary.

However, another interesting finding in gift-giving research is the phenomenon of “motivated gifts” (gifts that are given with the intent of receiving something in return). Aknin and colleagues (2018b) found that in scenarios where participants imagined they were given a motivated gift, participants were less willing to perform a favor than if they did not imagine receiving a motivated gift. Considering that gifts are not intended to cause negative effects in the recipient, understanding why this happens is crucial, especially if the goal of a motivated gift is to incentivize the recipient to perform a favor. One potential reason for this change in prosociality could be explained using the self-determination theory (SDT), which argues that humans require three psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) for optimal flourishing and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). These three needs are also associated with autonomous motivation, which the current study theorized to play as a mediating factor between motivated gifts and prosocial behavior. Although much research has been conducted linking

prosocial behaviors in general to subjective well-being (Aknin et al., 2018a; Chancellor et al., 2018; Curry et al., 2018), there is limited research that focuses specifically on gift-giving behaviors and how they may influence (or be influenced by) basic psychological need satisfaction.

Self-Determination Theory and Basic Psychological Needs

At its core, SDT identifies three basic needs required for optimal psychological functioning: autonomy (a sense of agency), competence (a sense of self-efficacy), and relatedness (a sense of connection with others) (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Deci & Vansteenkiste, 2004). These three needs are suggested to be fundamental in healthy development, and denying any of the three could be damaging to one's wellness and motivation and may even be responsible for passivity and ill-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Deci & Vansteenkiste, 2004). In addition to this, these three psychological needs have been found across many cultures, suggesting universal necessity (Church et al., 2012). If we consider situations where any of the three needs are thwarted (e.g., loneliness, social ostracization, inauthenticity) we see instances where people's well-being might be hindered in the form of poor health or decreased performance (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Deci & Vansteenkiste, 2004). Much research has been done exploring the ways these needs interact with daily life and well-being, and ways we can further enhance engagement in beneficial activities, including prosocial behaviors.

Prosocial Behaviors

Prosocial behaviors are defined as activities that benefit others as opposed to benefitting the self (Jensen, 2016). The finding that a person's happiness increases when making others happy (Titova & Sheldon, 2022b), suggest that engaging in prosocial behaviors, such as gift-giving, would increase well-being. It is worthwhile to learn more about prosocial behaviors as

such research can find ways to increase satisfaction. Giving, in general, is associated with greater feelings of happiness (Anik et al., 2009), as is prosocial spending (Dunn et al., 2008).

Additionally, reflecting on giving was associated with higher levels of further prosocial activities (Grant & Dutton, 2012), thus suggesting a circular feedback loop in which doing good “makes” you feel good, and feeling good “makes” you do good (Anik et al., 2009; Aknin et al., 2018a; Hui, 2022).

Moreover, a “spillover effect,” which refers to the phenomenon where people who were the recipient of a prosocial act are more likely to engage in prosocial behaviors after, has been observed in “pay-it-forward” practices. In other words, participants who were the beneficiary of a prosocial act were more likely to engage in prosocial behaviors post-experiment without being prompted (Pressman et al., 2014). In the study, participants were instructed to engage in “pay-it-forward” activities in a public setting. Pressman and colleagues (2014) followed up with recipients of these deeds, as well as non-recipients who had just encountered the participants after the deeds were completed, and asked them to complete a survey. They found that the recipients reported higher instances of “pay-it-forward” activity than non-recipients, implying that pay-it-forward practices really did “pay-it-forward” in that prosocial behavior seemed to generate more prosocial behavior. Even though these effects were not shown to be long-term, the impact of a spillover effect is important because it would suggest that prosocial behavior could magnify itself.

This form of altruism could be the result of people wanting to feel more connected to others. When that need is fulfilled, people may be further encouraged to engage in such activity. Conversely, the opposite might be true when an act is perceived to be less prosocially motivated, as in the study of motivated gifts, Aknin and colleagues (2018b) found that motivated gifts

decreased recipients' willingness to perform the requested behavior. Although a gift may usually be perceived to have altruistic intentions, associating the gift with a favor that otherwise might have been performed without the gift changes the perceived intention of the interaction; recipients of motivated gifts are more likely to report feeling manipulated into performing a favor (Aknin et al., 2018b). This might further hinder the recipient's willingness to engage in unrelated prosocial activities in that it may undermine their basic psychological need satisfaction. In the current study, this framework is used to examine why a motivated gift decreases an individual's willingness to engage in said activity.

Need Satisfaction and Prosocial Behavior

In many cases, people obtain need satisfaction as a result of engaging in activities they already find interesting or personally important, and need satisfaction further encourages engagement in these activities (Deci & Vansteenkiste, 2004; Pavey et al., 2011). This positive feedback loop likely enables individuals to be more willing to engage in prosocial behaviors, as need satisfaction has been found to be associated with prosocial behavior (Aknin et al., 2018a).

Relatedness

Relatedness is the feeling of being connected to others (Ryan & Deci, 2000), and is one obvious candidate for this connection between SDT and prosocial behavior, as participants show greater interest in volunteering when asked to reflect on relatedness need satisfaction (Pavey et al., 2011). Given the interpersonal nature of volunteer work, it is reasonable to assume that relatedness need satisfaction would be associated with volunteering as it may induce a sense of connectedness and empathy with others. In fact, one study in particular found an association between altruism (or prosociality) and empathy in that empathy is a strong predictor of prosocial or helping behaviors (Telle & Pfister, 2015), suggesting that many individuals engage in

prosocial behaviors when they believe it will benefit the recipient. This is also supported by Stocks and colleagues (2008), where the researchers manipulated the empathy of participants by instructing them to read about a character's situation and either remain objective ("low empathy") or encouraging them to imagine how the character feels in the given scenario ("high empathy"). Participants were then assigned to a condition which determined whether to shed obligation from themselves ("easy-escape") or not ("difficult-escape"). Participants assigned to the "high empathy, difficult-escape" condition reported more helping behavior compared to participants assigned to both "low empathy" conditions, suggesting that empathy played a role.

Autonomy

Autonomy need satisfaction is defined by the feeling of being in control of your own actions (Ryan & Deci, 2000). It may play a role in prosocial behaviors because individuals are more fulfilled when they feel in control of their decisions. In Stocks and colleagues' (2008) study, participants assigned to the "high empathy, easy-escape" condition reported even higher instances of helping behavior. In the "easy-escape" conditions, it would appear that participants had more autonomy over their decisions and were more likely to engage in helping behaviors. Furthermore, Moche and Västfjäll (2021) found that when participants were presented with an option to change a default setting (from either "keep" or "donate") regarding monetary compensation, those who changed their default from "keep" to "donate" experienced greater happiness compared to those who's default was already to "donate". The majority of participants who were in the "active decision" condition, where no default option was present, chose to "donate." These findings suggest that enacting autonomy plays a moderating role between prosocial behavior and happiness. Conversely, participants who were "forced" to stop volunteering in another study experienced decreased life satisfaction (Meier & Stutzer, 2008).

Not only does this demonstrate the role autonomy plays in well-being, but it also implies the connection between autonomy need satisfaction and prosociality.

Competence

Competence may be the least obvious need to play a role in prosociality as research typically focuses on relatedness or need satisfaction as a whole. Competence need satisfaction is defined by how efficient or impactful your actions are (Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, in a field experiment within a workplace, employees were assigned to be either a “Giver” or a “Receiver”. “Givers” were assigned to perform random acts of kindness to preassigned “Receivers” within the workplace, and need satisfaction was measured in both groups. Employees who were assigned the role of “Giver” reported greater competence (in addition to autonomy) need satisfaction over a period of four weeks (Chancellor et al., 2018). While employees assigned the role of “Receiver” reported greater autonomy need satisfaction, their competence did not significantly increase (Chancellor et al., 2018). This would suggest that competence need satisfaction is more related to doing good, as opposed to receiving good. The disparity here might be because autonomy is the feeling that an individual is free to act on their own, but competence is the feeling that one’s actions are efficient. When receiving prosocial gestures, “Receivers” are not able to respond to these gestures so are not able to see whether their actions are efficient or not (as opposed to the “Givers”).

Beneficence as a Potential Psychological Need

One other psychological concept that has been explored as a potential fourth fundamental psychological need is the idea of beneficence. This is defined as experiencing enjoyment when fulfilling the needs of others and has only been explored in a few studies (Martela & Ryan, 2015; Titova & Sheldon, 2022a). Titova and Sheldon (2022a) found that participants who imagined a

scenario where their prosocial intentions were thwarted experienced less positive affect (feelings of positive emotions like satisfaction, joy, and pleasure) compared to participants who imagined a scenario that depicted them being able to enact their prosocial intentions. The studies demonstrated that need satisfaction (for autonomy, competence, and relatedness) and beneficence need satisfaction individually played partial mediating roles, but, when added together, fully explained the relation between thwarting of prosocial tendencies and positive affect (Titova & Sheldon, 2022a). These findings not only imply a potential fourth basic psychological need, but also show how the needs may influence each other in terms of how they impact an individual's subjective well-being. One's need for engaging in prosocial behavior (beneficence) appears to be fundamental, as well as the other psychological needs, for obtaining positive outcomes. As such, it is expected that this will be reflected in the current study.

Motivation

When it comes to prosocial behavior and BPNS, SDT also highlights motivation as being another important component (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Motivation can be divided into two main categories: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation encompasses activities that the individual enjoys and engages in of their own volition and personal enjoyment, such as pursuing hobbies (Ryan & Deci, 2020). On the other hand, extrinsic motivation includes activities that individuals engage in because of external forces, such as working to earn money to pay bills (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Not only does motivation type play a large part in how individuals decide whether to engage in activities or not, but it also might determine how much an individual enjoys an activity. Individuals who are intrinsically motivated to participate in an activity are likely to enjoy that activity more because the activity is driven by internal forces as opposed to external forces (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

In addition to extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, SDT highlights two additional kinds of motivation that describe it as more of a spectrum as opposed to a binary: autonomous and controlled. These are further divided up and distinguished by the different kinds of regulatory styles associated with them, that is, the extent to which an individual internalizes the values of the task with their own values (Ryan & Deci, 2020). When an individual has successfully internalized and integrated the values of the task with their own, the motivation for engaging in that task is autonomous. This means that the individual is engaging in behavior that is determined by themselves, as opposed to external forces. An example of this might be someone who volunteers at a local homeless shelter or someone who recycles. In both cases, the individuals do not necessarily intrinsically enjoy these activities, but the values associated with the activities are fully aligned with the individuals' values. It would be said that these individuals are autonomously motivated (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Controlled motivation occurs in the absence of internalized values of the task (Ryan & Deci, 2020). This kind of motivation can be broken down into various types including external (motivation regulated by external rewards and/or punishment) and introjection (motivation regulated by the approval of others) which depict more externally driven motivations (Ryan & Deci, 2020). The more controlled a motivation is, the more likely the behavior is influenced by external forces and expectations. On the other hand, autonomous motivations can be also broken down further based on the kind of regulatory style: identified (motivation regulated by self-endorsement of the goals or conscious valuing of the activity in question) and integrated (motivation regulated by congruence of one's values and the activity). Both are associated with high levels of personal integration, meaning that individuals are more internally driven to engage.

Fulfillment of basic psychological needs facilitates this internalization or integration, meaning that motivation can adapt to be more beneficial, depending on the circumstances (Deci & Vansteenkiste, 2004; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Children whose teachers were “cold and uncaring” experienced a decrease in the integration of extrinsic motivation, and helpers in another study who were perceived to be autonomously motivated were more likely to induce feelings of closeness in recipients compared to those who were perceived to be motivated by more controlled means (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Weinstein et al., 2010). These studies suggest an important relationship between autonomous motivation and relatedness need satisfaction in that integration is facilitated when relatedness is fulfilled, but also that autonomous motivation can facilitate relatedness need satisfaction. Similarly, competence is key in facilitating this integration, especially in conjunction with autonomy need satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Wild et al., 1997).

With that in mind, it is worth noting the impact of thwarting those needs on autonomous motivation. Extrinsic factors (such as rewards and punishments) have negative impacts on autonomy need satisfaction (Deci & Vansteenkiste, 2004) as well as autonomous motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This finding is important when we consider the study of motivated gifts and how their presence can influence how an action is perceived. For example, motivated gifts decreased participants’ anticipated satisfaction from performing the favor (Aknin et al., 2018b). It would then make sense that motivated gifts decrease BPNS, therefore also inhibiting autonomous motivation.

Motivated Gifts

Given the role motivation type plays in need satisfaction, it would follow that motivated gifts may also influence need satisfaction. Indeed, motivated gifts provide an example of how a

prosocial act (giving a gift) – if perceived to be extrinsically motivated – decreases the receiver’s willingness to perform a favor that the gift is designed to entice them to do (Aknin et al., 2018b; Zhang et al., 2017). Additionally, participants who receive motivated gifts report feelings of manipulation and a decrease in willingness to perform the favor (Aknin et al., 2018b). However, previous researchers have not examined this effect from an SDT perspective, but it might be a very useful framework in explaining why this effect occurs. Specifically, this mechanism may be explained through autonomy, in that threatening an individual’s autonomy changes their motivation for doing a favor. This is supported by the finding that those who were asked a favor without the motivated gift did not report a decrease in willingness, suggesting that their motivation did not change (Aknin et al., 2018b). SDT facilitates the understanding of this in that autonomous motivation is inhibited by the presence of external rewards (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Additionally, recipients of prosocial deeds may experience decreased self-esteem if they perceive the act to have selfish or controlled motivations (Zhang et al., 2017). This may explain a decrease in willingness to accept an action if their autonomy was threatened. This is further evidenced by participants reporting feeling more obligation to provide assistance, or “felt obligation” as described by Zhan and colleagues (2021), when receiving reactive help (receiving requested help) compared to receiving proactive help (receiving unrequested help). Participants who received proactive help reported higher positive affect than participants who received reactive help, which provides further means to explore the importance of autonomy in helping behaviors and subjective well-being. Although the findings show that “felt obligation” was still correlated to productivity within the organization (participants who received proactive help reported engaging in more work-related activity), it could be that “felt obligation” simultaneously decreases autonomy, which in turn influences subjective well-being, without

necessarily harming an individual's performance at work (Zhan et al., 2021). In a prosocial setting, this study may replicate the findings of controlled motivation and the impact on increased effort and money spent on a prosocial task (Peetz & Milyavskaya, 2021).

The Current Study

By applying an SDT perspective to motivated gifts, basic psychological need satisfaction should play a mediating role in the focal relationship between a motivated gift and willingness to perform a favor. Considering the degrading impacts external rewards have on autonomous motivation, it might be that both a participant's competence and autonomy suffer when given a motivated gift, which could explain the decrease in willingness to perform the favor and anticipated satisfaction observed in the original study (Aknin et al., 2018b). For example, feelings of "felt obligation" observed by Zhan and colleagues (2021) in the workplace and participants reported feeling manipulated in the original study after imagining receiving a motivated gift (Aknin et al., 2018b) may indicate a decrease in autonomy and competence need satisfaction. Individuals who do not feel competent in their actions may experience a decrease in willingness, which would explain why participants in Aknin and colleagues' (2018b) study reported a decrease in willingness to perform the hypothetical favor.

Though relatedness is reported to play a smaller role in the facilitation of autonomous motivation, a change may still explain the impact of motivated gifts on autonomous motivation, specifically on prosocial behaviors. For instance, there is an association between relatedness need satisfaction and prosocial activities in that focusing on relatedness need satisfaction increases participants' prosocial tendencies (Pavey et al., 2011). Researchers suggest that empathy is a strong predictor of prosocial behaviors which further indicates the role of connection with prosocial behaviors (Telle & Pfister, 2015), and other research found that

participants were more likely to choose to help someone if they experienced higher empathy towards them and had more freedom in their decision (Stocks et al., 2008). Together, these findings suggest that if autonomous motivation is inhibited, motivation toward prosociality may also be inhibited. In the presence of a motivated gift, this could mean that the recipient's relatedness need satisfaction suffers because of their autonomous motivation being inhibited. As such, this study aims to replicate the original motivated gift study by Aknin and colleagues (2018b) and will investigate the focal relationship by testing the following hypotheses:

1. Participants who imagine receiving a motivated gift will report feeling more controlled rather than autonomous motivation for doing the asked favor and lower basic psychological need satisfaction compared to participants who do not imagine receiving a motivated gift.
2. Participants who imagine receiving a motivated gift will report a decrease in willingness to perform the hypothetical favor, which will be mediated by a change in their motivation and a decrease in basic psychological need satisfaction, beneficence need satisfaction, happiness, and negative affect.
3. Participants who imagine receiving a motivated gift will report a decrease in anticipated satisfaction from performing a favor, which will be mediated by a change in their motivation and a decrease in basic psychological need satisfaction, beneficence need satisfaction, happiness, and positive and negative affect.
4. Participants who imagine receiving a motivated gift will report a decrease in positive affect and happiness, and an increase in negative affect.

5. Participants who imagine receiving a motivated gift will report a decreased willingness to engage in an unrelated prosocial behavior, compared to participants who did not imagine receiving a motivated gift.

Method

Participants

For the current study, 426 participants completed the survey online through the UW Psychology Research Pool in exchange for class credit. An a priori analysis using G*Power suggested that a sample size of at least 352 would be sufficient to detect a small-to-medium effect size of $f = 0.15$ with $\beta = 0.80$ and $\alpha = 0.05$. Race demographics were recorded non-mutually exclusively allowing participants to select more than one race with the distribution as follows: 56.1% Asian, 38.5% White, 2.3% Hispanic or Latinx, 2.1% African American, 1.9% Native American, 1.6% Middle Eastern or Northern African and 1.4% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (4.5% selected Other and 0.9% chose not to disclose). The majority of the respondents (46.9%) were female and 15.7% were male; 2.1% of the sample identified as non-binary, 0.2% selected Other, and 35% of the respondents did not disclose their gender identity. The participants read and signed an informed consent form that is consistent with the University of Washington's Institutional Review Board policy. Participants that declined were redirected to the end of the survey. Incomplete responses were removed from the final dataset, as well as respondents who failed attention and manipulation checks. These manipulation checks included instructing the participant to correctly identify the scenario they had just read about, and to select the number 4. The latter was administered during the Basic Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale to check whether the participant was paying attention. From the survey's initial 596 responses, 170 were omitted for failure to pass these manipulation checks, resulting in a sample

size of 426. The study was preregistered at Open Science Framework, where all data and materials can be found¹.

Measures

Motivation

Motivation (autonomous vs controlled) was measured using The Comprehensive Relative Autonomy index adapted to suit this study (Sheldon et al., 2017). This index included eight statements (four for controlled motivation, and four for autonomous motivation) regarding potential reasons for why participants may engage in an activity (e.g., “Because others would want or expect me to” and “Because I would enjoy it”) and asks participants to rate how much they agree on a Likert scale from 1 (*Not at all for this reason*) to 7 (*Completely for this reason*). The scale was presented before and after the hypothetical scenario. Scores for each item were totaled and averaged across so that there were four variables in total: pre autonomous ($\alpha = 0.79$) pre controlled ($\alpha = 0.64$), post autonomous ($\alpha = 0.83$), post controlled ($\alpha = 0.69$).

Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Beneficence

BPNS was measured using 16 items. Twelve items are adapted from the Basic Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scales by Chen and colleagues (2014) and will be used to measure autonomy (e.g., “I feel that my decisions reflect what I really want”), competence (e.g., “I feel capable at what I do.”), and relatedness (e.g., “I feel connected with people who care for me and for whom I care about.”) with four statements for each need, totaling three variables: autonomy ($\alpha = 0.80$), relatedness ($\alpha = 0.86$), and competence ($\alpha = 0.90$). Four additional items, adapted from Martela and Ryan (2015), will be used to measure beneficence (e.g., “In general, my influence in the lives of others is positive.” ($\alpha = 0.82$)). A 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Not*

¹ https://osf.io/7ndbg/?view_only=1e6548b2e1a5429ca68ee4e6d30f4b0b

true at all) to 7 (*Very true*) will be used to measure the extent to which a participant agrees with all 16 items.

Mood and Happiness

Additionally, positive and negative affect were measured using the Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE; Diener et al., 2009). Items on this scale include words that relate to emotions such as “negative,” “pleasant,” and “angry.” Positive words were averaged across to calculate the positive affect ($\alpha = 0.85$) and negative words were averaged across to calculate the negative affect ($\alpha = 0.83$). Affect balance was computed by subtracting negative affect from positive affect. Participants are asked to rate each word on a scale of 1 (*I do not feel this at all*) to 7 (*I feel this very much*). A measurement of happiness will also be taken using a 7-point scale of 1 (*Not happy at all*) to 7 (*Extremely happy*) used by Aknin and colleagues (2018b).

Spillover effect

At the end of the questionnaire, participants were asked if they would be interested in being contacted again for an unrelated psychological study. Participants were prompted to select whether they would like to participate or not. The prompt was as follows:

Thank you for taking part in this study! We are also running another, unrelated psychological study that will take about 10 minutes to complete and will be administered online. There is no incentive for participation, but it would be a huge help if you would agree to participate. If you would like to participate, please select “yes.” If not, select “no.”

Procedure

Participants were asked to complete measures of motivation for prosocial behaviors in general to establish a baseline. After this, they were then randomly assigned to one of two conditions where they each read a hypothetical scenario and responded to questions. The

scenario was adapted from study 2A from Aknin and colleagues (2018b) (text in brackets only appeared for the motivated gift condition). The scenario was chosen to be relevant to students who were taking the survey, and was as follows:

Imagine that tomorrow your friend invites you over. You agree to go, and head over to their house; you're looking forward to catching up. The two of you sit down in the living room and begin to catch up [To your surprise, your friend gives you a box of chocolates, which you accept]. After a few minutes of chatting about your week, your friend mentions that they have an essay due next week and would really like it if you could help edit their paper [It seems that your friend gave you the box of chocolates so that they could ask for a favor in return].

After the participants read the hypothetical scenarios, participants were asked about their willingness to engage in the favor posed in the scenario. Participants rated this on a Likert scale of 1 (*I would not help my friend*) to 7 (*I would most definitely help my friend*). Participants were then asked to rate their anticipated enjoyment on a Likert scale of 1 (*I would not enjoy it at all*) to 7 (*I would enjoy it very much*). Next, measures of motivation and basic psychological need satisfaction and beneficence need satisfaction were taken. Finally, participants were asked about their willingness to perform another unrelated favor to measure a potential “spillover effect.”

Results

Willingness to Perform Favor, Anticipated Satisfaction, Happiness, and SPANE

Using an independent t-test, the results showed no significant difference in reported willingness to perform the favor between the motivated gift and no motivated gift conditions, in that there was no difference in willingness to perform the favor between participants who

imagined receiving a motivated gift ($M = 5.57$, $SD = 1.27$) and participants who didn't imagine receiving the motivated gift ($M = 5.61$, $SD = 1.24$), $t(424) = -0.27$, $p = .79$.

An independent t-test also found no significant difference in anticipated satisfaction between the conditions with participants who imagined receiving the motivated gift ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 1.28$) and participants who didn't imagine receiving the motivated gift ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 1.33$), $t(424) = -1.14$, $p = .26$.

When conducting an independent t-test, the results found no significant difference between the two groups regarding happiness, such that participants who imagined receiving a motivated gift ($M = 4.53$, $SD = 1.42$) did not report a change in their happiness level compared to participants who did not imagine receiving a motivated gift ($M = 4.69$, $SD = 1.30$), $t(424) = -1.22$, $p = .22$. Further, participants who imagined receiving a motivated gift did not report any change in their positive affect ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 1.16$) compared to participants who did not imagine receiving a motivated gift ($M = 4.59$, $SD = 0.95$), $t(424) = -1.93$, $p = .05$. Similarly, there were no significant differences in negative affect between participants who imagined receiving a motivated gift ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 1.14$) and participants who did not imagine receiving a motivated gift ($M = 2.93$, $SD = 1.10$), $t(424) = -1.68$, $p = .09$. Affect balance, which was measured by subtracting negative affect scores from positive affect scores, did not show a significant difference between participants who imagined receiving a motivated gift ($M = 1.28$, $SD = 2.12$) and participants who did not imagine receiving a motivated gift ($M = 1.66$, $SD = 1.89$), $t(424) = 1.95$, $p = .05$.

Autonomous and Controlled Motivation

Autonomous motivation was analyzed using repeated measures ANOVA, which compared autonomous motivation both before and after reading the scenario, and compared them

across both experimental groups: participants who imagined receiving the motivated gift and participants who did not. The model found evidence of a main effect of autonomous motivation in participants, $F(1, 424) = 183.98, p < .001$, indicating that autonomous motivation was lower post-condition ($M = 4.70, SD = 1.23$) than it was pre-condition ($M = 5.48, SD = 0.96$).

Additionally, the study found evidence of a significant interaction effect, $F(1, 424) = 4.19, p = .04$, such that participants who imagined receiving a motivated gift reported lower autonomous motivation post-condition ($M = 4.65, SD = 1.33$) than participants who did not imagine receiving a motivated gift ($M = 4.75, SD = 1.23$) (see Figure 1). Together, the findings suggest that autonomous motivation decreased in both groups, but more in participants who imagined receiving a motivated gift, compared to those who did not.

A repeated measures ANOVA test was also used to measure participants' controlled motivation both before and after reading the scenario, and compared them across both experimental groups. This model found evidence of a significant main effect of controlled motivation, $F(1, 424) = 53.19, p < .001$, such that controlled motivation was lower post-condition ($M = 3.85, SD = 1.20$) than it was pre-condition ($M = 4.22, SD = 1.06$). The results did not find evidence for an interaction effect, $F(1, 424) = 0.46, p = .50$. Thus, suggesting that controlled motivation decreased significantly in both groups, but there were no significant differences between participants who imagined receiving a motivated gift or not.

Initially, the study planned to test for a mediating role of autonomous motivation in the relationship between motivated gifts and willingness to perform the favor using the PROCESS macro for SPSS. However, given that there were no significant findings in participants' willingness to perform the favor or their anticipated satisfaction from doing so, there is no relationship that can be tested. Therefore, this statistical analysis was omitted from the study.

Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction

Independent t-tests found no significant difference in basic psychological need satisfaction (BPNS) between participants who imagined receiving a motivated gift ($M = 5.18$, $SD = 0.92$) and participants who did not imagine receiving a motivated gift ($M = 5.33$, $SD = 0.78$), $t(424) = -1.75$, $p = .08$. Additionally, when analyzed separately using independent t-test, no significant differences were found in autonomy need satisfaction between participants who imagined receiving a motivated gift ($M = 4.91$, $SD = 1.02$) and participants who didn't ($M = 5.03$, $SD = 0.95$), $t(424) = -1.28$, $p = .20$. There were also no significant differences between participants who imagined receiving a motivated gift ($M = 5.61$, $SD = 1.03$) and participants who didn't ($M = 5.73$, $SD = 0.98$) in relatedness need satisfaction, $t(424) = -1.26$, $p = .21$. Competence need satisfaction also had no significant difference between participants who imagined receiving a motivated gift ($M = 5.02$, $SD = 1.36$) and participants who did not imagine receiving a motivated gift ($M = 5.21$, $SD = 1.07$), $t(424) = -1.59$, $p = .11$.

Beneficence Satisfaction

Independent t-tests found no significant differences in beneficence need satisfaction between participants who imagined receiving a motivated gift ($M = 5.19$, $SD = 0.87$) and participants who didn't ($M = 5.25$, $SD = 0.83$), $t(424) = -0.73$, $p = .47$.

When analyzed together with BPNS data, an independent t-test found no significant difference between participants who imagined receiving a motivated gift ($M = 5.18$, $SD = 0.87$) and participants who didn't imagine receiving a motivated gift ($M = 5.31$, $SD = 0.7$), $t(424) = -1.63$, $p = .10$.

Spillover effect

Using a Chi-square test of independence to compare the frequency of participants choosing to engage in an unrelated prosocial task between the two groups, the results found no significant relationship between the participants who imagined receiving a motivated gift and participants who didn't, $X^2(1, 425) = 1.45, p = .23$.

Discussion

This study conflicts with the prior findings that motivated gifts negatively impact prosocial or helping behavior because there were no significant differences between the groups regarding willingness to perform a favor or their anticipated satisfaction from doing so. While the current study was not able to definitively examine the relationship between motivated gifts and prosocial behaviors, the results do reflect a similar inconsistency observed in Aknin and colleagues' research (2018b). The first study found only a marginal difference in participants' willingness to perform the favor. The rest of the studies, besides one, yielded significant differences between the groups which suggests that there may be some inconsistency with how motivated gifts impact an individual's response regarding willingness and anticipated satisfaction (Aknin et al., 2018b).

Given the body of research on SDT, motivation, and well-being, the current study contributes interesting findings regarding motivation and prosocial behavior. While the underlying mechanism may not be clear as to why this happened in the original study by Aknin and colleagues (2018b), what is made clear by the current study is that motivated gifts decrease autonomous motivation. Considering that previous researchers found that individuals perceived to have been autonomously motivated were more likely to promote feelings of closeness (Weinstein et al., 2010), it might also be the case that the reverse is true. As it pertains to the current study, because individuals experienced a decrease in autonomous motivation, this may

negatively impact how the recipient of the prosocial act (i.e., the person requesting the favor) may perceive the helper. Further, if recipients perceive a prosocial act to be motivated by more controlled means, then they are likely to experience a decrease in their self-esteem (Zhang et al., 2017). While this was not the focus of the current study, the findings provide a stepping-stone for understanding the implications of motivated gifts and individuals' relationships.

Implications

The main finding of the study is that motivated gifts appeared to cause a decrease in participants' autonomous motivation. This finding is important considering that autonomous motivation plays a role in BPNS, which influences an individual's well-being. However, the current study found no significant differences in BPNS, though the difference was in the predicted direction. Given what is known about autonomous motivation, it is surprising to see that motivated gifts did not appear to have any impact on BPNS, especially autonomy need satisfaction. These findings are inconsistent with the original study (Aknin et al., 2018b) in that a decrease in willingness to perform a favor and anticipated satisfaction would be expected to follow from a decrease in autonomous motivation. Though the current study found that motivated gifts decreased autonomous motivation, this could not be connected to a decrease in BPNS or well-being.

In addition, the study's findings in regard to affect can offer useful insights into how motivated gifts impact psychological well-being. Though the findings were not significant, the difference between groups was in the predicted direction, such that participants who imagined receiving a motivated gift reported marginally lower positive affect. This is important given that gifts are not intended to cause negative psychological well-being, so any indication of it having a detrimental effect could imply negative consequences in a relationship. Indeed, Aknin and

colleagues' (2018b) found that, in some of their studies, participants who imagined receiving a motivated gift reported lower positive affect and a decrease in closeness with the friend. Though these findings were inconsistent and didn't always occur simultaneously, the findings do suggest that there is potential for motivated gifts to have a negative impact on the recipient, but this effect is complicated by other factors, such as the degree of friendship. For instance, people have different expectations from friends, and this may change depending on how long they have known them, under what circumstances, etc. On the other hand, participants' ratings of happiness did not differ significantly across the conditions which suggests that motivated gifts do not necessarily impair an individual's well-being.

Limitations and Future Directions

One limitation of this study design is that it is based on hypothetical scenarios, not real-life situations. Though many studies utilize this kind of design, conducting future research in a real-world setting to study real-life behaviors may yield generalizable results. This would perhaps be more appropriate when testing for a spillover effect. Doing so would enable a potential effect to be measured in different ways to determine whether it can be generalized across different tasks. It might be that individuals are more inclined to engage in an activity that is similar to what they are already doing, and that a task involving a different activity (e.g., donating to charity, picking up litter, helping with homework) may be subject to different responses. Furthermore, another factor that could be examined is an individual's prior prosocial tendencies. If an individual has higher prosocial tendencies in general, it might be that motivated gifts would have less of an impact on their willingness to perform a requested favor. Individual prosocial tendencies could also be examined through a cultural lens. Given the lack of racial

diversity in the respondents, a future direction could recruit a more diverse body of participants and inquire more about possible differences in cultural beliefs and traditions.

Moreover, being that the current study only looked at BPNS and affect measurements after participants were assigned to experimental conditions and compared them across groups, the current study was unable to determine changes in BPNS and affect in individuals and thus was unable to determine if motivated gifts have any direct impacts. Future studies could potentially measure these both pre and post experimental manipulation to determine if motivated gifts decrease BPNS and affect.

Conclusion

Ultimately, this study was unable to replicate what Aknin and colleagues (2018b) found in terms of whether motivated gifts decrease the recipient's willingness to perform a favor and their anticipated satisfaction from doing so. While this meant that the study was unable to test for any mediating roles, the study did find support for motivated gifts causing a decrease in autonomous motivation. Despite this, the study did not find any evidence that motivated gifts cause a decrease in willingness to perform a favor (or an unrelated task), which suggests that motivated gifts may not have any negative impact on prosocial behavior.

In general, the findings of this study were mixed. However, motivated gifts still had an impact on recipients which is worthy of further exploration. Overall, it appears that this impact is limited to one's autonomous motivation, though this can be an important element in an individual's psychological well-being. As such, it is important to look at this relationship, as understanding it may better inform others on how to approach asking for favors, as well as provide a better insight into how people might perceive favor-requests with "rewards".

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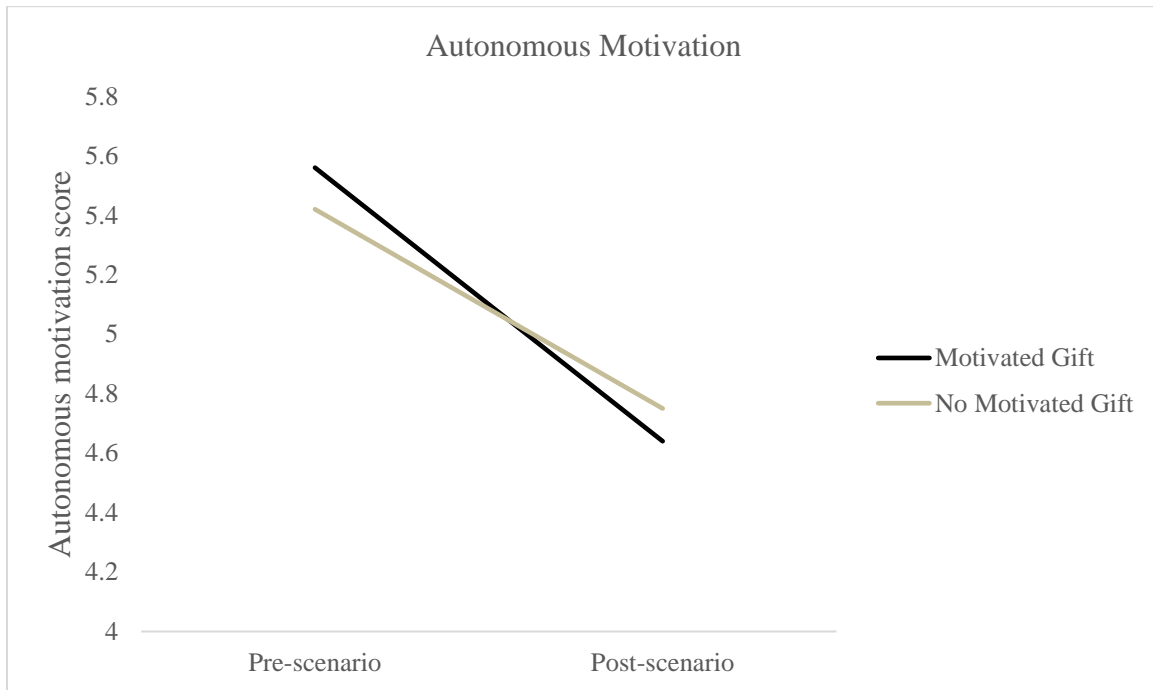
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Figure 1

Line Graph of Pre and Post Scenario Autonomous Motivation Scores



Note. Line graph showing how autonomous motivation changed in participants pre and post condition in both conditions.